VILLAGE OF WESTFIELD

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

MINUTES

Monday, March 27, 2023 7:00 PM

North Room – Eason Hall

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Mayor Mike VandeVelde, Deputy Mayor Denny Lutes, Trustee, Trustee Judy Einach, Trustee Blake Maras

**EXCUSED:** Trustee Josh Freifeld

**STAFF:** Rob Genthner, Becki Paternosh, Andrew Webster, Vince Luce,

**ATTENDEES:** Johanna Kelley, Thomas Alexander, Village Justice Jeff Thomas

**MAYOR/BOARD:**

The Mayor opened the Budget Workshop meeting just before 7pm. Before getting into the budget discussions, he asked for any comments from visitors.

Justice Jeff Thomas just wanted the Mayor and Board to know that he now has no court clerk’s and he is meeting with Judge Dean Puleo tomorrow and that Judge Puleo told him they will work everything out in some way. Judge Thomas indicated that he will most likely postpone the April 6th, Traffic court until a later date until he gets things figured out.

Thomas Alexander introduced himself and asked about the homeless situation. He mentioned that he occasionally takes homeless people into his residence to the help them out He indicated that more needs to be done for the homeless in Westfield. The Mayor acknowledged that there may be some but wasn’t aware there was a “homeless problem.” Mr. Alexander also once again offered up his residence but also noted sometimes he needs assistance. The Mayor assured him if there was a 911 call to Mr. Alexander’s residence the appropriate police or emergency personnel would assist. Trustee Einach reinforced that we are trying to help all people as much as possible but also ensure Mr. Alexander’s safety as well. Police Chief Genthner cautioned Mr. Alexander that if he allows people to stay there for too long of a time period they will have rights as renters and that Mr. Alexander may have to initiate eviction proceedings so he cautioned him about long term residential accommodations for people that he may not want to remain there for long periods of time.

Mr. Alexander left the meeting after the budget discussion started.

The Mayor then asked the board and supervisors for their thoughts on the budget. He noted that the budget started out at an increase of over $218K and that everyone was able to reduce the overage by $174,599 getting it down to $44,150. This represents a proposed overall tax rate increase of 5% from last year’s budget down from around a 16% originally. The Mayor noted that the severe inflation rate has required adjustments to wages and fuel expenses and that everyone has cut their budgets quite significantly already.

The Mayor noted that any overage will require an override of the tax cap so unless the board wants to make more cuts, we would need to set a public hearing and pass a local law to override the tax cap. It was noted by the Treasurer that both the tax cap local law hearing AND the budget hearing may take place at the same meeting.

The Mayor reinforced that this may cause some local controversy and that the Board should be prepared to discuss it publicly at the hearing.

Incoming Mayor Denny Lutes suggested that all board and staff be on the same page with this and that everyone be consistent in their messaging to the community about the tax cap override. Denny also mentioned that several cuts were made by supervisors already and that to pare things down even more would create greater problems in the future.

It was noted that the tax cap law is for only this coming fiscal year and subsequent laws would have to be passed each year to override the tax cap.

It was also noted that our fund balance is quite healthy. Current parameters require that the fund balance be from anywhere from 15% to 30% of your overall budget of appropriations. Currently, our fund balance is around 28% so we do have some margin there to work with. The Mayor cautioned; however, that you cannot rely on the fund balance every year.

Future developments going on the Village will also help with the local tax rate and so the Board noted that things look brighter in terms of overall assessment going up in the Village.

On a motion by D. Lutes, seconded by J. Einach and carried, the Board agreed with moving forward with proposed local law #3-2023 which would override the property tax cap AND also agreed to set the budget public hearing for Monday, April 3, 2023 at 7pm.

The Board will tour the Fire Department at 6:30pm and be back to open the public meeting at 7pm.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the work session meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:42pm.

Respectfully Submitted By:

Vincent E. Luce

Administrator & Village Clerk