

York County Budget Committee Minutes for May 5, 2021

6:30 p.m. via ZOOM

Members Participating: Jo-Ann Putnam, Ed Karytko, Chad Perry, John Bell, Dave Durrell, Paul Philbrick, Michael Cote, Alex Orestis, Marc Lessard

Absent: Dana Lajoie and Jonathan Kinney

1. INTRODUCTION AND WELCOME

a. Welcome and Swearing in of New Members

County Manager Greg Zinser swore in members.

Acting Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam welcomed all.

2. REVIEW OF INFORMATION PACKET – No issues with contact information of members

3. ELECTION OF BUDGET COMMITTEE CHAIR, VICE-CHAIR AND SECRETARY

Chairman – Ed Karytko nominated Jo-Ann Putnam. Michael Cote seconded the motion. Vote (by roll call)- unanimous.

Vice-Chairman- Ed Karytko nominated Marc Lessard. Jo-Ann Putnam seconded the motion. Vote (by roll call)- unanimous.

Secretary- Jo-Ann Putnam nominated Kathy Dumont. Ed Karytko seconded the motion. Vote (by roll call)-unanimous.

Introductions- All members present on the ZOOM call introduced themselves.

4. BEGIN REVIEW OF FY'22 PROPOSED BUDGET BY COUNTY MANAGER GREG ZINSER- County Manager Zinser explained that the budget shows an increase of .62% resulting in a .95% municipal tax increase. He continued that the Committee members won't see a lot of changes and that the County is currently bargaining with York County Unions. Mr. Zinser informed members that there are two new requests for personnel: courthouse security and an additional person in EMA.

B.C. Member Ed Karytko interjected that last year after a few meetings there was discussion of the budget committee members to drop the budget by a certain percentage. He asked if there is any interest from the other members to drop the municipal assessment to zero.

Chair Putnam recommended hearing from the County Manager first with an overview since there are many new members on the Committee.

County Manager Zinser continued and informed the committee that even if the budget was brought down to zero that would not necessarily mean the towns or cities would see a zero increase. B.C. Member Ed Karytko clarified that he meant the overall budget-not that of each, individual town. He spoke of his concern regarding the decrease in deeds revenue.

County Manager Zinser stated that the county prefers to budget conservatively and it is anybody's guess as to what the deeds revenue will be as it is currently over budget.

B.C. Member Ed Karytko replied that it is always nice to be able to go back to the town's boards and councils and let them know there is no increase on the County budget.

The County Manager proceeded and stated that the health insurance had been level funded in the union contracts for several years but we realize that we now need to make adjustments. He informed all that the police contract had just been settled.

York County is slated to receive a little over \$40 million from the American Rescue Plan. York County cities and towns are also receiving funds. This does come with "strings attached" explained County Manager Zinser. He informed everyone that in Section 9901, Section 603 of the Plan, it is explained what projects County government can participate in such as transportation and in conjunction with non-profit programs. He added that York County will use some of the American Rescue Plan funds to assist with jail funding as the funds distribution formula from the State is based on 2021 population which was low due to COVID. Courts were closed and police departments were and continue to use discretion before arresting people. We do believe, continued the County Manager, that there will be a large influx of people when the courts open up. I have had preliminary conversations with the Commissioners about the use of funds and the general consensus is to use the funds in such a way that they have a county-wide impact. As well, we are having discussions with non-profits to assist with the possible running of programs.

Budget Committee Chairperson, Jo-Ann Putnam asked what the timeframe is to utilize the monies. County Manager Zinser stated that the County is still waiting on guidance from the Treasury Department and that the funds are expected to arrive around May 11th. York County will receive two payments-\$20 million this year and \$20 million next year with a deadline of December 31, 2024 to spend the money.

Budget Committee Chairperson, Jo-Ann Putnam asked the County Manager to briefly explain the two new position requests.

County Manager Zinser explained that there has not been a security officer at the courthouse. The Judicial Marshalls are at the courthouse to protect the Judges. When COVID hit, we reduced building access at the courthouse, explained the County Manager. The State Court system did shut down on several occasions which left no screening being done at the courthouse. The Sheriff possesses certain emergency authority to create special deputy positions. Therefore, Sheriff King swore in special deputies mostly from the civil division to perform security duties at the courthouse. The new position request would alleviate any issues with entry screening into a more methodical method, stated County Manager Zinser. He added that it is beneficial to have an armed presence.

The other new position request is in our Emergency Management Agency and is for an EMA Planning Specialist. Director Cleaves will speak more about this position and answer any questions you may have. EMA is a very busy department and they have brought on 30 to 40 reservists to assist with, among other tasks, distribution of PPE and organization and running of the vaccine clinic.

Another increase that you will note on some budgets is the telephone line. We increased our bandwidth and obtained an improved telephone system that allows our employees to answer their work line from home. This has greatly assisted with workforce working remotely due to COVID.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam asked what the timeframe is for employees to return to working in person. The County Manager responded that there is some vaccine hesitancy and that he is

leaving that decision up to the Department Leaders at this time. He added that we do have agreements in place with our Unions that we can return employees to “in-person” working whenever we want to.

Budget Committee Member Dana Lajoie was not present at the meeting but did submit questions that the County Manager answered as follows: (questions included as record of these minutes).

- 1.) Were there any changes to the presented budget by the Commissioners? **C.M.- NO**
- 2.) If so, what were the major adjustments up or down? **C.M.-none**
- 3.) For clarification, I see close to 40 vacant positions in the corrections/jail division. Is this correct?
C.M.- The number is correct but the actual number is closer to 20. York County Jail has a long standing agreement with Cumberland County to board inmates. We are hopeful to be able to maintain this Agreement with them. We recognize the deficit (of corrections officers) and because of this we board out. Rather than putting a new line item in the budget for boarding costs, we know that at a number of 55 employees, we can cover the Boarding Agreements. We would like to have 76 corrections officers. The County Manager referred to the budget sheets in the budget and explained that employee #s 61-76 are reserved to cover the boarding contracts. Since this was published, there have been more resignations. We are competing with lots of companies, explained County Manager Zinser.
- 4.) What has been done with the left over money from year to year over several years as this vacancy deficit seems to routinely pose a \$1.5 million concern? **County Manager Zinser replied that from an operational standpoint, you can't slash positions. Today, we could but we know next year we would have to make up that deficit and more. We have to keep it there as we have to hire corrections officers.**
B.C. Member Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam asked where does the leftover money go? County Manager Zinser explained that in 2008 the Maine Board of Corrections set arbitrary limits (tax caps) with the State's promise to fund the gaps. As you can see in prior audits, the jail was in a precarious position as the general fund cannot supplement the jail budget. There was no funding for jail capital. For the past couple of years, the money has lapsed into the jail, unassigned undesignated fund. There are substantial investments needed at the jail, continued County Manager Zinser to include a camera system.
- 5.) Is there any plans to adjust this issue with jail vacancies or at least reduce the budget until the overall issue of employment stability can be addressed? **The County Manager stated that this was answered as part of question #4.**
- 6.) Will the Budget Committee be able to ask questions to department heads directly then allow for clarification if necessary? **The County Manager replied yes as has always been done.**

5. OTHER MATTERS, DATE/TIME/LOCATION OF BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETINGS, ETC.

Budget Committee Member Marc Lessard suggested the Committee begin their meetings at 6:00 p.m. since no one is required to travel. County Manager Zinser responded that he may have a conflict with the Commissioners' meetings but that next Wednesday will not be a problem as there is no Commissioners' meeting. It was decided that the Budget Committee meetings will begin at 6:00 p.m. and end at 8:00 (later if agreed to by B.C. Members) barring any conflicts.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam asked if any members wanted any other information and/or any department heads to come before the Committee?

Budget Committee Member Ed Karytko asked again if the Committee wanted to have a generalized direction?

Budget Committee Vice-Chairperson Marc Lessard replied that if there is ever an opportunity to reduce the budget, he is the first to sign up but he feels it will serve the Committee well to review each department as this budget is already skinny. Mr. Lessard continued that he does have one concern and that is his belief that we might be going into a time of hyper-inflation. He informed all that he works in the food industry and he is starting to see increases. This could get to all in the next five months and cause a slow down. Budget Committee Vice-Chair Lessard noted that he saw zero funding in the contingency line and feels if ever there was a year to have money in this budget line, this is it.

Budget Committee Chairperson Jo-Ann Putnam agreed that the committee should review each budget.

County Manager Zinser replied that the Department Leaders should have the opportunity to go before the Committee and will coordinate with Jo-Ann to schedule.

Budget Committee Member Ed Karytko stated that he is concerned with the deeds and jail revenue numbers.

6. PUBLIC COMMENTS-None

7. ADJOURN- Marc Lessard motioned to adjourn. Ed Karytko seconded the meeting. Motion Unanimous. Meeting adjourned at 7:56 p.m.