

March 5, 2024

This is a workshop meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Victory Gardens held on March 5, 2024.

Mayor Holeman called the meeting to order and declared a quorum present.

Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of Our Country.

Please remain standing for a moment of silence for our military.

ATTENDANCE: Councilman Glass, Councilman Suarez, Councilwoman Hedgepath, Councilman Lorenzo, Councilwoman Garcia Montes.

ABSENT: Councilman Hale.

Tonight's meeting is for discussion on the 2024 municipal budget. At this time the meeting was turned over to the CFO.

The budget I gave you tonight incorporates the 2% increases for salaries. The figures that Debbe gave me the last time for garbage and health contract are in here also.

Right now you are looking at about 3% increase to the budget. The State came out yesterday with their State Aid number. We are getting \$369.00 more dollars this year than last year. We don't have a say as to what we get in State Aid. Last year we got \$74,215.00. This year we are getting \$74,584.00.

I was talking to Glen who is our Assessor over here. I'm not sure how you want to handle the reval. If Glen is willing to do this for \$12,000 compared to \$35,000 plus with the costs of the Tax Maps, then it is a wiser move to go with Glen.

Councilman Glass said we asked Glen if he could do it for \$11,000. The Clerk said she talked to Glen and he said he gave a very fair price for \$12,000. He can't get any lower than that because there is a lot of work that has to go into this. The Clerk said the way Glen broke it down to her was that his part would be \$12,000 and then the outside company would be another \$12,000. Joe said when he spoke to Glen it sounded like it was only going to be \$12,000 with no other costs. No, the Clerk said, that is not the proposal he gave to me. Joe said he will talk to Glen again. The Clerk said she will see Glen tomorrow and she will ask him again.

The Mayor said that the proposal Glen gave was \$12,000 for him and then \$12,000 for the outside company. If you go that way, then you don't have to do the tax maps. Overall it comes out cheaper that way so you don't have an outside company doing the whole thing. Joe said that amount will be put into the budget.

The Clerk asked if a phone system will be under Capital? Yes. My thoughts are I want to see about the sidewalk and using the money from the old ordinance for reconstruction of town hall. I want to see if I can use that same ordinance to cover the phones.

Councilwoman Montes asked about the money we are supposed to get back from Dover, where will that money be? If we are getting money back from Dover, and we get it before the budget gets introduced I can put it in this budget.

The Clerk said she doesn't believe we are getting money back at this time. It is still before the Judge. What we have is the money we were holding from Dover. We never paid them. We are paying them now, but all the money we were holding, we are still holding. If we do get this money, would the increase still be the 3%? I have to see what those figures are Joe said. What I discourage the Council from doing, even if it is just a one time thing, don't use it just because it is there. You have to make a plan. Could we use it to offset taxes? It depends on what we receive.

Joe said everything looks good. Jason is doing all the bank recs. We will have all the revenues for the next meeting.

The Mayor asked about the doors for the fire house, where will that money come from? Last years Capital.

Councilman Suarez said for the audit, you have the same amount this year as it was last year. Last year we paid that money because the auditors were doing most of the work to get everything together. Should it be that high this year? Joe said he doesn't anticipate them doing what they did last year. So, will it be less? Most likely.

Joe said he and Jason are working on another accounting system which I mentioned to the Council before. We have concerns with Quick Books. It just doesn't work. Councilman Suarez asked where does the money come from for the new system. I will take it out of last years Capital.

Councilwoman Hedgepath asked if that was for Edmunds? Yes. When will that be in place? Once we have all the balances, I can co ordinate with the provider and then give you the exact date. I've seen it take anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks. I don't know how busy the company is and when they will be able to do what they have to do. Jason thinks by the end of the week he should have everything reconciled. I will reach out to the provider tomorrow and see if I can get a timeline and then I will let you know.

Councilman Lorenzo said the group insurance is higher? Group insurance is your health benefits plan. That went up. As for Workers Comp we are covered. The Clerk said she told the Council that we were covered.

Councilman Glass asked Joe if he was Finance S&W? Yes. It is the same amount as last year. Jason and I are not taking an increase.

The Mayor asked about Manny and Letty being covered under health care. The Clerk said Letty is part time and doesn't get coverage. She has coverage under her husbands health insurance. Neither one of them are in the pension the Clerk said. That is another piece that Jason and I are working on Joe said. Together we have to call pensions. There is still an issue with who is the Certifying Officer and who is the Supervising Officer. I am going to set up Jason as the Supervising Officer and Myself and Deb as the Certifying Officers.

Mayor Holeman asked since they are so far behind in the pension, where is the money coming from to catch them up? All the stuff that is arrears has to be caught up correct? Joe said what will happen is this. First, there will be no penalties to the town. We submitted the paperwork to the State already. The fact that the State can't get the Supervising Officer and the Certifying Officer together is their problem and I will fight any penalties they try to give us. They have certified Letty but they aren't taking anything out of her check. I can't control what the State does. Jason and I are going to take time and sit and talk to the pensions and try to get this resolved that way. We will do this some time next week. Even though Joe Costatino retired they still have him as the person doing the work. We are trying to put this under Jasons and mine id numbers so we don't have this same issue.

Councilwoman Montes asked if Joe had this problem in Wharton? Yes, when I started there we had the same issues. This needs to get taken care of because it has been going on way too long. Manny's name is in the health benefits but I have to check with them to see if he is covered.

The Mayor asked about the pensions? I have to do that with Jason. We both have to talk to the State at the same time. Where does the money in arrears come from? That money will come from the employees. They will have about 24 months to catch up. Why should the money come from the employees when it isn't their fault that they have not been put in? They are going to be penalized because they have to pay all that money back and it wasn't their fault? When you enroll in the pension you still have to pay back whatever is due until they actually begin to take money out of your check.

Councilwoman Hedgepath said that may be true, but for Letty this has been 2 years. For Manny it is over a year. I don't want them getting hit, especially Letty who is part time with a big deduction coming from her check. So they will have to pay their regular deduction plus something out for the arrears? Yes, that is what will happen Joe said. We have to take care of them. This isn't their fault that this hasn't been set up for them. We can't take a lot of money from them all at one time. We can enroll them as a hardship. This happened to me and it took me 18 months to get back into the pension. As a hardship, they gave me 24 months to pay the money back.

The Mayor asked how long is this going to take? It already has been 2 years for Letty and over a year for Manny. Pensions has a paper form on both of them. They haven't approved anything yet. Once they approve everything, it should be done within 30 days. Did they have this 2 years ago? No, they had it for about a year now. Manny was squared away in July of last year. The other Joe submitted Letty's paperwork. We have 2 letters from pensions saying she is certified but with zero deductions.

Councilwoman Hedgepath said that once they get this taken care of it will be an additional 30 days for them to actually start being billed? Correct. Is there a way to set up a misc. payroll deduction to start taking this money now so it isn't such a big hit to them? Then when it is time to pay you can take it from that misc. fund. What is the pension deduction per paycheck? Joe said it is 7 1/2%. Joe said he will email Debbe what he thinks the pension amount would be. I have to look at each of their checks. I need to have their exact salaries so it can be figured out. It may come out to about an extra 40 or \$50 per pay. We can't take misc. deductions. I would have to draft a form. If the employees want it to come out of every paycheck than that is fine too.

Councilman Glass said it would be better for the employees to take it out and put it in a savings account and earn interest than for us to do it.

Joe said that pension is pre taxed. Misc. deductions would be post tax. Joe said he will talk to the Auditors.

Councilwoman Montes asked Joe if he does payroll. Yes. Can you make sure you put the money into the accounts so that Debbe and Letty don't have to do it? I can but the problem is, and this is something that I am trying to get with Jason on, I want to project 6 months of payroll so we don't have this issue anymore. The issue is that the bank said they never got the signature cards. You said you went to the bank. I did/ Well Debbe spoke to the bank manager and he said they have no signature cards for you. Has the signature cards been taken care of? No. we need to fix that! I will do it immediately Joe said. It is part of your job. Understood.

Councilman Suarez said that Joe will project 6 months of payroll? Yes. I try to do it that way so there is no issue with anything being covered.

Councilman Glass asked how much is left in the school account? Joe said he didn't know. He would have to look. We take \$48,000 out a year to help with the budget and taxes. I will get back to you with that number.

Motion to open the meeting to the public by Councilwoman Montes, seconded by Councilwoman Hedgepath and approved on verbal vote. None opposed.

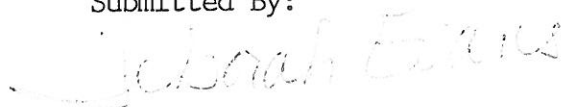
Jim Janone - A long time ago we had another employee who was never put into the pension and we had to pay like \$5,000 back pension for him. Is this something that will happen with these two people that aren't put into the pension yet? Joe said we have proof that it was submitted for both employees. Will the town have to put some of that in? That will be in the future. It will not affect this budget. When you were talking about health benefits you mentioned Eddie's name. He doesn't work here anymore. No, but he is still covered under the health benefits. At the next meeting can we have an overall budget picture as to what line items went up or down in the budget. Yes. How much interest did we get? we have our budget going up \$33,000. what does that equate to for a homeowner in taxes being raised? I don't have that figure. The Attorney said we should have about \$600,000 from Dover. Why can't we use that money to offset taxes? It will help with the budget increase. That money could last us 10 or 15 years. VG isn't hurting like a lot of other towns. We are in the black. Dover is getting a new fire truck and we probably have to pay a percentage of that. The truck won't be for three years. They want a new ladder truck which is about well over 1 million. The 2% increase is that only employees? No, it is across the Board. Professionals, everyone.

Motion to close the meeting to the public by Councilwoman Montes, seconded by Councilman Glass and approved on verbal vote. None opposed.

Councilwoman Montes said one of our trucks are all rusted out. Is there money in the budget for a new truck? No. Councilman Glass said there is nothing wrong with the trucks. we got the rust fixed. That was over a year ago. We just had tires and brakes done.

Motion to adjourn the meeting by Councilwoman Montes, seconded by Councilwoman Hedgepath and approved on verbal vote. None opposed.

Submitted By:

  
Deborah Evans  
Borough Clerk