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*BOROUGH OF WASHINGTON, WARREN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY*

*WASHINGTON BOROUGH COUNCIL MINUTES*

*January 28, 2021*

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The special meeting of the Borough Council of Washington, Warren County, New Jersey was held via ZOOM live stream at 7:00 P.M.

Roll Call: Conry, Cox, Duchemin, Heinrich, Noone, Norris, and Higgins.

Also Present: Matthew Hall, Manager  
Laurie A. Barton, Borough Clerk  
Natasha Turchan, CFO

Mayor Higgins led everyone in the flag salute.

Mayor Higgins read the following statement into record:

“The requirements of the Open Public Meetings Law, 1975, Chapter 231, have been satisfied in that adequate notice of this meeting has been published in the Express Times Warren County Edition and posted on the borough website and Facebook stating the time, place and purpose of the meeting as required by law.”

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

Mayor Higgins started the meeting with an update on a recent fire in the Borough. Sadly a resident perished as a result of that fire. Mayor Higgins asked everyone to keep her and the family in their thoughts and prayers. Also, keep thoughts and prayers to those who responded to the fire and who might have a hard time dealing with this.

A moment of silence was observed.

Mayor Higgins stated that the purpose of this meeting is to discuss solid waste and the meeting will be ending by 9:00 p.m. and asked that questions and comments be kept short and asked that no outbursts occur.

Mayor Higgins asked for comments from Council;

Councilwoman Noone stated after much consideration, she still believes a municipal waste utility is the most fiscally responsible way to fund solid waste pick up instead of bonding.

Councilman Norris agreed with Councilwoman Noone and added that taxes will go up if its put in the taxes. This is a way to prepare for the future. Councilman Norris also stated that bulk pick up was never free. Councilman Norris asked those to give council a chance and stated that they are trying to save money.

Councilwoman Duchemin agreed with both Noone and Norris. Keeping it separate as a utility is an act of having some foresight and control things. As time goes on hopefully people will see the benefit. Hopefully new questions today will be answered and we can move forward,

Councilwoman Cox agreed with what council has said so far. Councilwoman Cox asked Manager Hall regarding tax increase differences. Manager Hall reviewed what was done in the past with the private hauler and the increasing fees that are getting more expensive. Councilwoman Cox asked that everyone give this a chance and stated that the Manager is doing a very good job and appreciates it.

Councilman Heinrich agreed with everyone on Council and is the reasons why he voted yes. The solid waste utility budget makes the most sense and helps dedicate the surplus. Tonight's meeting is about discussing the utility versus the general fund. Comments regarding size of cans or other issues, to email the manager with those concerns, tonight we are focusing on the financial aspect and we have the CFO here to explain it.

Councilwoman Conry concurred with council who spoke about the garbage utility. Hopes that everyone on Zoom tonight understands why council took in place the voting for the utility. Councilwoman Conry added that they are not here to bamboozle anyone, its for the betterment of the borough.

Mayor Higgins stated that the focus tonight is the cost being in the taxes versus out of the taxes and in the utility. This is an effort on council to keep the taxes low.

Public Comment:

Gina Appleby, Willow Street, asked whether or not the calculation from the 1/23 memo took into account the loss of revenue if all properties that are eligible to opt out of trash pickup opt out. Do those models that are being compared reflect that loss of whatever they were paying.

CFO, Natasha Turchan explained that leaving it in the taxes puts a lot of restrictions in costs and cap allowances that the state requires. The law on the books is that you cannot deduct more than \$10,000 and for most people they reach that regardless if the garbage is in the taxes or not.

Manager Hall explained the SALT deduction for state and local taxes.

Pete (last name inaudible), Alvin Sloan Ave., asked why wasn't residents given the option to get their own trash hauler. Added that the truck bought wasn't bought correctly for the cans.

Councilman Norris added that the borough hasn't raised its portion of the taxes in six years, the borough can't control what the county or school does.

Joe Kopsco, Valley View Terrace, is this guaranteeing not to get bonds for the future?

Joan (last name inaudible), asked how difficult it would for rental properties to charge each unit house if they have three apartments and have one fee. Asked how the fee went from \$350 to \$300. Asked about the bulk sticker that is \$10 per item. Asked about revenue from bulk item stickers as part of utility fund.

JFK, Jason (last name inaudible), Valley View Terrace, asked about actual difference of the 2020 tipping fee and what the borough budgeted. Inquired about surplus and what the borough plans on buying with surplus funds. Inquired about repairs and maintenance for the next 15 years. Asked what is the expected tax credit value to commercial property owners.

Kelly Burn, Youmans Ave., asked what would happen if she doesn't get a tenant to rent out the other half of duplex, would she still need to pay to have the garbage can or could an option of not having pickup be done. Asked what happens if someone doesn't pay the utility bill.

Moez Hussein, stated that this is the best project the borough has done and thanked Manager Hall. Asked why aren't the details being spoken about, have the CFO who is here on this meeting explain the things straight and forward.

CFO, Turchan explained last years budget for garbage pick up and going forward with the 2021 budget. Ms. Turchan explained that it if it comes out of taxes or if it comes out of a utility, it's a wash.

Moez Hussein, asked if something could be put on the website in a simpler format to explain to the residents.

Wildricks, Oakwood Rd. asked how will it be decided when if additional cost will be a bill or included in our taxes. Urged council to keep those amounts separate from the taxes. Having another tax would deter potential buyers coming to the borough.

Gina Appleby, asked where in the ordinance does it give a deadline thereafter to choose to opt out. Stated that people weren't aware of this separate utility option to opt out and that potentially there could be more people. Asked have all properties that were eligible was the deduction they were paying prior taken into consideration and deducted for calculations.

JFK, Jason (last name inaudible), Valley View Terrace, stated for council to strongly consider with all the feedbacks that they consider leaving this in the taxes for 2021 and as we get further in quarter four in 2021 and come back to the residents with real numbers hard facts on what the facts will be. There too many conversations running in circles. There are real concerns here with these costs.

5643, Alexis Cregle(sp), Oakwood Terr., inquired about previous increases and why was it assumed to be 4%. Asked why was the information if this was planned a year ago , why wasn't this made public that it would be a separate bill.

Manager Hall explained the 4% was based on previous contracts plus recycling tipping fees.

Robin Klimko, Willow St., asked if a comparison was done with an outside contractor and the borough doing it on its own. Asked why didn't garbage go out to bid.

Ms. Klimko expressed her concerns how this will affect residents having a separate bill and what will the surplus be used for.

CFO, Turchan explained the sewer budget and added that there is no line that says surplus.

Kathy Moore, West Washington Ave., asked if they would still have to take that four-cent increase if they leave it in the taxes.

Marirose Albanese (sp), stated that for small properties and the houses aren't worth much, she is paying more for garbage living in a four-bedroom house. Stated that pulling it out of the taxes isn't the surprise, the way they are going to pay for it is what the problem is.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

A motion was made by Conry seconded by Cox to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 pm.

Ayes: 7: Nays: 0

Motion Carried.

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Mayor David Higgins

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Laurie A. Barton, Borough Clerk