

**TOWN OF DRYDEN
TOWN BOARD MEETING
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARINGS
NOVEMBER 7, 2019**

Present: Supervisor Jason Leifer, Cl Daniel Lamb, Cl Linda Lavine,
Cl Kathrin Servoss

Absent: Cl Alice Green

Elected Officials: Bambi L. Avery, Town Clerk
Rick Young, Highway Superintendent

Other Town Staff: Jennifer Case, Bookkeeper

**PUBLIC HEARINGS
PRELIMINARY BUDGET
SPECIAL DISTRICT IMPROVEMENTS
FIRE CONTRACTS
AMBULANCE CONTRACT**

Supv Leifer opened the public hearings at 6:36 p.m.

Bill Ackroyd confirmed there is no change in the budget request from Dryden Ambulance. There has been no feedback from the public specifically to the budget request, but there has been to the overall EMT crisis in the country and the state. He has sent industry articles to board members. There was an article in the Cortland Standard on or about October 19. There may have been something another paper.

Supv Leifer explained the board would not vote on budget matters tonight. A vote will be taken at the November 14 Town Board meeting.

If the board approves the Dryden Ambulance request it will essentially double the tax rate for the ambulance district to \$.88 per thousand of assessed value. Cl Lamb said it is always best to move in increments and this is a big change to the tax rate that will surprise a lot of people and asked if the amount could be reduced. B Ackroyd replied they would adjust accordingly, but the board has been presented with the analysis of what is required to maintain a high level of coverage and employees.

Bill Ackroyd stated they want to retain and recruit good workers, they need to increase the pay scale. They want to keep a viable ambulance service in the town. The ambulance will do what it needs to do. If there is money left over, it will go into their fund balance. This request will help provide a competitive pay scale. The median pay for a basic paramedic is \$16 per hour. Dryden is paying \$12-14 per hour for basic. They can make that at McDonalds. With this budget a base pay for a paramedic would start at \$20 to be more competitive with surrounding services and recruit people. There is a shortage of people going into the field. They are required to have 2,000 hours of training and are seeing people at their very worst.

Bill Ackroyd gave a brief history of ambulance service in the area. In 1976 it was entirely volunteer. In 1990 the State Health Department required a higher level of care that meant hiring higher skilled people and said a volunteer fire company can't bill for their

services. At that point Dryden Ambulance, Inc. was formed. He said they are on track for 1800 calls this year. Two-thirds of those calls are Medicaid calls and what they get paid for those doesn't cover the cost of the service. Payroll is a major part of their budget. People don't volunteer anymore. Their mission is to keep a viable ambulance in the town of Dryden.

The board discussed how to make the public aware of the situation. The ambulance and fire department can host a public information meeting. The board can put an insert in with the property tax bills in January.

The EMS industry as a whole is in crisis nationwide. The field isn't paying well. Their biggest expense is payroll (and benefits).

Supv Leifer and Cl Lamb indicated they are not opposed to an increase, but we need to be able to explain it to the public. B Ackroyd will work with them to create a document that could be inserted with the tax bills, put on the website and be posted in public places.

Linda Fenner and Michele Robinson were present on behalf of Etna Fire Department. Etna Fire Department had the largest department request increase. They presented the board with quote for the 18 air packs (9 this year and 9 next year) they need to replace (haven't decided which brand to go with yet).

Supv Leifer said air packs could perhaps be purchased from the amount held back for them pending increased response time (which has happened). Cl Lamb asked them to investigate the available FEMA grant programs.

Etna has \$245,000 in reserve toward their next truck purchase. Supv Leifer would like to see an equipment replacement schedule.

Lighting Districts – Amounts budgeted go to pay for the power for the street lights. The LED lighting project impact this budget in 2021 and decrease the cost of electricity.

Water/Sewer Districts - Several of the water and sewer districts are consolidating. Right now, the budget shows revenue from usage fees and property taxes. Once the consolidation is effective the plan is to do away with the property tax portion of revenue and go solely with usage fees. There will be a minimum charge plus a per gallon charge. That can be done because there is no debt in the districts. The board will need to pass new water/sewer rates for those districts. There will be a separate mailing to the properties affected by the consolidation. The plan was approved by the board and a public hearing and final vote will be held on the 21st of November. The consolidation will result in about an 80% reduction in administrative expense.

Supv Leifer said this is largely an infrastructure budget. The only projects the town is currently dealing with is the comprehensive plan update and eventually the broadband study/project. There will be a presentation on the broadband study on 11/21. Bridge payments are part of the budget. The 2020 budget has the final Dodge Road payment. Until the county votes to cover the local share of the BridgeNY grant, the town will have to vote to bond to cover expenses up front because it is a reimbursement grant. The town needs roughly \$300,000 - enough for interest and principal and that is in the budget. The salt price is expected to increase. The Recreation Department is adding taking over the Freeville summer camp, but that is revenue neutral. We keep putting money into the trail, which has been pretty popular.

The town will be getting some pilot money next year for the Ellis Tract, but won't start getting it for the 2150 Dryden Road project until 2021. The solar project on the Carpenter

property is almost complete. There are poles going up on the Ellis Tract that are part of the grid upgrade project.

Supv Leifer said a wild card is what we get for a franchise fee from Spectrum. There has been no answer to his inquiry about why the surcharge on customer's bills increased.

There were no further comments, and Supv Leifer closed the public hearings at 7:27 p.m. He noted that the board can make changes on the budget up until it is adopted.

There being no further business, on motion made, seconded and unanimously carried, the meeting was adjourned at 7:28 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bambi L. Avery
Town Clerk