

BUCKS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

December 10, 2009

The Special Meeting of the Bucks County Board of Commissioners was held on Thursday, December 10, 2009 at 5:30 p.m., at the Bucks County Courthouse, Community Room, Doylestown, Pennsylvania, for the purpose of reviewing the Preliminary 2010 Budget for the County of Bucks. In attendance were Commissioner Charles H. Martin, Chairman, Commissioner James F. Cawley and Commissioner Diane M. Ellis-Marseglia. Commissioner Martin called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

PRESENTATION

Commissioner Martin called on Brian Hessenthaler, Acting COO/Finance & Finance Director, to review the preliminary budget. Mr. Hessenthaler spoke about the inter-departmental process of forming the budget, including assumptions made and guidelines issued. Mr. Hessenthaler then introduced David Boscola, Deputy Finance Director, to explain estimated expenditures and anticipated revenues for the upcoming year. Mr. Boscola explained that a combined decrease in both operating revenues and in expenditures would result in a \$7.1 million shortfall, which he attributed to strained economic conditions, increased pension and health care costs, and state funding reductions. Mr. Boscola explained that the County may decrease expenses, research new revenue streams, utilize the "rainy day fund", or raise taxes to make up for the shortfall.

Mr. Hessenthaler pointed out that this was an extremely difficult year and although this budget has a shortfall, he was pleased that no programs were cut and there were no layoffs. He also said that he would continue to try to find ways to reduce the shortfall.

Upon the conclusion of the presentation, Mr. Martin thanked Mr. Hessenthaler and Lynn Bush, Acting Chief Clerk, for all their efforts to create this budget while essentially working two jobs. He was pleased to be proposing no tax increase for the fourth year in a row.

PUBLIC COMMENT

David Bower, a Doylestown Township resident, commended the Commissioners for proposing no tax increase and their fiscal responsibility.

E. Renee & Andrew Flager, Barbara Shandelman, and Linda Billig thanked the Commissioners for their support of the library system and expressed their concern for decreased state library funding. They presented a petition for a new way to permanently fund the county library system by adding a new fixed line item on county tax assessments. Mr. Cawley proposed further research and discussion. Ms. Ellis-Marseglia cautioned the use of proposing referendum for any program struggling with funding cuts, as this could be onerous. Mr. Martin explained that even with a fixed line item on the county tax assessment, the millage could be changed by Commissioners and therefore would not be guaranteed funding. Discussion followed as to local and county libraries, service, usage, and funding. Mr. Cawley provided direction on the group's submission of research and petitions to Public Information and said that the legality of their proposal would be researched by the Solicitor's Office and disclosed at the next Commissioner's meeting.

Steve Young, a Langhorne resident, spoke about the benefit in adversity and commended the Commissioners on implementing the Whistle-Blower policy. He suggested setting up a commission specifically designed to find ways to produce revenue, and said archaic ideas like the visitors center be revisited to possibly save funds. Mr. Young also asked about reducing cost of living adjustments (COLA) for county employees, bridge maintenance programs, and offering financial incentives for money-saving ideas. Mr. Hessenthaler informed him of the BEST Committee (Bucks Employees Saving Taxes) and its mission and successes to date. Ms. Ellis-Marseglia requested that suggestions in the BEST boxes be posted on the website or otherwise discussed to show that the ideas are received and considered. Mr. Cawley discussed the purpose of the EDAB (Economic Development Advisory Board) in the global economic picture. Mr. Martin voiced his support for the valuable service that the county newsletters provide, despite the cost, and pointed out that they are already used sparingly. Discussion ensued regarding current and continuous efforts to reduce costs, create revenue, generate new money-saving ideas, and bridge maintenance and safety.

Matt Taylor, a Bucks County resident, asked about the revenue sources shown on the presentation and how much was available from each source. Mr. Taylor was informed that the budget, by line item as well as summary form, would be available on the county website after it was adopted. Mr. Taylor voiced his support for decreasing COLA for county employees to help the deficit and set a good example.

Chris Taylor, a Buckingham resident, asked about county debt, interest rates, the "rainy day fund", and pension and health care costs. Brian Hessenthaler responded and clarified the County's financial position. Mr. Martin pointed out the favorable credit rating the county received, and a discussion took place regarding benefit expenses and employee contributions.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Approved: 12/15/10

BUCKS COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

BY:

Charles H. Martin
Chairman

James F. Cawley, Esq.
Commissioner

Diane M. Ellis-Marseglia
Commissioner

Lynn T. Bush, Chief Clerk