

# **Board of Fire Commissioners**

Greenfield Fire District  
P.O. Box 103  
Greenfield Center, NY 12833

The 2015 proposed budget public hearing of the Greenfield Fire District Board of Fire Commissioners was called to order at the District Office by Chairman Richard Spackmann at 7:05 PM on October 21, 2014. The flag salute and a moment of silence were recognized for departed members and troops fighting overseas.

## **Present were:**

**Commissioners:** Atwell, Chandler, Kugler, Spackmann; Secretary/Treasurer Joyce Petkus, D/P Jill Chouinard, Deputy Treasurer Christopher Thurman. Please see sign in sheet for the two residents in attendance.

Chairman Spackmann announced that in accordance with NYS Town Law §105, all Fire Districts must, prior to the adoption of their budget, hold a public hearing on their budget. He then also noted the following:

- Tonight's meeting is regarding the 2015 proposed budget;
- The proposed budget was adopted on September 24, 2014;
- As specified in NYS Law, the budget has been posted on the website, firehouse and Town billboards, etc.
- Notice of the public hearing was posted in accordance with NYS law;
- The proposed budget was also made available during district office hours;
- The purpose of the hearing is to allow the public to talk and ask questions about the budget;
- The Deputy Treasurer will be giving a brief presentation of the 2015 proposed budget prior to the public comment period;
- The budget must be adopted no later than November 4, 2014 and submitted to the Town budget officer no later than November 7<sup>th</sup>.

Deputy Treasurer Thurman then read the through the 2015 proposed budget. The total budget presented: \$1,565,735.00.

Chairman Spackmann then opened the floor to questions/comments from the public.

George Habig, 4007 Route 9N, Greenfield Center

- Thanked the firefighters, staff and Board for this year's service, including former Commissioner Barss;
- Special thank you to Commissioner Atwell for digging up all the stuff and not letting anything get unturned or get by;
- Installation/Inspection: in the years 2013 and beyond it was quite high; in 2013 it was \$13,557 with \$4900 for alcohol. Last year, he commends the Board, if the numbers are not forged or cooked, the amount was \$10,246 with only \$1600 for alcohol. That is a big improvement and would like to see that again for 2015. Assumes the lower alcohol bill was due to the amount of hours for the open bar being dropped. With that being said, going on a lower trend, would like to see the installation/inspection go from \$18,000 down to \$14,000.

- Back in 2010 the proposed budget showed a maintenance position for \$40,000, and he believes at that time he, Stan Weeks and Jack Atwell as residents, and Commissioner Kugler was Chairman, there was a lot of objection about that, and he believes that in 2014 we have better equipment than we had in 2010 and he thinks it is a waste of money to spend \$40,000 for a maintenance person, and it would be cheaper to send it out and save on social security, wages, hospitalization and all that. He is behooved that they shoot something down and then they wait a few years and throw it back in again. He would like to see it thrown back out again.
- Personal Services: Believes last year the staff got a 3% pay raise and the Town highway only got 2%, he does not know what it is this year, probably 3% again and probably the Town is 2% for the Highway Department.
- Newsletter: allotted \$5000; he would like to know when was the last newsletter we got? He has a copy of the 2010 proposed budget and one item, directed to Commissioner Spackmann; he would like to see the newsletter published after the budget is approved and the contents of the budget included in the newsletter, which would not be a budget breaker. Back in 2010 Mr. Spackmann made a comment about comparing the Wilton fire district, their budget is not online, it is not posted in Town Hall, nobody knows what's going on there, and we are very open, we have a newsletter – where is that newsletter? He would have to give the Board a failing grade on transparency. He knows we do a lot more than other fire departments but it just seems like when it comes to transparency like he mentioned before it's there but you guys don't hold the door open for us, the taxpayer. He would like to see the newsletter published toward the end of November with the budget in it. Without the newsletter he thinks half the people in the Town of Greenfield don't even know we have new equipment. You are supposed to give this transparency which he thinks is good and let the people know what's going on, so he wishes they would reassemble and consider having a newsletter come out after the budget with the budget breakdown in there for transparency.
- Thanks for the opportunity to voice his concerns.

Commissioner Spackmann asked if there was anyone else that wished to address the Board; there were none, and so the public comment period was closed. Asked if anyone from the Board wished to address any of the comments.

Commissioner Atwell noted the following:

- Back in 2010 when the maintenance position was first brought up, he was one who joined with Mr. Habig against it. Now after having paid for things every year like pressure washing, general maintenance, window and door repairs, painting and trim work in all four stations, it is costing a ton of money. The big back breaker is the snow plowing since the Town stopped doing snow removal for the fire district. It is going to cost \$18,000 this season to plow 3 stations, almost half the salary. If an employee was hired year round, it starts to make more sense to have a person do general maintenance and snow removal. It did not make sense to hire a maintenance person until the Town stopped plowing.
- Employee raises: the employee raises this year are about 1%. Commissioner Spackmann added that last year it was between 1-1.5%. Commissioner Chandler noted that this year they looked at Town salaries and everything else that goes with it to put everything into perspective as with Town employees. The Board talked to the Town Clerk, Highway Superintendent and Town Councilmen, figured out salaries and raises, and that was factored into the overall decision. Commissioner Spackmann explained that although last year the raises were 3% on paper because employee evaluations were historically done in January after the budget, money had to be allocated before what raises were actually figured to be; leftover money goes back into the reserve

account at the end of the year. This year the strategy was changed and employee reviews were done in August, and so the Board knows exactly what raises are going to be and then formally put into the budget. So it may have been 3% on paper but that does not necessarily mean that's what went into staff raises last year.

Commissioner Chandler explained that regarding the banquet, they are more conscientious of that and it is definitely Mr. Habig bringing it up year after year, and this Board is especially conscientious of that dollar amount regarding alcohol and how it is addressed.

Commissioner Atwell added that regarding the installation banquet, the same amount was budgeted this year as last year. They try to stay in the black regarding the banquet.

Commissioner Kugler explained that in reference to the maintenance person, they have spoken to other fire districts, including Clifton Park and Jonesville, and they have shown where it has benefited them to have someone on staff. Thinks that having someone on board to take care of our properties is a good thing. When asked, it was noted that Jonesville is paying close to \$50,000 for one, and they 2 employees on staff. Boght also has 2 station keepers. It was clarified that this is a salaried position for the year, with no overtime involved.

Commissioner Spackmann commented that he does not think that Mr. Habig gives the Board enough credit. It is his right to talk to the Board, and Commissioner Spackmann encourages it, and really believes in transparency. He also feels that some of the terms Mr. Habig used this evening were very unfair; he was behooved that that Board "threw the maintenance position back in" after people publically said they did not want it. Commissioner Atwell is evidence that the Board has done their due diligence, factored in quite a few decisions, it wasn't made lightly and there weren't any shenanigans going on whatsoever. The Board has spent countless hours on this budget over the last month and a half, he would go out on a limb and say that they have spent much more time than the Town Board has on theirs – and they are paid, this Board is not, they are 100% volunteer. For someone to sit in the audience and say we threw something back in the public's face he thinks is very, very untrue and very unfair, and frankly, incorrect. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Commissioner Spackmann also explained that the reason there is no newsletter is because he works full time, and no one on the Board has time to do the newsletter because of the amount of time put into the budget. Next year they will have a part time secretary, and his vision is to work in collaboration with the part time secretary and have a newsletter drafted. There are not enough hours in the day to accomplish everything, so again, to address his comment that we received a failing grade for transparency, he does not think all factors have been taken into consideration. Looking at surrounding fire districts, no one comes close to what we do for our community at the cost we do it; our tax rate is lower than anybody else. Commissioner Spackmann then questioned if the Towns sent out a newsletter; it was noted no. Commissioner Spackmann further commented that he believes in the newsletter, but to say that we failed in transparency when no one else is doing one is completely unfair.

In looking at other fire districts regarding the salaries of Joyce and Jill, Commissioner Spackmann explained that their salaries are way under what other fire districts pay, and he would put them up against anyone else staff wise with any other fire district. This board, with all its imperfections, transparency is not one of them, nor is conspiracy.

Commissioner Spackmann also explained that the budget presented this evening is not the final budget; the Board will be reducing the budget by about \$30,000 to get under the tax cap.

Assuming the Town gets under the tax cap as well, every resident in the fire district will be getting a refund.

Mr. Habig noted he is not looking for 3 or 4 newsletters a year, just one is sufficient, but why not put the budget in it.

Motion to declare the public hearing of the 2015 proposed budget closed was made by Commissioner Spackmann with a second from Commissioner Chandler. All in favor, motion carried.

Chairman Spackmann then asked for a motion to set the 2015 budget adoption date.

Motion made by Commissioner Kugler with a second from Commissioner Chandler to set the date for the adoption of the 2015 budget at a special meeting on November 3, 2014 beginning at 7:00 PM at the District Office, 13 South Greenfield Road, Greenfield Center. All in favor, motion carried.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Commissioner Spackmann with a second from Commissioner Chandler. All in favor, motion carried.

Chairman Spackmann adjourned the meeting at 7:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joyce A. Petkus".

Joyce A. Petkus  
District Secretary/Treasurer