

CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF MERIDIAN
TOWNSHIP BOARD REGULAR BUDGET DELIBERATIONS - **APPROVED** -
5151 Marsh Road, Okemos, MI 48864-1198
853-4000, Town Hall Room
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2011 **6:00 P.M.**

PRESENT: Supervisor McGillicuddy, Clerk Helmbrecht, Treasurer Brixie, Trustees Dreyfus, LeGoff, Ochberg, Veenstra (6:02 P.M.)
ABSENT: None
STAFF: Township Manager Gerald Richards, Director of Community Planning & Development Mark Kieselbach, Director of Engineering & Public Works Ray Severy, Township Assessor David Lee, Interim Human Resources Director Amy Holda, Interim Communications Director Deborah Guthrie, Police Chief Dave Hall, EMS/Fire Chief Fred Cowper, Director of Finance Diana Hasse, Director of Parks & Recreation LuAnn Maisner, Director of Information Technology Stephen Gebes

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER
Supervisor McGillicuddy called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.
2. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE/INTRODUCTIONS
Supervisor McGillicuddy led the Pledge of Allegiance.
3. ROLL CALL
The secretary called the roll of the Board.
4. PUBLIC REMARKS
Supervisor McGillicuddy opened and closed Public Remarks.
5. PRESENTATION OF THE 2012 RECOMMENDED BUDGET
Township Manager Richards gave an overview of the 2012 Recommended Budget.

Finance Director Diana Hasse introduced the financial overview of the 2012 recommended budget document.

Director of Parks and Recreation LuAnn Maisner, presented an overview of staff utilization to maintain services for parks, grounds, cemetery, Harris Nature Center, farmers market and recreation.

Board members discussed the following:

- \$270,000 difference in the capital item amount from the 2011 original budget to the 2011 projected total is for the carryover budget for the Fishing Dock Project and the restroom project at North Meridian Road Park

Township Assessor David Lee presented an overview of the current staffing levels and staff utilization to meet services of the Assessing Department. He noted that the Michigan Local Government Benchmarking Consortium survey revealed Meridian Township has the lowest per capita cost for providing assessing services of any local unit of government participating in the survey.

Board members discussed the following:

- Interior and exterior inspections performed by seasonal interns for the purpose of inventorying what is on the property allows for a check against existing records

Interim Human Resources Director Amy Holda noted her office serves internal clients, the Township's employees. She added she manages benefits, negotiates labor contracts, administrative grievances and arbitration processes, etc. as well as advises department directors on personnel matters. She noted that loss of an administrative employee has resulted in an outsourced payroll and human resources information system, which will allow for tracking of a large amount of human resource information to

meet reporting requirements. The proposed budget provides for a personnel increase of a .5 Human Resources Specialist position.

Board members discussed the following:

- Rationale for hiring an additional ½ time position

Interim Communications Director Deborah Guthrie presented an overview of staff utilization to maintain services while providing residents with increased access to transparency in government with relevant information in a timely fashion. This includes assisting other departments by providing information via multimedia platforms including, but not limited, to Facebook, Twitter, etc.

Board members discussed the following:

- Request to place the semi-monthly report on the Township website

Township Clerk Mary Helmbrecht spoke to her department's accommodation of loss of staffing beginning in 2003. She noted the reconfiguration of the Treasurer's/Clerk's "suite" to more adequately address needs of the residents entering the Municipal Building as well as additional automation of the telephone system. Clerk Helmbrecht indicated there will be four (4) elections in 2012 and redistricting will require redrawing precinct lines and sending new voter registration cards. She added that each election held requires a three (3) to six (6) month planning/execution process.

Board members discussed the following:

- Redistricting will result in a reduction in the number of voting precincts and correspondingly increase the number of registered voters in some precincts
- Reduction in the number of voting precincts will result in the reduction of cost for the August and November elections

Finance Director Diana Hasse presented an overview of staff utilization to maintain services through cross training with Treasury personnel. She added there has been an increase in duties through handling the billing for rental registration, a function previously performed in the Planning Department

Board members discussed the following:

- Request for the cost of the outside payroll service v. cost of payroll specialist position

Treasurer Julie Brixie presented an overview of staff utilization to maintain services through cooperation and reconfiguration with Accounting. She noted significant technological advances in software allowed for cross training between utility billing and the Treasurer's office, and staggering the utility billing cycles allows for billing and collection on a continual basis. Treasurer Brixie noted that while staffing has declined, the number of tax bills and customers have not. She stated the Treasurer's office continues to provide quality service with less personnel and pursues improvements in efficiency through technology.

Board members discussed the following:

- Requested correction in verbiage on page 72 which refers to the Treasurer being full time and also as .8 personnel

Director of Community Planning and Development Mark Kieselbach noted his department is made up of 4 sections: building, code enforcement, planning and rental housing. While noting the number of building permits per month (67) has decreased slightly, 2010 saw a 20% increase from 2009. He noted the average single family home, based on size, receives 4-5 inspections, and the average deck has 2-3 inspections. Director Kieselbach stated larger projects, such as Walgreens, results in at least 20 inspections lasting a minimum of two hours for each inspection. He indicated his department does all the processing, finals and issuance of approximately 120 mechanical, electrical and plumbing permits per month, City of Mason building inspections (20) and Williamstown Township's building inspections on an as-needed basis.

Director Kieselbach indicated approximately 80 code enforcement complaints per month are investigated by all staff except clerical. He indicated each complaint typically receives at least two (2) inspections, plus the commensurate paperwork. He noted Planning staff has been reduced 1.5 positions,

while he continues to provide staffing to the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), the Downtown Development Authority (DDA), the Environmental Commission, the Township Board, the Planning Commission and the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Director Kieselbach added the Planning staff has processed 14 zoning amendments to date, approximately the same special use permits as 2010, and more site plan reviews than in 2010. Director Kieselbach indicated there has been an increase of 300 registered rental units to date from 2010 (80 of which are single family), for a total of 7,950 registered rental dwelling units handled by two (2) part-time personnel.

Board members discussed the following:

- Request for seasonal help during summer months as building, code enforcement and data entry and permit processing significantly increase
- Additional ½ time position will handle both the EDC and the DDA
- Inquiry if the Township will be reimbursed by the DDA for staffing
- The employee will not receive any additional monies for staffing the DDA
- Majority of permits are for air conditioning replacement
- Inquiry as to why the current number of planners are needed for the greatly reduced amount of building in the Township
- Amendments to projects which have already been approved must be handled by planners
- Reduced number of cases which come before the Zoning Board of Appeals
- Question whether the additional ½ time person is needed
- *May Planning and Zoning News* indicated government operations aimed at economic development are failures universally
- Clarification that the rental registration fee can be paid in installments
- Clarification that the annual fee for one and two-family duplex inspections is \$120
- Suggestion that single family duplex inspections be performed every two to three (2-3) years as it could aid in reducing staff and save money for the taxpayer

Director of Public Works and Engineering Ray Severy presented an overview of staff utilization to maintain services, noting a decrease of four (4) full time positions in public works since 2001. He stated his department is responsible for: maintenance of sewer and water lines; maintenance of 132 vehicles and equipment; building maintenance; engineering functions for all developers as well as township projects, and coordination of the East Lansing Meridian Water and Sewer Authority. He spoke to work with the Lansing Board of Water and Light (BW&L) (the southern part of the Township south of Bennett and Kinawa is serviced by BW&L water) and the Ingham County Road Commission regarding the pavement preservation program.

Mr. Severy noted his department is funded primarily from non-general fund sources through user fees and millages. He noted there are 143 miles of sewer and 28 lift stations maintained by five (5) employees who clean and “TV” all of the sewers on a five to seven (5-7) year basis. Director Severy stated manpower limitations have not allowed for that schedule. He indicated staff is responsible for 164 miles of water main with 2,000 valves in the system and 1,900 hydrants, all of which need to be turned and flushed on a regular basis. Director Severy addressed the engineering requirements for pathways, water and sewer improvements, soil erosion and sedimentation program, and inspections for developments.

Board members and staff discussed the following:

- Water and sewer rates are lower than almost all other governmental entities in the area
- Gradually raising water and sewer rates in the future would allow for the hiring of additional personnel to meet Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) requirements for system maintenance
- Implementation of computerized work orders through the GIS system to have accurate records
- \$400,000 General Fund loan for local road repairs is identified on the balance sheet as the transfer happened several years ago
- Additional \$225,000 appropriated this year for local road repairs has been allocated, but not yet spent

- Vehicle allocation is tied to department operations and staffing; staff looks at each department's needs, vehicles shared among departments and vehicles reduced when staff was reduced
- Vehicle replacement done on an as needed basis with more efficient and smaller vehicles
- Police vehicles are rotated on a mileage basis so that an equal number of cars are replaced each year
- Commercial riding lawn mowers with a wide cutting path are powered by diesel engines

Police Chief Dave Hall offered an overview of staff utilization to maintain services handled by the 40 sworn officers budgeted for 2011. During the year, one officer retired and one resigned for a current total of 38, noting he has been given authorization to fill one position. Chief Hall reminded the Board that in January, 2011, the Township picked up responsibilities for police services in Williamstown Township. He noted there has been a substantial reduction in personnel from the 46 full time officers working for the Township in 2000, but has been able to maintain the caliber of service enjoyed by the township's citizens through increased technology.

Police Chief Hall noted investigators have a 30-incident case load, and records personnel was reduced to 3.5 positions, down 1/2 time position. He indicated electronic tickets and field based reporting downloaded to the data base allows police officers to stay on the road. Chief Hall stated automatic license plate readers will be installed on patrol cars this week to assist in solving crimes. He noted current participation in a regional jail program and an online reporting program for predefined crimes and calls for service is proposed for 2012, noting that a resident who wishes to utilize the reporting system can do so through the web.

Board members and staff discussed the following:

- Request for a comparison of revenue from Williamstown Township for patrol services v. costs

Fire Chief Fred Cowper noted a need to reinvent the fire department in order to survive and become efficient. He and his staff worked with the IT department to capture information when personnel is the busiest on runs.

Chief Cowper noted 2011 started with 35.6 personnel and, with one retirement, the total now stands at 34.6. He stated the positions of Assistant Chief and EMS Coordinator were combined into one position, now titled Chief of Training. Chief Cowper indicated the suppression division operates out of three (3) stations with two (2) battalion chiefs and three (3) captains, seven (7) lieutenants and 18 firefighters. He noted that while calls are maintained with proficiency, there has been a significant increase from slightly over 400 calls last year, with a total to date of 675.

Chief Cowper indicated negotiations resulted in the hiring of part-time firefighters, while acknowledging that the increase in pension and health care costs resulted in the increase over 2011 operation costs.

Board members and staff discussed the following:

- Coping with increase in volume of paramedic runs with less personnel through use of part-time firefighters when volume is high
- Approved firefighter contract not in place (using part-time firefighters) when the 2012 recommended budget was prepared
- Money in the budget under the salaries line item includes part-time firefighters
- Request for changes in the chart to include the number of part-time positions
- Concern that \$4.3 million included in the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) for a new fire station in 2012
- CIP is a "wish list" which anticipates that at some point in the future the fire station may be replaced
- Dollar figure in the CIP is not a commitment for that project or money, but used as a planning tool
- CIP is presented with the budget for the Board's information and review, but staff will review the CIP approval process
- Option for a heated garage to house an ambulance is necessary for medications which must be kept on-board

Information and Technology Director Stephen Gebes presented an overview of staff utilization to maintain services while acknowledging that his department's personnel was reduced by one quarter in January 1, 2010. He indicated his department has the following six (6) separate service initiatives and two (2) operational initiatives which guide his staff's interaction with other departments: server maintenance, work station maintenance, server replacements, work station replacements, training, and new infrastructure/new technology projects.

Director Gebes noted the following changes for 2012: significant changes in network infrastructures will focus on efficiency and monitoring; replacement of a new backup server, new virtual technology, cloud based solutions where applicable; consideration of virtual workstations and/or thin client deployment, addition and training of an additional network operations assistant and possible outsourcing to offer help desk service which would perform initial "triage" for all networking issues. He also spoke to possible outside consulting services and memory expansion.

Board members and staff discussed the following:

- Line item of \$100,000 for outside services includes outsourcing the help desk
- Concern with the creeping privatization throughout the budget
- IT survey conducted in May of this year for department head and staff input on priorities
- Results of the survey identified an additional 90 hours per week of technology support not currently being provided to other departments
- Challenge is having sufficient resources to apply to other department needs
- Help desk service would provide specialty knowledge without involving current IT staff
- Help desk service would allow IT staff to allocate larger blocks of time to concentrate on larger projects
- IT would evaluate the impact of the help desk prior to hiring the additional staff person
- Efficiency of the IT department has saved at least seven (7) positions and associated costs throughout the Township
- As staff continues to be reduced, there is increased dependency upon the remaining staff
- Additional position would focus primarily on customer care
- Geographic location of the help desk service

Continued Board member discussion:

- Central Fire Station – option to close, replace or relocate
 - Alternative to locate the paramedic/ambulance service in rented commercial space in the central business district of the Township near Grand River Avenue as a pilot program
 - Option for replacement of the existing central fire station to be placed on the ballot as a millage question
 - Moving the ambulance and commensurate personnel to the Public Safety Building would allow time for a study
 - Township could sell the property at Okemos Road and Clinton Street
 - Prudent to allow the voters to decide the important issue of replacement of the Central Fire Station
 - Concern with asking for a millage when the economy continues to be depressed
 - Preference for the Township to send out requests for proposal (RFPs) for rentable heated garage space to house the ambulance
 - Ambulance should be located where it has the highest use
 - Deplorable condition of the current central fire station precludes renovations
 - Support for keeping ambulance services in the central part of the Township
 - Need for data to be analyzed to ascertain the best location
 - \$50,000 included in the 2012 recommended budget for the option to build a heated garage and living space in the Public Safety Building
 - Ambulance services are important to the health, safety and welfare of the community and Township owned property should be used
 - Request for staff to provide costs for heated garage space in the Township to house an ambulance and staff
 - Clarification that one option would be to house the ambulance and necessary staff at the Public Safety Building and the remainder of staff would be housed in the other two (2) fire stations
 - Request for additional information regarding the current Central Fire Station fire truck

- Appreciation to the employees of the Township for their continual sacrifice in difficult economic times
- Request for staff to change the name in the voted operating portion of the budget resolution and all subsequent areas from Capital Area Transportation Authority to Redi-Ride
- Inquiry if the \$75,000 in the Sewer Fund for contracted services should be adjusted since the Board has approved the Sewer Study Grant Application
- Clarification that the Sewer Study Grant is a multi-year grant which allows three-years for the work to be completed
- Entire \$110,000 figure for capital outlay is not all needed in 2012
- \$520,000 allocated for roads does not include anticipated Ingham County Road Commission monies (\$57,500)
- \$520,000 allocated for roads is a combination of millage (\$395,500) and \$125,000 from the general fund
- Clarification that the requested monies from the ICRC will not be known until January or February of the budget year
- Budget will be on for discussion at the next Board meeting, followed by a subsequent public hearing, and then adoption at the last meeting in October
- Timing of proposed Board amendments to the budget
- Suggested changes could be offered during discussion at the next Board meeting

6. PUBLIC REMARKS

Supervisor McGillicuddy opened and closed Public Remarks.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Supervisor McGillicuddy adjourned the meeting at 8:50 P.M.

SUSAN McGILLICUDDY
TOWNSHIP SUPERVISOR

MARY M. G. HELMBRECHT, CMC
TOWNSHIP CLERK

Sandra K. Otto, Secretary