

# **Board of Fire Commissioners**

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

The 2014 proposed budget public hearing of the Greenfield Fire District Board of Fire Commissioners was called to order at Greenfield Center Company #1 by Chairman Spackmann at 7:08 PM on October 15, 2013. The flag salute and a moment of silence were recognized for departed members and troops fighting overseas.

## **Present were:**

**Commissioners:** Atwell, Barss, Spackmann, Waite; Secretary Petkus, D/P Chouinard, Treasurer Perkins, D/T Thurman.

Please see sign in sheet for others 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 2014 proposed budget;
- The proposed budget was adopted on September 11, 2013;
- 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 Treasurer will be giving a brief presentation of the 2014 proposed budget prior to the public comment period;
- The budget must be adopted no later than November 4, 2013 and submitted to the Town budget officer no later than November 7<sup>th</sup>.

The Treasurer then read the through the 2014 proposed budget (see attached). The total budget presented: \$1,525,921.00.

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

Rick Schwartzbeck, 236 Plank Road, Porter Corners, noted the following:

- Most of the stuff has been kept in line from last year;
- Would like the Board to explain the transfer into Reserve Funds, where exactly each one is going and why it is such a large part of the budget.

George Habig, 4007 Route 9N, Greenfield Center

- Noted the Treasurer did not read off the tax rate; Commissioner Spackmann noted the tax rate is 1.08 for the Town of Greenfield and 1.12 for the Town of Wilton, but he thinks that may be backwards.
- Thanked the firefighters, staff and Board for this year's service;

- Installation/Inspection: still feels this is too much spent on alcohol; last year was \$4991.00 for a three hour open bar. The Board should lower the time limit. Reminded Commissioner Barss again about meeting with Dave Meager and raising the insurance limit. Concerned about a potential lawsuit that went beyond the current limits.
- Repairs to apparatus: \$70,000 down to \$55,000 and all of a sudden now there is apparatus maintenance at \$15,000.00. Questioned what the difference is, would like an explanation for this.
- Newsletter: would like to see the Board make a decision to publish the newsletter after the budget is final. Would also like the 2 page budget part of the newsletter. Would like to poll the Board and their comments for or against.
- Personnel service: 3% again this year. Last year was 3% but school teachers were only getting 2%.
- Transparency: several years back he approached the Board to get the Saratogian as one of the newspapers for conveyance of information about the fire district. They agreed and then all of a sudden a year or so later they stopped the Saratogian and went with the Daily Gazette as before. He had a conversation with Joe Anderson, circulation manager, on Tuesday May 7, 2013 in regard to the circulation numbers of the Saratogian to the Daily Gazette. Found out the Saratogian is delivered 3:1 compared to the Daily Gazette. A while back the Secretary asked the Board for permission to put into the newspaper about the 99 Restaurant fundraiser; it would seem to him that they would want to put something in the paper that has more circulation than the Daily Gazette. Wishes the Board would change that.
- Spending: the electronic sign that was put up at Co #4 in his opinion is a waste of taxpayer money regardless of outside donations, just as well could have had the replacement sign like it was before. There was a comment in the Saratogian about this, not his, feels the Board has dropped the ball on this one. The Board can spend \$100,000.00 on a fancy electronic sign and that would not get the fire truck to the fire scene one minute faster. Cannot understand why the Board agreed on this. Commissioner Spackmann noted his comment period is about the proposed budget, it is not his opportunity to pontificate about anything he wants to. This is not a soap box. If he wants to continue regarding the proposed budget that is fine, the sign has been previously talked about three times in other public meetings, this is not new. Tonight's opportunity is to talk about the proposed budget, and there is nothing in the proposed budget about signs, and that he needs to stay on topic. Mr. Habig asked that he please not get in the mode of stifling people, it is not right. Commissioner Spackmann noted that he is not stifling him; if he wants to talk about the proposed budget for the next hour, he will stay and listen to it. The sign is not about the proposed budget.
- Overall feels the 2014 budget is still too high.

Chairman Spackmann asked if there were any other comments/questions; as there were none, the public comment period was closed. Chairman Spackmann noted at this point that the Commissioners or Treasurer would answer any questions, if able to do so, discussed during the public comment period.

Commissioner Atwell commented on the following:

- Reserve accounts: the reason that amount of money is put into the reserve accounts is so as not to have to bond anything, like the new office building out back, which is coming out of the Building Reserve. A year or so ago the district purchased 2 thumper machines out of the EMS Reserve, which drained the account as they are very expensive, but the Board felt they were really important for the community. The Equipment Reserve is used to purchase new trucks, and they do not bond anything. The problem is the last two trucks they purchased were over \$500,000.00 each; trucks

are not cheap. They save about enough money to purchase a truck about every 4-5 years, and it takes about 20-24 years to rotate through the fleet. Gear Reserve, noted each set of gear is \$4000.00 each to outfit one firefighter. Mr. Schwartzbeck noted he was a past Assistant Chief and firefighter, and is now currently a life member; questioned what the balances are in each of the accounts currently. Commissioner Atwell commented that regarding the ladder reserve, estimates are the lifespan of a ladder truck is about 20 years before it becomes a money pit, so they are putting \$50,000.00 in it each year so at 20 years they hope to have enough money to replace the ladder truck. SCBA account is getting \$25,000.00; a pack and bottle is now \$6500.00. LOSAP is the retirement program for the firefighters. Commissioner Atwell noted he puts in a lot of time trying to keep costs down, but they need to put enough away so they do not have to bond anything as he feels that is a waste of taxpayer money. Mr. Schwartzbeck questioned again exactly how much money does the District have in the bank? Commissioner Atwell noted total assets are about \$1.5 million. Brief discussion continued regarding reserve accounts. Mr. Schwartzbeck questioned how much is going into the Building Reserve this year; Commissioner Spackmann noted \$360,000.00.

Commissioner Spackmann noted the following amounts going into some reserve accounts in 2014 as follows:

- Building Reserve: \$360,000.00
- EMS: \$5000,00
- Equipment Reserve: \$175,000.00

Commissioner Spackmann also explained that each account has a different value, and each account can only be spent on what that account is designated for. Treasurer Perkins noted that in actuality in the reserve is \$1.265 million, the previous number given was total assets. Currently in the Building Reserve is a little over \$664,000, which is expected to be expended. Commissioner Spackmann noted the office building is expected to cost around \$850,000.00; Commissioner Atwell noted that this is what the cost is when you are expected to pay prevailing wage, and to follow Wick's and Taylor laws. Mr. Schwartzbeck noted he understands, but you hear a lot of rumors and he just wanted to know black and white.

Paul Lundy, 332 Ballou Road, Porter Corners, noted he has gone back to 2006 and looked at the budgets, understands the reserves and accounting, but what he does not see is where it shows the reserves being spent. Treasurer Perkins explained that in government accounting there is fund accounting, which is what he is looking at now, and reserve fund is a different fund that is shown individually. Commissioner Spackmann explained that reserve accounts are nothing more than savings accounts and can only be spent on what the title says they are for. Spending out of the reserve accounts is shown in the minutes via resolutions and in the abstracts. Mr. Schwartzbeck noted that in looking at past budgets, it doesn't show that any reserve account money has been spent, and so anybody that goes on the website sees nothing being spent, causing confusion. Commissioner Atwell noted that a permissive referendum needs to be made by the Board to spend that money and it is in the minutes. Brief discussion continued.

Mr. Schwartzbeck questioned the timetable for apparatus replacement; how old are the trucks before they are being replaced, other than the aerial. Commissioner Spackmann noted the answer is not black and white; it depends as the Board has started an initiative to downsize the fleet. What they are trying to do is sell two trucks, combining the roles of those trucks into one truck. The timeline used to be 15-20 years, but that when they were on a rotation basis. The Board has now tried to go to a business perspective where they look at the fleet as whole and

try to target which trucks are no longer useful to the District, which are costing more money for repairs, etc., and gave several examples.

Mr. Schwartzbeck asked where the Board came up with the figure of \$175,000.00 to put in the Equipment Reserve Fund. Commissioner Spackmann noted that that figure came from what was left over in terms of what they wanted for an overall budget and to minimize taxes after what was put in for all the other accounts. Commissioner Spackmann further explained the process that the Board goes through to determine amounts in the budget, and why they put more money into Building Reserve versus Equipment Reserve, as well as that it was reversed several years ago when they were concentrating more on equipment.

Commissioner Atwell then addressed the Repairs and Maintenance accounts. The accounts were split this year, although the totals are still the same as last at \$70,000.00. The reason behind this was about preventive maintenance, hoping that keeping on top of the trucks will keep small problems from becoming large, expensive problems. Commissioner Spackmann also pointed out that it is still hard to plan for something you cannot predict.

Commissioner Spackmann addressed the installation/inspection; Mr. Habig had the same comment he has had thought multiple public meetings regarding the open bar specifically. Last year the open bar was three hours as correctly pointed out. Rides were made available and there were room discounts for people to stay overnight. The open bar was paid for through donations and also foreign insurance money, individual companies also put in money. The only thing the Board spent was about \$1000 out of the District's budget for the event. The Board is very responsible, he has been to all the banquets and he has yet to see anyone act inappropriately or irresponsibly. Mr. Habig questioned what the Board was planning on doing this year; Secretary Petkus noted the open bar will again be 3 hours at the beginning of the evening, and the total length of the banquet is 5-6 hours. Mr. Habig referenced back to the insurance meeting and what would happen if we did get hit with a lawsuit and the insurance didn't match that amount, who would pay for it; it was noted it would go back to the town. Mr. Habig suggested we raise that part of the insurance to protect us. Commissioner Spackmann noted yes it goes back to the Town, but not specifically the Town, it goes back to the fire district, so both the taxpayers of the Town of Greenfield as well as the taxpayers of the Town of Wilton would foot that bill. The open bar does not itself make us liable as its own case. Mr. Habig noted that if you cut the hours down you decrease the risk. Commissioner Spackmann noted we have a \$7 million dollar umbrella policy and they are not going to raise it, the overall coverage of the District is excellent. Commissioner Atwell noted that it would be great to keep raising coverage, but they already spend \$60,000 a year on insurance. Mr. Schwartzbeck added that it is the responsibility of the servers; the fire district and the fire commissioners are not necessarily responsible just because they foot the bill.

Commissioner Spackmann then addressed the publishing of the newsletter after the budget; for the most part it is fairly hard to do because the end of the year is very busy and the newsletter takes 2-3 months to put together. Mr. Habig noted that last year instead of mailing them out they delivered all around to Stewarts, but a couple of months later there was still a stack there. No one picks them up, people are lazy, you need to put it right in their face by mailing it to them. Feels that the budget is just 2 pages and what is the problem with adding it. Commissioner Spackmann explained that there is not enough money in the budget to add another 2 pages and mail it out. Mr. Habig noted he has been hammering about the transparency; he comes away with the feeling that it is open and on the internet but people don't go on the internet; they would get more transparency if the newsletter was mailed after the budget was finalized. Commissioner Barss noted that Mr. Habig just said that there was still a stack at Stewarts and nobody is taking them. Mr. Habig questioned that doesn't it say

something? Commissioner Spackmann noted it does say something, it says that there is a difference between his definition of transparency and what the Board is actually doing. He further noted that there is no one more transparent as this Board of Fire Commissioners. The budget was published on the website before it was mandated by law, minutes are not required to be published but they do it because they want to. Commissioner Spackmann noted the many ways the Board posts things on the signs, website and newspapers without spoon feeding people. Mr. Habig explained that the notice was published about the public hearing in the Gazette, but they don't even want to put the budget breakdown in the newspaper, and it does not even go in the paper with the biggest circulation in Saratoga.

Commissioner Spackmann noted that at the January Organizational meeting his suggestion to the Board will be to make the switch to the Saratogian as the official newspaper of the district from the Gazette. Commissioner Spackmann also noted that based on Mr. Habig's recommendation last year, the Board went to both the Gazette and the Saratogian. The Board spent twice the amount of money for that change alone, and they got zero people to come to these meetings; based on this the Board went back to one newspaper. Agrees with Mr. Habig that the Saratoga may be the better option; however it does not mean that people are going to come to the meetings. Mr. Habig noted he always shakes his head that the district has three different banks to take care of the financial stuff; isn't one of them a full service bank? There are three banks but only one newspaper and as far as he is concerned they are not giving the public transparency. Commissioner Spackmann noted he does not understand how transparency correlates to using multiple banks; they use them to support local businesses and not to put all eggs in one basket. Treasurer Perkins explained that FDIC comes into play.

Commissioner Spackmann explained that last year the Board, through officer recommendation, spent over \$10,000.00 just in EMS equipment in direct response the Empire Ambulance fiasco in the Town of Greenfield. He further explained that the district went to a four tone system so that all four fire companies are dispatched for any medical call in the Town of Greenfield. When they made that change to better serve the community they also had to spend money and buy more equipment, which is why they are now putting more money into the EMS Reserve, to build it back up. As for the \$25,000 going into the SCBA Reserve it is because an SCBA is \$6500 to replace. There was a recent fire where two firefighters were burned; they are okay but their gear and SCBA are not, and are most likely not reparable.

Mr. Habig asked again for someone to comment on the 3% raises; last year was the same 3% and the school teachers were getting 2%. Feels it is out of whack, they do a good job but it would be nice if they could take some of the other spending and use that instead. Thinks 3% is too high. Commissioner Spackmann noted he does not think it is too high.

Andrea Mann, North Creek Road, Greenfield Center, commented that she thinks 3% is just fine. Commissioner Spackmann added that for clarification, 3% is budgeted, but based upon reviews they may be issued less than that. But you need to budget for it just in case. Treasurer Perkins noted that the tax rates are correct for each town; she used the assessed value not the equalized old value, and this year Greenfield had a 1.04 to equalize. Commissioner Spackmann noted for information purposes the tax rates always change based on evaluation and that happens after the Board publishes the budget. Mr. Lundy then asked if the Town of Greenfield's is based on the fire district's evaluation of property, is it based on the value of the homes covered in the Towns of Greenfield and Wilton? Commissioner Spackmann explained that you take the assessed values and that works out to be a percentage. It was noted that the assessed value comes from the Town. Mr. Schwartzbeck explained that it is the assessed value of the fire district's coverage area in Wilton including the area by the mall and the whole town of Greenfield.

Motion to declare the public hearing of the 2014 proposed budget closed was made by Commissioner Atwell with a second from Commissioner Waite. All in favor, motion carried.

Chairman Spackmann then made a motion to set the 2014 budget adoption date.

Motion made by Commissioner Spackmann with a second from Commissioner Barss to set the date for the adoption of the 2014 budget for the Commissioners Workshop beginning at 7:00 PM on October 23, 2013 at Greenfield Center Co #1, 13 South Greenfield Road, Greenfield Center. All in favor, motion carried.

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

Chairman Spackmann adjourned the meeting at 8:14 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

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

Joyce A. Petkus  
District Secretary