

**These minutes were approved by the Warren County Board of Commissioners on February 10, 2021. Full text of the resolution appears at the end of this document.*

The Board of County Commissioners of the County of Warren met in Budget Session in its offices in the Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building, Belvidere, New Jersey on January 20, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

Due to social distancing directives, this meeting was conducted without any members of the public in attendance. The public had the opportunity to listen to the meeting, and participate if they chose, via telephone.

The meeting was called to order by Director Kern and upon roll call, the following participants were present: Commissioner Lori Ciesla, Commissioner Deputy Director Jason Sarnoski, Commissioner Director James Kern III, County Administrator Alex Lazorisak, County CFO Kim Francisco and Deputy Commissioner Clerk Holly Luberto.

After Director Kern led the flag salute, he confirmed with the County Administrator that the meeting notice complied with the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975 and all amendments thereto.

County CFO Kim Francisco began with some good news: the county received a \$372,104 payment from the state for COVID expenses (as part of an MOU with different categories for testing by date, and a percentage of expenses not covered by FEMA). Mr. Francisco was pleased to report that we were successful recovering legal fees, and provided a detailed breakdown of other items reimbursed. "That's very good news," he said.

Mr. Francisco reviewed the latest version of the budget worksheets pointing out the following changes:

- \$200,000 insertion to the County Commissioners line for EDC business grants
- The Communications Center and Fire Academy both reverted to last year's funding levels (reductions to both)
- A \$150,000 reduction to Capital Improvements, thanks to Frank Wheatley agreeing to defer some projects
- The amount to be taken from surplus increased about \$32,000 but was still under the \$10 million threshold with which the CFO was comfortable

Mr. Sarnoski asked if we had the latest ratables data. Mr. Francisco said not yet, but hopefully by the next meeting.

The board welcomed Liz Zukoski to discuss Buildings & Grounds' budget. She had requested a couple of vehicles, one of which was a Ford Escape for interoffice mail runs. Mr. Lazorisak said vehicles used by department heads for a couple of years then go back into the fleet, probably for Prosecutor's Office personnel, and Ms. Zukoski turned her vehicles in just like new.

Mr. Sarnoski asked how things were going with cleaning and sanitizing. Ms. Zukoski said it was taking staff away from other duties, and cleaning products had gotten more expensive, but the budget was able to handle it. They were no longer utilizing outside cleaning services, resulting in savings.

Buildings & Grounds' biggest problem was obtaining personnel, though they were able to get an electrician from the Technical School upon graduation. This launched a conversation about steering Vo-Tech students toward the county for a good career. Mr. Sarnoski suggest a career day; Mr. Lazorisak suggested summer internships in which the students could potentially earn credits. Ms. Ciesla inquired about including other schools, perhaps in the Phillipsburg area. Mr. Sarnoski preferred to keep it to WCTS.

In conclusion, Mr. Lazorisak said Ms. Zukoski and the whole division stepped up to help deal with COVID, making partitions and things like that, and it was appreciated. This portion of the meeting concluded at 6:17 p.m., followed by a short break.

Upon return at 6:22 p.m., next up was Division of Bridges Assistant Superintendent, Calvin Inscho. This was his first budget, and there was no increase to his OE. He proceeded to provide details on special vehicles he had requested under capital, and had already been convinced to give something up (a Ford 600 4WD truck with dump body and accessories), which he hoped for next year. Three remaining requests were approved, including a skid steer, which Mr. Lazorisak said was a universal piece of equipment that could be shared with other divisions.

Mr. Sarnoski asked how they were managing with COVID. Mr. Inscho said they have been lucky, and now as their slow time, so they were keeping busy working with Buildings & Grounds. Mr. Lazorisak said the division works outside the box, noting the hiking/biking bridge they built along the Morris Canal towpath. They also work closely with the Roads Division.

A long-time worker with a lot of experience was planning to retire in the coming year. He was working with the other staffers, teaching them welding and other skills.

Mr. Inscho inquired about a supervisors' boot allowance. Mr. Lazorisak said that was a union issue that he was not going to delve into unless the union approached administration. This portion of the meeting concluded at 6:35 p.m.

The Roads Division was next, with Supervisor John Tate. He kept his OE flat, and proceeded to go over his requests for special vehicles and equipment. His request for a new Elgin Broom Sweeper Truck (\$310,000) was going to have to wait, but all other items were recommended for approval (a roller, a trailer, flail mower, and four 150-gallon mounted tanks). Mr. Tate said the division was now paving its own parking lots, and the roller complemented the new paving. Eventually all of the trucks would have saddle tanks for optimum efficiency.

The fleet service program moved to OE. The Belvidere garage needed new curbing and relocation of the island. This was the third year putting money toward this project (another \$5,000). Regarding the Alpha garage, Mr. Lazorisak said money had been set aside for a new facility once something reasonable becomes available. This portion of the meeting concluded at 6:45 p.m., followed by a short break.

Upon reconvening at 6:51 p.m., County Engineer Bill Gleba began his presentation by reviewing bridge and culvert improvements. He hoped to get through the design phase for Bridge #02004 over the Norfolk Southern Railroad. He budgeted \$200,000 for design, but the project might cost around \$3 million. It was the county's responsibility, but the commissioners thought there should be some share of the financial burden. Mr. Lazorisak suggested getting the design done, then bringing Norfolk Southern to the table.

With the NJTPA having been mentioned, the stalled Route 57/519 intersection improvement project was discussed. The NJTPA lost federal funding since it kept delaying the project. Mr. Lazorisak thought the NJTPA should be put on notice, similar to a tort claim, at its next meeting. Mr. Sarnoski asked County Planner Dave Dech to follow up.

Bridge #19003 in Phillipsburg (South Main Street, over the Lopatcong Creek) was also budgeted for design this year. Mr. Kern recalled a sight issue due to a large sign welcoming people to the town. He suggested rectifying that in coordination with the bridge improvement.

Mr. Gleba was able to cut one \$200,000 item because there were some prior funds to cover it. This brought the 2021 budget for bridge and culvert improvements down to \$1 million.

Mr. Gleba went over the road resurfacing schedule next. He said we were average about 12 miles per year, and it should be more like 13-14. He proposed aiming for 16.5 miles for the next three or four years to get caught up. Also part of the conversation was the fact that while we were getting more in state aid, the price of asphalt went up, and the DEP permitting process had become more cumbersome. Mr. Sarnoski noted they raised the gas tax, but then they just raised the prices of materials. Even though this year brought reduced commuter traffic due to COVID, Mr. Gleba said trucks made the most impact on road surfaces.

With respect to road and drainage improvements, three items totaling \$750,000 were cut from Engineering's original request. One was guiderail replacement and improvements, even though Mr. Gleba stated the longer we let it go, the worse it was going to get.

Another item cut was \$350,000 for partial construction of Spring Valley Road in Hardwick. Currently a raised, one-lane road, the concept of keeping it raised, building upon what the Road Division created and making it a two-lane road, was discussed. Mr. Sarnoski thought it would still probably flood by the municipal building, where the township did some paving, but the road had been holding up okay. It seemed unlikely to be able to get to construction this year, however, so the commissioners decided to take the money out for this year and revisit the matter next year.

In conclusion, Mr. Gleba said the impacts of COVID made the past year tough. He said getting projects out the door has been very, very difficult.

This portion of the meeting concluded at 7:23 p.m., at which time County Planner Dave Dech came forward to discuss his budget requests. His OE did increase \$19,500 in anticipation of legal fees.

Mr. Dech had requested \$200,000 for a more detailed Route 519 traffic impact study, from Route 22 to I-80. Mr. Kern asked about the status of the Hope traffic study from WSP. Mr. Gleba said the draft report arrived recently; he had to go over it with the consultant, and hoped to present a final version to the commissioners in three weeks or so. "This is the document that addresses (the DOT's) administrative code requirements for consideration," Mr. Gleba said. Mr. Kern thought it wise to share the report with the DOT before the commissioners approve it and accept it as final. All agreed.

Mr. Sarnoski wondered if it was too soon to authorize another \$200,000 study this year, while still working on Route 519 north of Route 46. Mr. Kern thought the study was a priority going into the budget season, but COVID presented challenges. He asked if the Highlands could be a source of funding, albeit with caveats.

Mr. Dech said we were able to rely on Highlands to fund a past study because there was an existing pot of money reserved from prior grants. If we want more money from the Highlands Council, “They’re going to be looking for plan conformance now from the county for us to start playing ball,” said Mr. Dech. Mr. Kern asked what – if any - costs would be borne by the county for plan conformance.

Mr. Dech said we would first do an initial assessment, which would mostly be handled in-house. Then a planning agenda would be developed based on that, identifying critical issues facing the county and what plans or studies might be done to address those issues. The process would include updating a county master plan, a storm water plan and a water quality plan. Mr. Dech did not think the water quality plan would be germane to Warren County, since it does not do the wastewater planning (unlike some counties). The process would likely take the entire year, with minimal outside costs, aside from staff time.

“What I’m getting at is, if we think that the Highlands might be funding a large countywide study, that study realistically wouldn’t be something that we would be funding this year because if we were to consider plan conformance, it would probably take the entire calendar year,” Mr. Kern said. Mr. Dech concurred, but noted one critical step: “The commissioners need to pass a resolution indicating that they are seeking plan conformance.” He said that would have to come before an initial assessment.

Ms. Ciesla raised the topic of the I-80 rockfall issue, and the citizen group’s assertion that the traffic study conducted by NJ DOT was incorrect. They overlaid it with their data and wanted the county to weigh in. She wondered if there was anything in the budget for that. Mr. Sarnoski said he would be reluctant to embark on our own study to point out to the DOT that their study was flawed. He preferred pointing out our concerns (potential impacts and where we see deficiencies) either through correspondence or in a resolution. Mr. Kern noted we were working with the DOT and on the Hope traffic issues, so we had to be careful. Mr. Dech was currently going through the DOT study and was documenting questions on the data. “I think that’s all they’re looking for,” Ms. Ciesla said.

Back to the \$200,000 capital budget request for a more detailed Route 519 traffic impact study, the commissioners decided to remove it. “I don’t think we have to pay for it,” Mr. Kern said. “I agree,” said Mr. Sarnoski. Mr. Dech was going to get back to them with an estimate of how much money – if any - might be needed this year to embark on initial stages to potentially pursue Highlands plan conformance. Mr. Francisco said that would be an OE expense, as opposed to capital, which was fine. Mr. Dech said if we pursue plan conformance, next year we might be able to get money from the NJTPA for a sub-regional study. “Maybe pull those funding sources together,” he said.

Mr. Dech noted that we were also wrapping up our transportation plan this year, with some initial modeling scenarios on the county road system based on different assumptions. “We’re doing this in incremental steps,” Mr. Dech said.

Mr. Gleba wanted to make sure the commissioners understood that the study they solicited from the Highlands looked at a number of sites around the entire county. “It was a very high-level view,” he said; a potential build-out scenario that could occur over decades. “That was a wake-up call to the municipalities,” Mr. Kern said. Mr. Gleba said the consultant did look at certain corridors (519 and 517), but it was a very broad brush and identified constraints. To come up with some type of a model that realistically predicts what we are going to see in the next five or 10 years, Mr. Gleba said there had to be a design project. “If it’s premature, that’s fine, but I think the reality is, at some point, that has to happen,” Mr. Gleba said, “It needs to be on your radar.”

Mr. Sarnoski assured him he understood, and it was on the radar, but thought it could be paid by other means discussed without being a capital expenditure this year. Mr. Kern said we were focusing on a different area that would potentially have the same result. Pending a more detailed cost estimate from Mr. Dech, Mr. Francisco was going to take \$200,000 out of capital, and insert a few thousand dollars in Planning’s OE for an initial assessment. “A substantial savings,” Mr. Francisco said.

There were no comments from the public or the press.

Mr. Lazorisak advised there was an emergent matter that had arisen, requiring discussion in Executive Session.

RESOLUTION 54-21

On motion by Ms. Ciesla, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTIVE SESSION OF THE WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS PROVIDING FOR A MEETING NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF THE NEW JERSEY OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12, one matter under Exception (12) b7 - *Matters Relating to Litigation and Attorney-Client Privilege* - at 7:42 p.m.

Recorded vote: Ms. Ciesla yes, Mr. Sarnoski yes, Mr. Kern yes

On motion by Ms. Ciesla, seconded by Mr. Kern, the board adjourned Executive Session and returned to Open Session at 8:03 p.m.

Recorded vote: Ms. Ciesla yes, Mr. Sarnoski yes, Mr. Kern yes

On motion by Ms. Ciesla, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, and there being no further business before the board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 8:04 p.m.

**THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
OF THE COUNTY OF WARREN**
Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building
165 County Route 519 South
Belvidere, NJ 07823

RESOLUTION 54-21

On motion by **Ms. Ciesla**, seconded by **Mr. Sarnoski**, the following resolution was unanimously adopted by the Board of County Commissioners of the County of Warren at a meeting held on January 20, 2021.

**A RESOLUTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTIVE SESSION OF
THE WARREN COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
PROVIDING FOR A MEETING NOT OPEN TO THE PUBLIC IN
ACCORDANCE WITH THE PROVISIONS OF
THE NEW JERSEY OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12**

WHEREAS, the Warren County Board of County Commissioners is subject to certain requirements of the *Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6*, et seq., and

WHEREAS, the *Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-12*, provides that an Executive Session, not open to the public, may be held for certain specified purposes when authorized by Resolution, and

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that this Board hereby excludes the public in order to discuss such matters. The general nature of the subjects to be discussed are as follows:

Exception (12) b7

(1) *Matters Relating to Litigation, Negotiations and the Attorney-Client Privilege*: Items to be discussed include: Warren County Sheriff's Action

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Board shall disclose to the public, as soon as practicable, the contents of the discussions after the final disposition of the matters discussed.

RECORDED VOTE: Ms. Ciesla yes, Mr. Sarnoski yes, Mr. Kern yes

I hereby certify the above to be a true copy of a resolution adopted by the Board of County Commissioners of the County of Warren on the date above mentioned.

_____, Clerk
Alex J. Lazorisak