

**These minutes were approved by the Board of County Commissioners on April 12, 2023. Full texts of resolutions appear 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 4, 2023 at 6:02 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Deputy Director Kern and upon roll call, the following members were present: Commissioner Jason Sarnoski and Commissioner Deputy Director James Kern and Commissioner Director Lori Ciesla would arrive later. Also attending were County Administrator Alex Lazorisak and County CFO Kim Francisco.

After leading the flag salute, Deputy Director Kern confirmed with the County Administrator that the meeting notice complied with the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975. He then turned to County CFO Kim Francisco for an initial overview of 2023 budget ordinances and proposals.

Mr. Francisco began by reviewing notices from the Division of Local Government Services. The Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2023 was 2.5 percent, the maximum allowable increase to the property tax levy to comply with budgetary cap laws. However, the cap may be increased to 3.5 percent as long as the Commissioners adopt a resolution increasing appropriations and banking any unappropriated balance, which has been our practice and what we intend to again this year. The second notice is in reference to the introduction and adoption deadlines, introduction due by March 31 and adoption due by April 28, 2023. Mr. Francisco anticipates not having any difficulties meeting these deadlines. He anticipates meeting the deadlines with introduction at the second meeting in February and adoption second meeting in March.

Mr. Francisco presented a Budget and Tax Levy Analysis dating back to the 1970s. "I want to refresh our memories of what we did last year. We did raise the tax levy by \$2.5 million but the tax rate went from 62 cents down to 60 cents. A two cent reduction in the rate due to the increase in ratables. We kept our library rate the same at a nickel. It has been a nickel for many years. The library is in fine shape going to 2023. Open Space we left at two cents and we brought in \$2.4 million with that, with the increase in ratables. Open space is in really good shape."

Mr. Francisco moved on to our Debt Service, which is minimal. Our only debt is Chapter 12, Warren County Community College debt, which is half ours and half

the State. We cannot refinance it or pay it off because half of it's from the State. At the beginning of this year we had \$1.6 million in gross debt. The net debt for the County is only \$830,000. At the end of this year it will be down to \$570,000. The debt will be paid off in 2025.

Surplus – in the 2022 column, we began the year with \$26,136,000 surplus. We used \$10.3 million in the budget, leaving \$15.7 million. During the year we received added and omitted taxes of \$543,000. Miscellaneous revenue is not anticipated. \$2.4 million. Excess revenue is \$1 million and last appropriations of \$8.3 million. We replenished \$12.4 million and we used only \$10.3 million. So we replenished more than we used. Subtotal of \$28 million. We had the adjustment there of \$25.9 million. Over the past five years this is the highest that it has been, we are in good shape with our surplus.

Summary of American Rescue plan – During the summer of 2022 we received our second payment of \$10 million, we have \$20 million and change to work with. This is what we obligated in 2022. We have just under \$16 million obligated to work within the next two years.

Next subject is revenues for 2022. Our revenues are very strong. The County Clerk-remember, last year houses were selling in one weekend with multiple offers above asking price. They had a banner year at the Clerk's office and brought in \$2.7 million. This year we brought in \$2.4 million, still good, but a reduction. The \$2.4 million was heavy at the beginning of the year. As the year went on, the fees slowed down. I talked to our Clerk, Holly Mackey, about 2023 and she said we should anticipate \$1.6 to \$1.8 only. It's returning to normal. The Surrogate had a good year too. We usually come about \$120,000. This year it came at \$140,000. I spoke with Acting Surrogate Thorp, in November, about the increase, response was COVID. People delayed coming in to settle things. He thought we should continue to estimate the same. The Sheriff had another good year as well. They brought in \$469,000 with foreclosure fees. The Sheriff thinks the foreclosures will continue. CFO Francisco will project revenue of \$255,000 for 2023.

Interest – last year we received \$850,000 last year (2022) and anticipate \$700,000 for this year (2023). Mr. Francisco may adjust this amount.

Motor Vehicles fines are up a little bit. Last year we brought in a little less than a \$1 million in the jail. The County is not making money because it costs approximately \$14 million to run the jail, but every bit helps.

TASS reimbursement - \$4.2 million. This year they did not meet their goal, but with very good reason, it's the reimbursement of money and they have about 20 vacancies. They came in with about \$1 million under budget. But we didn't spend a million dollars, we saved. We came up \$200,000 short. Incentives have been met, department has done a fine job, remarked Mr. Francisco.

Interest regression – In January, we were earning 0.25 percent in our money market. In the current interest, it includes our current fund, capital fund, and grant fund. We earned \$12,000 in a month. In open space, we earned \$5,000 in a month. The rates went up. In July, the rate was almost 1.5 percent; we earned \$55,000 in one month and open space earned \$19,000. In November it was almost 3.7 percent. We earned \$193,000 in one month. Open space earned \$69,000. Opening statements today are over 4 percent.

American Rescue Plan – we did receive \$20 million dollars. We obligated \$4 million. Some of it is under the category of Revenue Loss. The formula they use for revenue loss is free money. It can be used on any government service, except debt and pension. Using the calculation, we have about \$13 million available; we used \$3 million. We have about \$9.7 million of free money. The rest of the money has to be used in certain categories. Warren County did not receive its fair share of the monies in comparison to what other counties and towns had received.

This year inflation affected all of us at home with our food and gas. It affects the county with toilet paper, copy paper, insurance and gas.

The Debt Service is decreasing \$468,000. We have three more years of small payments. The invoice for our patients at the State psychiatric hospital went down this year by \$450,000. For the first time since 2020 we are not budgeting \$250,000 to OEM for COVID.

Our health care is staying flat, which is a win for Warren County tax payers and employees. The towns are going to go up 20 percent in the State plan. The towns are going to pay more, the employees are going to pay more and the tax payer is going to pay more. We are keeping ours the same for two years.

- Commissioners' Office S&W increase for the newly created confidential aide, Clerk of the Board salary went up last year, along with the restructure and added a Deputy Clerk and another worker.
- Engineering operating expenses increases by \$150,000 for contracted

- engineer. We can't hire engineers. There will be savings in the salary because they are not employees.
- Planning- a salary is increasing. Last year we got a Deputy Director working full time for a full year.
 - Senior Services – Last year we had extra Cares money. We were able to apply that to some salaries, thus reducing the salaries last year. This year it's coming back up, \$64,000 to make things normal.
 - Nutrition, their budget is increasing due to meal cost and labor. They are the one department where the minimum wage affects their budget. The kitchen workers, hired through Manpower, get minimum wage, and it went up.
 - Community College requests increase of 2.5 percent, which is normal, to \$49,000.
 - Warren Tech 3 percent, about \$130,000. They also requested \$500,000 in capital. Commissioner Kern expressed his appreciation that the Vo-Tech submitted a detailed budget request. No other administration in the past five years has done a fantastic job given us information. He asked if we can get something more from the College in advance of their budget presentation on Saturday.
 - Pension – Double digit increase, 8 percent on PERS, eleven percent for police and fire. A total increase of almost \$500,000; ten percent increase.
 - Grant money – New Jersey Transit, additional grant money or a match of \$49,000, but we will get an extra \$150,000 in grants.
 - Our multi-line of workers comp insurance package went up five percent this year. Last year was no increase. A five percent increase over two years is not bad.
 - Correction Center health care for inmates went up by \$367,000. They have difficulty getting nurses.
 - Road salt went up \$10 a ton. We used 18,000 tons. That's \$180,000.
 - Mosquito Commission went up because they are in the State health care benefits plan and pension costs. We are assisting them in getting out of it.
 - Youth Shelter shared agreement with Morris County – We've had \$80,000 dollars in that for years. We pay for one bed a day and if we have more, we pay extra. This year we had to do a budget transfer. For some reason this year, we had more youths in the shelter.

Last year we lowered the tax rate by two cents. Mr. Francisco proposes we keep the tax rate the same, at sixty cents. That rate applied to a larger rate base should bring us another \$1 million in the levy. Tax Administrator did not have available

numbers today. Numbers will be available next week.

Over all our budget operating, excluding capital, is going up by 1.5 million, approximately 1.7 percent. Capital increase costs is going up \$3.9 million, that's American Rescue. The offset will be made by American Rescue money and additional tax revenues. Today, this is very preliminary, if we can keep the rate the same and maybe we can address the interest income through the Feds.

Capital Improvement Fund – we are pay as you go, so we save as we go. We started the year with \$2.7 million and we ended the year with \$4.6 million. We brought in extra money, canceled some projects, library paid back their funds. We're in good shape there.

This year we are going to fully fund all our ordinates and not use any capital funds. Our capital and savings was healthy and this County was strong fiscally before the American Rescue Act. American Rescue funding was not used to reduce taxes.

Prior Year's tax levies. The de-appreciation of 62 to 66. Other trust accounts – Snow removal trust we have \$429,000. Bicentennial trust - \$70,000 now, depositing \$40,000 in 2023 for a total of \$110,000.

Commissioner Director Ciesla arrived at 6:29 p.m.

Open Space is in great shape at the end of the year with \$28 million. The balance did decrease by \$500,000 during 2022. We still have \$28 million. The levy was 2.4 million last year. The increase in interest will bring in an additional \$600,000. This is the equivalent of ½ tax point. Corey Tierney does a great job with maximizing the cost sharing with other agencies when purchasing properties. Open Space debt was paid off last year. Mr. Francisco and Mr. Lazorisak suggests we should keep the rate at 2 percent. Commissioners would like to have a discussion of the future of the program as far as purchases and maintaining of the properties.

The Library – we keep the tax rate at a nickel. Last year we went from \$4.7 million. This year we should do the same and take advantage of additional ratables. In 2023, we will receive an additional \$62,000 from Phillipsburg. This is the third year of a six year agreement. The library has had vacancies, therefore results in a savings due to not being able to fill positions. This year we can put over \$1.6 million towards a new library. We'll have about 3.6 million towards the new library. Capital inter-fund for the SW Branch. Back in 2016, the current fund loaned them 2.6

million. It was paid off in six years without raising the library tax rate. Mr. Lazorisak reminded the Board to keep in mind the need for maintaining the buildings over time.

Mr. Francisco concluded his remarks, “We had a good year, and thanked everyone for their help. We have a good team here in Warren County.”

Information Systems Director Bob Sidie was invited to present his budget to the Board. He talked about some of the aspects of his budget and the accomplishments his department achieved. He started by pointing out seventy new security cameras have been installed to protect our buildings and our employees across several different buildings. Cameras will be installed shortly at Warren Acres. Fifty-one card readers and door locks have been installed across several buildings. Twenty-nine of them went to six buildings and 22 of them went to the Annex. Those were actually existing card readers. The system was upgraded and brought on-line with the County system. We did quite a bit with cameras and they have come in handy. For example, we have video of a bus fire over at the Road Department. We have video of some cars that there were some questions about at the Health Department. Even Belvidere Police have come to us to see if we had video about vandalism in the park downtown. We’ve done a pretty good job getting them deployed. We don’t have too much more to do. We do have some other locations, such as: Hope, Hackettstown and Oxford Garages to bring on-line. One of the things that made that possible was the deployment of additional Software Defined Wide Area Networking (SD-WAN). This has been an important project for the IT in 2022 and will continue in 2023, because previously our buildings were connected through metro-ethernet that we obtained through CenturyLink. That connected several major buildings: Health, Acres, Annex, Courthouse, Human Services, and Administration Building. It was not able to connect to a lot of smaller locations due to the expense of it. Each circuit, between the circuit and the annual recurring cost of routers involved was about \$10,000.00. So we didn’t run a circuit to the Alpha garage. SD-WAN is a different story. The endpoint hardware and we just use the DSL dialup. We were able to connect the County network now to much smaller locations. We connected the Alpha garage, Hope garage. That’s why we put cameras up there. They are on the County network. We’re going to install SD-WAN at Hackettstown. We have installed it now at the Southwest Library. We have cameras there and also at the Northeast location. One of the by-products of extending the network to the library locations is that previously all the library associates did not have access to County resources such as FinancePlus System. Therefore they could not go in and access W-2s, they could not access pay stubs, like all the other County employees could. Now they will be able to do that. It’s important to me that all associates have

access to County resources. We are bringing the Library on-line. There are still separate networks. They still participate predominately through the New Jersey State library system but now they have a mechanism to get into the County network and can use our system. This is going to be really helpful for access via the County website into the employee portal in 2023.

In regard to his department's budget, he has kept it pretty-much inline. There is a small increase and one larger increase. The annual tech upgrades had to increase because when the pandemic came along, we transitioned a lot to laptops and that made people mobile to do remote work. The expectation now is our annual PC refresh cycle is going to be replacing 20% of our PC each year. While we use to be refreshing computers that cost \$1,000 per station, now we are going to be refreshing computers that cost \$2,000 per work station. Because of the adjunct equipment you have to have a docking station, extra mouse and so forth. The laptop is generally more expensive than a desktop. There is a small increase there. I don't expect to spend much of that money this year but we're banking it for it for future years because that expense is going to come around eventually.

I have added money from meetings I have had with vendors and Public Information, Health Department and Planning regarding moving some of our information to the web. Planning permits and submissions, septic permits for the Health Department and some other things that Pete wanted to have made available to the public, this would allow tracking the status of the applications, and the actions that are being taken. Also, a lot of OPRA requests. Public Information has been also at those meetings. We have spoken to a number of vendors. It turns out, originally, my hope was that a vendor could provide a one size fits all solution that would cover all of those aspects of what we want to put out on the web. It turns out, not so much. Some vendors have deficiencies in other areas where other vendors excel. So we may spreading that across several different vendor, two or three. There is money in the budget for professional consulting fees to implementing those projects.

I also have an increase in there because I still have one more head count to fill. I can work with Kim on that a little bit because it's taking a long time to find people. Last year's budget I allocated to for a head count but it's taken us half the year to fill as many seats as I did. So there is a lot of money that wasn't spent in the first half of the year that was budgeted. Current budget request is for current head count plus one more. It's January and I don't have any candidates. It's going to be at least March before I see one.

Of course there is money in the budget for continued security improvements

which also this year will include rekeying some buildings because we are not in a master key system across all sites. Some sites don't have lock boxes for fire marshals, library headquarters, for example. Other sites don't have consistent keys throughout the building. I will be addressing that as well.

We started a new ticket tracking system for Help Desk requests in March 2022. In the eight months we tracked 1,772 tickets. Forty-five percent of those tickets happen to be for Temporary Assistance and twenty-nine percent were for Prosecutor's Office.

Human Services was the next department to present their budget. Shawn Buskirk, Director of Human Services, began her presentation by describing Human Services as being comprised of three division and the Office of the County Adjuster. It is the largest department within the County and when fully staffed and has approximately 100 employees. Each division head from each department as well as the County Adjuster will present their department's budget. The outline is as follows: Steve Unger will present the Division of Aging and Disability Services, Lauren Burd will cover TASS, Laura Richter, will cover the Division of Administration, and I will talk about the County Adjuster. Ms. Buskirk introduced Steve Unger, Department Head for the Division of Aging and Disability Services to start off the presentations for Human Services.

Mr. Unger started by saying it has been a very productive year in his division. We were shut down in the beginning of the year, roughly just under two months. There has been a significant increase in the number of participants at the senior community centers. Three hundred sixty-six unduplicated seniors have come out. Our meals at home program had four hundred forty-two people sign up this year. The exercise programs have increased significantly, both in person and virtually. We've had approximately 20 people per each session. We have brought on two more yoga instructors for virtual classes. We conducted classes in three locations.

The fall Expo at the Warren County Farmer's Fair has seen over 450 participants this year. This is more than probably in the past ten years. We have a senior and disability fall picnic. We've seen over 200 individuals show up at that. After thirteen years of a major issue at Warren County Farmers Fair, that issue has been resolved. The event that came after ours has been moved to a different day. We also assisted Phillipsburg Senior Center by purchasing the new commercial oven for them.

The Division continues to provide five primary services:

- ADRC Contracted Services
- Congregate and home delivered meals
- Care management
- APS SHIP
- Medicaid services

The ADRC program continues to be implemented by the ADRC coordinator of which is a part of Division of Aging through the Delta-T contract.

Our congregate participation numbers have also increased over the last six months to approximately 130 individuals per day at all four of our nutrition sites. We have served 15,634 meals in 2022. This is a very positive outlook. With the numbers increasing, we've had to increase our staff. I've brought in a lot of Manpower staff. The Division is requesting the abolishment of two site vacant, part-time management positions. The four community centers are fully staffed by Manpower.

Going into 2023, seeing the minimum wage rise from \$13.00 per hour to \$14.00 per hour. We've recently signed a new contract with our nutrition provider. The single meal price has increased from \$6.32 in 2022 to \$6.88 in 2023. Looking into 2023, with the increase of meal pricing, the budgeting growth of the Division respectfully requesting an increase of \$16,500.00 in County support for our hunger meal program to cover our increase budget. Our meals at home program provides budget of note increase in 2023. Your financial assistance in 2022 helped us immensely. We were able to hire two drivers and two kitchen staff in Phillipsburg. It's not just in Phillipsburg, but throughout the County, whoever is in need of a hot meal to be delivered, is getting one this year. There is no waitlist in 2022 and no wait list this year.

We delivered 42,272 meals to 442 seniors in 2022. We are currently looking to provide meals to another 275 new plate of seniors in 2023. With twenty-five percent of residents of Warren County being over the age of sixty, we will continue to see participation rates increase at all of our sites and programs.

Our call rates have increase from 15,810 in 2020 to 18,874 in 2022. People continue to look for information on nutrition benefits, home community resources, transportation, and much more.

The Division estimates revenue remains the same as 2022 at \$215,000.00. \$115,000.00 coming from the Federal Finance Participation (FFP) and \$100,000.00 from our JACC reimbursement. I do not have any new position requests at this time. However, if you could keep in mind, I would like to hire a County Veteran Services Officer in the future. I think our County is in dire need of a veteran's service officer. We have 10,000 veterans between Hunterdon and Warren Counties. Hunterdon County has a veteran's officer who goes to veterans' homes, helps them get as many services as possible, fills out applications for them and does everything possible for them. We have a State veteran's officer that assists Warren County, but he doesn't go out to homes and he doesn't see the veterans in the County.

TASS Division Director Lauren Burd was next to speak. TASS has had another exceptional year. The division fell just short of their \$4.2 Million revenue. Considering reduced spending and vacancies, it was far less than it could have been. We do have to spend the money in order to make the money back. Because of all the vacancies, we are up in the twenties in our vacancies for most of the year. That's a significant number for my staff. We made up for it in other areas. At the highest time this year, we had in the twenties, but we are slowly recovering making that margin smaller. Five additional staff are starting tomorrow. A short discussion took place about the reasons for the high vacancy rate.

Our 2023 budgets reflects a slight increase about 3.2 percent this is due to an uncontrollable cost for our data processing and that has no match. Fifty to seventy-five percent of TASS county budget line items would be reimbursed by the state.

There is a decrease in case numbers. During the pandemic, the State would not allow us to close cases. Those waivers expired during 2022 so a lot of people auto-closed. We had an enormous increase of new applications. This has been our focus over the past couple of years. We have 3,502 new cases as of January of this year. This is a 41 percent increase from 2019. I used 2019 because those are more normal numbers. The pandemic pushed our limits. It made us to be proactive and creative. People were utilizing our human services programs to no end. We gave our clients benefits. We accepted the challenge and we provided our population with what they needed during that time.

Next Ms. Burd turned to Medicaid. We had another successful year in Medicaid work in 2022. In 2015, as I always say, there were changes in reimbursement structure, made at the Division level. It included a payment per Medicaid case and it increased the reimbursement for Medicaid positions from fifty to seventy-five percent. I am happy to report we were reimbursed the maximum

amount for 2022. It's also our highest amount since the changes in reimbursement structure.

Ms. Burd focused on the percentage backlog chart she provided. In 2016, we started out with over 26 percent backlog. Today we are at 0.51 percent backlog. With the support of the new positions, we were able to improve our timeliness. It's directly tied to our reimbursement of revenues.

In 2020, the Division moved to a new incentive and penalty program. Now every year, an MOU is introduced and signed. For 2023, there are the three components: redetermination timeliness, initial new application processing time and re-distribution bonus pool incentive.

For TASS we are performing far better than the percentages discussed earlier. The percentages went down. The amount per case is staying the same for 2023, but the performance is lower. It's good for us, because we are performing well beyond the ninety-percent and we will still be eligible for that \$45.00 per case, but it will give us a little bit of leave way with the PHE unwinding. We were informed April 1, 2023 is the date for Medicaid unwinding, which will resume normal operations. We've kept normal with our operation and tried keep up our best, but we weren't closing cases of Medicaid during the pandemic.

The next topic is initial application processing time. The bonus payment of \$10,000 per quarter will be paid to the CWA for processing one hundred percent applications within the federal guidelines. That was the same incentive for 2022. We received this bonus incentive every quarter in 2022. That means that one hundred percent of our applications were timely. We received this for the first time in 2022 and that was at the amount of \$37,226.00. We have a ceiling of Medicaid funding that we can get reimbursed for and we exceeded it. Last year we received no payment in the fourth quarter because we had exceeded it by the third quarter. This year it took us through the end of the year because the dollar amount was a little higher. This redistribution bonus pull money doesn't count toward the max funding.

Despite the pandemic, TASS was able to maintain the re-debt in application timeliness and as of November of 2022 we were at 99.49 percent timeliness. As a result, we were able to reach our 115 percent cap, exceeded our goal of incentive payment for calendar year 2022 and are eligible for the first time ever for the bonus dollars. As you can see for the 2022 Medicaid revenue, we've received over \$185,000.00. My projection for next year, if we do meet all of the requirements, we'll get the \$160,921.00 plus the bonus pool incentive on top of that.

Next, Ms. Burd turned to the digital information management system. As you can see thousands of files that we have scanned and indexed. New to report this year, the number of case files completely virtual. This means that we are receiving documents virtually, printing them directly to DIMS. There is no actual paper printing. The State is working out some bugs in the system. We are one of the first counties to take advantage of it. We are reducing the amount of paper case files, no need of retention, lessening our storage needs, and increasing our usable footprint within the agency.

The CWA budget is due to the State by the end of the month.

A brief discussion took place about bilingual services the agency provides. The agency uses an interpretive service and we've added two clerks that are bilingual and we've had an HSS2 bilingual position that we had vacant for quite some time. We do service the Spanish population, mostly. Ms. Burd mentioned the last time civil service offered the written bilingual test, everyone on the class failed, pointing out there needs to be changes in the civil service system.

Laura Richter was up next to discuss the Human Services, Division of Administration's budget. She explained it's broken down into the internal operating expenses:

- Capital Requests
- Contracted, Outside Agencies, which includes youth services, mental health, addiction services, transportation and human services.

Operating expenses for calendar year 2023, the line request is a flat funding request to the County, was \$800,000.00 in 2022 and the same for 2023, no changes. We are requesting the money from civil commitment for an attorney to be kept and allocated to mental health and addiction services. Funds for youth shelter in 2022 saw an increase because they hold beds for Warren County residents, so that's 365 bed-days. In 2022, the total bed-days for youth we used was 511 which is higher because of the need. The State keeps a database from the Medical Examiner's Office. Warren County had double suicide rate in 2022 than the previous two years, combined. We are also seeing a service need at our providers increase for both mental health, substance abuse. Youth Services is in need with that.

The capital expenses – There is a project request for a vehicle replacement plan. The County's paratransit system has not received a new vehicle since February

2020 which was purchased using 2019 Capital Budget Funds. If American Rescue Funds are available, we are requesting to purchase up to six vehicles, over the next several years, for this program. I realize that's a lot. We anticipate five vehicles will need to be replaced due to high mileage and cost repairs. Per that plan, three of those vehicles will be ten years old this year and the other two are nine years old. If the funds are not available, we realize the County will not be able to fund this entire request.

Regarding the opioid settlement, to date we have received around \$300,000.00 in the opioid settlement. Those dollars are to extend for the total of eighteen years for the two settlements that are currently available. We have already received some of the funding in our accounts. We have to create a county advisory council, we could use the current LACADA. Mr. Sarnoski suggested we could also use the Heroin and Opioid Addiction and Awareness Task Force. Discussion took place regarding the funding that is due to come in over time. Ms. Richter stated she could do a separate presentation regarding the settlements.

The Department of Human Services, Division of Administration, is responsible for monitoring and administering Human Services programs that serve the most at-risk, older, vulnerable residents in the County. The chart represents those agency those agencies funded for 2023 for mental health services, human services, addiction services, youth services and transportation. The safety net offers residents opportunities for care to prevent more costly services such as institutions, jail or hospital-based services. For calendar year 2022, funding was a total allocation of \$800,000.00. In 2023, the funding will remain a flat request with no increase for the County.

Back to the opioid settlement funds - The Department of Human Services will take the lead in either establishing a county advisory council or using the current, established LACADA. A Commissioner should be a part of that and the process. The Youth Shelter increase of \$20,000.00 due to the increase in beds. Personnel request references in this budget will be discussed at a later meeting.

A brief discussion took place about the new program that needs to be set up for re-entry program with the jail. Warden McCarthy has procedures set up for when inmates come out. What we are looking for is a person who can be that liaison for the in between from when the inmate, being an inmate, to when they leave, then the follow-up. This isn't what social services does. They do the intake and make sure they have those benefits. A true re-entry program that can be successful for inmates, re-entering and not going back to the jail. That's the goal, to keep them out. He is

looking to have someone in-house at the jail to be able to have that contact with them inside and be able to liaise with Lauren's office. The position should be from Corrections because they would be interacting with those inmates on a regular basis.

Shawn Buskirk addressed the adjustor's budget – Our operating expenses which will remain the same as in calendar year 2022, with no increase. I am happy to report, with the help of the County Administrator, that beginning in January 2023, we are no longer using Michael Hanifan as private counsel. We are saving \$62,000.00 a year. We have opted to go with the Office of Public Defender, and as Ms. Richter mentioned, that funding amount can go back into the budget for mental health services or human service programs.

In personnel, we've been fully staffed since April of this year. The number of mental health background checks, as you are aware, the law changed in June of 2022. We have seen an increase to about 508. Our number of adult commitment cases is 219. The minor commitment cases is 125. This is a significant increase. We've had children ages 6 now placed in hospitals and these patients are often repeat admissions. We are seeing a trend with the kids that are being hospitalized. They are the adults of our future. Investigations – our County Counsel is represented by Doug Steinhardt, and his firm. In calendar year 2021 our cost total was \$79,986.25. In calendar year 2022, as of December, the amount is \$34,583.63. That's a difference of \$45,400.62. The main reason for this is because our county counsel is now sharing rotation in some state hospitals so her appearance is not needed as much. In addition our hearings are still virtual. Regarding investigations, we started with 38 open investigations. To date, all of these investigations are open. We're in the process of completing 42 investigations. We get transfers from some counties. We make sure we are being billed appropriately. We've used the County Adjuster in Sussex County to help provide us with some leadership with the investigations as well as other matters. We're now doing settlements for five years. From 2016 to date, we have State billing of \$2,829,676.39. Right now our County responsibility is only \$304,687.40. That is resulting in a savings of \$2,524,988.99. As you can see we have made market advances in this area. There is a State share of 85 percent and a County share of 15 percent. If the resident is not ours, we transfer it. We may get transfers in from other counties. Across the board, this budget is extremely fiscally responsible.

The board took a break at 8:01 p.m. and returned at 8:10 p.m.

Mr. Francisco introduced Department Head Corey Tierney, Director of Land Preservation. Mr. Francisco stated they have their own fund, dedicated tax of two

cents. That raised about \$2.4 million last year.

Mr. Tierney began by proposing we leave the open space tax at two cents. He said they had a great year. We closed thirteen farms, almost 1,200 acres. Total cost of that was about \$5 million. The County portion of that was about \$1.5 million. Mr. Francisco intervened by saying Mr. Tierney did a great job with matching our money with others. We got \$5 million dollar for one point. Good job! Mr. Tierney continued stating they had one open space project, with about 95 acres for about \$500,000.00 and there were four for the MCCT grants for \$550,000.00. With the proposed flat rate and the existing percentages, fifty-five percent is still allocated to farm land preservation. That ends up approximately \$970,000.00. Twenty-percent is allocated to the Board of Recreation for \$350,000.00. Twenty-five percent is allocated to the MCCT for \$440,000.00. There were two projects for the MCCT that were not funded the total asks were over \$1 million. Even with what was funded, this year, \$550,000.00, a flat budget with those same percentages wouldn't cover that, so we would be short \$440,000.00 versus \$550,000.00. One of the things we could look at doing is reallocating that. Farm land preservation we only drew down \$500,000.00 this year. Our cost is \$1.5 million, we had about \$1 million budgeted for it. If we were to zero that out, we would draw that balance down faster. If zeroing it out isn't palatable, we could change percentages.

Total administrative expenses is about \$557,000.00 and an additional maintenance line for operations is \$355,000.00. The percentage we put into administrative is ten percent.

Money will be allocated to the other two programs would be MCCT and the Board of Recreation, open space acquisitions. In addition, we would like to make more improvements to the parks and we would like to expand the park program, the educational offerings, create a full-time park naturalist position. If we were to reallocate the funding between the Board of Recreation and the MCCT. If we were to do 50-50, we would allocate about \$880,000.00 to each of those. If we would do a third, and keep some going to farm land preservation, then we could do about \$587,000.00 apiece.

Mr. Sarnoski asked regarding MCCT are seeing the numbers come in? These requests we are getting, although they are good projects to fund, we've got to tighten our restrictions on some of these things. We have to say is there a purpose for these in the towns? Are they being utilized? We've fund so many things, that unfortunately, are just not being used like their original intent and they are going into their degrading, and then we have to refund the maintenance of these certain

things. My question is if we put more money into the MCCT, “What are we preserving here? Is there a need?”

Ms. Ciesla asked how many open space projects we have seen coming in. Mr. Tierney stated we have seen that fall off. The towns and even the non-profits. We had one, one-hundred acre project last year. We didn't have any this year. In the past five years they have tapered off. The towns are not pursuing the open space projects. They are also not pursuing farm land preservation projects.

Mr. Sarnoski made comment that when we give the MCCT money, they feel like they have to spend every penny of it. It was suggested that maybe they should complete an audit of the projects they have given to and do a site visit. Mr. Tierney made comment there are projects going on for about ten years. Because of limited funding, they come back every 2-3 years. If there were more funds, they would tackle bigger projects.

It was mentioned another concern is that volunteerism has dropped and as the population ages and there are less interest in keeping these historical places open and to volunteer to. We're losing these resources because nobody is interested anymore.

Mr. Tierney said that raises another objective. What is the end objective? According to the farmland preservation plan, there's about 72,000 acres of productive farm land in Warren County out of 232,000 acres. We've preserved 28,000 of that 72,000; about thirty-eight percent. The plan/goal was to preserve about half of that. That would require another 8,600 acres. At the going rate of \$5,000.00 an acre, that's a cost of \$43 million. If we continue the rate of 1,000 acres a year, over the next 8-9 years. Of that \$43 million, if State funds remain available as have been, our forty-percent share of that would be \$17 million. There is concern the \$5,000.00 per acre cost is on the low end of what farmers are going to get. Corey said every farmer and every landowner he has talked to, even when they go ahead and preserve their property, have said it's undervalued. There is talk in Trenton that there is a bill pending. There is an alternative evaluation. There is the Highlands development credit which aren't funded, but on properties, there evaluations far exceeds what we get with our fare market appraisals. The appraisal standards that we use for both green acres and farm land preservation don't account for example, solar leases. They are looking at comparable sales. They are looking backwards in time. Farmers are telling me solar is willing to lease for twenty years at \$6,000 an acre and we're only paying \$5,000.00 an acre and that's a one-time thing. There are risks associated with that lease. Those are the decisions that landowners make. The problem we run into, with using the SADC grants, to get that 60 percent match then

we can't go above the highest appraisal without losing it all. As a County, we can pay above that. We would have to pay the full freight. To the Commissioners' credit, we started doing that. For the first time, the County has paid 100 percent of some of these easements that couldn't be funded through the SADC. I think we are looking at doing more of those. We're also looking at doing more of direct acquisitions. One of the problems we're running into is that farms are going up for sale and we can't move as quickly as private buyers. The only thing to do is to try and move in as quickly as we can to buy the entire farm, preserve it and resell it. There again, there are risks and we have to be competitive to get those. We're looking at doing more of that. We do have some ongoing discussions with landowners right now.

Mr. Tierney mentioned in 2023 are costs are going to be the same. As soon as you go further out from that, it becomes more and more unpredictable of what 2, 3, 5 years are going to look like.

Mr. Kern commented on Mr. Tierney's point, we don't know what the market is going to be, need a willing seller to work with and the other thing we have not touched on what is the municipalities plan and how does this fit into their development goals too. We also need to factor in inflation.

Mr. Sarnoski discussed the additional receipts we are going to get this year with the two cents, and the interest rate increases we're looking to get almost \$3 million in receipts. What are we looking at with disbursements? Are we close to equal to in disbursements next year with our preservation? You can probably guess what is needed for preservation money. We don't know MCCT's numbers, you have any idea of what open space is going to require. What's our disbursements looking like next year?

Mr. Tierney it will be very similar to what it was like this year. \$1.5 million for farms, \$500,000.00 for open space and \$500,000.00 for MCCT. That puts us at about \$2.5 million. This doesn't include administrative costs and operations. Those costs are \$800,000.00. So we are at similar costs.

Mr. Sarnoski discussed spending, so this year we spent about \$500,000.00. Next year, we're only losing about \$300,000.00 because we are bringing in more with interest and investments. We're at \$11.5 surplus this year. We're talking about adjusting agriculture. I'm in favor of the position for open space. I think it's our park land being utilized better, maintained better. We need to do that. I'm not in favor of more MCCT money at this time.

Commissioner Kern, commented that we should wait and see. This will be the first year, I would argue, that towns and organizations will be coming in post pandemic, seeing what they got. Maybe that will be our gage of what we want to fund? It's difficult too with the bicentennial coming up. We're going to full back funding.

Mr. Sarnoski is concerned with MCCT is he has been asking for years to get better control over MCCT funding. Put a little more emphases on the need to have a group setup to make sure they are utilizing the facilities or whatever we are preserving and to some degree this is being done by MCCT. They do go out and look at value-based projects but just to make sure the long term plan is there and the controls of the use of as well are there. We're not there yet, but we have gotten better. We need a true end goal. What is our overall historic preservation plan? There are not any new historic site being created, so we should know what is out there and what we are going to need and what the value is of what we are preserving.

Our farm land is at 55, MCCT is at 25 and Board of Recreation is at 20. Do we know what the deferred maintenance is?

Mr. Tierney spoke of the deferred maintenance. There is a lot of deferred maintenance that needs to be done. We have Bread Lock Park, along with other locations including the Stein Farm Building, Plane9, The Pump House, Old Marl Works Ruins at White Lake. We don't have a comprehensive park improvement plan.

There was a lengthy discussion about what percentage of funds should be used for the MCCT, Farm Land Preservation and Recreation Board and how to properly fund these areas.

Mr. Tierney will put some scenarios together for the Commissioners to have a better understanding and idea of the funding.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Thomas of Liberty Township, as we are talking about open space and farm land preservation. Inquired about the County ever considering purchasing Apple Mountain Golf Course and to use it as golf course? The Board explained the property is a part of the preservation area, so it is no longer developable. Also, the expenses of owning and operating a golf course is very expensive. Mr. Lazorisak remarked most municipalities are sub-contracting them out. It costs too much money

internally. They rent them out to a management company and make a little bit of revenue off of it.

There were no more questions or comments from the public.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

RESOLUTION 18-23

On motion by Mr. Kern, 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 at 8:50 p.m.

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

On motion by Mr. Kern, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, the board adjourned Executive Session and returned to Open Session at 9:24 p.m.

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

ADJOURNMENT

On motion by Mr. Kern, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, and there being no further business before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 9:25 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 18-23

On motion by **Mr. Kern**, 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 4, 2023.

**A MOTION AUTHORIZING EXECUTIVE SESSION 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:

- (1) *Matters Relating to the Employment Relationship*: Items to be discussed include: Employment – FT Warrant Officer.

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

[01]