

**These minutes were approved by the Board of County Commissioners on April 23, 2024.*

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 6, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

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

After leading the flag salute, 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 2024 budget ordinances and proposals.

Chief Financial Officer Mr. Francisco, started by stating we are not presenting a capital plan today. This is not our official budget. Meetings have been held all week and it's being worked on. We'll get a feeling for where we stand.

Mr. Francisco began by reviewing notices from the Division of Local Government Services. The first notice is in reference to the introduction and adoption deadlines, introduction due by March 29 and adoption due by April 30, 2024. Mr. Francisco anticipates meeting the deadlines with introduction at the second meeting in February and adoption at the second meeting in March. The second notice is in reference to the Cost-of Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2024 is 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.

Mr. Francisco presented a Budget and Tax Levy Analysis dating back to the 1970's. As a recap, we had a great ratable increase in 2023. He reminded everyone we lowered the tax rate by four and a half cents in the current fund. The levy went up 1.5 million, but the rate went down four and a half cents. The Library levy was the same but due to the increase in ratables; the rate went down a half cent. We had two a cent levy for the open space. Last year between the current fund and Library we had a five cent tax decrease, which is good.

Next Mr. Francisco turned to debt service. We have a debt service payment for two more years. In 2025 we'll be debt free. This is the Chapter 12 college debt.

He next spoke of the county's surplus. He reviewed the results of the prior year. They are not official, audited numbers. The year started with \$25 million in surplus and we used \$10 million in the budget, leaving the subtotal of \$15 million. The next four items were results of the operations. There were some added taxes of \$169,000, miscellaneous revenue, which was not anticipated of \$2.5 million, and excess anticipated revenue, of \$3.5 million. This is mostly due to interest rates increasing. There were appropriation reserve for 2022, which lapsed in the amount of \$8.9 million. We used \$10 million and replenished \$15 million. This is very good. We would have a surplus of \$31 million, but

then we had the settlements. At the end of the year, we are looking at about \$29.5 million in surplus, just under \$30 million. The surplus will be at an all-time high. He reminded the board to keep in mind, we are a pay as you go county, and must deal with inflation, and increased construction costs.

In the budget presented today, which is not final, we're using about \$12 million of surplus. That could go up, depending on our capital projects. He points out we are in a pretty good position and in good shape. He mentioned how expensive everything is. All our projects are so expensive.

A discussion took place about the bond for this year and Mr. Francisco said we did not borrow that money. With this type of surplus, he is hoping we won't have to use it. We can use our own money. The bond was just a backup in case we needed it. He also commented we haven't seen any FEMA money yet. County Administrator mentioned while interest rates are starting to drop, we made a good amount of money on interest. Also the bonds will be low interest bonds. If we got into a situation, we may need to use the bond. It's a one year note that we would have ten years to pay it off or finance with a serial bond. We're hoping we don't have to do that.

Next Mr. Francisco discussed revenues. The first item was the County Clerk's office. In 2022 the office brought in \$2.4 million from real estate transfer fees, but at the end of the year, it began to fall off. So it was budgeted at \$1.75 million and the office brought in \$1.739 million. That office did not meet their goal, but it was still a very good year. The market has cooled from the COVID years. Surrogate's office - this office continues to do well. They earned \$140,000 in 2022 and \$152,000 in 2023. The Sheriff's office, has met their goal of \$255,000 again in 2023, unfortunately due to foreclosures fees.

Interest in 2022, we earned \$945,000. In 2023 we anticipated \$700,000. We brought in \$3.5 million, through eleven months. We have one more month to go. We will probably earn another \$350,000. Mr. Francisco is estimating \$2 million for 2024, which is conservatively low because the Fed is going to lower their rates three to six times and as we spend our money for our buildings and projects, our principal goes down. Mr. Francisco wants to remain conservative.

Mr. Francisco continued to review the revenues. Election reimbursement by the towns were normal. Motor Vehicle Fees: We anticipated \$200,000 and received \$195,000. This is for tickets on county roads. The Library share of pension costs reimbursed were stable. For the jail we anticipated \$900,000 and we received \$1.2 million.

Mr. Francisco next turned to state aide. The state pays us for their share of college bonds. They pay half the debt. The Division of Aging and Disabilities Services gets their reimbursement for care management. We budgeted \$100,000 and they brought in \$126,000. The DCA reimburses us for a portion of the Prosecutor's salary. Our request for \$199,000 was submitted on the fourth of November. We still haven't been paid for 2023. They owe us \$199,000. TASS: This is our single highest revenue other than taxation. We budgeted \$4 million and they brought in \$4.3 million resulting in \$300,000 surplus. Despite being short staff, they met their incentives. SSI: is one of the things in TASS's budget. We have to budget the county share for benefits and the state reimburses us. That amount is going up in 2024.

Last year we anticipated revenues of \$9.18 million in the current fund budget. This year Mr. Francisco is anticipating \$10.8 million, approximately a \$1.6 million increase, mostly because of

interest and Temporary Assistance.

Mr. Francisco reviewed a few slides in his presentation:

- Capital Improvement Funds-This is our savings account on the capital side. We started the year with \$4.6 million. We did not use any for our 2023 projects. We put in \$15 million, authorized \$15 million in improvements. We did apply \$500,000 as the down payment towards the bond ordinance. The bond ordinance required a down payment. We ended the year with \$4.1 million in our capital improvement fund.
- The Snow Removal Trust - we have \$469,000. It was commented that we haven't used this in the past few years, however, we have depleted this account in previous years.
- The Bicentennial Trust – We have been putting aside money for years and we're up to \$135,000. So far, we've spent \$11,000. By planning to put in another \$65,000 this year, we'll have \$200,000.
- Catherine Dickson Hofman Library in Blairstown – The Library put \$3 million from their 2023 budget and we matched \$3.9 million from American Rescue and there was \$932,000 left in the library 2022 budget for the project. There was \$7.9 million available, we encumbered \$7.3 million and there's \$536,000 left to finish the project and purchase furniture.
- Human Services Building – The money was put aside, we had American Rescue and our own capital money. There was \$4.1 million available. We encumbered \$3.5 million leaving \$644,000 to finish the project.
- Storm Damage Appropriations – We used American Rescue for an emergency appropriation to get it started. We did a \$2 million appropriation. In last check run for the year, December 20th, we spent the last of that money. Any expenditures going forward will come from the \$20 million bond appropriation. Any cash we will use will be our own. Any money we get from FEMA, will go back into ordinance funding.
- Pension – For the past couple of years, pension payments has gone up eight to ten percent each year. This year, our increase is almost flat at \$11,000 which is a fraction of a percentage (.19%). Last year it was almost over \$500,000.
- Psychiatric Hospitals – This is something we have no control over. The state sends us a bill and we must pay it. This year we will \$900,000. In 2023 we paid \$1.1 million, a decrease of \$172,000. Last year the Human Services Department had two employees out on disability. The department is back on track and doing a good job. We don't determine the price of the hospital stays and we don't determine the length of the stay. We can however make sure the people there are ours and we only pay for Warren County residents.
- Employee Health Care – You have all heard about the state health care plan over the past several years. This year we are proposing to raise our budget by one percent. Over the past couple of years, the state's gone up probably over thirty percent. We're going up one percent. We meet with our consultants every year. In 2023, we had an increase in behavior health claims, including counseling and addiction services. The addiction services were a surprise to us and higher than expected. It was noted by law, we cannot mandate for individuals to stay within network. If someone wants to go out of state for addiction services, we can't stop them. It should be within network of our health insurance. Mr. Sarnoski commented he's not surprised that this coincides with the legalization of marijuana. Mr. Francisco said the reason for the one percent increase is for protection. There is no way to predict hospitalizations, surgeries, etc. We do have stop-loss insurance so if someone has a million dollar claim, we're capped at \$300,000. The initial premium increase came in at twenty-nine percent. He and

County Administrator negotiated and got a 4.9 percent increase. Many towns and counties in the state would love to have just a one percent increase. Many are looking at a thirty percent increase over two years.

- Mosquito Commission – They were in the state health care benefits program. We reimbursed them for their health care expenses. Last year they had a twenty-four percent increase. County Administrator suggested bringing them into our health care program because we are paying their premiums anyway. We did an analysis of their claims and they are a good group. We saved money and they saved money. We made sure they were a good fit and it worked.

Next, Mr. Francisco discussed budget appropriations:

- Salaries - In the past we tried to keep our salary negotiations at two percent. We've talked about this for a while. We want to attract employees and retain our good employees. Our salary increases have been in excess of the two percent. We can't be like private industry, but we can try to increase a little more. Overall, salaries have gone up a little bit.
- Planning is asking for \$50,000 to amend the county Solid Waste Management Plan.
- Our multi-line workers comp insurance is increasing by eleven percent. This is not a final number. John Daily told me eleven, I was hoping he would come in at maybe nine or ten. Right now, I'm trying to get it under nine. We all know insurance is going up.
- Corrections – Inflation really hit them. Their food service went up \$200,000. Their medical care for inmates went up \$575,000. Their operating supplies are going up. We did negotiate a new contract with Hunterdon County and we raised their rates 7.74 percent.
- Buildings and Grounds had an increase of \$132,650, for supplies that are necessary.
- Utilities we kept about the same.
- Senior services salaries, increasing now that we have the veteran's coordinator. It's a new full-time position. Nutrition has increased too with food inflation and transportation. Steve Unger will talk about that later on.
- Vo-Tech is requesting a three percent increase about \$134,000 dollars and a million dollars in capital.
- The Community College requested a two percent increase and no capital increase.
- The Prosecutor's Office is requesting a \$27,000 increase in cyber unit.
- The Cap: Mr. Francisco mentioned the cap for the tax board and surrogate. We're going to have a problem with their two percent cap soon. Because they are such small departments, if their salaries go up three or three and a quarter percent, the cap is going to be really tight. It's such a small budget and any little increase over two percent is the problem. We're okay this year.
- Open Space – We ended the year with a cash surplus, \$27.6 million. The balance did go down in 2023. It's the second year it went down. We're still looking at \$27 million.
- Open Space Tax Levy - In 2023, the tax levy was 2 cents and brought in \$2.6 million. The interest we earned is the equivalent of 1 cent. We received \$2.6 million from taxation and \$1.3 million from interest. That's pretty good. We are going to replace the SUV for the department this year and take that out of the Open Space fund.
- The Library has not submitted any documentation for this year's budget. Mr. Francisco took the levy, assumed it will be the same, looked at the line items and appropriated to what the past history was and where he thought the money should go. A discussion took place about

the Library's non submittal of a budget. It was confirmed that every department is required to submit a yearly budget. Mr. Sarnoski commented he was concerned that the library has not submitted a budget that the Board could review with the considerations going on with the new construction. A discussion took place about how once the Catherine Dickson Hofman Library (CDH) is complete, all of the libraries will have been renovated or constructed/reconstructed. Now the focus will need to be on repairs such as roofing, mechanical issues, heating systems, etc. County Administrator suggested a five to eight year plan for the library maintenance of the buildings. Mr. Francisco asked the board if they wanted to keep the levy the same. If the ratables go up, like Tax Administrator thinks they will, we could either keep the levy the same, which will lower the rate or keep the rate the same, which will bring in a little more money. It was also commented the \$50,000 increase added to the legal fees line item. This is because they hired outside counsel instead of using county counsel. This was not discussed with the Commissioners before doing so. This has increased their budget line item for this purpose. This should be a part of the discussion as well. It was noted that this fee will come out of the library budget. Mr. Kern requested a letter to be sent to the Ms. Wilkinson, Library Director to submit a budget by close of business on January 10, 2024.

- Mr. Francisco said we will be receiving \$62,000 again this year from the Town of Phillipsburg. We're in year four of a six year federation separation agreement.

Mr. Francisco is putting some money aside for a new library van. With the budget, keeping the levy the same, there will be \$1.6 million to put towards the capital fund to finish the CDH reconstruction and then have a balance going forward for new capital items.

He referred back to the presentation and said the \$75.5 million levy is the same in the current fund. He thinks that could go higher. There's a \$12,000,008 we need from surplus. The surplus could change. Again, we replaced \$15 million last year so we are in a good position. He hopes we can increase the \$75.5 million levy due to a ratable increase. Maybe be like last year, we can lower the rate but still increase the levy.

For the Library, he highlighted the \$50,000 line item. He looked at last year and he did leave money in there for digital items. Ms. Wilkinson always said digital is more expensive.

The last page is the Open Space cash. We're showing the \$27 million in cash reserves.

Mr. Francisco has concluded his overview of the proposed 2024 budget.

Next on the agenda is Shawn Buskirk, Human Services Director. She began by wishing everyone a Happy New Year and she started off with the Adjusters budget. She mentioned Mr. Francisco previously discussed the savings of \$172,000. As he mentioned, investigations are current and we're ensuring that it's only Warren County residents that we're paying for the cost of care. As you know, these are the most chronic, severely, mentally ill patients. Often times, even though it's a civil commitment, they have criminal charges as well. The operating budget is flat funding with no projected increases. Last year we transitioned from private counsel, patient counsel to office of the public defender and that's working very well. Legal fees, we paid for Florio, Steinhardt to represent county counsel. Those numbers have decreased over time because our hearings have been virtual. Now some will be returning to in-person and some will remain virtual.

Next Ms. Buskirk turned to mental health background checks. This is required as part of the gun permit. We have seen a sharp decrease in the numbers because the law changed last year.

She next turned her attention to Commitments. We have a total of 336 commitments. Adult cases are 219. Ms. Buskirk finds the number of minor admissions to be startling. There are 133 adolescent admissions. To date there are 16 individuals who are committed in the community known as involuntary outpatient commitment. Those are individuals that can be maintained in the community, not requiring state hospitalization.

A quick summary of the minors - in the past, Ms. Buskirk said the board has asked her to articulate and highlight the municipalities. Phillipsburg is still the highest municipality, followed by Hackettstown and then Washington. What we have seen is an increase in Blairstown, which is now in the double digits. Reasons for admissions for adolescents, the reason I'm stressing this is because our youngest adolescent is six years old. It was asked if they need to be Warren County residents or could they be a student from another county and Ms. Buskirk's reply was they don't have to be a resident, they could be a student say at Blair Academy. She noted often times the parents' insurance or Medicaid may cover it. Top reasons for admissions is suicide ideation, self-harm, behavioral crisis and depression. This year we have seen two cases where the primary cause was homicidal ideations. That's new and rather startling. Ms. Buskirk ended her presentation by asking if the board had any questions. While there were no questions from the board, Ms. Ciesla did comment and say Human Services is doing a good job and making sure we're paying for who we're supposed to be paying for, to keep costs down. Ms. Buskirk commented the investigations have shown and we're seeing savings across the board.

Next, Laura Richter, Associate Director/Mental Health Administrator/Substance Abuse Coordinator, regarding the Human Services, Division of Administration budget. No increase to the operation expenses is being requested. They are asking to remain flat at \$800,000 for their outside agencies. They did renew their contracts this year. They have one agency that relinquished their funds because they were understaffed. Because the agency couldn't provide the services, they would like to put it out to contract, which they did at the end of the year, but no one came in for it. They will try to go to contract again in 2024. They have a capital request for two paratransit vehicles, due to high mileage and the expected maintenance and repair costs exceed the \$4,000 threshold. It was asked if they could do with one and the answer was not really, but if they had to, they would. It was noted two may be able to be leased. Ms. Buskirk mentioned they have been able to get leased vehicles through the 5310 program. They don't know from year to year how many they're getting, but they've received at least two and probably looking at least five more. CFO Francisco commented it takes ten years to get them, by the time you apply and receive them.

Next Ms. Richter turned her attention to the youth shelter, stating it decreased by \$20,000. In 2022 the bed days had increased, which is based on what they saw during COVID. In 2023 the numbers have gone back down, back to normal.

The opiate settlement since August is \$563,363.36 and the recommendations are put forth for review. Mr. Sarnoski asked if there was a timeline and the answer is no. Ms. Richter said her recommendation is that the state is going through theirs, remember they get half of the whole \$600 million. We will get a very small portion of that. The state just finished their listening sessions and are still in the planning phase. They're going to be spending dollars. She thinks we need to show that

we're spending our dollars, that we're using it. The Local Advisory Committee on Alcoholism/Drug Abuse (LACADA) has put forth their recommendations as the department. This is like a first phase because it will continue over several years. She thinks the need will change. We're looking at opiates, but we're also looking at an addiction. When you look at the numbers of people who are going into treatment now, for the first time since 2019, alcohol has topped the admission rates over opiates and other drugs. During COVID, we saw in the news how more people were buying alcohol than had ever done so before. They are seeing that in our populations and the need for outpatient and inpatient services. It's something to be aware of. They're looking at the opioid settlement. She said what they are really looking at is an addiction. They're responding to addiction regardless of what substance it is. Opiates were really driving the fentanyl. They're seeing xylazine in our samples from Warren County as well as from other parts of the state. Her point is she thinks we have some time to spend, to make our decisions on that because the state is going to be spending.

She next turned her attention to agencies that they fund – they fund twenty agencies at the moment, with thirty-six programs in mental health addiction, youth transportation, human services, and through aging. Staff monitor each of the programs for their spending to ensure that their needs of the service is to truly to pay for what they say they are going to give us for those outcomes. They've been able to expand how the number of programs over the years, with the dollars that they have, to serve more people. Mr. Kern mentioned he would like the department to start to think about where we can have bus stop coverage shelters on our routes. He feels it's a problem and he's heard complaints about. He feels the department would know where those places are. They have been working with Public Works on funding. There are students at Warren County Community College who are getting soaked before classes. We can probably install them as well. The county would need to do it, but the Department of Human Services knows where all the stops are.

Lauren Burd, Director of Temporary Assistance and Social Services, was next on the agenda. She started off stating TASS had another exceptional year revenue wise, they exceeded their revenues by over \$322,000. They left over \$600,000 of the budget unexpended. They did it consistently throughout the year with approximately fifteen vacancies. They still have these fifteen vacancies. Their 2024 budget reflects a zero percent increase in projected operating costs. She reminded everyone that fifty to seventy-five percent of her budget is covered by state reimbursement.

Next she went over some figures, the number of clients on assistance in the county. There have been some minimal increases in decreases. The biggest increase was in Medicaid. Medicaid is going through their unwinding process right now. They took the COVID extension cases and added them back to the department's caseloads. That's the reason for the big increase. They've given them twelve months to catch up on those redeterminations and they have been able to keep up. The process started back in June. They continue to have an enormous increase in new applications since pre COVID numbers. You'll see it says forty percent increase on there. Our number is only one percent from 2022 to 2023, however it's a large increase in new applications. Ms. Ciesla asked if she saw any increase in people applying due to the storm this past summer. The answer was no, not really. Ms. Burd indicated it's usually based on income unless there's a declaration and then they have to do a disaster food stamps. With the storms, they were not in that type of disaster situation.

Next, Ms. Burd focused on Medicaid. She indicated they had another successful year from Medicaid work. She reminded everyone in 2015, changes in the reimbursement structure were made. They were paid per Medicaid case and increased their reimbursement for Medicaid positions from

fifty to seventy-five percent. She outlined their Medicaid revenue totals and she's happy to report they were reimbursed the maximum amount for 2023 and their highest amount so far. They hit over the million mark in Medicaid revenue since the changes in the reimbursement structure were made. This does not include fifty to seventy-five percent that they got for Medicaid positions. This is just based on their Medicaid members and revenue. The percentage backlog in 2016 was at twenty-six percent backlog and today they're at 2.91% backlog. This was with the support of the new positions that the board supported in 2016. They have also been able to improve their timeliness, which is directly tied to their reimbursement. In 2024 there's going to be a bit of a change in Medicaid. The focus will be on three components just for January 1st through June 30th. Their splitting the year by six months. Right now they only know what their reimbursement structure is going to be for the first six months of the year. Again, it is redetermination, timeliness, initial new application processing time, and then bonus pool incentive. They get redetermination timeliness. They will get 125 percent of what they earned for the incentives in 2022. Then they will get the bonus money for the \$10,000 per quarter as long as they're 100 percent timeliness with all the new applications, which they've hit that \$10,000 every quarter since it has been available to them. She anticipates hitting these targets. Mr. Sarnoski asked if we are the only county in the state who is hitting our numbers. The response was we are not. There are other counties doing very well in Medicaid and they have made similar changes like we did. We were the worst county at one time but we are at the top now.

Next she turned to what the 2024 Medicaid revenues are going to look like for now until we know what the second structure is going to be. The state has shared that the structure is being worked on. Ms. Burd anticipates hearing about the updated MOU by the first quarter of the year.

The next item on Ms. Burd's agenda was the snapshot of their digital imaging. She believes COVID put them at a new mark for virtual process and they've continued to do all of their work virtually. The handouts she provided showed the number of files in 2023 that they prepped, scanned and indexed, the number of boxes they destroyed. They have no paper case files, no detention, and no storage costs. The information is available to workers at their fingertips. They no longer pull cases, they're not wasting time. When they have quality control come in from the state and they are audited on things, they have it in their document imaging system. There is a lot less time wasted. She added the CWA budget is due to the state by the end of January. The only other thing she wanted to mention today, which is included in her budget, is for two promotions and an additional social worker. She wanted to highlight the social worker request. As she has presented to the board as other meetings, the county's homeless population has increased. That's why she is seeing the need for another social worker. She praised her current social workers, stating it's a special group of people. They are working to the max right now. They saw a thirty percent increase just through August, in referrals, and then for just for homeless and then another forty percent in other services such as shut off notices, back rent, security deposit, the other services that they provide as well. Mr. Sarnoski asked if the state provides any funding for that based on need or increase in homeless population or is there any kind of money from the state? The answer is we get percentages, half of it back. It's not a fully funded grant or anything. The cost for the county for the additional social worker, with the fringe benefits and the salary is a little bit higher, the state will cover half, and it's only about \$33,000. Ms. Burd concluded her presentation by asking if there were any questions from the board but there were none.

The final presentation from the Department of Human Services is from Steve Unger, Division of Aging and Disabilities Services. Mr. Unger started out by saying it has been a very productive and busy year at the Division. They had their first Spring Fling this year at their North Warren site with

approximately 150 seniors in attendance. The Outstanding Senior Award Banquet was well attended also. Warren County Farmers Fair, there was a slight disappointment again due to the stage and accessibility issues, however, he anticipated approximately 300-350 participants came through. There is a fall picnic every year. This year they had approximately 200 participants, which is the most they ever had in attendance. In 2023 they contracted with Comcast to create a commercial which has been aired 117,315 times within 14,600 households. Last year they aimed for households of the age of fifty and above. This year they're going to aim for households of age thirty-five and above so they can reach out to the caregiver population as well. Through 2023, the congregate participation numbers were steady at about 140 participants per day at the four locations compared to eighty-five participants per day in 2022, which is approximately a sixty-four percent increase in participation at the nutrition sites. They served 22,000 congregate meals in 2023 compared to 15,634 meals in 2022. As you know with the increased participation, it brings an increased in costs for our congregate program. The meal costs have risen from \$6.88 to \$7.10 for a four percent increase. Their rents have increased, additional Manpower costs for new and existing staff. Minimum wage has gone up to \$15 per hour. CFO Francisco intervened and said this is the department who is most affected by the minimum wage because they have kitchen workers. Mr. Unger continued with a total projected increase of \$70,828. Due to the current and anticipated increase in participation at the sites, they are estimating increase in transportation costs of \$62,570. The increase in senior participation and the need for additional funds, the division respectfully requests \$133,398 increase in county support for the congregate meal program. For participation at the sites, he's thinking they have a lot more programs, more activities, more promotions such as the commercial, the overall food is better than it was last year. He said he makes it a point to visit the sites monthly so he gets to know the people. He put more staff in there that are pleasant and polite. The participants really like to come to the sites now. The Hackettstown site has gone up. In 2020/2021, they had about 25 participants at the Hackettstown site. Now they are roughly about 40-45 participants a day. Mr. Sarnoski mentioned we have approximately twenty-five percent of our residents are over the age of sixty. That has to be one of the higher percentages in the state. Mr. Unger said correct, we have approximately 27,000 seniors in the county. Mr. Francisco remarked, he did include the full \$133,000 increase in his worksheet. Mr. Sarnoski asked about the veterans service person, what do you find them doing mostly for our veterans? Mr. Unger replied, his staff person has been helping a lot of veterans with navigating benefits for the veterans. She has gone through training and acquired her veteran's accreditation. Now she is able to help our veterans file claims. So far she has helped about ten individuals with claims. She is being assisted by Rich Booth, the Veterans Officer in Hunterdon County. He's doing a fantastic job in training her. Mr. Unger expressed he was not sure what he would have done without Mr. Booth's support. Our Veterans Service person has helped approximately sixty-five individual veterans navigate for benefits. She makes referrals to the Aging office for temporary assistance. She has been doing a fantastic job. She's been doing outreach as well, working with Milly Rice. She has been attending Legion meetings at night. She has no issues with working extra time, helping our seniors and veterans. Her main concern is because she is working from the Division of Aging, she's helping a lot more senior veterans that she is with younger veterans. Younger veterans may be more able to navigate the veteran's services a little easier than the older ones. It is definitely a warranted position and beneficial to the county.

Next, Mr. Unger spoke of the Meals at Home program begins in 2024 with significant changes. However, there is no financial request for an increase in county budget. The service provides an invaluable safety net for most of our vulnerable residents. For twenty years Visiting Homemakers was our contract provider for the meals at home program coordination and assessment, and also the volunteer programs. As of December 31st Visiting Homemakers, ceased operations. It had been

proposed by his Division to bring in-house the Meals at Home program, which is a required service under area plan contract and the volunteer programs which work hand in hand with one another. Both programs were incorporated into the Department RFP, but we did not have any proposals. He brought on nine experienced staff from Visiting Homemakers under Manpower to ensure the transition on January 2nd was seamless. He brought on their meals at home coordinator, the volunteer coordinator, a part-time assistant coordinator, and three site staff to help pack the meals and three meals at home drivers. County Administrator Lazorisak gave Mr. Unger a lot of credit. That was a lot of work to put that all together. He worked with me, insurance, legal. You did a lot. He gave him a lot of credit for putting that together in such short notice.

Mr. Unger's next topic of discussion was about call rates. The call rates have gone up slightly from 18,874 in 2022 to 19,134 in 2023. He anticipates the rates to continue going up in the coming years due to the increased senior population. To put this in perspective, in 2019, he documented 12,232 calls to the Division. They are up approximately 7,000 calls in a couple of years. The Division estimated revenue for 2024 is going to be \$240,000 with \$115,000 coming from federal financial participation and \$125,000 coming from the JAC program reimbursement. He's hoping for increases in 2025 because the JAC care management rate went from \$95 to \$153. The \$95 has been in place for quite some time. Mr. Unger is not making any requests for new positions, however, he does have three promotional requests for the board's review. The Division is seeking to promote three full-time employees due to increased job responsibilities associated with new programs they're administering in 2024. He ended his presentation asking if the board had any questions. Ms. Ciesla thanked all the presenters from Human Services stating they all do so much work in the Human Services departments. She expressed her appreciation.

With no further discussion with Mr. Unger, the agenda continued on with Mr. Sidie, Information Technology Director. While Mr. Sidie was setting up, Mr. Francisco addressed the IT department's budget, stating the budget has actually gone down \$10,000, the capital request is standard every year. There are no increases, but rather a reduction in the budget. Mr. Sidie started by saying this past year was substantially addressing infrastructure and stability in our systems and they made substantial progress. There is a fair amount left to do but they made great progress. One was evidence of installing this network management system. This is a recent addition, it keeps track of how things are going in the network. It allows them to keep an eye on all of the county's locations. Through the introduction of their distributed network, their software defined wide area network, SDWan. IT now have locations reaching up through Hope, where the Hope Garage is, down to the southwest library branch, and the Alpha Garage. This has enabled them to implement their security features with video cameras, which have been installed to protect our assets and our associates. Mr. Sidie demonstrated how they can see various county properties. Even though Hope has limited network coverage, they could still keep an eye on the property. He stated they have invested quite a bit of time with security this past year and they most recently helped out the Town of Belvidere, looking at some of the cameras. The system allows them to keep an eye on our facilities, including the card access system at the Health Department. He mentioned there are now phones and computers at the Hackettstown Garage and will be putting cameras out there. They also have the network into the northeast library branch. There is also networking in the southwest library branch and headquarters. When the CDH library branch is back up and running, the networking will be there as well. He stressed the importance of having the county network there is that there are county associates working there and they deserve to have access to the county network. Prior to the introduction of this, the employees had no way of accessing the county network, for example access to their pay stubs,

etc. Commissioner Sarnoski asked if the county does all the IT for the library now. Mr. Sidie replied no and he thinks it's something that should be addressed this year.

Mr. Sidie turned to accomplishments of the IT department. One being the records search for the Health Department. He explained they had an outside vendor and they actually researched three different vendors. The best vendor that they found offered a range of services. They packaged those services as modules and each module was leased for \$12,000 per year. So they could do a particular task for \$12,000 a year as well as the restaurant inspection module. They also had a food truck module separate from the restaurant module and the campground inspection module. They're \$12,000 apiece and they had to buy five for a total of \$60,000 per year. They went to another vendor and had a module developed with a cost of approximately \$24,000 for a one-time fee. So the return of investment for two years is great. This has just been published out as part of their online OPRA requests on the website. Users can actually pull these records up online. He's very happy about that. He will be meeting with the Health Department Director next week about continuing that work and getting some of these other modules.

Mr. Sidie turned his attention to the budget. He's kept the budget flat. He will need to take a look at the PC upgrades over the next few years. He explained their plan had been a five year lifecycle on those. When the pandemic hit, of course, they had a significant increase in laptops, which were purchased through the American Rescue plan. The cost of PCs have increased. In trying to keep that budget flat, he will work with the department heads and various divisions to assess how strongly we need the laptops. To the extent possible, if and when those laptops break, if we can replace them with desktops again and bring those costs back down because the laptops when we purchased them were approximately \$2,000. Now the costs has gone up to approximately \$2,300 apiece. What's worse is that the docking station you need for them is now about \$300 apiece. Commissioner Kern commented we are in government, which means we're in the business of people facing. He thinks desk tops are appropriate. Laptops are more mobile remote employees. It was determined a desktop costs approximately \$1,500.

Mr. Sidie turned to the other line areas in his budget. Particularly the switch replacement which includes the expansion of the network to those remote sites and the support thereof. The phone system upgrades, there is money set aside so they can migrate from the PRI circuits which are primary rate interface circuits, which are dedicated copper circuits that run to the central office to SIP circuits, which are voiceover IP. The driving needs to go to SIP circuits is to comply with the law. That requires a notification to 9-1-1 of the originator's location. The PRI circuits don't give precise location of the originator, which the SIP does. They want to keep the PRI as backup but want to transition everyone to SIP so they can get that location information to 9-1-1. Then the continuing security improvements coupled in there, there are some buildings where we don't have a good master lock program in the building. He has actually had to issue card keys to the fire marshal so the fire companies can have access to all the doors in the building. They will have to rekey some buildings. Included in that dollar amount is actually rekeying certain locations. Commissioner Ciesla commented about part of the budget was to increase Wi-Fi availability in these buildings because some have basements and the Wi-Fi needs to be improved. Mr. Sidie answered one of the things he did get to do in 2023 was get cell repeater at installed at Public Safety, with the courthouse to be done in 2024. Commissioner Ciesla asked about the college and Vo-Tech? The answer was that's their budget to deal with. The results at public safety were well received.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

On motion by Ms. Ciesla, seconded by Mr. Sarnoski, and there being no further business before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 10:17 a.m.