

## **MINUTES**

Mayor and Council Special Meeting

Saturday, March 7, 2026

8:00 A.M.

### **CALL TO ORDER –**

A Special Meeting of the Mayor and Council of the Borough of River Edge was held virtually via Zoom on March 7, 2026. The meeting was called to order at 8:09 a.m. by Mayor Thomas Papaleo.

### **SILENT PRAYER – FLAG SALUTE**

Mayor Papaleo asked for a moment of silence for service men and women, those involved in the peace process and all those innocent people who are involved in battle conditions. He then led those present in a salute to the flag.

### **STATEMENT –**

Mayor Papaleo read the Statement of Compliance into the record as follows:

Statement of Compliance with Open Public Meeting Act: This meeting complies with the Open Public Meeting Act by notification on January 9, 2026 and January 12, 2026 of the time, date, location, and access information to the Town News and the Record and by posting of same on the municipal bulletin board and Borough Website and filing a notice of the same with the Municipal Clerk.

### **ROLL CALL**

**PRESENT:** Councilwoman Montisano-Koen, Council President Kinsella, Councilwoman Malellari, Councilman Glass, Councilwoman Dhariwal, Councilman Feffer and Mayor Papaleo.

**ABSENT:** Donna Sanders, Citizens Budget Committee Member

**ALSO PRESENT:** Borough Administrator Lissette Aportela  
Chief Financial Officer Chris Battaglia  
Jason Milito, DPW Superintendent  
Daragh O'Connor, Library Director  
Joseph Ricca, Recreation Director  
William Sanders, Fire Chief & OEM Coordinator  
Michael Walker, Police Chief  
Gregg Cariddi, Citizens Budget Committee Member  
Joseph Gautier, Citizens Budget Committee Member (arrived at 8:14 a.m.)  
Kenneth Krautheim, Citizens Budget Committee Member  
Albert Ruhlmann, Citizens Budget Committee Member

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

Motion by Councilman Glass, second by Councilwoman Dhariwal, and all members present voting in favor, to open the floor to the public.

No one came forward.

Motion by Councilman Glass, second by Councilwoman Montisano-Koen, and all members present voting in favor, to close to the public.

## **2026 OPERATING BUDGET DISCUSSION**

### **Fire Department**

#### **Capital Budget**

William Sanders, Fire Chief, advised that he would like to reduce his request for the ladder truck replacement from \$300,000 to \$200,000, remove the request for the key fob door entry system and include the purchase of pagers as part of an overall communication system in the amount of \$40,000, \$35,000 of which would be for a base station. He advised that all other requests remain unchanged.

It was questioned whether the ladder truck request could be reduced to \$100,000 and whether the cost for the pagers includes soft costs such as installation and maintenance.

Chief Sanders confirmed that the ladder truck request can be reduced to \$100,000. He also confirmed that the cost for the pagers does include programming and will allow the Fire Department to purchase 6 to 8 pagers.

It was the consensus of the governing body to reduce the request for the ladder truck to \$100,000 and approve the other requested changes.

#### **Operating Budget**

Chief Sanders asked that his uniform repair request, 6-01-25-255-032, be increased from \$300 to \$800, office supplies request, 6-01-25-255-036, be reduced from \$750 to \$500, and siren maintenance request, 6-01-25-255-105, be reduced from \$750 to \$500. With respect to line 6-01-25-255-196, software contract, he explained that the Fire Department is required to change over to a federally mandated reporting system and the startup cost is almost \$4,000. He noted that this line will be reduced next year.

Gregg Cariddi, Citizen Budget Committee member, questioned the name for line item 6-01-25-255-190, noting that this line relates to the maintenance of the fire monument.

It was agreed to rename this line to fire monument maintenance. It was also agreed to approve all other requests for inclusion in the budget in the amounts specified today.

### **Office of Emergency Management**

#### **Operating Budget**

Chief Sanders advised that there are no changes to the Office of Emergency Management budget requests.

## **2026 Municipal Budget Overview**

Chris Battaglia, CFO, reported that this budget year was very difficult, and due to prior due diligence, the budget requests were vetted thoroughly. He noted that there is a total tax increase of 4.47% or approximately \$751,000. He advised that, of the \$751,000, there was an increase of \$473,000 in the medical benefits cost, \$136,000 in salary and wages, an estimated \$86,000 in wastewater management,

\$82,000 in utility costs, and \$66,000 for the Library. He advised that \$168,000 of additional fund balance was utilized to offset the total increase. He advised that the fund balance total is currently \$6,825,000, and noted that, although it looks like the total is decreasing each year, the Borough has been loaning itself money from the current fund to the capital fund to avoid incurring larger interest payments on debt. He noted that the total surplus is \$10.25 million if the loan amount is taken into account. He advised that the Borough is only utilizing an amount of surplus that can confidently be replenished. He commented that the Borough is within the appropriation cap as a large amount of the health benefit increase is allowed outside of cap.

There was discussion regarding whether the Borough can shop around for health insurance or offer different levels of coverage.

Borough Administrator explained that the Borough has been exploring options but noted that another plan would have to be equal to or better than the current plan. She noted that there are already different plans with varying levels of coverage offered within the State Health Benefits Plan and are available to employees during open enrollment.

There was also discussion regarding when the Borough will look to permanently finance as well as whether debt is increasing or being paid down.

CFO Battaglia advised that the Borough will look to hold a bond sale in 2029 where the first payment will be due in 2030. He noted that, although the debt has been increasing over the past few years, it is due to the size of the projects and has not been increasing significantly. He advised that the impact will not be felt in 2030, however, as the Borough has been planning for it.

Council President Kinsella, Finance Committee Chair, thanked CFO Battaglia, Borough Administrator Aportela, Councilwoman Malellari, and Councilman Glass for taking part in many discussions regarding the budget. She noted that this budget is needs based.

## **Police Department**

### **Capital Budget**

Chief Walker reviewed his Capital Budget requests which included one new vehicle, ballistic vest replacement, radio car toughbook, traffic signs, cones, and defibrillators. He commented that the reason for the increase to the traffic cone request resulted from the increased traffic details. He noted that the purchase of the traffic cones and toughbooks will come out of the traffic trust account. He advised that the body-worn cameras are coming to the end of their life expectancy which he commented is a huge cost. He advised he will be including a request in the amount of \$90,000 beginning next year to replace this equipment, stating that they have applied for a small grant to help offset some of this cost. He noted that this cost can be taken from the traffic trust, advising that there are still a few years of traffic details.

There was a question regarding the amount for the vehicle replacement. Chief Walker asserted that the amount should be \$87,000 whereas the amount in the budget book is \$97,000. DPW Superintendent Milito advised that the extra \$10,000 was included for the vehicle wiring. He explained that, due to retirements, the wiring of this vehicle is unable to be completed by the DPW. Chief Walker requested that he and DPW Superintendent Milito have further discussion regarding this issue.

### **Operating Budget**

Chief Walker explained that, although the increase in maintenance contracts, 6-01-25-240-105, is partially due to contractual increases, the main reason for the increase is all maintenance contracts have

been consolidated into one line. He noted that the decrease in line 6-01-25-240-172 for uniforms is due to the SLEO I and SLEO II programs being frozen and no patrol officer hirings being anticipated in 2026. He advised that the lines for police reserves, 6-01-25-240-188, and wellness program, 6-01-25-240-200 were both reduced this year. With respect to maintenance contract renewal for the Borough cameras in the amount of \$9,000, he noted that the cameras are utilized by all Borough departments except for DPW and inquired whether he should include this amount under his budget or the Public Information portion of the budget. In order to help in finding Crossing Guards, he finished by requesting that the starting rate be brought to \$20, the middle steps be eliminated, and the top rate be increased to \$26. He explained that the \$20 rate would be the rate during the training phase, and once training is complete, the employee would be brought to \$26.

It was confirmed that the Police Department's budget can absorb this increase. Borough Administrator Aportela advised that a resolution to adjust the Crossing Guard salaries would be required. It was the consensus of the governing body to place this resolution on the next agenda with an effective date of April 1<sup>st</sup>. It was also agreed to create a sub-account under Public Information in the amount of \$9,000 for the camera maintenance contract.

The meeting recessed at 9:50 a.m. and resumed at 10:01 a.m.

## **Recreation**

### **Capital Budget**

Joseph Ricca, Recreation Director, advised that the \$75,000 request for the Memorial Park playground replacement will be taken from the Open Space Trust Fund, noting that it is the 2- to 5-year-old playground that requires replacement. He reviewed his second and final request which is a Recreation vehicle in the amount of \$30,000. He noted that this purchase would minimize the need to borrow a DPW vehicle as well as the need for DPW employees to be brought in for events.

There was discussion as to whether an older vehicle from another department can be used. It was decided to leave the vehicle in the Capital Budget for now and to have Chief Walker, DPW Superintendent Milito, and Borough Administrator Aportela report back as to whether there is a vehicle available that is not beyond its useful life. Borough Administrator Aportela advised that, should it not be feasible for a police vehicle to be transferred, she is willing to reduce her document scanning request to cover the cost of the Recreation Department vehicle.

There was also discussion as to whether a grant can be sought for the playground equipment. It was explained that the grant process would take too long as replacement of this equipment is an immediate need.

### **Operating Budget**

Recreation Director Ricca advised that line 6-01-28-370-177, AED, needs to be increased from \$6,500 to \$6,700. He noted that this maintenance contract covers eight AEDs throughout town.

It was the consensus of the governing body to increase this line to \$6,700.

## **DPW**

### **Operating Budget**

DPW Superintendent Milito reported that there are no changes to his budget requests.

It was questioned why there is such a significant increase in overtime from 2021 to now. DPW Superintendent Milito explained that the Collective Bargaining Agreement was renegotiated and rates have increased, including receiving double time on Sundays. CFO Battaglia added that there were four separate lines for overtime previously whereas, in 2024, the lines were consolidated.

It was noted that there is a decrease in the budget request for line 6-01-26-303-100, garbage & trash removal – contractual, in the amount of \$50,000. It was then questioned when the contract is due for renewal. DPW Superintendent Milito reported that the current garbage contract expires in 2029, noting that the current contract was very favorable and there is a need to prepare for the next contract. As such, he explained that he did not want to decrease the amount too much. CFO Battaglia commented that this conversation is very similar to the one that was had regarding debt service.

### **Capital Budget**

DPW Superintendent Milito reviewed his vehicle requests and provided justifications for each request. With respect to the Senior Bus, he explained that old capital lines were reconsolidated for this purchase.

CFO Battaglia explained that the emergency temporary appropriation resolution adopted earlier this year will be funded through a cancellation ordinance.

With respect to road paving, DPW Superintendent Milito explained that PSE&G will begin Phase II as soon as the snow is gone and explained that PSE&G will be reimbursing the Borough for half the cost of paving the entire street. He noted that the paving will need to wait until PSE&G is done with the piping. He then reviewed the ADA ramps that would be completed. With respect to the capital projects that fall under buildings and grounds, he advised the request to replace the flooring in the Public Safety Building can be reduced from \$200,000 to \$160,000.

It was the consensus of the governing body to approve this reduction.

He then reviewed the items that are included in the emergency capital funds portion of his Capital Budget. With respect to the storm drain/sewer line, he explained that a drainage line needs to be added on the Borough easement between Bogert and Lakeview to alleviate flooding. He explained that, as per the 5-Year Forestry Plan, the Borough must include a minimum of \$30,000 for the replacement of any Borough trees that were removed. He then reviewed his requests for decorative lamp replacements and Borough Hall decorations.

The meeting recessed at 11:24 a.m. and resumed at 11:30 a.m.

### **Administration**

Borough Administrator Aportela reviewed her Capital Budget requests which entailed \$5,000 for computers and IT equipment as well document scanning services in the amount of \$55,000. She noted that she is willing to reduce her scanning request by \$30,000 so the Recreation vehicle can be purchased.

### **Library**

Daragh O'Connor, Library Director, noted that the minimum statutorily required funding increased significantly. He detailed how the funds will be utilized which included increased digital content and books.

Council President Kinsella advised that the Finance Committee decided that line 6-01-29-390-100 is to be kept flat at \$138,610, noting that the statutorily required minimum funding increased by almost \$100,000.

CFO Battaglia noted that the budget will be introduced on March 26, 2026 and adopted on April 23, 2026. He advised that the Operating Budget tax impact increased from 4.47% to 4.57%, resulting in approximately an additional \$4 per household. With respect to the Capital Budget, he explained that it was reduced by \$224,000 which will assist with future debt. He noted that the assessment number has not been finalized yet due to the reassessment process so the number in the budget book is only an estimate.

Members of the governing body recognized the Finance Committee, Citizen Budget Committee, CFO, Borough Administrator and Department Heads for their efforts. It was noted that there may be minor changes to the budget prior to introduction.

**ADJOURNMENT –**

There being no further business to come before the Mayor and Council, on a motion by Councilwoman Montisano-Koen, second by Councilwoman Malellari, and unanimously carried, to adjourn this meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 12:04 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Dodd, RMC  
Borough Clerk