

MINUTES
Mayor and Council Special Meeting
Monday, March 1, 2025
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. The meeting was called to order at 8:00 a.m. by Mayor Thomas Papaleo.

SILENT PRAYER – FLAG SALUTE

Mayor Papaleo asked for a moment of silence for peace in the world and for the government and American people. Councilwoman Kinsella 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 via the February 19, 2025 Sunshine Notice containing 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 Web Site and filing a notice of the same with the Municipal Clerk.

ROLL CALL

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

ABSENT: None

ALSO PRESENT: Borough Administrator Lissette Aportela
Chief Financial Officer Chris Battaglia
Kenneth Krauthaim, Citizens Budget Committee Member
Albert Ruhlmann, Citizens Budget Committee Member
Donna Sanders, Citizens Budget Committee Member
Jason Milito, DPW Superintendent
Robert Schlossberg, Fire Chief
Michael Walker, Police Chief
Joseph Ricca, Recreation Director

2025 OPERATING BUDGET DISCUSSION

CFO Battaglia advised that there is currently a 6.6% tax impact based on the 2025 budget requests. He noted that, although he is utilizing the average residential assessment, the Borough is currently undergoing a revaluation which has not been finalized. As homes will be assessed at a higher number, he explained that the tax rate will be lower. He reported that, at this point, there is a \$248 increase on the average household. He detailed sources of revenue and commented that two big items that are not in this year's budget which were included in the past few budgets are reserve for ARPA funds and Municipal

Relief Fund Aid. Although he stated that he does not expect anything to change, he noted, however, that the State aid certifications have not been released yet. With respect to appropriations, he advised that budgeting additional funds for the garbage contract last year worked in the Borough's favor as it was anticipated that the cost would come in much higher. He detailed the other drivers on the appropriations side.

Mayor Papaleo noted that an increase of 6.6% cannot be placed on the residents and questioned how the increase can be reduced to 4%. CFO Battaglia advised that a reduction in the amount of \$420,000 would need to be made. Mayor Papaleo commented that it may be necessary for the governing body to make strong cuts across the board and consider hiring and salary freezes.

Police Department Capital Budget

Michael Walker, Police Chief, reviewed his Capital Budget requests. He explained that, with respect to vehicle replacement, he is looking to move the \$101,000 from the Capital Budget to the Outside Duty Trust. He explained that they still have at least two more years of traffic details for PSE&G, and once these details are done, he anticipates phasing out more vehicles. He noted that the Outside Duty Trust can also be utilized to purchase some traffic signs and cones. He explained the benefits of purchasing the ALPRS and additional cameras as well as the need for the BEAST evidence software.

CFO Battaglia explained that, by moving the \$101,000 for the vehicle replacement to the Outside Duty Trust, it would reduce the overall debt that is authorized and would save the \$5,000 down payment that would need to be included in this year's budget which he noted is a more of a long-term benefit. He advised that radio car computer replacement and traffic cones and signs can also be moved to the Outside Duty Trust which would result in a total reduction of \$114,000 from the Capital Budget. He inquired whether the BEAST software would have an annual maintenance cost which should be considered as it would have a future impact.

Chief Walker expressed his belief that the annual maintenance cost would be \$1,000 to \$2,000. He explained that half of the amount for ALPRs and cameras is for license plate readers in the police vehicles. He explained that the current readers are old and are no longer able to be maintained. He advised that these license plate readers are buy one, get one free.

It was requested that Chief Walker report back with the exact amount of the annual fee for the BEAST evidence software. He was also asked to provide the breakdown of the \$170,000 for the ALPRs and cameras into the two different categories as well as to provide evidence that the current license plate readers can no longer be repaired.

Police Department Operating Budget

Chief Walker reviewed his operating budget requests, noting lines in which he was able to make reductions.

It was questioned whether line 5-01-25-240-182 entitled "US Traffic Other – Gen Group" can be reduced. Chief Walker expressed that he would be comfortable reducing it by \$1,000. It was noted that an additional sergeant is being requested and it was questioned whether line 5-01-25-240-001 entitled "Superiors – Full Time" includes the salary for this position.

Mayor Papaleo noted that, as the request for an additional sergeant would require amending the Table of Organization to increase the supervisory staff, the Labor Attorney advised that the governing body does not need to consider this request.

CFO Battaglia confirmed that the addition of another patrol officer would add approximately \$125,000 in salary, pension and benefits to the salary line.

Chief Walker detailed the justification for adding this additional sergeant. He explained that the department has been inundated with requests for body worn camera footage which requires a supervisor to review prior to release.

Mayor Papaleo advised that the Labor Attorney confirmed that review of this footage does not need to be done by a sergeant and that his firm has offered to cover this responsibility at minimal cost.

Chief Walker clarified that he is referring to discovery requests versus OPRA requests and explained that this footage needs to be reviewed as per the Attorney General's guidelines.

It was agreed that Chief Walker and Borough Administrator Aportela are to speak with the Labor Attorney to confirm who can handle this responsibility. It was also clarified that an additional officer would not be required should the additional sergeant position be created.

The meeting was recessed at 9:57 a.m. and resumed at 10:09 a.m.,

Upon returning from the break, it was the consensus of the governing body to move the amounts for patrol vehicle replacement, radio car computer replacement program, and traffic signs and cones from the Capital Budget to the Outside Duty Trust. It was further agreed to approve the requests for the ballistic vest replacement program. As Chief Walker reported that it is less than \$1,000 to maintain the BEAST evidence software, this request was also approved. The remaining request for the townwide ALPRs and cameras will be further considered at the next meeting.

DPW Capital Budget

Jason Milito, DPW Superintendent, reviewed his Capital Budget requests. He noted that, with respect to the sweeper, he was initially looking to replace this vehicle in 2027. Due to the EV mandates, he advised that the price would increase from approximately \$350,000 to \$600,000 to \$700,000 and it is for this reason that he moved this request to this year. He detailed the various streets that will be paved, noting that there has been coordination with PSE&G to ensure that entire streets are paved.

DPW Operating Budget

CFO Battaglia spoke to the DPW salary and wage lines, noting that percentages of employees' salaries have been broken out based upon their work function. He explained that salary amounts designated to stormwater are outside of the appropriation cap.

DPW Superintendent Milito then reviewed the remainder of his operating budget requests, detailing the reasons for various increases and decreases in his budget lines. He advised that reductions can be made to line item 5-01-26-300-042 entitled "Training" from \$5,000 to \$4,000, line item 5-01-26-300-166 entitled "Operating Costs" from \$9,000 to \$6,000, line item 5-01-26-315-174 entitled "Mech. Wk. - Police" from \$24,000 to \$20,000, and line item 5-01-28-375-185 entitled "General Maintenance & Repairs" from \$15,000 to \$12,000.

It was the consensus of the governing body to agree to the proposed reductions as recommended by the DPW Superintendent. It was also agreed to approve the Capital Budget amounts as requested.

Fire Department Capital Budget

Robert Schlossberg, Fire Chief, reviewed his Capital Budget requests. He noted that the ladder truck will need to be replaced in 2028 and recommended that \$300,000 be included in this year's budget towards this purchase. He advised that the amount requested for turnout gear can be reduced from \$38,000 to \$30,000 and for the programming of portable radios from \$46,000 to \$38,000.

It was the consensus of the governing body to approve the requested amounts for the purchase of pagers in the amount of \$4,000 and the ladder truck replacement in the amount of \$300,000. It was also agreed to approve the proposed reductions to the amounts for turnout gear and radios.

Fire Department Operating Budget

Chief Schlossberg read a prepared statement thanking the governing body for their support. He then reviewed his operating budget, detailing any major increases and decreases. He noted that there are new additional requests which included \$4,000 for the purchase of four dress uniforms, \$7,500 for a dinner dance, and \$3,000 for maintenance contracts for tools. New line items would need to be created for these expenses.

It was agreed to revisit these requests as the first item on March 8th.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Motion by Council President Montisano-Koen, second by Councilwoman Malellari, and all members present voting in favor, to open the floor to the public.

No one came forward.

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

ADJOURNMENT –

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

Respectfully submitted,

Anne Dodd, RMC
Borough Clerk