



Town of Tusten Town Board Meeting

Town Board Budget Public Hearing / Workshop Minutes

November 6th, 2023

6:30 PM

ZOOM ID: 890 1678 4280

Venue: Tusten Community Hall, 210 Bridge Street

PRESENT

Supervisor Bernard Johnson
Deputy Supervisor Jane Luchsinger
Councilman Greg Triggs
Councilman Kevin McDonough

OTHERS PRESENT

Crystal Weston, Town Clerk; Victoria Strumpfler, Deputy Town Clerk

ABSENT

Councilman Bruce Gettel

PUBLIC HEARING

- Supervisor Johnson opened the public hearing for public review of the 2024 Budget at 6:34pm.

Tusten Town Board Budget Public Hearing / Workshop 11-6-2023

Supervisor Johnson [00:00:20] Good evening and welcome to the public hearing for the tentative budget for 2024 for the Town of Tusten. I will open up the public hearing before I go through a bunch of stuff and just answer any questions you've got.

Sue Powell [00:00:36] Under almost every category, there's an expense label, personal what does that mean?

Supervisor Johnson [00:00:42] Personal is the actual payroll section.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:00:45] It's personal. It's not personal.

Sue Powell [00:00:49] Oh it's not spelled correctly

Councilman Triggs [00:00:50] No, that's per state guidelines.

Sue Powell [00:00:56] Oh, that's or someone's personal...

Councilman Triggs [00:00:59] That's how they ask us to outline it, but the interpretation should be personal.

Citizen [00:01:05] And what does contractual mean?

Supervisor Johnson [00:01:08] Contractual is, what the expenses for say, pens, paper. This year I used my contract to get a laptop.

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Citizen [00:01:15] Okay, so...

Supervisor Johnson [00:01:18] And that will depend on which department you're at, the board department is different than, say, the water or the sewer departments. Their contractual can be things like pumping, septics and things like that.

Citizen [00:01:28] Okay, thank you

Speaker 2 [00:01:30] I'm sorry.

Jill Fruchter [00:01:31] Materials?

Supervisor Johnson [00:01:32] Yes. Yes.

Jill Fruchter [00:01:34] People though? People part of that contractual?

Supervisor Johnson [00:01:37] They can be part of that, if you're hiring somebody under a contractual. Say, if we look in the parks section, you'll see a contractual for lawn mowing

Iris Helfield [00:01:50] I mean, it's especially now, is it appropriate to ask about a particular line item?

Supervisor Johnson [00:01:57] Anything with the budget, this is what we're here for.

Iris Helfield [00:02:00] So what I would like to know, can you hear me clearly, so what I would like to know in this one particular line item, there other's but we are others dealing with this one item. I would like to know, how many children from Tusten Youth do not live in Tusten?

Supervisor Johnson [00:02:19] Are you talking about the line item for Tusten Youth with the grants?

Iris Helfield [00:02:31] Yes, I know that their...

Supervisor Johnson [00:02:34] I don't honestly have the answer of how many people partake in the program that are not Tusten Youth.

Iris Helfield [00:02:43] But, it is something that I'm assuming, I don't mean to assume, but I am assuming that if they are in Tusten Youth and I have the preference and saying that I'm totally in favor of youth (inaudible) There's no bias, I just want to know financially, record wise they are the town that have registration specifically for their use to participate in certain activities and you have to be in Tusten, you have to be a resident of that town. And what I'm asking is we want to know, we know something things come from Sullivan 180 some from the County. There are things that come from our budget as well, taxpayers budget, and what I wanted to know, for Tusten Youth yay but for non Tusten Youth. We should not be paying for non Tusten Youth weather they are out of state or county. If they live in another community.

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Supervisor Johnson [00:03:50] To the best of my knowledge, when they have an event that requires payment, like when they go to Kalahari or something like that, there's a two, tier fee for that. The Tusten Youth is one fee, if they're registered within the townships, and then there's another fee for those that are not there but are partaking in the deal that they get. So that they're.

Iris Helfield [00:04:14] Okay. So that's great, right? I'm glad to hear that. But does that across the board for anything that's dealing with Tusten Youth?

Supervisor Johnson [00:04:22] Like, when they do, they say they're 4th of July down here. Nobody, to my knowledge, gets charged to walk through the door of that event.

Iris Helfield [00:04:33] Who pays for That?

Supervisor Johnson [00:04:34] That's done mostly. Mostly it's done by fundraising, which is the local businesses.

Iris Helfield [00:04:40] Okay.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:04:42] I think we should have a presentation from Tusten Youth to the public. And.

Supervisor Johnson [00:04:48] We could do that.

Iris Helfield [00:04:54] But I.....

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:04:56] I think. I think they're good questions and alot of it could be answered by a presentation.

Iris Helfield [00:05:06] Unintelligible. Like I said, I thought it would be beneficial for the public if there's a presentation from Tusten Youth.

Supervisor Johnson [00:05:20] The presentation said, I have no problem with that. I mean, look. We are. I rein Crystal in in which Hat she wanted to wear. At this point, I think it's a valid question. And so ww are in the budget, it's not so much a town meeting where we're making decisions that it could help somebody understand better. I think that's good.

Town Clerk Crystal Weston [00:05:41] Tusten Youth we receive money through grants that go through Sullivan County and the state and that money goes to town. Our agreement with the town is we do spend money on events such the fourth of July but we do spend a substantially in the area of around 10,000 for Tusten Youth children only. If you pay taxes in the town of Tusten your children are considered youth. We went to Hershey Park, we go skiing, we pay for the children's tickets 19 years and under and that's it's allowable to the county and state. For anything other than that, if somebody else wants to go with Tusten, they are able to get a group rate and we obtain those group rates because we go with about 60 kids going, so the company gives us a rate and we're allowed to give that group for each other people. But we do not pay per head for anyone that is not in Tusten Youth. And we do our best to make sure that we can fund events such as fourth of July mainly through donations for this past year Tusten Youth, but only a \$4000 towards July. The rest of the 24,000 was all donations that we went out and obtained for that exact reason.

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Iris Helfield [00:07:01] Okay, that doesn't answer my question, how many Tusten Youth my question that I had asked prior to that was how many Tusten Youth are in Tusten Youth? Are in Tusten?

Town Clerk Crystal Weston [00:07:16] It depends on the numbers, we have up to about 300 children in the town of Tusten, they don't all go to every single event affect them. We see them. We don't know. Sorry.

Iris Helfield [00:07:29] Do you have a roster of approximately 300 children under the age of 19 that remain in the Town of Tusten? **Town Clerk Crystal Weston** [00:07:37] Depending on the year. Yeah. I don't always I can't just give you a list of their but if they live in Tusten they register for a couple.

Iris Helfield [00:07:48] So you're saying, given the reason (unintelligible) to live in the Town of Tusten.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:07:57] We were trying to look up the number to see what the what the count was in, say, 1960, to do a comparison.

Town Clerk Crystal Weston [00:08:06] Reason to believe that solid number is a 147 is all the way up, for example. Every year we find more and more that have just moved here or that. And even though we're a small community, they don't know that we exist. Some people have been here for five years, I home school my kids, I've got five kids. we had no idea Tusten youth

Supervisor Johnson [00:08:26] You've still got Tusten Youth that to go to Honesdale to volunteer or something.

Supervisor Johnson [00:08:32] So we've got a lot of kids that we don't always we we're still trying to find them.

Iris Helfield [00:08:37] Obviously, my concern is not with Tusten Youth because I think it's fabulous. And I think it's important to know. unintelligible..... Very important to know that it is the youth of Tusten and not of Pennsylvania not of the youth of another town that is benefiting from it. I saw the line item was \$21,000. You know, what is that, \$21,000?

Town Clerk Crystal Weston [00:09:11] So and we guarantee it because the town, the taxpayers are giving that 10,000. That we want to make sure that 10,000 stays with Tusten Youth children. The other ten, because it comes with the state and the county and it goes through those channels the state and county, have told us if they live the state of New York specifically Sullivan County that the acceptable usage through your community event, you can claim that and that isn't affecting your tax bill.

Supervisor Johnson [00:09:39] Because. What you you'll see a revenue side. You will see a revenue side and you will see a funding side, the funding revenue and in the expense side. Our budget from Tusten. The first 10,000 that gets reimbursed by the state. The next 10,000 is the actual budgeted that she's talking about. The Tusten Youth used to get in the budget up until the last year, \$10,000. That 10,000 was reimbursed between the county in the state last year. I asked the board to double it to \$20,000 so that we could then we get the \$10,000 back from the state and the county. We're using \$10,000 of our taxpayer money because we are seeing more programs and more kids get involved in it. And we thought that it was a beneficial thing. And what we found is by doing that, it's allowed the youth committee to go out and they start to get more money back in grants because of all the things that they're doing. So we've got a budget

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line of 21,000, but we might get back 15,000 of that towards that. But 10,000 of that is taxpayer funded money. The other 10,000 comes back and there's a question to back. Up.

Citizen [00:10:56] Thank you, Is it possible to get more details as well as how the breakdown, not just Tusten Youth but in general, in other words I understand that this language is used at various events and we don't know that though many of us do. Is it possible to get any more details, because (Unintelligible)?

Supervisor Johnson [00:11:21] Yeah. I don't see. Yeah. I mean, the finances are public knowledge to get a broken down expenditure of it. I'm sure that the committee can do that.

Supervisor Johnson [00:11:35] Yes.

Citizen [00:11:38] So when I was in my twenties and my manager was not so very number and he said no. So sort of. So I'm curious at one level, like I love the detail, do that at a really strategic level. What are our strategic priorities, you know, that are driving the budget spending choice? And a lot of it may not going on, you know, like the infrastructure stuff and the whole process that.

Supervisor Johnson [00:12:12] If you go through the budget, you're going to see a couple of lines of two very large jumps. But the trust involved, Jim, was bought for the largest Joe. They took a \$10,000. They wanted \$100,000. They need \$100,000. But the answers that we got didn't satisfy the board to say, okay, we're going to we're going to jump on that. You will see that the rent for the state police barracks. So part of the idea that was it. We haven't done anything. We haven't changed that rent. And it's part of the volunteer ambulance work. So it's kind of we weren't going to give them one whole lump sum of money. As one board member says, Well, throwing money at it is not going to help it. There's some other questions of board needs answered before we can we can actually dive into that a little bit more. Yes, your rates for your sewer, your water, that's all driven by infrastructure. Most everything else that was in here stayed pretty well flat or within a few percentages. We did have, ohh, where.

Supervisor Johnson [00:13:20] Highways are. You know, one of the things that we had our bank by 19 40.2 is in there you'll see a large increase in that. That was to pay off the bank bond. We increased the board wanted to increase the unsafe building amount in there so that we've had a lot of questions that were asked about what the board's doing about some of the derelict buildings. So let's put the money in there and see if we can know can we do it this year? We don't know what at least the unsafe buildings know, at least have the money in the budget so that if we can move that fast, we've got the money already budgeted to do it.

Citizen [00:14:00] And the park took a big jump.

Supervisor Johnson [00:14:03] Parks too a very large jump. Part of that is what we hear at the meetings. Part of that is also the fact that lawn mowing is become quite an issue, something that Glennie used to do for us for between four and \$6,000. That's probably going to come in somewhere around \$20,000 this year just in that.

Citizen [00:14:25] Line item parks what are all the parks.

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Supervisor Johnson [00:14:29] And we've got the veterans, parks kind of takes up quite a bit of things. It Kirks Road, it takes the Veterans Park, things that are done down on the deck and obviously the park down on the flats, lawn mowing, garbage removal, flowers, maintenance for those things. Covers. Covers quite a bit of it. Yeah, we are. We've also heard about things that need to get done down in the flats as far as like flower planters and things like that. So we're going to have to hire somebody to do these things. So we said let's, you know, it's budget time, let's put it in there.

Citizen [00:15:11] That's why I'm doing it.

Supervisor Johnson [00:15:13] We need more volunteers. We need more volunteers.

Citizen [00:15:19] Okay. Were there any things where it looks like you're like, Look, we can't, you know, some hard noes, like strategic is as much about what you say no to.. Really What you say no to versus what you say yes to? so, because you want to do everything. Were there any noes that were difficult?

Supervisor Johnson [00:15:41] Yeah. Pay raises was the first one. And then some of our departments wanted a larger contractuals.

Citizen [00:15:56] And I think this will be I don't think it will be (unintelligible), but I think probably benefit everyone. So the way it's done, because surmising from what you've heard is that people ask and then you as a board review and determine.

Supervisor Johnson [00:16:17] It's funny you ask that because it was done a little bit different before I came back in, But the way it's done now is I put a request form to each of the department heads. They fill it out for what they want or what they need. Those have to come back to me. And then I put together a tentative budget to bring in to the board. And then the board sits and they go through it line by line to determine what is and isn't needed. Some of the things that are asked for on the request form don't make it to what the board gets to see. Some things that are in parks and things like that that aren't department issues. That's what I can put in and I can present to the board and then they can decide whether they want to do it that way or not. And then after a couple of meetings, we come up with a preliminary budget and then hopefully we come up with an adopted budget. But it is a process. It involves everyone that either is a department head or an employee of the town. And then the board.

Citizen [00:17:19] I Thank you for all that time.

Supervisor Johnson [00:17:23] Now.

Citizen [00:17:23] One moment I'm having trouble trying to understand. Parks department and where they go and.

Supervisor Johnson [00:17:35] Find. Which part are you...

Citizen [00:17:38] (Unintelligible) it's like. Yeah, it's(unintelligible).

Supervisor Johnson [00:17:50] If you can give me an item number, that would help me a lot to answer your question.

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Citizen [00:17:57] And then something. I guess I mean... I mean, I'm having trouble understanding how something in one year...

Supervisor Johnson [00:18:08] You give me a number off of here and then I can address what you're asking.

Citizen [00:18:15] Parks is one. What do you want?

Supervisor Johnson [00:18:18] There's an A number or.

Citizen [00:18:23] I learned over from reading it online. What if something goes wrong? We won with a 42% increase on the park, and the other was. Umm 19, I think it was A, seven, ten, zero, point 4.

Citizen [00:18:54] Something.

Councilman Triggs [00:18:55] To Ben and everyone. We are getting request from Zoom that people come to speak closer to the microphone because they are having a hard time getting.

Councilman McDonough [00:19:04] Its the art playground contractual. I think. Ben kind of.

Supervisor Johnson [00:19:09] Yeah. A71 10.4. That includes our mowing expenses. That also includes anything that we're going to be doing as an improvement down there.

Supervisor Johnson [00:19:25] We are in trouble with a 53% increase for that. And also, you know, I mean.

Supervisor Johnson [00:19:33] What that was based on, ma'am, what that was based on was last year when we put our mowing out to bid that we'd been paid six and \$7,000 for, and it came back at \$19,000. So we had to then turn around and reduce what was being done in order to make it fit within the budget. So the increase that you're seeing there is based on what the bids came back last year in the hopes that we'll be able to get all of the work done that we wanted to do.

Supervisor Johnson [00:20:03] Mowing for the parks with 19,000 is that what you are telling me?

Supervisor Johnson [00:20:07] They mow two cemeteries. They mow the park that's down on the flats. They mow a vacant piece of property that's down on the flats. They mow Kirk Road. They mow two triangles. They do the bank cleanups around the Veteran's park, and then they do the guardrails along Kirk Road. And that's included within the contract for all of the. Mm hmm.

Supervisor Johnson [00:20:35] Yeah. It's not. What parks is not just the park that is down there that that includes all of the things, the cemeteries, the Beaverbrook cemetery and the Ten Mile cemetery they get done twice a year, once at the beginning and once at the end. The one that's at the Ten Mile takes about eight man hours and it has to be weed wacked.

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Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:20:59] And that's state law.

Supervisor Johnson [00:21:00] That's because the town is responsible for them.

Councilman Triggs [00:21:05] And I think an important thing that Ben mentioned, but maybe not everyone heard is that the number was prime prior to that generously low due to a citizen who was providing a service for which we were not paying market rate. So that's a huge part of this spike.

Citizen [00:21:29] Market rate correction.

Supervisor Johnson [00:21:30] Correct? Yes.

Councilman Triggs [00:21:34] Very generous.

Supervisor Johnson [00:21:38] Yes. Star. Right.

Supervisor Johnson [00:21:41] I just wanted to know what has happened to and where is all the equipment that was removed from the park. ummm.

Supervisor Johnson [00:21:50] The multi-generational part of it that was taken up to the town Highway barn, so that we can hopefully in the future get that reestablished.

Supervisor Johnson [00:21:57] Reestablish. Okay. So its just in.

Supervisor Johnson [00:22:02] Yes. But the problem was we couldn't find somebody to come in and do the work in a timely manner. What's the other thing to do? We're hearing that it looks terrible, that it's unusable, that it's unsafe. So it comes out until we can do something with it but its up at the highway department.

Citizen [00:22:24] But beyond that question, does that mean it's going back to the same places that that was removed from?

Supervisor Johnson [00:22:29] I don't know that.

Councilman Triggs [00:22:31] And that's not a budget. Yeah.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:22:34] And then there's the Mound is being installed in part of it.

Supervisor Johnson [00:22:40] The mound is being installed in part of that. So we don't know if it's going to go back in the exact same spot. Cass, Before I go to you, Star.

Star Hesse [00:22:47] To say, I think what we heard here tonight is that a lot more specificity being put in and why it's being put in. And, you know, this public hearing was scheduled for 15 minutes. Anybody that asks the question, I mean.

Supervisor Johnson [00:23:06] It was never scheduled for 15 minutes. We didn't put a time on it.

Star Hesse [00:23:12] 30 right.

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Supervisor Johnson [00:23:13] Now. We said the hearing started at 630, the public hearing.

Star Hesse [00:23:20] Okay. Anyway, point is, I think that there's been ample demonstration that people want to see more detailed information on what's going on, where everyone is going to ask. As I said, it's about the agendas. When you come into to room and you can't really see anything with more information about what's happening, I think you would get less people sitting here asking questions, or at least it would take a little less time.

Supervisor Johnson [00:23:53] So I think the time is fine for the questions because they're all good questions. I mean.

Supervisor Johnson [00:24:00] I understand what they're asking as far as arcs and a breakdown of it. I don't think you're going to see a park breakdown in an 18 page budget, you know, contractual when they ask, you know, what's a supervisor to bring back to it, Why is why does he have 1200 dollars? That's my mileage. That's it. If I were to claim a cell phone, if I was to do a school. I mean, do you see that the county does a county? When you were in the county, did they take their budget? And they did. They broke down each year contractual down into other lines so they could look at it. That's why we have the hearing and that's why we can get the information like was asked about the youth.

Star Hesse [00:24:39] Because you do have it on Zoom and this time and thank you for that. But I think somebody can come here and have the time to go through this with me. I don't understand because its not detailed enough. I just think it could be easier on everybody if it was a little more.

Supervisor Johnson [00:24:56] It's been it's been up on online Star. Anybody can ask a question.

Star Hesse [00:25:00] It's been up online with know we didn't go through all these items but how many people how many are coming from where? I just don't think that that's where fair statement where we can justify the documents that. Okay.

Supervisor Johnson [00:25:18] The next question.

Supervisor Johnson [00:25:20] I guess you had one.

Cass Collins [00:25:22] From my question is on page eight. On the (unintelligible),.

Town Clerk Crystal Weston [00:25:28] Cass if you could speak a little louder.

Cass Collins [00:25:31] I'm wearing a new hearing aid so I can hear myself, my question is on page eight for the demolition of unsafe buildings and \$20,000, A,15,70, of what building is that or buildings.

Supervisor Johnson [00:25:55] There are none that are slated right now. I know Jim had brought up the one that's down on Fourth Street. It could be any buildings. But we the board, wanted to fund that particular line to make sure that we weren't going to be slowed down because, well, we didn't budget the money.

Cass Collins [00:26:15] Yeah, I think.

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Councilman Triggs [00:26:17] Just to be clear, that is not money that is currently spoken for, but it would potentially cover costs. Were one of the buildings to be demolished.

Cass Collins [00:26:31] One build is that what you are saying?

Supervisor Johnson [00:26:34] No, no, I don't know that we know that. We came. Up with.

Cass Collins [00:26:38] Of the buildings that are down in Luxten Lake. They're falling apart. And I know that's a whole thing.

Supervisor Johnson [00:26:46] Yeah, that's going to depend on where they are and what public highways are on.

Cass Collins [00:26:53] Oh public highways.

Supervisor Johnson [00:26:53] I believe so that I would have to check with Ken to be sure.

Cass Collins [00:26:56] Of that. Yeah.

Supervisor Johnson [00:27:01] Absolutely. But that the reason was, you know, the board said. We've. We've got this conversation going on. People are asking these questions. Where's the money going to come from? So we made sure we put it in.

Supervisor Johnson [00:27:16] Anybody online? Eugene

Eugene [00:27:18] Yes. Well, thank you, Mr. Johnson. Some of these answers have been illuminating. The answers you've provided on the Tusten Youth were very helpful because just being kind of an outsider, having not really looked at the budget previously, I was to understand that 20,000 was coming from the Tustin taxpayers and 10,000 from the county. And you have corrected my thoughts in that we get a reimbursement. So in fact, last year it was a 100% increase from 10000 to 20000. But the total budget, in fact, is not 30, as I had assumed by looking at the budget. But in fact, 10,000 went back to 10,000 from the county gets reimbursed. So with that said, that 100% increase last year, we do have down in the current budget seven and a half percent increase this year, which is a little bit surprising given the fact that such a large increase last year. But I think the discussion of a general separate meeting discussing how the how the group, the youth group was formed and the membership and the financial oversight, I think would be a great idea because that would allow a lot more understanding and I think it would ultimately lead to greater embracement by the community, get behind the organization because again, as an outsider, it's very difficult to understand how these things are. And then moving on to the parks, the 52% increase jumps out at you after last year having a 42% increase. But you're again, your answer that Craig was charging under market rates really illuminates the position that we're in and makes it a lot more understandable. And I think the fact that I never realized that we are the town was on the hook for this, the two cemeteries. So I find that very interesting and very helpful, again, because it makes it makes things while again, when you're just looking at the black and white, you see a 50 just summerly week going over any budget and you see a 52% increase and say, wait a second, what's going on? But when you have that further information, I find it very helpful. And the last point I would like to make is, you know, another number that really jumps out at me is the \$80,000 from the ARPA funds. And I would my expectation is a taxpayer and a member of the community is I'd really like to see a vigorous, separate discussion on the potential use of those funds in terms of some strategic thinking that would give the

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community and the town some longer term benefits, possibly in the area of public safety or broadband communication or whatever the needs may be of the town. And I think that would be very important to have ideas flow in and a bit of discussion because it's a kind of unique one time opportunity for the community or for the \$80,000. And as I investigated online, it's pretty much a broad, a broad ability to spend that money. I mean, it's not a very narrow avenue that is given by the government in which it can be spent. So I think that creates a lot of opportunities that would be unique and hopefully that would allow us some benefits for the community, long term benefits such as the strategic importance. So thank you for that. That's all.

Supervisor Johnson [00:31:33] Anybody else on line.

Citizen [00:31:36] But the. Yes. Just following up on Eugene's suggestion.

Supervisor Johnson [00:31:51] I mean, if people have got anything that they would like to see, that the board would be open to listening to as some of the money has been used for the sewer and for water department and putting a new generator that's down at, well, number one. You know, so some of that has been used on infrastructure already. We've taken the rest of it and put it in the budget so that people would see it there instead of just being a number that's known as, you know, that that's an asset that we've got no liability assessed to. We actually have it in the budget. So, yes.

Citizen [00:32:30] Following up with that, the ambulance and the 100,000.

Supervisor Johnson [00:32:35] They did, Yes.

Supervisor Johnson [00:32:38] And.

Supervisor Johnson [00:32:40] Yes.

Citizen [00:32:41] So what if you could. Would you consider some of that money considering the weight and safety and health? They do.

Supervisor Johnson [00:32:48] Personally, I would not consider it because there's questions that arise within the ambulance itself and how they're being operated and where they're operating that I would want to answer. the one board member that said is throwing money at it, going to help it. And the answer is no, it's not going to help. But we need to dig into why there are these issues and we need to correct those issues. The ambulance is doing a great job. They've got a lot of volunteers. They work very, very hard. They're so understaffed that some of the things that they can do to help themselves aren't getting done. So we need to address why they're not having the ability to raise the funds that they need before we start throwing money at it. And then those root causes never get taken care of. There's accountability now. And we're still not making it.

Citizen [00:33:46] Not making what they're not making what? They're not doing the what they're supposed to be doing?

Supervisor Johnson [00:33:51] No, they're doing what they're supposed to be doing. But. You know, the ambulance district and it's not a special district, but the ambulance district for, say, covers two states that covers multiple municipalities. Are each of those municipalities paying a fair share to make sure that this ambulance board keeps

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operating? What we're finding is they are not. So if you're upset because we're going to give some money to the lawn mower. How upset are you going to be when we get a \$100,000 to the ambulance core to find out of municipalities giving zero money in for that service?

Citizen [00:34:29] You look good.

Supervisor Johnson [00:34:31] That's why we're not going throw \$80,000 of our money at. It right.

Supervisor Johnson [00:34:36] Away. Mm.

Supervisor Johnson [00:34:38] Well, we've been in discussion with them now for several months in order to get it. And they are working the annual scores, working on addressing what we've brought to them and what we're asking. But it wasn't done in time for budget, so we're just.

Citizen [00:34:55] Going to try to put in within the next year or two or even a little bit more for them. So, they would have you.

Supervisor Johnson [00:35:08] Know, their incentive is we're not giving you what you want because you need to cross the T dot the I and get the other municipalities to do their share to make sure that you survive. Because the truth of it is, if you don't serve those other municipalities, you have enough money to survive on what we give you.

Citizen [00:35:32] I think we can make the decision more to preserve numbers now, even if they're not really big contract.

Supervisor Johnson [00:35:42] They contract with the municipalities that they work for. Yes, Iris.

Iris Helfield [00:35:51] Is this some kind of public meeting that can bring in all the components of who is supposed to be represented paying? Yeah.

Supervisor Johnson [00:36:05] That's what that's what ambulance corp is doing now. The Ambulance corp has been working very hard with the other municipalities that they serve. In trying to work out their contracts with them to get more money from them. It's very hard to. Pay nothing, and then all of a sudden say, hey, you got to pay. You know, it's very hard because if we're getting ambulance service for next to nothing, why would we want to pay more for it if this town is paying for.

Iris Helfield [00:36:33] The same care like everybody else does?

Supervisor Johnson [00:36:36] But unfortunately, that's the stance of this board. So, when they said we're not throwing money at it. You're going to have to figure out what you want to do.

Iris Helfield [00:36:46] Is there any public hearing or something that's going to public listen like this maybe?

Supervisor Johnson [00:36:52] I don't know that the ambulance board does that. I know the fire department because they are a special district. They have to have the same property we do in order to get their money. But they're not. The annual score is not a special district here in the town of Tusten. It's covered under our general fund. If it was a special

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district and they wanted \$100,000 and their budget was 50, okay, we'll give you \$100,000 because all we do is put it on the taxes, and then each each purchase within that special district has to pay the tax. Ours is not a special district.

Supervisor Johnson [00:37:28] Go ahead.

Citizen [00:37:32] Are saying that when it comes to Tusten Ambulance corps is their responsibility, you go and grab the people say to those guys have to pay

Supervisor Johnson [00:37:46] They contract. The contract with other municipalities. So, they need to when they negotiate a contract, they need to negotiate a contract that's going to give them enough money to properly operate.

Supervisor Johnson [00:37:59] In. New York state. What happens is, yes, the town of Tusten pays for this ambulance, but because we have so few volunteers for the ambulance, our Tusten ambulance can be in Monticello. Our Tusten ambulance can be down in the town of Highland. They don't get to charge extra for that. They can't charge that particular municipality for it. It's called mutual aid. Much like if our ambulance has to take somebody over to Honesdale because they've taken a test resident over it in their second ambulance get called and they're out. When that third ambulance call, it might come from the town of Callicoon or the town of Delaware, or it might come from Highland or it might come from Lumberland the mutual aid, does it? So those things they can't charge for, but it eats up their budget. So, when they negotiate them. On tracks with people like the Town of Tusten who they serve? Those are the things that they have to make these municipalities understand that they've got a budget. Some of it is beyond their control. But what isn't it beyond their control you need to pay for? And our ambulance board does a good job. My last conversations with them about a month ago, they were hitting 90% of their calls. 90% of their calls meant that they made it on the first run to their full. Didn't need a mutual aid to come to them, and they're very understaffed, so they do a great job. I just think other municipalities need to step up and pay more. Yes, I'm Star and then in you.

Star Hesse [00:39:38] I'm just getting a little confused about being an ambulance corps contracts with Tusten or a certain place, that covers their expenses if its just Tusten. But they're bound to help other counties or other cities or towns held by this mutual aid. Provisions. So if they're required to do this, how are they going to negotiate with these people that they have to pay? But they said something that is accepted. It's no secret.

Supervisor Johnson [00:40:13] I'm talking about municipalities in Pennsylvania that we serve that aren't paying.

Supervisor Johnson [00:40:20] Okay.

Supervisor Johnson [00:40:20] So how did it how does our ambulance tell them how much to charge? They have an operating budget. They know how much it costs to operate. Mutual aid is one of those things that you don't know if it's going to be \$100 a year or \$200 a year. But you have an idea of about what it'll be. You put it in your operating budget when you negotiate your contracts. Well, you know, if I do 50% of my calls in this municipality and 25 in this municipality and 25 in this municipality, I'm going to take my 100% budget and I'm going to divide it up 50, 25 and 25. If they don't like it, did not find another ambulance corps. Much like it has happened in the county, the counties. The whole county is this way.

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Star Hesse [00:41:07] Okay, I know, but I think.

Supervisor Johnson [00:41:10] I believe me. I was more lost on you when I started with this stuff, with the ambulance.

Councilman Triggs [00:41:16] In our discussions that I've been part of. I find that the labyrinth that is just my own health insurance goes up proportionately to the area that's covered, including things the way we get bills a year after service. That is reflected sometimes in the compensation and the way it comes into the organization when health insurance is involved. There are a you are right to be confused.

Supervisor Johnson [00:41:49] We have even got into Medicaid, Medicare and ambulance services. And what they.

Councilman Triggs [00:41:54] Tell you, that essence is not part of the.

Star Hesse [00:41:55] Formula. So, when you're saying is there is this bad that people are being charged for the dollar and yet in the mutual aid situations, it seems like you don't have the standard.

Supervisor Johnson [00:42:09] You can still get the Medicaid part of it, but you're not getting paid the extra mileage, the hours that they're gone, the fuel. There are other things that go in. There's a lot of stuff that goes into it, unfortunately. But now it's there.

Councilman McDonough [00:42:25] And is related within Sullivan County. Yes.

Councilman McDonough [00:42:28] What the concern we have is that we're not going to throw it where we're not going to allocate more money until they figure out what the Pennsylvania. Municipality should be doing, because there's no incentive if. Tusten allocates more money, there's less incentive for them to try and get the money from.

Supervisor Johnson [00:42:54] Damascus.

Supervisor Johnson [00:42:57] Yes.

Citizen [00:42:59] QUESTION Related to that about education and even money for that. I would volunteer more of an ambulance service because I train for Medicaid for and work as another department. And then I'm looking about getting my new requirements so that I can volunteer here but with travel the nearest point that I can find, the nearest place is not tenable for me with my work situation. So would you consider you mentioned there was something about volunteers of having something locally like at the school or someone that we knew or that would train and put out some motives in this community that would be here. I'm going to use what.

Supervisor Johnson [00:43:45] We have nothing, the, the town board does not have anything to do with the training at all done by the Department of Health. So, it would it would be through the Department of Health, and it would that I don't know if they would come out here, but we've never asked questions.

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Citizen [00:44:05] If appropriate, use for life or training to get people out. I mean, I don't know. I'm just one person, but I think if there was something important locally, there would be or people would be interested in the training that was provided.

Supervisor Johnson [00:44:20] Through the training right now away. Like I thought the EMT.

Town Clerk Crystal Weston [00:44:23] They do the funding all over. It's a matter of people having the time to do the training.

Supervisor Johnson [00:44:26] You know, I forget what the EMT training.

Supervisor Johnson [00:44:28] Is, know.

Citizen [00:44:31] I do find places very, very difficult to find anything.

Supervisor Johnson [00:44:34] And that that is one of the things that our volunteer services are finding out the fire department does to become not even an interior firefighter, the amount of training it's required of them. You know, that amount of time, forget the emergency calls, just the amount of time to get training and then the time to retain your training each year. And in the medical part of it, it's even harder. They got they got more drivers than they have EMT. And there's a reason for that.

Citizen [00:45:07] I mean, this man is willing to find out. There are things going on and you have to really find out who that is going to be. You get a lot of the public

Supervisor Johnson [00:45:26] It would help.

Supervisor Johnson [00:45:28] Mayor Greg Burkle is the president of the ambulance corps. So he would take any and all volunteers. I think.

Councilman McDonough [00:45:41] It is a good call for you to let me know what.

Supervisor Johnson [00:45:45] That was.

Supervisor Johnson [00:45:46] Greg Burton. Okay.

Supervisor Johnson [00:45:51] Do we have any questions on the floor here?

Councilman Triggs [00:45:53] Can I just respond? If you do find out anything and I can be a part of helping move that communication forward, I'm happy to help. However, I can.

Supervisor Johnson [00:46:03] Have a lot of people waiting and try to do more will give new ways of connecting what we do. And I can tell you from Wyoming that we've been looking for friends.

Supervisor Johnson [00:46:15] Thank you for trying.

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Supervisor Johnson [00:46:16] Welcome to New York.

Supervisor Johnson [00:46:21] Anybody can.

Supervisor Johnson [00:46:22] Buy more? Yes. Eugene.

Eugene [00:46:25] Yes. Given that the banks are finally paying some interest rates, has the board changed its strategy in terms of how it's parking, any reserves or any monies that it has on an account to enjoy the better interest rates that are now available? What?

Supervisor Johnson [00:46:50] What I requested from the board and they approved was last year. There are municipal rates that you're able to get into in all the towns that had done that they had, they had moved into these high interest accounts. I went and spoke with the president of Catskill Hudson Bank. They did not offer that interest rate. But they offered it to us, I believe, within a quarter point.

Supervisor Johnson [00:47:24] Of what.

Supervisor Johnson [00:47:25] Was being offered. And it was my position that I believe that 'Tusten is one of the larger depositors in Catskill Hudson Bank. So, I requested that the board keep that money in our local bank because we had already lost two banks in town. And I think that us taking several million dollars out of a bank was not going to be, you know, to send it to Albany or to another bank. For the quarter point, I think we could use the bank here.

Eugene [00:47:55] Now, that's why I agree 100%. And on a lighter note, hopefully, it's interesting to note that the dogcatcher and the historian were at the same budget level, but the historian now has gone. Where does that leave the poor dog catcher? They can make it. Will the \$500 be enough to entice somebody, Ben, or will you possibly have to go to \$1,000 that the historian is getting?

Supervisor Johnson [00:48:29] The historian who unfortunately, the historians actually don't get that money as a repay. It's a more of a contribution for them to do stuff with. They don't use any of it. What I would like to see the historical society, you know, I know that there's going to be a change in the coming year with the board of the Historical Society. So, I'm hoping that they might do some things within town to promote the history a little bit more, whether it's moving displays or billboards or. There's a lot of history and we don't have it anywhere in town. It's stuck in the basement of a library in an eight by ten room.

Eugene [00:49:13] So I support that. I think it's important. And the dog catcher. Is there any hope of getting someone at \$500?

Supervisor Johnson [00:49:23] And that's another contract shortage per or pickup of dog. It covers the mileage and it does that. It'd be our city if we got somebody that was busy and they needed more money and they were good at it. We take money out of a contingency or some other part of the budget in order to make sure we got them.

Councilman Triggs [00:49:44] Plan is much clear for picking up dogs than it is people with the ambulance.

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Supervisor Johnson [00:49:49] Thank you. Iris.

Iris Helfield [00:49:53] I wanted to know where are we in terms of the buying or some financial something for the problems that we're having in the water. And I say and.

Supervisor Johnson [00:50:09] We haven't begun to bond with. The. With. The Water project yet. We're still waiting. The Department of Health and I believe the email came today is that I didn't read it from Joe Golan is that. For the to. Begin the water tower? Is that something else?

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:50:25] I didn't. Read it.

Supervisor Johnson [00:50:26] Okay. We're waiting for the Department of. Health to approve our request to replace the water tower. So, we have not wanted any money until we put shovels to the ground.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:50:40] That's always. Been surveyed. though and it's all set to go.

Supervisor Johnson [00:50:43] On the same note, the main street Lake Erie project, which we are bonding \$800,000 for, we still have not bonded that because we are awaiting hopefully a reduction in interest rates. So, what we've been doing is using our other town funds in order to pay the bills as they come in because we've got the reserves built up and hopefully, we can get a cheaper rate for the bond.

Iris Helfield [00:51:15] In order of things. The water tower, this first.

Supervisor Johnson [00:51:19] Water tower was found to be the most needed.

Supervisor Johnson [00:51:23] And so that's first.

Iris Helfield [00:51:24] I'm not disputing.

Supervisor Johnson [00:51:25] Right? No, no.

Iris Helfield [00:51:25] That's all i am organizing in my head. So that's first. What comes second? and what comes third?

Supervisor Johnson [00:51:32] I would have to pull the report out to just tell you what it is. But it's going to be water mains. And. Hydrants. When the water mains there's a seven-step program. I just I don't have it in front of me and it's about twice that size, so. And to be honest with you here, I'm a little bit worried. It's a seven and a half million-dollar project. We had a leak up on School Street when they dug up the main. We found that the main was sitting on bedrock. Once they open up the ground, I don't know what they're going to find. But our seven and a half million dollars, I'm hoping will do the project that was presented to us. Well, looking at the costs and some of the things that we've already run into, we might only get about 80% of that project done for that same seven and a half million dollars.

Councilman Triggs [00:52:25] And the tasks of the project have been prioritized to reflect whatever we find to give you.

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Supervisor Johnson [00:52:34] Just to give you an idea of some of the things that we run into. We had a and I know people get upset when they see the big TAM truck come in to shut down the water or to dig on Main Street. When I got to the leak on School Street, it was estimated to be 90 gallons a minute, which meant it was coming right from the water tower. So I shut the water tower off. They never put a valve in at the water tower. When I was put in, the nearest valve was at the intersection of Erie and School Street. If they shut that off, they were going to have to shut down the water on Main Street, even though it wasn't close to each other, which would have meant shutting the businesses down. So, these are the things that we run into that it just compounds itself. So, they sleeved it. They came back, they put a valve in the tower. They had the other ones. And now when it came back to trying to repair it, they were able to shut the water off just on school street for a short period of time and didn't have to do a boil water.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:53:41] So. all very involved.

Supervisor Johnson [00:53:46] Yeah, it just I think sometimes we sit up here and we just say all of this was done and not understanding that. You know what it is.

Citizen [00:53:58] I don't doubt that.

Supervisor Johnson [00:54:01] I'm sorry.

Citizen [00:54:02] Involved part

Supervisor Johnson [00:54:05] I don't know what they were thinking in 1930 when they put in the water system. But it's.

Citizen [00:54:11] Really.

Supervisor Johnson [00:54:13] What we're fighting with the sewer department is we do not have enough manholes to do inspections. That was in the eighties. so.

Councilman McDonough [00:54:23] And the water tower that replacing now was. Built in when Truman was president and it was supposed to be replaced when Jimmy Carter was president Was there. And so, you know you're old.

Supervisor Johnson [00:54:36] It was supposed to be painted inside when the year that I left in 2009. And that hasn't been done yet.

Councilman McDonough [00:54:44] Lot of things that haven't been done about water. And, you know, you've read the newspaper. We're not alone. This kind of. Infrastructure.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:54:53] That we were trying.

Iris Helfield [00:54:55] When I heard that there were no fire hydrants or basically (unintelligible) a little scary. firefighters, the firefighters. And the.

Supervisor Johnson [00:55:09] Fire department does very well with what they've got.

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Iris Helfield [00:55:12] They have.

Supervisor Johnson [00:55:13] An.

Citizen [00:55:13] Amazing.

Citizen [00:55:14] Proof of that is.

Citizen [00:55:16] The.

Supervisor Johnson [00:55:16] Fact we still have Rasmussen's building on Main Street.

Town Clerk Crystal Weston [00:55:20] And you have the rest of Main Street.

[00:55:21] Yeah.

Iris Helfield [00:55:23] Like in what?

Citizen [00:55:24] Where they have the rest of Main Street

Town Clerk Crystal Weston [00:55:25] Street, the rest of Main Street because of them.

Supervisor Johnson [00:55:29] Hmm. Do I have any. Other questions online or on the floor furniture? Yes, Bernie.

Bernie [00:55:35] I think you guys the budget looks was pretty good. And how much work goes into it.

Supervisor Johnson [00:55:41] Um. I didn't mention it before I did. For those who don't know. Municipalities have to stay within what's known as a cap that's set by New York State Comptroller's office. It's based on all sorts of different things. Our cap for this fiscal year was \$1,403,000. We came in at \$1,398,000. That's the 3% property tax cap you always hear about. And that's based on previous years, what you've done, any carryovers that you've got. So. We were able to start the process under the budget cap and finish under the budget cap. So, unlike some towns that are 17% before they start.

Citizen [00:56:36] That's, that's...

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:56:37] I'd just like to say that this is the 10th year that I have been involved with the preliminary public hearing for budget. And you should. All congratulate yourself. Never has anybody, as many people shown up and asked such an intelligent question. Really,

Supervisor Johnson [00:56:57] The budget, the most aggravating thing, because I really do spend a lot of time with the budget.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:57:03] And the fiscal officer.

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Supervisor Johnson [00:57:06] You know, I spend a lot of time with the board, with the budget, and I really prepare so that the people come and ask me questions. And before this year.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:57:13] Nobody and.

Supervisor Johnson [00:57:14] I would sit here and I'd be like, I spent all this time.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:57:17] With.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:57:18] Nothing.

Iris Helfield [00:57:20] Not Wasting any time this year.

Supervisor Johnson [00:57:23] I'm no, I'm happy. You know. it's. But I think like. We don't. Oh, no, it still is now. I'm kidding. I'm kidding.

Citizen [00:57:37] About the paying for the Beautification.

Supervisor Johnson [00:57:41] Which one?

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:57:42] I have the number, right.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:57:43] Oh, okay.

Citizen [00:57:47] A 7155 Page six. Yep.

Supervisor Johnson [00:57:58] That purchasing of plants, flowers, trees.

Citizen [00:58:05] Is that because, like we used to get money the Beautification group get money directly from Sullivan Renaissance is that when they merge and so then when they are recovering more than.

Supervisor Johnson [00:58:16] Sullivan 180, But this is money that we can continue to use. I think if the beautification came to us and said, I need \$1,000 for the flowers.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [00:58:26] Yeah, this is this is. Just like you said, too. Continue what's been going on.

Supervisor Johnson [00:58:34] But well, that was that from 3 to 5 we just got more areas to do.

Councilman McDonough [00:58:40] But it's about I think it's intended, like you said, a budget is a story. It's a narrative for what we do and. And what the town and it what's interesting is you've all that really. Good questions but nobody asked anything about the highway which is what, half the budget, whatever things like that where the rubber hit the road, so to speak. You know, if there's you know, we approved that like okay. This the water department. Okay, \$25. You've raised about \$85,000 for it. You know, the other thing it it's like when you go through that, that you realize it's the highway that really that's a good chunk of it. And it's kind of stuff that. Is. Daunting because like, oh my God, that thing. But that's still it's part of the narrative with. Story, like you've said. And the other.

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Supervisor Johnson [00:59:43] Questions, I'm sure all of us. I have learned from Eugene.

Citizen [00:59:53] I have learned a lot. And when I hear you saying that.

Supervisor Johnson [01:00:02] Yeah, it's easy enough to break down. I mean, it's. If you're looking for more breakdowns, everything's set. This is. This is what you need every month. We break down how much we spent. Do we want. To close on public records or any more questions? Both. Do we want to Close the public hearing?

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [01:00:27] What was the public hearing?

Councilman McDonough [01:00:29] Second. Second.

Supervisor Johnson [01:00:31] All in favor, Ayes.

Supervisor Johnson [01:00:34] There anything that you want to do over as far as the questions that have been asked or danger? Not anything that we want to. Answer preliminary budget. Make it the adopted. Do you want to leave it. For. Monday or Tuesday of next week?

Councilman McDonough [01:00:55] Would. Would increasing a dog give it more flexibility or.

Supervisor Johnson [01:01:02] I think it would just be easier to take it out of that 10,000, \$12,000.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [01:01:05] Contingency money if the guy if any. Yeah. Because it's a per term.

Councilman McDonough [01:01:10] All right.

Supervisor Johnson [01:01:12] We have a contingency line. It's in the budget. I believe it's 12,500. And that's for things like the dog catcher, the things that come up, the mowing turns out to be too much money or.

Councilman McDonough [01:01:30] I think we should follow up on Eugene's idea about the community forum for how that grant money is used, but I think it probably should wait until we know the structure and makeup of the next board.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [01:01:44] So I think we. Can adopt the budget, even if he was struggling to get through the. And one what. Looks one less thing for Tuesday. So, you have a presenter, right?

Supervisor Johnson [01:01:57] Yes. And it would also keep us closer to the point where it needs to be adopted

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [01:02:04] So we need a motion to approve.

Supervisor Johnson [01:02:08] A motion to accept the preliminary budget for 2024.

Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger [01:02:12] I'll move that.

Councilman McDonough [01:02:13] Second.

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WORKSHOP

- Presentations from the following:
 - Sullivan 180
 - Sullivan County Youth Bureau

CLOSING ITEMS

- **Meeting reminder**
 - ZBA Meeting – CANCELLED
 - Town Board Regular Meeting 11/14/2023 at 6:30pm
 - Planning Meeting 11/28/23 at 7:30pm
- **Adjournment**

With no further business to be had, the meeting closed at 7:38pm on motion of Deputy Supervisor Luchsinger, seconded by Supervisor Johnson

Respectfully Submitted,
Crystal Weston, Town Clerk