

Public Hearing
2010 Budget
November 24, 2009

The Public Hearing on the 2010 Budget was called to order by the Chair at 6:04 P.M. Three Legislative members were present, Legislators Monell, Oberbeck, Quinlan, Roberts, Sauerbrey, and Sullivan being absent.

There were 15 people in attendance.

The Clerk read the legal notice as published in the official newspapers.

The Chair turned the meeting over to the Budget Officer, James McFadden.

James McFadden, County Budget Officer, spoke. “Thank you Mr. Chairman. I would like to welcome you all here tonight. This is addressed to the residents of Tioga County and the Honorable Tioga County Legislature.

“I present to you tonight the proposed County budget for 2010. As the national recession that started in December 2007 approaches a third year, many state and local governments nationwide have seen an erosion of their finances. As New York State slid into a recession the demand for government services such as unemployment benefits, social services, and Medicaid have increased. During this same period municipal revenue has decreased from less economic activity, job losses, and lower consumer spending. Tioga County has not been insulated from the effects of this recession. With this in mind, local officials have made prudent decisions formulating the 2010 county budget while still providing both valuable and mandated services for the citizens of our County.

“General Fund expenses have decreased from \$66,962,768 in 2009 to \$65,795,756 in the proposed spending plan. This represents a decrease of 1.74% or \$1,167,012. Significant operation cuts were required from all county departments including no pay increases for non-union workers, forfeiting of dental insurance, and elimination of ten positions. These measures were necessary to combat higher increases in employee health insurance and pension contributions.

“These reductions were offset by a decrease in General Fund Revenues of \$1,230,459 or 2.84% from \$43,392,898 in 2009 to \$42,162,439 in the 2010 proposal. We are anticipating lower sales tax collections and reduced state aid next year.

“There have been significant costs reductions in other areas of the budget, namely the Capital Fund. However, \$1.7 M in federal stimulus monies acquired this year has been dedicated to replace the East River Road Bridge in Nichols next year.

“Overall the total proposed spending plan of all funds is \$85,814,893, is a decrease of \$1,526,167 or 1.75% over the current year. It is proposed that a decrease of appropriated fund balance in the amount of \$800,000 be used to help offset the General Fund increase. This will bring the appropriated fund balance in the 2010 plan down to \$3,800,000 from \$4,600,000 this year.

“The county tax levy will increase \$863,447 or 4.55% to \$19,833,317, although tax rates vary from town to town and village to village due to the state established equalization rates. The composite tax rate for all taxing districts combined have decreased \$0.15 to \$13.63 per \$1000 due to a slight increase in net assessments.

“The other tax that appears on your bill is the recycling tax. The tax levy for recycling in the solid waste budget has increased from \$796,594 to \$828,403, an increase of \$31,809 or 3.99% for 2010. Appropriations have decreased \$20,061 or 1.57% from 2009. However, revenues have also decreased \$51,870 or 10.7%. The proposed composite tax rate will drop from \$0.58 to \$0.57 per \$1000 of assessed value.

“I would like to thank the County Legislature, Department Heads, and all County Employees for working very diligently these past few months at helping formulate this 2010 budget.

“I would also like to point out that the projected tax levy may not increase after tonight’s hearing without an additional public hearing.”

The County Budget Officer then showed a slide presentation to go over some of the highlights.

George Penney spoke. “First I applaud the Legislature and the County Departments for decreasing county expenses by more than \$1,000,000, but I do not understand why it should now be necessary to raise property taxes in any amount and this at a time when increasing numbers of taxpayers are facing foreclosure. Thank you.”

Marilee Geibel spoke. “I live in the Town of Owego. This is my first time at attending a meeting. I do feel that I would not want to do your jobs, however I do have a lot of questions and I am not sure if I am limited to time. I saw in the paper where there were some new hires at Social Services and Law Enforcement was not going to be there, so that I believe would assume that we are going to pick up \$75,000 in cell phones, speeding, no stop signs because they are going to be out on the roads and highways I assume, the gentleman and ladies that were up there.

“The health insurance and dental insurance I am not sure where I can find the county employees pay for that. I understand that it is not a very large amount and that it has also not increased yearly for them as to what the rates go up. Say the rates are up 5%, I do not believe their portion goes up that amount of money. Real estate taxes bother me, the fact that there were six pages in the Pennysaver this week seemed absorbent to me. I did talk to Jim earlier and he said that is about what they normally are, but I feel the seniors are kind of maybe going to be pushed out of their homes. There is no social security increases this year and yet gasoline goes up, the fuel goes up, property taxes are going up, groceries are going up, and there is not going to be an increase from what I understand for the next two years, but all their expenses are going to go up.

“Is this a done deal, the budget?”

James McFadden, Budget Officer, spoke. “The Legislature will probably have at least one more meeting and then I believe it is two weeks from tonight it would have to be adopted by public resolution two weeks from tonight. Excuse me, three weeks from tonight there will be a night meeting where the final adoption and resolution is passed. They could make some changes, but I have not heard anything major.”

Marilee Geibel spoke. “So between now and December 15th there could be changes to this?”

Chair Weston spoke. “The budget cannot go up at this point unless we have another hearing. It does not look like it is going to go up. It can go down.”

Legislator Huttleston spoke. “This is a maximum when we have the public hearing. It cannot be raised, but we can lower it and I think in some years we have possibly done that. The only way you can lower it is money revenue that we did not know we had at this point or if we take some more out of surplus, but it cannot go up, but it can go down.”

Marilee Geibel spoke. “So the questions that I have presented, are they addressed, I mean what happens with the questions that I just asked this evening?”

Chair Weston spoke. “They will be discussed.”

Marilee Geibel spoke. “At your meeting or an open meeting?”

Chair Weston spoke. “Well if we have an open meeting, if that is the case.”

Bridget Kane spoke. "I am from the Village of Owego. I just have one question. In looking at the spending page where total decreases of \$1.16 M and it shows the largest decreases in general government, interfund transfer, and social services. Now social services decreased by \$450,000. General government, which I am assuming is every other department except social services. How many departments are included in general government? The reason why I am asking is because it just seems to me that social services has decreased more than half an amount than the general government. It just does not seem fair to me somehow. I mean I would expect the general government number to be higher or to be a lot higher, a lot higher than it is because there are more departments involved in general government. I would be interested to see a page here that shows the decreases that each and every department took. I think that would be helpful to the public. Thank you."

James McFadden, County Budget Officer, spoke. "I could try to answer her questions. Social services total spending plan, just social services alone, is a little over 20 million dollars. They are cutting by \$450,000 and actually it was even maybe a little bit more than that when you include fringe benefits and the like. I am sure they cut over 3% of their budget, so it is 20 million.

"General government is I guess you could say a little bit of everybody else, the Sheriff and Public Safety, and Public Works, Mental Health, Public Health, and those are the ones that the rest totaled \$817,000. The total spending once again the general fund spending is around \$62 million, so social services is about a third of that. There is the breakdown there. It is about a third, \$800,000 and \$450,000 is about a third. The interfund transfer is just a large chunk of money that on a yearly basis is transferred from the general fund to the capital fund to perhaps do a third bridge instead of two bridges, and that is the big change from last year is that we are only going to do two bridges next year I believe instead of a third one. We just wanted to give social services credit because they are the largest department and they did their fair share, they took a tough hit this year.

"The Sheriff's Department did eliminate I think three positions, maybe four, in the Sheriff's Road Patrol arena which is the reason why they removed two guards from Social Services. Corrections is difficult. How many people work in Corrections is pretty much set by the State and that is always a difficult area for them to go. Then last but not least there is a recession on and probably the crime rate is not going down is my guess too."

Bridget Kane spoke. "Is there a place on the Internet that we can see those cuts, like point by point, is that on the County website?"

James McFadden, County Budget Officer, spoke. “In about two weeks from now when we adopt this full budget we are going to have everything on a website with about 70 pages worth of each department budgets and where the total spending plan is along with salaries, a list of salaries, so the total budget is over 100 pages and that will be on a website in about two and a half weeks.”

Legislator Huttleston spoke. “One thing that I am concerned about is not the County. I think the big thing that people got to be concerned about is the Federal Government. As far as I am concerned they are bankrupt or close to it, and the State Government is close to it. Fortunately the County ever since I have been on the Legislature have been very frugal, always stayed within their revenue and expenditures. All of our department heads have always done an excellent job of maximizing state aid and maximizing most revenue, and also third party pay and controlling expenditures, but the big problem that I am concerned, I think this whole Legislative body is concerned, is if the State pulls money away from us then they are going to hurt the county. It is going to go down to the Towns and it is going to go to the people. Like the lady just said, no social security increase. I appreciate that because you have to look at the revenue and when your expenditures exceed faster than your revenue you got some real problems. We are all aware of that and I am one that has never voted for a budget with increases.

“This year we had a tough time and I did say if we could get it within some kind of means I will probably vote for the budget. Next year it may be tougher and tougher, and I think the population in this country has got a put a lot of pressure on State and Federal Governments to start looking and cutting where they should be cutting. I think we have got to much government, to much expenses of government, and it should be cut, and hopefully I think the more people that can be vocal about it I think it will help, but I do think we have done a good job under the conditions we are working under and we are not a county that is in debt, which is good.”

There being no further comments, the hearing was adjourned at 6:38 P.M.