

**PUTNAM COUNTY LEGISLATURE
PUBLIC HEARING
ON THE
2021 TENTATIVE BUDGET
AND
REPORT OF THE BUDGET & FINANCE COMMITTEE
Held Via Audio Webinar Pursuant to Temporary Emergency Orders**

Monday October 26, 2020 7:00 P.M.

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 P.M. by Chairwoman Addonizio who lead in the Pledge of Allegiance and Legislative Prayer. Upon roll call, Legislators Montgomery, Gouldman, Nacerino, Albano, Jonke, Castellano, Sayegh, Sullivan and Chairwoman Addonizio were present. Also present was Legislative Counsel Firriolo.

Chairwoman Addonizio requested that the Clerk read the Public Notice (attached).

Chairwoman Addonizio read the procedure for public comment on the proposed 2021 Tentative Budget.

Chairwoman Addonizio explained that the Legislature received correspondence containing comments and questions on the 2021 Budget from the following two (2) residents of the Town of Southeast: Ms. Lynne Eckardt and Mr. John Lord. She read the correspondence, which is attached, as part of the record of the public hearing.

Chairwoman Addonizio stated that the Legislature would now accept public comment on the 2021 Tentative Budget from those members of the public who have confirmed that they would like to speak on the webinar.

Mr. Vincent Fiorentino from the Town of Kent explained that he was a life member of the Lake Carmel Fire Department and was against defunding the police overtime. The Sheriff's deputies are needed to protect the health and safety of our community.

Mr. Phil Bayer explained that he did not want to comment on the funding aspect of the Sheriff's Department, however he wanted to comment on a perspective which he felt has grown since last January when someone said the Sheriff was just using budget lines to spend money. He stated that someone also said it was a "runaway train request" and someone said, "there was a pattern here." He believed a pattern has developed of "party over County." He explained that the Legislature was here to serve the residents of the County the same way Sheriff Langley and his dedicated deputies were there to serve the residents. He stated that nothing good comes out of partisan politics. He asked the Legislature to let Sheriff Langley and his deputies perform their duties.

Ms. Kathleen Foley believed the budget was slim for departments. She expressed concerns about the Transportation Manager receiving a \$15,000 stipend on top of his \$85,000 salary. She explained that the \$100,000 salary will now include the additional raise percentage that the managers were receiving. She stated that his total salary equated to a 20.3% higher income than the year before. She explained that this was one (1) example of executive salaries. She believed the employees that suffer in this budget were front line staff, particularly our Health Department workers and Sheriff Deputies who put their lives on the line for the public.

Ms. Janice Hogan, Town of Philipstown, read in the Highlands Current about the budget. She was surprised that there were cuts being made to the Sheriff's Department and Healthcare, Legal Aid and Tourism was receiving less money. She explained that the Sheriff's Department will not only be hampered by the cuts to his department, but by cuts to departments that have an effect on the Sheriff's Department, such as the mental health and drug crisis that is ongoing and worsening in Putnam County. She explained that Legal Aid is being cut at a time when individuals are losing their jobs and might not be able to hire lawyers if needed. She explained that tourism has increased in the Highlands and the Town of Philipstown. She believed that more support from the Sheriff's office. She stated that it did not make sense to cut all these departments. She hoped that the Legislators would work with Sheriff Langley to restore monies and figure out sensible ways, such as foregoing some raises, in order to put money in the budget where it is truly needed.

Ms. Ricann Bock, Town of Philipstown, stated that she couldn't imagine the Sheriff's budget being cut especially in the middle of a pandemic. She stated that she was grateful for the Sheriff, his deputies, and the employees in the Sheriff's Department in protecting the public. She stated that they do not have a choice to do their job from home. They needed to be out on the roads protecting the community. She stated that from what she reads, the Sheriff was left out of the planning of this budget. She stated that it reminded her of what she believes happens to Legislator Montgomery on a regular basis. She believed that we needed to put County over party and take care of each other.

Ms. Terry Raskyn, Town of Putnam Valley, stated that she was concerned about cuts to the Sheriff's Department, especially since it is the sole law enforcement body for Putnam Valley. She stated that we cannot afford to have our officer's hands tied. She explained that the Legislature was not shifting funds for additional healthcare, legal aid or things that the public needs. She stated that the Legislature is shifting funds for things like horses on Tilly Foster Farm. She believed that public safety should be given highest priority, especially during a pandemic.

Ms. Pamela Richardson, Town of Kent, stated that she had concerns about the proposed budget which seems to increase county salaries and adds positions, while simultaneously cutting essential services such as the budgets for the Department of Social Services, Legal Aid and the Sheriff's Department. She stated the County Executive's office is slated to see a \$700,000 revenue raised by the tax levy in the 2021 budget, yet other departments that are critical to the quality of life and safety of our community are not being equally funded. She stated that one (1) example is that the proposed budget allocates less than \$100,000 in tax revenue for the Department of Social Services. She stated that Putnam County is one (1) of the safest communities in New York, however cuts to these departments put our quality of life at risk. She stated that it appears that the Legislature's priorities may be askew. She stated that in the midst of a pandemic public health and safety departments must be fully funded. She stated that residents are relying on our community services more than ever. She stated that in a time of lean revenues, she believed that pay raises and additional personnel of nonessential workers needed to be put aside. She hoped the Legislature would reconsider its priorities and put the residents of Putnam County first.

Ms. Tatiana Brahim, Town of Kent, stated she was extremely disappointed with the underfunding of our Sheriff's Department. She stated that with the current state of

affairs of this Country and with Antifa being in Carmel a month ago, drivers coming through Route 301 dumping garbage and harassing residents that have different political beliefs, she stated that we need our police. She stated that the main priority right now is to ensure that all citizens of this county needed to work together to make sure our Sheriff's Department has everything they need. She believed that funds could be cut in other areas that were not a priority. She stated that our citizens needed to be protected, our children, seniors, and veterans. She explained that someone in Cold Spring is trying to get rid of the Village Police. Ms. Brahim stated that if this happens the Sheriff's Department will need to branch out even more. She stated that our deputies and Sheriff put their lives on the line every day and every night doing the best they can to protect our County. She stated that they go above and beyond, and when you need them, they are there. She explained that she was in support of body cameras to protect our officers.

David Merandy, Village of Cold Spring Mayor, stated the Village's request for additional County aid to help with the ever-growing number of visitors was denied. He stated that he understood that during the COVID-19 pandemic there would be constraints on the County's budget. He stated that it didn't seem like it effected the budget with most of personnel receiving at least a 2.4% increase and some receiving more. He stated that the Village has received \$7,500 from the County and they have not received an increase in that over the years. He stated that their request to the County was to double that amount which would be an additional \$7,500. He explained that they have a small budget, and they appreciated every cent they receive. He explained that the number of visitors to their area has doubled which has required them to have another police officer on duty. This is difficult as it is a volunteer department, and they are short a few officers due to injuries. He believed it would cost the Village a minimum of \$1,000 per weekend for the extra officer. He stated that this is just to handle tourism. He stated that the Village needs help and whatever could be sent their way would be appreciated. He encouraged the Legislators to come to the Village during the weekend to see the amount of tourism they receive. He asked the Legislature to reconsider the amount the Village requested. He stated that someone mentioned earlier about defunding the Village Police. He clarified that it would not be happening. He stated that we have a good relationship with our Village Police. He stated that the Sheriff's Department is very valuable in the Village. He stated that they have been incredibly helpful. He asked that the Legislature reconsider the cuts that were made to that department.

Ms. Judy Farrell, Councilwoman from the Town of Philipstown, supported the Village of Cold Spring and what was said by Mayor Merandy. She showed support for the Sheriff's Department, officers, and staff in serving our community so well during this horrific pandemic. He stated that it was unconscionable during this pandemic to reduce their funding. She urged the Legislature to support all the people of Putnam County as the Sheriff's office is a critical component, as is all of our first responders, during this public health crisis. She stated that she was also impressed on how hard the employees of the Health Department are working and she believed that we needed to support them during this pandemic. She believed reductions in critical areas as these, and in Legal Aid, during the greatest public health crisis of our lifetime need to be reconsidered.

Ms. Gail Levine, Town of Southeast, stated that she wanted to show support to the Sheriff's Department. She explained that safety was one (1) of the reasons for moving to this area many years ago. She explained that many areas would be negatively impacted if that were to change. She stated that she was surprised that defunding the police would even be considered.

Richard Shea, Town of Philipstown Supervisor, stated that the Sheriff needs to be supported and how he arranges his budget is his concern. He stated that the Sheriff's Department does an excellent job of community policing in the Town of Philipstown in a professional manner. He stated that he would like to know what the unexpended balance would be at the end of the year because he believed there would be some unexpended funds. He wondered if that could be directed to the Sheriff's Department, the cut to real essential services like Village aid, Department of Social Services, Legal Aid, and the cemeteries. He stated that respecting the dead is very important, especially our veterans. He could not see cutting those funds at a time like this, especially when they were small to begin with. He stated that these cemeteries need to be maintained. He explained that he would appreciate support from the Legislature with the Parks. He stated that it is tough on the residents of the Village of Cold Spring and is unbearable on the weekends. He would appreciate it if the County petitioned the New York State Office of Parks & Recreation Historic Preservation asking them to get their act together and put in the infrastructure that is needed. He stated that as far tourism, he asked that the County stop promoting the Village of Cold Spring. He believed that it did not need to be promoted any longer. He stated that they have hit a threshold that is so far over the top that it is unpleasant to be here for everybody. He explained that entertaining cuts to real essential services, while entertaining raises for elected officials, was not right. He stated that there have been no raises for elected officials in the Town of Philipstown for eight (8) years.

Mr. James Adams, Town of Philipstown, explained that in times of economic distress and in times of a health crisis, it is easy to predict that both crime and addiction problems will increase. He stated that in light of this, and the fact that it is highly unlikely that the pandemic will go away much before the end of next year, to reduce funding for health services and the Sheriff's Department, which seems fairly thinly stretched anyway, does not recognize the reality that we are living in today. He believed that the planning that goes into the budget should recognize the realities that we have. He stated that this is a different situation and the needs for the Sheriff's Department will be increased and not decreased.

Mr. John Van Tassel, Town of Philipstown, offered his condolences to the Sheriff's Department, and family members, for their loss today of an off-duty officer. He stated his town depends heavily on the Sheriff's Department. He explained that he understood the Legislature's responsibility to review that budget and he agreed with that. He stated that he hoped that scrutiny was across the board in other departments as much as what is being done with the Sheriff's budget. He explained that he heard one (1) of the Legislators defending the spending at Tilly Foster Farm which they believed was a draw for tourism. He wondered if there was any ratio of dollars per visitor spent by Putnam County. He explained that as stated earlier this evening, there are thousands of visitors in the Town of Philipstown every weekend. He stated that he bikes the roads through the Town of Philipstown and you can barely get through Route 9D on a Saturday or Sunday afternoon. He explained that the Village of Cold Spring has requested additional funding for assistance, and he believed that assistance would go a long way.

Mr. Scott Reing, Town of Carmel, explained that last year he questioned the Legislature and the Executive decision to continue to reduce the general fund. He believed that there was less sales tax revenue generated by the County this year. He explained that we are in the middle of a health crisis and he believed it was outrageous to have a budget

which increases the salaries and compensation of elected officials, while decreasing funding for the Health Department, Veterans and Sheriff's Department. He stated that on behalf of the citizens of Putnam County, he questioned why there would be defunding in the Health Department and Sheriff's Department at a time when we need both more than ever, not to mention Legal Aid too. He believed that, as people lose their jobs and unemployment runs out, we will see an increase in crimes of necessity like shoplifting and burglary. He would like to know the justifications of giving raises to elected officials and taking money out of the pockets of our deputies.

Ms. Alana Sweeney, Town of Carmel, stated that she looked at the budget. She stated that she was concerned that under normal circumstances she believed it would look like a decent budget, however, she stated that these are not normal circumstances. She stated that businesses are failing, sales tax revenue that she suspects will continue to be a challenge. She stated that as COVID-19 continues she believed that we will be seeing more problems. She believed that the New York State budget would move more State costs onto the counties. She stated that the Metropolitan Transit Authority is experiencing difficulties. She believed that the County's budget looked like a budget prior to COVID-19. She believed that areas that deal with substance abuse, child abuse, domestic violence, mental health, and health are strained right now. She believed that during the pandemic, those areas would experience an increase. She stated that the budget puts funds into executive salaries and increased personnel rather than into those areas. She believed that it looked bad to give a 2.4% raise across the board in executive salaries when there is some defunding or lack of increased funding to the Sheriff's Department. She believed this budget did not look into what will be happening in the future due to COVID-19. She urged the Legislature to make some adjustments based on our current circumstances and what will be projected in the next six (6) months.

Mr. Nicholas Kuvach, Town of Putnam Valley, stated that as a self-identified black lives matter ally, he was interested in reimagining public safety in the future. He complimented the Sheriff's office for maintaining peace. He believed the Sheriff's budget should be increased not reduced.

Ms. Eileen McDermott, Village of Brewster, stated that the funding which is proposed to be withheld would actually help to improve public safety and community relationships with the police, as it would be used to purchase body cameras among other things. She believed that the exorbitant raises that were proposed for the County Executive and other officials were unconscionable in the midst of a pandemic.

Ms. Erin Crowley, Town of Carmel, stated that many citizens may not realize the difference between the Sheriff and the police. She stated that the Sheriff is the only position elected to law enforcement. She stated that the position is subject to a higher degree of accountability of the population that voted the individual into office. She stated that the Sheriff's office is not directly governed by the County Board of Supervisors or the Mayors, however the budget is usually controlled by the County Executive and Legislature. She believed that public safety should be the primary function of the general fund. She explained how the Sheriff's Department can be the sole source of law enforcement in a large territory and yet these Sheriffs are often running on thin staff and have demanding schedules. She stated that the lack of funding not only affects the Sheriff's Department but other necessary public services such as; firefighting, Department of Health, domestic violence and mental health. She explained and went into detail what she believed could happen to the Sheriff's Department if it is not funded and

staffed appropriately. She questioned why we were jeopardizing the health and safety of our Sheriffs and County residents. She questioned why the Sheriff's Department did not have any mandated COVID-19 testing or protection for the deputies.

There being no further comments, at 8:25 P.M., Chairwoman Addonizio made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Legislator Albano. All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Diane Schonfeld, Clerk.

Lynne A Eckardt

Brewster, New York 10509

Putnam County Legislature
40 Gleneida Avenue
Carmel, New York 10512

25 October 2020

Dear Chairwoman Addonizio and Members of the Board,

Unfortunately, I have another meeting tonight and will be unable to ask questions and comment at the Public Hearing regarding the 2021 Budget. Please read this letter into the record and, if possible, please answer the questions posed.

As mentioned in my last letter, Putnam seems to be a hotbed of losing litigation for the County. Obviously, body cameras for our police could aid immeasurably in litigation while protecting our good cops and weeding out the bad.

- Please explain why you believe that body cameras are not a necessary piece of equipment and why they should not be funded in the 2021 budget.

License Plate Readers can also help protect the residents of Putnam County yet the money for this remains in sub-contingency.

- Please explain why you believe that License Plate Readers are not a necessary piece of equipment. And why the money in sub-contingency should not be released immediately.

And finally

- Please explain why you want to cut these necessities while raising salaries for the County Executive and other top officials?

With all that has been eliminated from the Sheriff's budget I have to wonder if public safety really comes first in Putnam County.

Sincerely,

Lynne Eckardt

Diane Schonfeld

From: John Lord
Sent: Monday, October 26, 2020 11:25 AM
To: putcoleg
Subject: 2021 Budget

Dear Chairwoman Addonizio and Members of the Legislature,

I cannot attend tonight's meeting but I wanted to make my concerns known to you. Please read this into the record.

Please include the Sheriff's requested funding into the 2021 budget. Monies for training and body cameras should be made available to the department so that they can provide for the protection and security of the residents of Putnam County.

Sincerely,

John Lord
Resident of Southeast