

PUBLIC HEARING

November 9, 2017

A Public Hearing was held on the Preliminary Budget for the fiscal year 2018 on Thursday, November 9, 2016 at 6:45 pm at the Ghent Town Hall, Route 66, Ghent, New York, 12075. Pursuant to Section 108 of the Town Law that the following salaries of elected officials are proposed for the Year 2018.

Supervisor \$12,000.00, Town Clerk \$33708.00 Councilperson (4) \$3985.00, Justices (2) \$12310.00 and Highway Superintendent \$59518.00

Supervisor Benvenuto read the notice aloud and introduced Lisa Gill, from the Town's accounting firm Pattison, Koskey, Howe and Bucci to give a brief overview of the budget.

Lisa Gill- The 2018 budget includes a 1.25% increase from last year. This increase is reflected in full time wage increases per union contract, and additional funding for the bridge project on Angell Hill Road. The budget is under the tax cap by \$20,681.00.

Jack Couch- Tipple Road resident opposes any cut in the budget for West Ghent Fire Company.

Mike Zibella- What is the reasoning behind budget cut? Are you taking from one company to give to the other?

Supervisor Benvenuto- the Town Board finally received a copy of WGFD budget for 2016. Once it was reviewed the board was able to see what funds are available, what they receive and their expenses. The expenses for 2016 were around \$75,000. This indicates if the Town provides \$100,000 in financing the expenses or covered not including monies received from Claverack. Also shown on balance sheet is a fund balance of \$555.095 which is monies on hand. Also we did not just take that \$10,000 and transfer it over to another department. Ghent received a \$4000.00 increase. Last year they had no increase.

Mike Zibella- Why are you using 2016 budget numbers.

Supervisor Benvenuto- That is what was provided to us. Part of this as well is WGFD is not a 501C3 which most companies are. Ghent files an IRS 990 form which is extremely detailed and given to the Town each year, it's difficult for the Board to make decisions on three pieces of paper received for WGFD. We understand some of their records were not available do the investigation into missing funds, but based on what was received 100,000 is an adequate amount of funding. We have met with WGF and they were aware of this decrease. While you may not agree, to send out a letter and Facebook messages to residents basically telling them you cannot protect their property without \$10,000.00 there is no correlation there between \$10,000.00 and the ability to fight fires. That was beyond low.

WGFD member- Membership will tell you that we have been receiving \$110,000 since 2010 and if you cut us now, we are ready to tell you we will not sign the contract.

Supervisor Benvenuto- This is the second time WDF has refused to sign the contract and we were giving them \$110,000. We opted for 6 month contracts last year. The Board is under scrutiny when one of our fire companies is being investigated for financial issues.

WGFD Member- Those numbers you have are not correct.

Supervisor Benvenuto- That what is what was provided to the Town from your financial advisor. We do not want the WGFD to go out of business but we have to base our decisions on what we receive.

WGFD member- You are not taking into consideration what we have spent in 2017.

Supervisor Benvenuto- again we do not have that information. One more very important point. You are spending money on a mailer to residents, when other fire companies use fundraisers such as barbeques and clambakes to raise almost \$10,000.00 a year. What have you done?

Jim Cesternino- We volunteer to fight fires not to do fundraisers. Why should we have to? What are you paying the other fire companies?

Supervisor Benvenuto- It's in the budget.

Jim Cesternino-Why is Ghent getting more than West Ghent?

Attorney Cabral- The point of tonight's meeting is a public hearing, not a questions and answer. Please limit comments so everyone has a chance to speak.

Councilwoman Matheney- We are not voting tonight. We have been waiting for two years to get your financials.

WGFD member- The Attorney General still has our records. They were downloadable off their secure website, but we just want to go pick them up.

Supervisor Benvenuto- Did the WGFD file an official response to audit? Yes

Mike Zibella- If there is some type of unexpected expense is it feasible to for the Town to help out if needed?

Supervisor Benvenuto- We will revisit amount in 2019 budget. Right now it's our determination they have plenty of money.

WGFD member- you're looking at whole total, what if a emergency should happen and fire house is destroyed then what?

Supervisor Benvenuto- We can fund budgets on what ifs? You can always bond a new truck if needed.

WGFD member- We have always saved to keep taxpayers amount down. We saved for air packs for 15 years, saving for foam trailer, saving for new truck, need new turnout gear.

Councilwoman Matheney- Can we get an update of your 2017 numbers?

Attorney Cabral – If you feel there is more information the Town should have please submit it before November 16, 2017.

WGFD member- What happens if the contract is not signed?

Supervisor Benvenuto- We would have to contact the Attorney General's office, State and County Fire Boards. Mutual aid and battalion response in order to keep West Ghent coverage. We will have to research on what happens to the funds they have and every cent has to be accounted for?

Jim Cesternino- Even though we had not signed contract last year we still provided protection. We are not the bad guys, we just ask to be treated fairly.

Supervisor Benvenuto- Cutting \$10,000 is treating you fairly after seeing the financials.

Justin Taylor- Cutting budget because we are not spending your penalizing us for saving.

Jim Cesternino- WFGD has more industry, bigger buildings, GFD is mostly residential. Why do they have a bigger budget?

Toney Brahm- Urge both parties to come to some kind of agreement. GFD cannot cover the whole district. Keep in mind the people we are trying to serve.

Member- Does the County provide any funds for coverage of the airport? No.

Councilwoman Matheney- Encourage you to get as much information as possible to the Board before next week. It is our fiscal responsibly to the taxpayers to have all the information. The audit should be made available as well.

WGFD Member- The audit is available on line on Comptrollers website.

Wally Engel- This situation is really new or specific to WGFD. New Lebanon is having a very similar issue with LVPA. New Lebanon is cutting I believe the LVPA to \$18,000.00 versus \$180,000.00. They have \$600,000 in their General fund with no line items listed. The State is really holding Towns accountable for the funds they give out and holding everyone fiscally responsible on those funds.

Supervisor Benvenuto thanked everyone for their comments and closed the Public Hearing at 7:40 pm.