

Council introduces budget with lower costs, fewer employees

South Plainfield – By a 5-1 vote, the Borough Council introduced a 2010 budget tonight that includes nine fewer employees and a variety of other cost-cutting measures designed to save tax dollars. Under the plan, the average homeowner will see taxes go down in 2010 by about \$183.75 when compared to 2009.

“Families are making hard decisions around the dinner table, and we’re making those same hard decisions for the Borough,” said Council President Matt Anesh. “In this economy, everyone has to spend less.”

“We’ll actually have at least nine fewer employees this year than last,” Anesh explained. “By the time we have the final adoption, I anticipate we’ll be looking at a ten to fifteen percent reduction in our workforce.”

The Council also asked each department to cut expenses by ten percent, and it’s had a hiring freeze in place for several months now. It’s also trying to take advantage of retirements, which are averaging a lot more than normal.

“When people retire, we either eliminate the position or we fill the position with a current employee whose spot can be cut,” added Councilman Ray Rusnak, head of the Council’s finance committee. “We’re trying to cut positions, not people.”

According to Anesh and Rusnak, more moves are in the works. “We plan to trim several more positions, but exactly which ones are yet to be decided.”

In addition to fulfilling a promise to taxpayers, the cost cutting is required by an approximate \$600,000 loss of state aid.

“We had to make that amount up without raising taxes,” said Anesh.

“We worked hard to cut costs,” said Rusnak. “Taxpayers will see the results in their tax bills.”

Anesh and Rusnak also pointed to two other measures that helped bring down costs: refinancing the Borough’s debt and bidding out its recycling programs. Between curbside recycling and the recycling center (along with expected rebates) bidding out these programs is expected to save about \$50,000.

The budget introduction is the first step according to Anesh, a Republican. The next step, he says, is to form a bipartisan council committee to look for additional ways to bring down costs and trim even more from the spending plan by the time of its final adoption.

According to Anesh, he’ll be on that committee with Rusnak, also a Republican, and Democratic Councilwoman Chrissy Buteas.

“We had a good bipartisan effort for the school-board budget, so I’m hoping we can do the same for our own budget,” Anesh said.

During the meeting, Mayor Charles Butrico questioned whether residents would really see their taxes fall, stating that the Borough’s tax levy would be up about \$1.1 million compared to the 2008/2009 fiscal-year budget.

In response, CFO Glenn Cullen explained that it’s impossible to compare a fiscal-year budget from 18 months ago with this new calendar-year budget, which is the

first full year's budget since the Borough changed over to a calendar year last summer.

As part of the switch, the Council had a six-month transitional budget that ran from the beginning of July 2009 to the end of December 2010.

The new budget had some bipartisan support, with Democratic Councilman Franky Salerno joining Republican

Councilmen Rob Bengivenga, Tim McConville, Anesh, and Rusnak in voting for the plan. Buteas, who cast the lone "no" vote, is the Council's only other Democrat.

"By including Chrissy in the process, I'm hoping she too will be on board for the final adoption," Anesh said.

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