

Special Council Meeting
01/30/2018
6:30 PM
Municipal Building

Gary Bauer, Chad Hollon, Reilly Hopkins, and Cindy Sutton were present. Mayor presided over the meeting.

BAUER/HOLLON: Motion to excuse Don and Lori from meeting. All voted yea.

Mayor pointed out due to the crowd in the audience, he would like to add a public comment portion for this meeting. He asked if anyone had any objection to add this to the agenda.

BAUER/HOLLON: Motion to accept agenda with the added public comment section. All voted yea.

Mayor stated that the police department is ~72% of the total General Fund budget and estimated expenses were projected to be over \$570,000 in 2018. Mayor stated that anytime a Village can keep and maintain its own resources, it is best. He stated that while upfront a contracted service may look nice, it is best to have services provided by the Village itself when possible.

He mentioned that property owners have recently seen and felt the impact of the new parks levy that was passed in 2017. He then asked, "What is needed to fund the police department? What is in the best interest of the residents of the village?"

The Mayor offered two options: Police levy or earnings tax. The county has provided an estimate for the funding needed to fund the police department with a police levy. Roughly, 10 mills would bring in ~\$550,000, which would roughly cost each person owning a \$100,000 home ~\$350 more per year. Mayor proposed that if the earnings tax were tried again, the language could be that the revenue collected would go 100% to the police department. The resources would be available in order to hire more officers. Over the years, obviously because of the revenue depleting, the number of officers has declined. Mayor stated that we want people to come to our Village, but people will not come if they do not feel safe. Mayor opened the floor to Council for their thoughts on the options.

Reilly asked if the earnings tax be permanent or 5 years. Mayor asked if Council wanted a permanent police department. Reilly stated that he didn't see how it could sell to the residents in time for the primary running. Reilly stated there was a reason the public has not supported the earnings tax.

Mayor responded that they haven't supported "us" (meaning Council). He expressed his belief that the public wants Council to be specific. Mayor stated this earnings tax would state 100% would go to the police department. If the money was supplied by an earnings tax, there would be no reason to outsource services. Mayor stated Council has an obligation to the public to go outside of the box to explore outsourcing services.

Chief stated that if Council was going to try for an earnings tax, it seemed too short of a time period to sell the idea. Mayor stated that if people want police, they are going to support it. If Council were to wait until the end of the year, if the earnings tax didn't pass, almost a year had passed and the next year's budget would already be in progress. He stated he believed action should be taken now.

Chad stated that Council as a whole is mistrusted by the people. He believed going after \$500,000 is "crazy". He believed an earnings tax is the better option because the property owners are footing the entire bill right now.

Mayor stated that if people want to keep policing, a 1% earnings tax is not too much to ask from people. He stated he didn't want to place more of a burden on the property owners. An earnings tax would affect less residents in the Village overall.

Chad stated personally it doesn't make any difference for either a levy or an earnings tax. He stated that for those who are already paying \$500 in property taxes, he simply didn't want to see their taxes increase again. Mayor stated out of ~4,000 people only about 250 people who lived in the village would be affected by the earnings tax. There are about 1,300 people who drive into the village each day that are working in the village that would be contributing to the tax as well.

Discussion took place from the audience regarding proper constitutional use of the republic, if an increase in taxes to cover the entire police department budget were really needed, explanations as to

how the money saved in the General Fund would be spent, and if a smaller tax could be generated and then police department's remaining budget supplemented with the General Fund.

Mayor stated right now the Chief's staff is bare-boned. He stated that the Chief will want to increase his staff. An increase in staff would mean an even greater budget. Some of that money "excess" would free up other monies for matching grant funds and other project that have been put off due to no revenue.

Chad stated that 4-mils would be the limit he would support in a proposed police levy.

Concern was expressed from the audience regarding the response time in the Village if the Sheriff's Department were to be contracted and if outsourced, the Sheriff's staff might increase. Chad called point of order stating he believed the meeting to be getting off of topic.

Chief budget when he started was over \$700,000/year. He believed at that time that it was overfunded. Mayor stated if the earnings tax was ran for ½ percent, it would bring in about \$250,000/year. Mayor stated he still sees a levy being more of a burden on the Village property owners. Discussion took place in the audience regarding how past levies have not failed in the Village.

Reilly stated his opinion was changing during the meeting regarding a levy. He said prior to walking in, he was more supportive of an earnings tax. If we zone in and pinpoint and tell residents where the money will go for, the Village would support a levy.

Chad reiterated that he would still prefer an income (earnings) tax, but that he would support a levy up to 4 mills.

Cindy stated she had been talking to elderly residents. She said, "I'm torn because I know that the property taxes cannot keep going up. It's sad for those people."

Gary stated he would support the levy, but would go with even lower (i.e., 2 mills).

Mayor asked what timeline Council was thinking, either the primary or to wait until November. Chad stated it doesn't matter when it's placed on the ballot; the levy or tax would not go into effect until 2019. Audience discussion then focused around possibly having another opportunity to pass a levy in November if levy failed to pass in May. A resident inquired about the demographics of Blanchester proper (age ranges of residents). Jewelie and Mayor looked online at age demographics. ~800 of the population were aged 60 and older in Blanchester (roughly ¼ of the population).

Mayor stated general consensus among Council was no more than 3 mills police levy for Blanchester. It was agreed that since there was not agreement on the May deadline, there would be no need to make any motion.

HOLLON/HOPKINS: Motion to adjourn. All voted yea. Meeting adjourned at 7:32 PM.

Approved: 2/8/18

Mayor: John M. Conner

Attest: Jewelie Carter