

Minutes of the 2019 Budget Public Meeting of the

Board of Ward County Commissioners

September 11, 2018

The Budget Meeting public hearing of the Ward County Commission was called to order by Chairman Walter at 6:30 p.m. with Comm. Rostad and Weppler present. Also present were Amanda Schooling, Devra Smestad, Ryan Kamrowski.

Auditor/Treasurer Devra Smestad gave a review of the preliminary budget and pointed out that the mill levies are down from \$328,443 to \$321,941, a decrease of \$6,500 per mill and that happened largely because of our centrally assessed specifically in wind tower assessments. Budget requests are up from \$51,763,833 to \$53,377,572 an increase of \$1.6 million. Mill levies are up from 73.23 to 74.14, a .91 mill increase. Estimated cash on hand is expected to be down \$2.5 million, other income is expected to be up \$4.3 million. Dollars to be levied are down approximately \$161,875 but because the mill levy is down it is going to take a slight increase to makeup that change. A \$200,000 home in 2018 to 2019 would have an \$8.19 increase and for an average quarter of land, it will be a \$4.27 increase.

Comm. Louser arrived at 6:37 p.m.

Chairman Walter invited those who wish to speak to come forward. Betty Flemming appeared. She is concerned about the tax increases while the value of her property has not increased. Her neighborhood is comprised of senior citizens on a fixed income. Wants to understand how the County's tax money is being spent. The commissioners pointed out that the estimated tax statement does not reflect her homestead credit and encouraged Ms. Flemming to share the homestead exemption information with her neighbors who are on fixed incomes.

Marilee Beavers appeared and was concerned about the increase in her county taxes. Feels the increase in taxes is unwarranted and that the County is not living within its means. Comm. Rostad said that part of the increase is due to the rising cost of health insurance. She feels she is not a direct recipient of the township fees as she plows her own road and that benefits the township. It was recommended that she arrange to have the property assessed if she is in disagreement with the valuation.

Torri Nelson came forward and stated her concerns. She said her county road is dangerous. Also questioned the valuation of her home. Feels she does not benefit from the services she is taxed for. Feels the County needs to protect its citizens.

Alan Dostert appeared on behalf of his father. Had questions about the valuation of his father's property. Wanted to know what the process entails. Was encouraged to contact the Tax Equalization office.

Comm. Walter brought up the fact that the mill levy increase equates to \$293,000 and that the County should be able to trim that amount out of budget so that there is no increase from 2018 in County taxes. Mr. Walter said that HR will be evaluating salaries so certain proposed increases will be put back to 5% and HR will come forward with her recommendations at a later date. The positions affected are the Tax Equalization Director and Jail Supervisor.

Comm. Fjeldahl arrived at 7:13 p.m.

He also recommended that requests from the Souris River Joint Board and North Dakota State Fair be reduced by \$50,000. Other proposed reductions were the Weather Modification Board by \$25,000, Assiniboine by \$5,000, and Commissioners Contingency by \$15,000.

In departmental changes, it was recommended that the part-time Veterans Services Officer position be eliminated. Ms. Smestad pointed out a correction to the Sheriff's Department budget in the amount of \$33,216 for a full time security officer. This position does not exist and was a carryover from last year's budget. It was recommended that Jail Operations be reduced by \$8,000, Emergency Fund by \$19,450 and Poor Relief by \$10,000.

These recommendations add up to \$293,000. Comm. Wepler reminded those in attendance that the Commissioners are doing what they can to have a zero increase to county taxes. They have no control over other entities or valuation of property. The budget cannot go up once approved, however, other recommendations for reduction can be entertained.

Mr. Walter asked if there any other comments. Yun Ji Nam came forward and asked if a budget comparison is available on line. The budget won't be posted on the website until it is final. Ms. Smestad said her office is working on a solution so that citizens can see budget comparisons from year to year.

Josh Jenkins appeared as a concerned veteran. He feels the Veterans Services Officer (VSO) should be reinstated as there is a large military presence in Minot due to the location of Minot Air Force Base. The current VSO is doing a lot of outreach to veterans who are either unaware or unable to come in to the office. By hiring another VSO, there would be much needed office coverage.

Moved by Comm. Rostad, seconded by Comm. Louser, to approve the reduction of salary for the Tax Equalization and Jail Supervisor to 5% and reduce the Souris River Joint Board and State Fair allocations by \$50,000. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Fjeldahl, seconded by Comm. Rostad, to reduce the Weather Modification levy by \$25,000 and the Assiniboine budget by \$5,000. Roll call; Comms. Louser and Weppler voted no; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Fjeldahl, seconded by Comm. Rostad, to remove the proposed Veterans Services Officer position from the budget. There was considerable discussion about the issue. The hope would be that there could be other budget cuts in order to keep the position. Roll call; Comms. Louser and Weppler voted no; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Weppler, seconded by Comm. Fjeldahl, to make the correction to the Sheriff's Department budget and remove \$33,000. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Louser, seconded by Comm. Weppler, to reduce the Commissioners Contingency Fund by \$15,000. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Fjeldahl, seconded by Comm. Rostad, to reduce the Jail Operations levy by \$8,000. Roll call; Comm. Louser voted no; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Weppler, seconded by Comm. Louser, to reduce the Emergency Fund by \$19,450. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Rostad, seconded by Comm. Louser, reduce the Poor Relief General Assistance by \$10,000. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Comm. Louser encouraged the Department Heads to scrutinize their budgets and see if any reductions can be made so that the VSO position can be included in the budget.

Moved by Comm. Weppler to adjourn 2018 Budget meeting at 8:28 p.m.