TOWN BOARD
TOWN OF OYSTER BAY
REGULAR MEETING
October 18, 2022
7:06 p.m.

HEARING - BUDGET

To consider the Preliminary Budget for the Town of Oyster Bay for the Year 2023 (M.D. 9/13/22 #18).

JOSEPH SALADINO
SUPERVISOR

RICHARD LaMARCA
TOWN CLERK

P R E S E N T:

SUPERVISOR JOSEPH S. SALADINO
COUNCILWOMAN MICHELE M. JOHNSON
COUNCILMAN LOUIS B. IMBROTO
COUNCILMAN THOMAS P. HAND
COUNCILMAN STEVE L. LABRIOLA
COUNCILWOMAN LAURA L. MAIER
COUNCILWOMAN VICKI WALSH

A L S O P R E S E N T:

RICHARD LaMARCA, TOWN CLERK
JEFFREY P. PRAVATO, RECEIVER OF TAXES

Minutes of the meeting taken by:

TRACIE A. CINQUEMANI
Reporter/Notary Public

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Okay, ladies and gentlemen, we began this meeting this morning -- obviously, it's Tuesday, October 18, 2022 -- our 7:00 p.m. second half of our Town Board meeting and Budget Hearing.

We began our meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance and prayer and a moment of silence, there's no need to do that because this is not a new meeting, it is a continuation of the same meeting.

With that, may I have a motion to continue our hearing from this morning?

COUNCILWOMAN JOHNSON: Supervisor, I'll make a motion that this hearing be continued.

COUNCILMAN IMBROTO: Second.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: All in favor, please signify by saying, "Aye."

ALL: "Aye."

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: All opposed, "Nay."

(Whereupon, there were no "Nay" responses from the Board.)

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: The "Ayes" have it.

(TIME NOTED: 7:08 P.M.)

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: And with that, I officially gavel in.

Okay. We are going to take a Public Comment out of order so they don't have to stay for the whole lengthy hearing that we will be having this evening, and with that, I call to the podium, please, Michael O'Connell.

(Whereupon, Supervisor Saladino entered into Public Comment Session beginning at 7:08 p.m. and the proceedings resuming at 7:11 p.m. as follows:)

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: So, folks, this is a continuation of our Budget Hearing from this morning.

I do want to point out, especially for those who may be watching online, that this -- even though our Nation is experiencing the highest inflation rate in at least 40 years, we, in the Town of Oyster Bay, have been able to provide the fifth consecutive budget with no tax increase.

This is a no tax increase budget. We collect the same amount that we have collected every year, except in 2018 when we cut taxes and collected $1.3 million less from our residents.

We continue to sustain that and provide all the increasing services for the same amount, and that means $7.8 million are back in the pockets of our taxpayers, and that's a big, big deal. We get it.

When we started in 2017 and this administration took over, it was a $44 million deficit. As of the close of 2021, a $62.2 million surplus, again, while cutting taxes.

In January of 2017, there were five funds within our overall budget that were negative. Now, all funds are balanced. Every single one of them.

The total Town debt back in January of 2017 was $763 million. Now, we have it down to $576 million, and we continue to shave off that debt -- net -- while still borrowing at a much lower rate because our bond rating keeps going up to pave the roads and take care of all our responsibilities in taking care of the Town.

The annual debt service used to be $92 million in 2017. Now, it's $78 million. The annual new debt issuance used to be over $100 million a year. Now, we have it down to $55 million or less.

Standard & Poor's gave -- we had a junk bond status in 2017. Now, today, we have an A+ positive outlook with six budget notches up from there.

We have so -- and Moody's also has recognized the big positive changes we've made in the Town, and now Moody's gives us A1 stable outlook with five notches upgrade, and we're only four notches away from a perfect AAA bond rating, and this Town Board will get there. You can be sure of that.

In January 2017, the New York State Comptroller had the Town of Oyster Bay labeled in significant stress. Now, we're entirely off the stress monitoring list. Not just lessened our stress, but no longer are on that list.

We collected $234 million in property taxes in 2017, and as of today, $233 million annually. We cut that down.

The Town -- before we got here -- used to borrow $32 million annually for cash flow borrowing. Now, Zero. We stopped that process all together, and we continue to go through this very, very good news.

So with that, I am going to ask --

MR. LaMARCA: Supervisor, may I just point out, please, that Councilman Imbroto has joined us for the hearing tonight.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: And he wasn't with us --

MR. LaMARCA: He wasn't with us this morning.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: May we, for procedural purposes, take attendance, once again, for this night -- second half of our Hearing, and if the Town Clerk would please take attendance.

MR. LaMARCA: Supervisor Saladino?

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Present.

MR. LaMARCA: Councilwoman Johnson?

COUNCILWOMAN JOHNSON: Present.

MR. LaMARCA: Councilman Imbroto?

COUNCILMAN IMBROTO: Present.

Thank you for pointing that out.

MR. LaMARCA: Councilman Hand?

You're welcome.

COUNCILMAN HAND: Present.

MR. LaMARCA: Councilman Labriola?

COUNCILMAN LABRIOLA: Present.

MR. LaMARCA: Councilwoman Maier?

COUNCILWOMAN MAIER: Present.

MR. LaMARCA: Councilwoman Walsh is not here yet, but she is on her way.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Wonderful.

Thank you very much, Town Clerk.

So we've gone down just some of the tremendous improvements. We went through this all earlier today.

And with that, I'm going to ask our Director of Finance, Rob Darienzo, to step forward.

Mr. Darienzo, we have no residents here for our meeting -- at least physically here -- in the Town Board room, so we're going to do this in an abbreviated fashion, and, obviously, if a resident does show up and wants to speak, we're happy to entertain their comments, but I do want to point out, for the record, there is no resident here, and that's why we're doing this in abbreviated fashion.

We, actually, do have one resident, and that's Mike Polanski (phonetic), no disrespect.

Mike, are you here to make comments or just to observe?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Just observe.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Just observing.

Okay. So pointing that out, rather

than go through the whole litany of all that we've accomplished over these years, we, the Town Board, would like to thank you, as our Finance Director, for a multiple of aspects including doing an incredible job getting the Town out of its darkest days and putting us in a position as one of the fiscally strongest municipalities in the State of New York.

Do you concur with all of the factual information that I just presented?

MR. DARIENZO: I certainly concur. I put it together for you.

(Whereupon, there was laughter among the assemblage.)

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: You put together this budget, and, therefore, you concur that everything that I mentioned is a fact, and we've come a very long way.

Would you like to summarize where we are -- not long -- but summarize where we are from a fiscal standpoint?

(Whereupon, Councilwoman Walsh arrived at the hearing.)

MR. DARIENZO: We are -- I've been with the Town for 25 years, and we're in a better spot

financially now than we've ever been in during my career.

We have a higher surplus than we've ever seen before. It's at a level that's where it belongs -- it's not too high, it's not too low, it's just right, right now -- so I'm very happy and very proud of the work that we've all done here at the Town of Oyster Bay led by yourself and the rest of the Town Board.

It's your stewardship that has helped us get to where we are today, and I hate to say that we're on cruise control now because there's always work to be done, but, with that being said, we are beyond the darkest days, and now the sun is shining brightly and only good times ahead.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Well, our news is so good that we know that we're very proud to tell this information to the public, to our taxpayers, to our residents.

It's great news, and we -- even with all of the wild inflation and -- nationally, it's 10 percent -- I went to the store and eggs are four times what they -- 400 percent more than what they cost just a couple of -- and food bills and so on -- gas is up over some 50 percent of what it

was.

MR. DARIENZO: The gas in our budget is up roughly 50 percent in 2023. That's our projection, yes.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: But with all of the massive inflation we're dealing with, we still are charging our taxpayers the same amount now for the -- going into the sixth year -- sixth consecutive year.

MR. DARIENZO: It's -- I want to say it's unbelievable, but it really isn't because we're doing it, so I believe it.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Thank you.

On behalf of the entire Town Board, Mr. Darienzo, thank you for your hard work.

MR. DARIENZO: It's my pleasure.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: I'd like to call up our Town Comptroller.

Sir, will you please state your presence?

MR. BALLAS: Hi. My name is Steve Ballas. I'm the Comptroller for the Town of Oyster Bay.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: You heard me go down a synopsis of some of the highlights of this

budget including the fact that we are, once again, freezing taxes -- not raising. We cut, our first year, $1.3 for the 2018 budget, and, now, this is our sixth budget without a tax increase.

You heard all of the items about the highlights of this budget including our bond rating increases and the long litany of, actually, wonderful news for our taxpayers.

Do you concur that everything I've said is actually factual?

MR. BALLAS: I do. Absolutely.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: And can you tell us about outside, independent agencies that look carefully and audit our budget?

MR. BALLAS: Well, as you know, we are required to have our annual financial report audited by an outside auditing firm -- Cullen and Danowski is our auditing company -- and they've audited our financial statements and have given us an unqualified opinion that all of our records are in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and government accounting standards.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: How -- you see the fact that many municipalities are raising taxes to stay afloat, and we are not doing that.

As a professional accountant for decades, how would you classify where we are in our Town in terms of our fiscal strength and our conservative practices?

MR. BALLAS: As I said earlier, it is amazing -- and Rob says unbelievable -- but it is believable because we are doing it.

I'm, actually, proud to be a part of it, but it's all because of the sound management and stewardship that you and this Board have actually guided the Town since you've been here.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: And the outside rating agencies, such as Moody's, that looks carefully over everything we do, what have they said about the financial practices and the position, the financial position of the Town?

MR. BALLAS: They agree.

And when I say they agree, they awarded us upgrades -- I think it's seven up to now -- seven upgrades.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: And it's only the beginning.

MR. BALLAS: Yes. We're shooting for the top.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Thank you for

your assistance, your professionalism, and your stewardship in assisting this Town Board.

We greatly appreciate you and your team.

MR. BALLAS: Proud to be here.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Thank you.

MR. BALLAS: Thank you.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Well, with that, this is the time when we turn the floor over to Town residents that have comments, but I can tell everyone who is watching this online that we're looking at a near empty room, but for the purposes of procedure, I'll ask if anyone would like to comment or ask any questions as it relates to this Town Board Budget Hearing.

(Whereupon, there was no response from the assemblage.)

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Let the record reflect that no one has indicated that they would like to be heard on that.

COUNCILMAN LABRIOLA: Supervisor, in light of the fact that our residents are not present, but they're listening at home, I would just like to make a comment about everything we've heard today, and what we've listened to from our

financial people, and, particularly, for those that may be listening at home, in these times where we open the newspaper and see so many things -- the difficulties that our citizens are facing between their worries about if they can afford food, the price of gasoline, heating, electricity -- everything has gone up. Well, in their budget, that is true.

And it's happened in our budget, too, and what you've heard today, if you were listening earlier, was our Finance Director point out that even in the times of high inflation where our fuel costs are over 45 percent, for instance, and other challenges that we meet because the cost of everything that we do has gone up, and even in spite of that, we have found ways to bring in more revenues without taxing more of our residents, and I think that's quite an accomplishment because the easy thing to do, and a lot of municipalities do it, is to place the burden on to the taxpayers and ask more of them and raise their taxes, and we've chosen not to do that.

We've taken the more difficult task, which is to make our municipality do more with less and to maintain those services that they have

come -- and that they expect, and I think it's a real -- this budget is a testament to that. I think it shows that even in these difficult times that we can manage with the right managers and the right stewardship and the right direction and leadership from yourself and your team.

And I'm proud to be voting in favor of this budget -- as we will eventually next week -- but the hearing really demonstrated that; that in spite of all these challenges that we've managed to make one thing less that our citizens have to worry about. They will not get an increase in taxes in spite of everything else that has increased in their budgets.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Thank you.

With that, I am so proud to be the Town of Oyster Bay's Supervisor and a member of this team. It's an incredible team.

I thank you all.

And with that, may I ask for a motion?

COUNCILWOMAN JOHNSON: Supervisor, I'll make a motion that this hearing be closed and decision be reserved.

COUNCILMAN IMBROTO: And I second that motion.

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: All in favor, enthusiastically, please signify by saying, "Aye."

ALL: "Aye."

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: Those opposed, "Nay."

(Whereupon, there were no "Nay" responses from the Board.)

SUPERVISOR SALADINO: And with this gavel, I close this meeting on an incredible report to the people of this incredible Town.

(TIME NOTED: 7:24 P.M.)

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