

**TOWN OF SOUTH BETHANY
TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET WORKSHOP MINUTES
THURSDAY, MARCH 27, 2025
9:00 a.m.**

Meeting Called to Order

Mayor Dondero called the March 27, 2025, Town Council Budget Workshop to order at 9:02 a.m.

Attendance and Absences

In attendance were Mayor Edie Dondero and Councilmembers Randall Bartholomew, Bob Biciocchi, Chris Keefe, Tim Shaw, Bob Shields (via Zoom), and Cindy Van Horn; and Town Manager Maureen Hartman, Town Finance Director Renee McDorman, Chief Jason Lovins, and Town Clerk Matt Amerling. Public attendees: 3; virtual attendees: 7.

Review, discussion and possible action on FY2026 draft budget

Councilman Randy Bartholomew provided an overview of the FY2026 budget. Councilman Bartholomew stated the biggest change as a result of the last Council meeting was to fund out of the operating budget the items in the asset replacement and maintenance (ARM) fund.

Councilman Bartholomew stated Council is proposing a tax rate reduction in the Town property tax from \$1.30 per \$100 to \$0.051 per \$100; however, even though there is a reduction in the Town tax, due to the increase in County assessments, it still would be an increase in what everybody is paying in property taxes. Councilman Bartholomew stated, of the 1,405 properties in Town limits that get billed, 105 will receive reductions in their billing, 106 will see their bills increase greater than \$500, 333 – 31% of the population – will see their bills increase less than \$100, and 861 – 61% of the population – will see their bills increase between \$100 to \$500. An example of an increase for an average bill last year of \$392, would – under this new budget – be an average of \$601; so that's a \$209 increase. Councilman Bartholomew stated he would like to get a consensus to take this budget and move it forward for the next meeting's approval. After a lengthy discussion, the draft budget will next be reviewed for possible approval at the April 11 Council meeting. Councilman Bartholomew motioned to move the budget forward using the tax rate of \$0.051 per \$100, seconded by Councilwoman Cindy Van Horn. Motion carried 6-1 (with Councilwoman Keefe voting no). Councilman Bartholomew stated incorporated in this budget is the purchase of a police vehicle and he requested Council approve that purchase now so that Chief Lovins can go ahead and order the vehicle. Councilman Bartholomew motioned to add the monies to authorize Chief Lovins to purchase the police vehicle, seconded by Councilman Tim Shaw. Motion carried 7-0.

Public Comment

Nancy Maher, 30 South Anchorage Drive, stated she agrees the Town needs to get the budget balanced, and she can pay it, but there are a number of people that are getting their new tax assessment and – coupled with the possibility of another school tax referendum passing – there are some people here that are literally living on pensions that have not gone up because they're not cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)-related. Ms. Maher suggested Council possibly balance the budget but not raise the taxes this year, which she thinks would make everybody a little bit calmer.

Steve Chantler, 422 Tamarack Drive, stated there are many places in the country where senior citizens can file for some sort of relief if they fall under a certain income, salary base, etc., and suggested if there are people in this community who need that kind of relief because they're on a fixed income, maybe the Town could provide some sort of formula to make an accommodation to them.

Simon Moore, 309 West 6th Street, stated the 5.1 cents does absolutely nothing for our long-term capital needs and is the absolute minimum that balances the budget. The budget includes this year's cash flow, as well as replacing items that have to be replaced on a regular basis. Mr. Moore very strongly suggests to Town Council that anything lower than 5.1 cents is not even supporting

the needs the Town has right now. Mr. Moore would like to see an increase above 5.1 cents to support the long-term capital needs.

John Beauregard, 108 Petheron Drive, stated while it's admirable for people to try to keep taxes at the exact same rate, when you do it for many, many years, it does the Town a disservice, because costs don't stay static. Mr. Beauregard stated a possible COLA-based increase is not a bad idea going forward, because all costs do go up year by year, but he is in favor of at least the five-cent increase.

Schedule of fees – review the application fee for the Planning Commission lot separation/combination, and Road Cut Permit (Bartholomew)

Councilman Shaw motioned to approve the schedule of fees as presented, seconded by Councilman Biciocchi. Motion carried 7-0.

Discussion and possible action to approve an advisory group for community planning (Dondero)

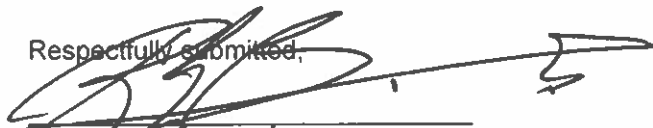
Mayor Dondero stated, at the December 13th Council meeting, Council approved the hiring of the staff from the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) at the University of Delaware to lead a community engagement effort that includes preparation of a community survey and the hosting and leading of several community engagement sessions with our residents, with the idea being to get feedback from residents on various things in preparation for town planning projects. Mayor Dondero stated the Town is at the point where we would like to put together a working group to interface with the consultants in the preparation of these projects, and that the group will have representation from our Town committees.

Councilman Biciocchi motioned to approve an advisory group for community planning, seconded by Councilman Bartholomew. Motion carried 7-0.

Adjournment

Motion by Councilman Shaw, seconded by Councilman Biciocchi to adjourn the March 27, 2025, Town Council Budget Workshop meeting at 10:04 a.m. Motion carried 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,



Council Secretary

Town Clerk

4/11/25

Date of Approval