

Minutes of the Budget Public Hearing of the Board of Ward County Commissioners

October 6, 2022

The Budget Public Hearing of the Ward County Commission was called to order by Chairman Rostad at 7:00 PM with Commissioners, Anderson, Fjeldahl, Pietsch, and Weppler present. Also present were department heads Jason Blowers, Jennifer Wiechmann, Kristin Kowalczyk, Lolly Gorze, Marisa Haman, Noreen Barton, Robert Roed, and Roza Larson.

Moved by Comm. Anderson, seconded by Comm. Weppler to open a public hearing on the 2023 Ward County Budget at 7:01 PM. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Larry Bellew, Minot, appeared and spoke about his 17.8% increase in taxes and home valuation increasing sharply without any warning. Mr. Bellew had questions about what the Soil Conservation District is for and how the \$2.00 per phone line per month regarding the 911 system is spent. Larry Haug, Ward County 911 Coordinator, informed Mr. Bellew that in prior years there were grants that helped with 911 expenses which are no longer available. In regard to the \$2.00 collected, Ward County receives \$1.50 for salaries and the dispatch center with the other 50 cents going towards the SORN radio project and is state implemented.

Mr. Bellew also spoke regarding Prairie Dog money in the amount of 5.5 million is scheduled for Ward County in January or February to be used exclusively for roads and bridges.

A discussion was held on the above.

Tina Chapman of Minot appeared and questioned why 90% of her taxes go to the school as she feels not enough goes to the fire districts and other areas.

Lorine Tallerino of Minot appeared and spoke regarding more consideration for senior citizens with a fixed income on the property tax reduction. It was recommended for her to contact her state legislatures in Bismarck regarding this issue.

Scott Samuelson of Minot appeared to discuss the taxes that are mandated by the state and how this needs to be fixed. His valuation on his home that he has owned for 29 years has gone up 350% over that time. He feels the Commission and the City of Minot needs to talk with the State and fix the rising valuation and taxation issues.

Moved by Comm. Pietsch, seconded by Comm. Fjeldahl to close the public hearing at 7:36 PM. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

A discussion was held on the overall budget. Total budget dollar amount increased \$3,255,706.00 which is 5.95%, the value of the mill increased \$15,409.00 which is 4.52%, overall levy as it sits right now increased 0.46 which is 0.74%, estimated cash on hand has increased \$4,027,064.00 which is 29.27%, cash reserve has increased \$2,933,395.00 which is 44.07% of which most is due to more reserve in the tax revenue bond fund this year over last year which was \$2,846,982.00 over what it was last year. Other income estimated increase of \$844,518.00 which is 3.07% and overall dollars levied is up \$1,172,375.00 which is 5.8%. Average assessed home value has increased \$25,000 over last year. Assessed value of ag land is up \$2.00 over last year.

Discussion on salaries, salary study, and highway fund decrease was held.

Lolly Gorze, Human Resources Director, appeared and stated at a 5% increase, 17 employees are below the step 1 and would need to be bumped up. In looking at a 3.5% increase, there would be more employees needing to be bumped up but unsure of how many until new numbers are run. Ms. Gorze also stated that Ward County salaries need to be adjusted for recruitment of employees since there are some departments that are not getting anyone to apply for open positions.

Moved by Comm. Fjeldahl, seconded by Comm. Pietsch to move the salary increase from 5% down to 3.5%. Roll call; Fjeldahl, Pietsch, and Anderson voted yes; Wepler and Rostad voted no; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Wepler, seconded by Comm. Anderson to adjust the salaries for those employees who are below the minimum as outlined in the salary study. Roll call; Wepler voted yes; Pietsch, Anderson, Fjeldahl, and Rostad voted no; motion failed.

Moved by Comm. Fjeldahl, seconded by Comm. Wepler to reduce the highway fund budget to 7.5 mills which is a reduction of 1.24 mills with a savings of around \$500,000.00. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

Moved by Comm. Pietsch, seconded by Comm. Fjeldahl to reduce the Water Resources levy by 1 mill which would be \$356,140.00 due to their cash on hand of 2.3 million dollars. Roll call; all voted yes; motion carried.

A Special Budget meeting has been scheduled for Monday, October 10, 2022 at 2:30 PM for final budget approval.

Moved by Comm. Pietsch, seconded by Comm. Fjeldahl to reduce the amount requested by the North Dakota State Fair Association from \$400,000.00 to \$350,000.00, which was amended to \$360,000.00 to be the same as last year. Roll call, Comm. Pietsch, Fjeldahl, Wepler, and Anderson voted yes; Comm. Rostad voted no; motion carried.

At 8:23 PM with no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

ACCEPTED AND APPROVED THIS 1ST DAY OF NOVEMBER, 2022

Chairman, Ward County Commission

ATTEST:
