

**Bellaire Village Council**  
**Public Hearing Meeting Minutes**  
**February 15, 2023**

1. **Call to Order:** President Bennett called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM.
2. **Roll Call Attendance:**
  - Present:** President Bennett, Trustees Trish Drollinger, David Ciganick, Pat Boyd, Bryan Hardy & Eldon McPherson.
  - Absent:** Trustee Helen Schuckel.
  - Staff Present:** Cathy Odom, Treasurer, Nicole Essad, Clerk, Brad Keiser, DPW Supervisor & Bill Drollinger, Chief of Police.
  - Also Present:** Ed Neipoth, Steve Elandt, Chris Grnya, Haley Gray, Carl & Christina Regner, Terry McBee & Aaron Kirt.
3. **Conflict of Interest:** Trustee Drollinger noted a conflict with the police department budget.
4. **Public Hearing:** President Bennett stated the purpose of this hearing is to discuss adoption of the FY2023-24 Village budget and the FY2023-24 DDA budget. The property tax millage rate proposed to be levied to support the FY2023-24 Village budget will also be a subject of this hearing.
  - a) **Open Public Hearing:** The public hearing was opened at 6:33 pm.
  - b) **Public Comment Period:**
    - **Chief Drollinger:** Chief Drollinger noted that the Public Safety Committee recommended that we post the millage proposal on the Facebook page and the website and wondered why we had not put it out there yet. It was noted that it was a recommendation to Council, and it had not yet been approved. He stated that it should be released to the public sooner rather than later. Mr. Drollinger held up the budget and asked who understood it. He recommended doing a forensic audit. Ours is not a clear budget. He also suggested removing the zoning. The budgeted amount in zoning would be saved. He explained that a forensic audit would let you know if your finances are in line and if there is anything we should know about. The cost is not cheap for this type of audit.
    - **Mr. Elandt:** asked about cutting the employee pension, which prompted a discussion about the previous meeting where the Council discussed several potential cuts to the budget. It was noted that the Council chose to remove the two vehicles from the budget, eliminate the employee pension and remove the proposed wage increase for this year. Trustee Ciganick noted that Council did leave our health insurance in place. It was also noted that the pension would be discussed again next year. President Bennett reviewed the items that were discussed and noted that there are options that can be discussed.
    - **Bradley Keiser:** Mr. Keiser noted that the budget forecast still shows a deficit in the coming years. His concern is that once removed, the chance that it will be reinstated could become less. Mr. Keiser noted that since motor pool was placed into the general fund, it has become difficult for him to save for any equipment. The motor pool revenue exceeds expenses, but when cuts are made the equipment is what gets removed. This led to a discussion about fund balance. Treasurer Odom explained how the CD's are cash that is moved from one cash account (a checking or savings account) to another cash account (CD). These are balance accounts and are not included in the budget. A budget records revenue and expenses that are expected for a fiscal year only.
    - **Trustee Drollinger:** noted that some of the figures in the retirement line item do not make sense. Treasurer Odom said she can review this. She also noted that nobody comes in to see her about questions or concerns and cannot provide any answers to

them if she doesn't know about them. Trustee Drollinger said she would like to see a Clerk/Treasurer, which leaves one employee in the office, and move zoning to the police department. It was noted that this was addressed at the previous meeting, but Council did not want to cut any staff.

- **Trustee Boyd:** noted that we cannot cut the pension for two employees, so it would be difficult to cut the other employees' pensions. We did remove the vehicles, which will help the budget and give us time to explore options for future budgets. His proposal would be to remove the vehicles, remove the wage increases but put retirement back into the budget. This will give us time to address the police millage and look at other options to address the shortfall in the budget.
- **Trustee Ciganick:** said due to removing the vehicles we could possibly postpone the retirement, but we have to commit and be diligent in figuring out the budget problems for the future.
- **Haley Gray:** asked where the money is going? Trustee Ciganick noted that there is not a clear-cut answer to that question due to the scope of the items in the budget. This includes expenses for parks, streetlights, debt service, etc. It comes down to expenses consistently exceeding revenues.
- **President Bennett:** noted that he would like to consider all ideas and would like to hear from staff. He said we could eliminate the police department and use the County services, but staff are valued, and we don't want to remove any staff.
- **Trustee McPherson:** asked if there were resources available to provide training, which would allow for a better understanding of budgets and accounting. It was noted that there are some recourses available. Some would be at a cost but there are probably some classes or webinars that the council could attend. Our auditors also provide a financial statement to the Village on an annual basis. He asked if we are at a level of confusion that our auditor cannot explain that would require us to pay for a forensic audit. He explained that a forensic audit has a negative connotation to it. Chief Drollinger commented that it is a checks and balance, it is not pointing fingers at anyone. Trustee McPherson said we should educate ourselves first.
- **Ed Niepoth:** noted that a forensic audit cost them between \$3-5,000 dollars. He explained that it is a deep dive into books. They go through the revenues and expenses, and they will provide a report. They will tell you where you are lacking and where you are good.
- **Trustee Hardy:** said he knows how this works; he can read a budget. He would like to see where our funds are, and he would like to see the budget tweaked a little. He said he looked at Central Lakes budget. Treasurer Odom explained that she looked at it also and found that ours had a little more detail. She explained that she is happy to do what it takes to make it easier to understand if we can. She noted that she has told everyone, many times, that if there are problems or concerns to let her know and nobody ever does. She also noted that everyone keeps asking where the money is going. Over the last two or three budgets, expenses have exceeded revenue and that is where the money is going. We are spending more than we are bringing in. Tax revenue has increased, which is noted in the budget, but we are still spending for than we are bringing in. She said she is more than willing to make adjustments so the council understands what they are approving.
- **Carl Regner:** asked if we must wait until November to vote for a millage. It was noted due to deadlines, the next possible election is November. President Bennett stated that adding a police millage, writing grants, looking at health care options can all be looked at to help bring in additional revenue and cut expenses. Chief Drollinger stated that we may want to look at the ready to serve fees for water &

sewer. If they can be reduced, then that would be one way to promote the police millage. Mr. Keiser noted that there are reasons we charge ready to serve fees and it was explained at a public hearing and the office explains it to those that call. Ways to promote the millage were discussed. Some of which include social media and holding and televising public meetings. Developing a flyer that all of us are comfortable handling can be passed along to the community. Going to the DDA meeting, the school board, the Lions Club, the Rotary, festivals, etc. was suggested.

- c) **Closing of Public Comment Period:** The public comment period was closed at 7:37 PM.
- d) **Deliberation:** Council discussed the budget, cuts to the budget, which includes no cost-of-living wage increases and the removal of both vehicles. Also discussed was placing the pension back into the budget. Trustee Ciganick said that we are continuing to spend more than we are bringing in so when we look at the budget next year, we will have to address this again. We need a commitment to make sure we address all these budget issues throughout the year. Mr. Keiser noted that adding extra meetings also adds expense to the general fund. Trustee Ciganick said that we could look at capping those meeting fees. Treasurer Odom said she will need 15-20 minutes to make the changes to the budget and resolutions for approval at the regular meeting.

**5. Closing Member/Public Comment:**

- **Ed Niepoth:** Mr. Niepoth asked if the Village may move forward with the Village to City. Trustee Ciganick noted that he made one phone call, learned a lot and it is probably not something we should pursue. Mr. Niepoth also mentioned that he would like to see better communication between the local units because it helps accomplish many things.

**Adjourn:** Meeting adjourned at 7:51 pm.

Respectfully submitted:  
Cathy Odom, Deputy Clerk

Minutes are subject to approval.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_