

SPECIAL MEETING

HUNTERDON COUNTY BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS

Main Street County Complex, Second Floor

Flemington, New Jersey 08822

March 10, 2008

The Special meeting of the Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders convened at 3:12 p.m. in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act.

PRESENT: MR. PETERSON, MR. MENNEN, MR. MELICK, MR. SWOREN.

ABSENT: MR. HOLT.

Open Public Meetings Act

Director Peterson announced: "This meeting is being held in accordance with the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act. Adequate notice has been given by posting throughout the year a copy of the notice on Bulletin Boards on the First and Second Floor of the Main Street County Complex, Building #1, Flemington, New Jersey, a public place reserved for such announcements. A copy was mailed on or before March 07, 2008, to the Hunterdon County Democrat, Lambertville Beacon, The Express, Courier News, Trenton Times, Hunterdon Review and Star Ledger, newspapers designated to receive such notices and by filing a copy with the Hunterdon County Clerk."

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

EXECUTIVE SESSION REQUESTS

Mr. Melick moved and Mr. Mennen seconded these:

See Page 03/10/08-1A

RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, Executive session to discuss litigation entitled: Sheriff v. Board of Chosen Freeholders.

See Page 03/10/08-1B

RESOLUTION

RESOLVED, Executive session to discuss a complaint concerning certain personnel within the Sheriff's Office.

ROLL CALL: (AYES) MR. MELICK, MR. MENNEN, MR. SWOREN, MR. PETERSON.
(ABSENT) MR. HOLT.

The Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders went into Executive Session at 3:13 p.m. and reconvened in Open Session at 3:41 p.m.

PRESENT: MR. PETERSON, MR. MENNEN, MR. HOLT, MR. MELICK, MR. SWOREN.

FINANCE

Budget Session

PRESENT: Deborah Trout, Sheriff, John Maloney, Undersheriff, George Muller, Confidential Aide, Charles Balogh, County Treasurer, Kim Browne and Ronald Mathews, Director of Grants and Budgets.

Mr. DeSapio stated that he, Mrs. Yard and Cheryl Weider had met with the Sheriff and Undersheriff Maloney last week to discuss some things and a suggestion had come from that meeting that the Sheriff would come to another budget meeting to discuss her budget with the Board of Chosen Freeholders and if they had any questions for her then she could answer them. Also, the Sheriff could make an additional presentation before the Board makes a final discussion on the budget.

Director Peterson asked Sheriff Trout to tell the Board about her budget first and if they have any questions they can ask her.

Mr. Maloney was asked to take the lead. He said there have been some misunderstandings about titles and in the paper it has been reported that George Muller was made an Undersheriff and that Ed Davis has been made a Chief Warrant Officer. Those were just proposals; there has been no change in titles that these people were sworn into on January 1, 2008 and January 02, 2008. If those changes were to occur in the future then Mr. Muller would have to be sworn in as an Undersheriff since the Chief Warrant Officer title is only for a one year position mandated by law. Those things have not happened; they were just proposals to the Board to try to resolve the issues that lie before us. A lot has been discussed about qualifications for each person. The people that the Sheriff has chosen are not novices and they are not people without experience, Michael Russo has 20 years of experience as a law enforcement officer; he was a former Sheriff's Officer in this County and worked in State Human Services Police, Federal Law Enforcement for Policemen of Public Defense, he was a previous Lieutenant in New York City and a liaison officer to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Mr. Russo is a graduate of the Trenton Police Department and has had a United States Security clearance and still possesses his homeland security clearance.

Mr. Maloney stated he has no previous law enforcement experience but he is an attorney. He was a public defender and as such has handled many different types of offenses. He has worked for the courts for case management and was an adjunct professor at the College of New Jersey.

Mr. Maloney advised George Muller has had 18 years on the Freeholder Board and served 7 years as the Sheriff's Department liaison. Mr. Muller has owned his own company, he is a chairman for the Yardville National Bank and in taking on these duties Mr. Muller has gone out of his way to make contacts with the community to assist the Sheriff's Office by bringing some good communication between the Sheriff's Office and other Departments. On his own, Mr. Muller went to Virginia and was trained for Project Lifesaver. He is not only trying to make contacts he has been able to get from private companies to for funds for projects they are trying to get off the ground, so the people in the community will not have to put out money to be covered by these programs. Previously they have provided job specifications for each employee that was hired in the department. He assumes the Board was given a copy of the Budget Proposal and the one they have now is the one that was presented to County Counsel last week. The contention that had been going back and forth was that the proposed budget that it would go over last year's allocation. The Sheriff's Office can provide documentation that they do not need an extra \$38,400; but with slight changes are staying within the requested \$1,609,360. This is being accomplished because an officer on Family Leave had given the department a heads up that she might not be returning to the department and does not wish to return this year due to the health of her child and family; so her position would have to remain open in the future but does not need to be figured into the budget for this year. With that money taken off then the department can get by with less than last year.

Mr. Holt said it appears that the one position seems limited. Mr. Muller said it all depends on how the Board looks at this.

Mr. Holt said there are duties of the Chief Warrant Officer and he was wondering how that would be split up between the office. Mr. Muller stated that the Board felt the title could be used and that the Warrant Officer Position be filed and his title could be used as an Undersheriff. It depends on what the Board would like to have the Sheriff do. Sheriff Trout stated that there had not always been a Chief Warrant Officer in the office. Mr. Maloney stated that the reason for the proposal being made was based on these feelings. They could move Mr. Davis to the Chief Warrant Officer and Mr. Muller could be brought in as an Undersheriff.

Mr. Maloney advised that under former Sheriff Doyle, Undersheriff number one was given \$83,549, Undersheriff number two was given \$78,734, Undersheriff number three was given \$72,902 and the Chief Warrant Officer was given \$67,502. That total is \$302,683. Nothing had changed if Sheriff Doyle had run again and kept his same team together. As the former Sheriff had done, in previous years he had given salary increases and that would have been \$86,000, \$81,000, \$76,000 and \$70,000. In the proposal that Sheriff Trout has put together, the four salaries came together as \$300,070, which is less than what former Sheriff Doyle would have been putting forth.

Also some questions have risen about the other counties and what do they pay. Mr. Maloney received information on surrounding counties and similar counties. Mercer County's Undersheriff's in 2007 were paid \$108,306, Morris County \$101,000, Sussex County \$98,000, Somerset County \$88,000, Middlesex County \$85,000 and Warren County \$76,560.

Also, the question that has risen is bringing in someone that is new to the position but has experience and this Board signed a contract with the Sheriff's Officers in 2006 and in that contract it states that the Sheriff may hire a trained officer.

Mr. Muller stated that Sheriff Doyle had submitted to the Board his increase in salaries in 2007 and the Board at that time had passed it. It shows that the Board made their decision but could have objected on salaries made by the Sheriff.

Mr. Maloney said that the sense of the Board last year was that as long as Sheriff Doyle had stayed within the amount of the budget, then the Board could not object to the salaries. Judge Cuccioni told the Counsel that as long as the Sheriff stayed in the budget of last year then the Sheriff could set the salaries for her personnel this year.

Mr. Sworen stated that they spoke about an employee leaving and they may or may not have a document that that person is or is not coming back, but the Board believes that there is no binding at this time that that person can come back tomorrow and as the County, they are legally required to have that employee come back at their currently salary. That money is not in the figures to be removed, that money needs to stay in the budget incase that person decides to come back.

Mr. Maloney said when they had the transition meeting with Undersheriff Wilson, in his time he had been in the office but their numbers showed that in the ten years they had gone through 80 some officers, so the idea is if Ms. Saharic wants to change her mind.

Mr. Sworen said that is true but his concern is that the Board has a responsibility to still have the salary for this employee if they decide to come back to their title. They can not live by the rule of a possibility they need to keep these things in mind because it is their responsibility and that is his concern that the employee may want to come back.

Mr. Maloney said that if that arose, the Sheriff would lay off an investigator to give that officer their salary back.

Mr. Sworen stated that he is unsure if that is legal or not.

Mr. Maloney stated that they can be let go at any time by the Sheriff. If they want to let somebody go then it states in the legislature that they are appointees and they can be let go at anytime. The other issue is that if the Board goes back to the original amount that was requested, there is a 2.5% increase of last year and is contractual increases for the officers and clerical staff.

One thing is that people do not get the higher salaries as those who leave the office. He had a certification that he had done previous to the last court appearance and was presented to County Counsel and was too late for the last hearing. Mr. Lember was the first assistant Prosecutor and a long time employee of the County and he was the first Assistant then acting Prosecutor and when he left he was making \$130,000, and the County brought in Charles Ouslander as an Assistant and then he jumped to First Assistant. He was making more. He had never been a first assistant anywhere else and he had a lot less experience than Mr. Lember and he was given the same salary as the person he was replacing. However, in the office of the Sheriff an Undersheriff was brought in and was making only \$2,000 less than that of Harcar. And when Mr. Bunting came in he got a \$6,000 raise.

The idea that it has never been done before is not true because it has been done in the past. He did not want to start off his presentation with that information but wanted to start by bringing their qualifications that they bring to the table as staff in this department. Either way whether the Board would accept the previous budget or the amount now or what Judge Cuccioni stated.

Mr. Mennen asked who was in charge, what name position was charged with the Community Outreach. Sheriff Trout stated that the Undersheriff dealt with that position. Mr. Harcar more specifically was in charge of that area. Part of the Project Lifesaver was taken over by the Chief Warrant Officer. Undersheriff Wilson had done the child ID's and Senior Id's at that point.

Mr. Mennen said that public relations component was handled by one of the undersheriffs to the best of their knowledge.

Mr. Holt asked the question that relates to a number of officers, there were more officers in 2007. There were 19 filled at one point. Ms. Wieder stated that she would have to go back and look to see exactly how many officers they had. Sheriff Trout stated that the resolution in 2007 was for 18 officers and budgeted for one additional. Mr. DeSapio stated that there was a resolution attached that was adopted that set salaries because the salaries were done late and he is unsure if that is the resolution that she is referring to.

Mr. Holt said he is not going to look at a piece of paper, he wants to know how many bodies there were in the Sheriff Department. Mr. Muller stated that there were three Sheriff's Officers that just came out of the academy and were not on the payroll. Mr. Holt stated that there are three more officers somewhere and he wants to know where they are coming into effect.

Mr. Maloney said just looking at resolutions and the names that are on there, one jumped to him there was Sarharic and Salhanick and one left the department to work at another Police Department. There are other names on the resolution that are not employees currently in the office.

Mr. Holt asked if the Security Guards are the same number as there were last year. There are 12 on there now. Mr. Holt confirmed these are the guards that will be on the resolution.

Sheriff Trout stated that theoretically the Security Guards are part time and hourly that even if they had 100 security guards, it still by the number of hours and they could have a lot more of them but still doing the same amount of hours and it would not make any difference. Some of them work part time because they are retired police officers. Others work 20 hours a week and they break it up as they want to work.

Mr. Melick said a year ago there were officers that left and they loosened up and there are going to be a problem filling these spots and no one has left recently. It was never the Board intention to have this many Sheriff's Officers. Therefore, we end up with more people than we need. Generally speaking he is aware of what Warren County tax payers are paying and his goal for the tax payers of Hunterdon County not for Warren County. He wants to do what is good for the tax payers of this County. Their budget is more than ours and their population is about the same and he might want to say that the Freeholder Board here and he is one that is very concerned as to where we are going tax wise in this economy and for the first time they are coming up on negative value from last year. He stated that the present budget across the Board is going to reflect their feelings on lowering the taxes and there is no department that is not immune from trimming. They are setting new goals for the departments and they are being made by how the economy is and how what the Governor is talking about and Hunterdon County is not immune to it. If we can save a buck somewhere to help the process than that is what is going to take place.

Sheriff Trout stated there were two officers who left towards the end of the year and rather than being replaced their positions were considered vacant and that is why they are at the numbers they are at now. Those employees have not been replaced and their salaries have been taken out of the budget. Which is why they are at the total of 17 that they are at right now. And once again in the comparison to Warren County, Warren County does a lot less than Hunterdon County does.

Director Peterson stated Sheriff Doyle often did things that the Board did not agree with and to use that as justification to the Board to do certain things is not a justification. Some of those things did not make the Board and Mr. Muller was present for those things when he sat on the Board.

Director Peterson asked about Court Security and what other things their office will undertake. Sheriff Trout stated that the department does prisoner transportation from the jail to other facilities, from other facilities to the court, juveniles from other facilities coming to our court.

Director Peterson asked if that is something that Sheriff Doyle did as well. Sheriff Trout stated that it is mandated by law that the Sheriff does these duties.

Director Peterson said that he wanted to clarify that since the Sheriff had stated that Warren County Sheriff does not do those transportations and that is put on the Corrections Officers. Sheriff Trout stated that they do the transports and security in the courthouse.

Director Peterson noted that Sheriff Trout is making a reference that Warren County is violating the mandate and there may not be a statute for the office on this duty.

Mr. Maloney stated it is his understanding that it is dictated by the Attorney General as to what the guidelines are for the statute as to what the duties are.

Director Peterson asked if Warren County has someone sitting in the courtrooms for security. Mr. Maloney said when you transport prisoners you always have an officer present in the courtroom to supply security. If there is no prisoner being brought over then there are one or two officers in the courtroom for security purposes. In Morris County there were one or two officers in there at all times and an additional one on hand if need be. There are two officers to every three inmates that are brought over. In Warren they still have Sheriff's Officers in the courtrooms because they are mandated to have the security but for the transport of prisoners into the courtroom that is done by the Corrections Officers. Either way there needs to be someone to transport the prisoners, so you are either going to be paying Sheriff's Officers to do this or Corrections Officers. His understanding is that Sheriff's Officers are paid less so it would make more sense to have the Sheriff's Offices handle this duty. They transport from all over the State and from out of the State to the Courthouse. This is one of the duties of the Sheriff's Office as well as serving warrants and serving the violators or probation.

Mr. Muller said that the Sheriff has also reached out to municipal departments in the area to see if the departments would be sending officers or if they needed the Sheriff's Officers to transport prisoners. This is also a help to the municipalities.

Mr. Maloney said if someone is picked up on a warrant wherever it is in the State, the Sheriff's Office is required to go pick up those people.

Mr. Peterson asked what else other than those duties are going to be done by the department. Is there anything else that the office plans on doing for the 2008-2009 year.

Sheriff Trout stated they have the child ID programs, the senior ID programs, project lifesaver.

Mr. Muller stated that he is certified now to train employees for the project lifesaver and he can do that in house instead of having an outside instructor come in. They are going to also work out with ESC and see if they can work out programs there with the juveniles. They want to introduce a Star Cadet Program to get these individuals involved within the community and familiarizing them with this department and Public Safety. He took his own time and went to VA and saw the program and how it was run. He has met with people at Senior Services to develop programs there as well. When they have functions the Sheriff's Office will be there as well to help with their programs. They also have developed a good relationship with the law enforcement program and have worked with Polytech as well to develop their relationship with them. This has not existed before and they are trying to make a better relationship with other departments in the County to help move these programs forward. The public will benefit from it and the public will have a better security provided to them.

Mr. Maloney stated that in the future, they have already gone to the Essex County Police Academy and there is a program for Sheriff's Deputies and this is a program for people who volunteer and they pay their own way to go through the Police Academy. The Sheriff's Office would like to put this forth as well as a proposal at no cost to the County. It would be similar to the volunteer Fire Departments in the County. In Essex County they have 85 Sheriff's Deputies and they go through a full Sheriff's Academy for six and a half months and are fully trained as a police officer and they pay their own way to go through this, so there is no cost to the County. Obviously people who go through the academy sometimes end up finding a job in a police department and leaving the position they are holding so what they are going to do is require the volunteer to stay with them for a year and they have to volunteer 20 hours a month minimum. Obviously again there is no cost and the idea behind this was for the municipalities that do not have police coverage. Especially now with reading the papers, it shows that Lambertville is going to down size their department and some departments have the State Police come through on a part time basis. They could also be there for Emergency Services, or if there is a parade or a fair then there are additional people who are there to help. Then this would cut out on the amount of over time people are taking. They have done a lot of research with the Essex County and their program and like he said earlier they have 85 volunteers and some of those volunteers have been there for over ten years now. This is something they were looking at and if the Board put through a proposal then this would not go into effect until 2009. But since Mr. Peterson asked what were

some other things the department was looking into, he wanted to share this with the Board at this time. He thought this would help a lot of people out in the County.

Mr. Mennen asked these volunteers would be doing traffic stops, would the Sheriff's Office supply the firearms for these individuals.

Mr. Peterson asked if they would be carrying their own firearms, since they were going to be doing traffic stops.

Mr. Maloney stated that they would have to have their own private firearms and they would be fully qualified to carry the firearms and they would be trained as a law enforcement officer.

Mr. Muller wanted to reinstate that these programs would be of no cost to the County tax payers. He has spoken to Juvenile Justice Programs and he can apply for a grant for the program so it will not cost the County anything. He has been able to receive money from other organizations to help get project lifesaver up and running. He will also be collecting cell phones which they can turn in for money which will help to pay for the costs of the bracelets.

Mr. Maloney stated that Essex is not the only County that has begun this program, that Passaic County has run this program as well. Essex began theirs in 1993.

Sheriff Trout stated that the volunteers pay their own way and they pay for their own uniforms, so the County would not be putting out any money for this program.

Mr. Peterson asked to do these programs, how many people does the department need to run all of these programs.

Sheriff Trout stated that it depends on the situation. She said it can not be answered that simply because if you have a program that only has 20 people attending you only need 2 or 3 officers but if you have a program that will have 300-400 people attending then you would need 4-5 officers to cover.

Mr. Peterson is curious with these other programs the Sheriff wants to create how many people will you need to run them that are not mandated for their other duties. He also stated if they do not have an exact answer to that question right now that is ok and they can just say that. He wants to know how many people in the department have they allocated for these new programs.

Mr. Maloney stated that that has not been that far thought out yet. He could have an answer in three months.

Mr. Muller asked for guidance from the Board, does the Board wish to make any comment on the structure that the Sheriff has addressed either way to having a Confidential Aid and the Undersheriff's.

Mr. Peterson stated that the structure of the Sheriff's Office is the Sheriff's responsibility not the Boards and they do not have any more questions and thanked them for coming to the meeting.

Sheriff Trout left the meeting at 4:50pm.

Mrs. Yard brought up the last time they were together the Board had given a charge to herself, Cheryl Weider, Charles Balogh, Ron Mathews and Kim Browne to see where they were at with the budget and there are things they feel they can do now in the 2008 budget and things that they feel they should make decisions about for next years budget. However, they are not going to talk about that today. The sheet that was handed out was done between herself, Ms. Weider, Mr. Balogh, Mr. Mathews, and Ms. Browne.

Mr. Balogh came before the Board of Chosen Freeholders and stated when they previously met they proposed the \$1 million in savings and they were told to go back and look at it some more because the Board did not want to take another \$1 million out of surplus, so they went back and did some more reductions and those are the items in red on the big sheet to get to the amount. In addition they took \$15,000 and reduced the allocation of Soil Conservation, reduced the seasonal workers and went back and looked at department operating budgets and were able to reduce those amounts as well. In addition they got a revised figure on the retables. On the short sheet they need to take an additional \$275,000 from surplus. This will not be the final number they get.

Mr. Mathews said the final will be the abstract that comes out after August.

Mr. Balogh stated that based on the numbers they have it is maintaining the tax rate at last years rate. However, he would like to point out to the Board that they have put in for the Sheriff's salaries and wages the figure that was provided to them earlier.

Mr. Sworen stated that he would like to have a conversation with County Counsel on the Sheriff's budget issue when he returns to the meeting.

Mr. Peterson stated that he believes from what County Counsel has told them today that they are not going to create new programs.

Mr. Holt said as we move forward in 2008 we will have a Solid Waste Plan coming forward and they will be dealing with components later with that department.

Mr. Balogh said they did not have to use all of the allocated funds last year for Solid Waste so they reduced the amount for this year.

Mr. Sworen brought up the \$130,000 in the budget.

Mr. Peterson stated that the time to look at the senior positions is not now, it is later.

Mr. Sworen stated that the time to look at these figures is now since they are working on the budget and are ripping at departments they should just do it all now instead of pushing it off as it has been being done for the last three years and this is what we are working on right now and leaving certain things in then we are not reducing the budget as we need to be.

Mr. Peterson asked where Mr. Sworen would like to draw the line and to look at the numbers and let him know.

Mr. Sworen said he is not sure what the bottom line number should be and Mr. Peterson said since he is making a proposal he wants to hear it. Mr. Sworen said we should start at \$75,000 and that is where we should hold the line.

Mrs. Yard stated that there are contractual employees that make \$90,000 a year and they're master leveled and they have been here for many numbers of years. Mr. DeSapio and Mrs. Yard have discussed this before and they had been before the Board on March 31st and were there for many hours trying to figure this out. She stated that once we go through a rotation of the new contract it takes three years to get through a full rotation and you can not stop one group and not the other so it must be an unclassified and non-contractual. And the second part of the presentation is decisions they need to make now for next year.

Mr. Mennen said if the Board goes through and slices pieces from each department is that what Mr. Sworen is thinking about doing.

Mr. Sworen stated that that is close to what he is thinking. He feels that the Board needs to have a couple more discussions on that issue.

Mr. Balogh thinks that rather than reducing the budget the amount of surplus they would have to use in additional favor. In the total budget we are where we want to be with the rate staying the same. So with the example of \$75,000 we would use \$2,000 to offset the expenses that way.

Mr. Holt said it is important to have a Board consensus at this point that the budget is where it needs to be at a dollar amount. He has a great concern with a budget that increases or decreases in any given direction and he is concerned if the budget decreases too much. He feels that this moment it is a spending issue and with the budget with dollars and tax rate it has been brought to a level that the Board has asked for and the question comes down to how they are going to spend it. He cautions between the difference of cutting the budget and reducing the spending somewhere.

Mr. Melick said along with what Mr. Holt is saying he would like to achieve and have this figured into the budget and we have to have a goal to achieve it but it is questionable whether or not the Board will be able to achieve it. So what bothers him is if we are taking out of the surplus or having a lot less for next year. The surplus is an arbitrary thing and he would like to protect the surplus because he thinks that next year may be more of a problem and it does not come easy and we are reading about credit ratings and whatnot and we have funding that saves us money in the end so why play around with it. He would like to take \$13,275,000 out of the surplus because next year it is going to be a bigger problem and secondly some of the figures are going to be hard to achieve. We need a goal and here it is to knock this stuff out. The minute we adopt the budget it is going to be an on going thing and a way to save money throughout the year.

Mr. Balogh said to accomplish that you would need to increase between 1 and 2/10's of one cent.

Mr. Melick said that is the sign of the times but that may not be the worst thing because next year he does not see things that are going to take a whole lot of construction out there. He is looking ahead a year and looking ahead two years.

Mr. Balogh said the last time there was a decrease in the funds was in 1992 and it was a two cent decrease.

Mr. Melick said we have gone through some ups and downs before so once extreme starts you look at the cycle and he would like only take \$13,000,000 and he thinks it is achievable if they work with the department heads to do so.

Mr. Peterson said we could even scale down our non competitives and that would help cut down on the money.

Mr. Melick said it is a 50-50 chance if we are going to reach those goals.

Mr. Sworen wants to do it the right way and not have a fantastic budget this year and then in two years from now have another situation.

Mr. Melick said as long as we realize what the projector is then we can address the problems.

Mr. Balogh said the total tax levy would still be less than last year.

Mr. Peterson said the only problem with the thing that Mr. Melick is proposing is that it is giving the opportunity to take the people at a higher rate when there is a recovery. He would like to leave it at where it is now and set the standard. We have two choices, we can either cut the \$275,000 or take it out of the surplus and then working it back in.

Mr. Sworen said there was a change in the surplus a number of years ago. He said the tax rate is where it is \$275,000 and that is where it should be.

Mr. Peterson feels the surplus should be used for times like this so we do not whack the tax payers. There are already markets blacked out now and the houses on the starting off level are starting to sell and he has already done more sales now then he had in the beginning of the year. The market is going through its correction and what we are dealing with is the lag of things. In 1990 there was a worse correction then they have now and by 1991 you saw part of it and by 1992 you saw the end of it and in 1993 it all came up. The second quarter of last year is when it started. It takes a year to go through its cycle and then a lag is where we come in. Every economists that has talked about this said that in some time of the second quarter in 2008 the market was going to start coming back up. What we are going to see is that after next year we will not see much of a reduction after that and the surplus should be used to level out the problems. So instead of spending that money we should have been putting more of it away and we should be putting it away so we have it for the two year cycles that are reciprocal.

Mr. Sworen asked what the recommended percentage for surplus.

Mr. Balogh stated that there is none that he can find published but his rule of thumb is 25% of the update. So we will be at 25% and will be right about where we should be. It is 25% of your budget remaining as your surplus.

Mr. Melick would like to be on the conservative side of this so we can look at next year.

Mr. Peterson said it is a lot harder to do when you want to give back two cents on the tax rate.

Mr. Mathews said that it worked out well last year and the Board had no problem with that.

Mr. Peterson said that we still took \$104,000,000 more last year than we needed to take. We see these jumps and he thinks that we need to look at the rate of which the budget has grown over time because it is a little disturbing. Even though we cut the rate we still used more money.

Mr. Mathews said that this year the contractual obligations or 5-6%.

Mr. Sworen said this year if we do not have surplus for next year.

Mr. Mathews said there is always something new coming out but what we are doing is lowing that base so whatever it is when it comes down the road to it. This way you know your hands are not tied.

Mr. Sworen said that you can not just do a one year budget.

Mr. Peterson said there have been complaints about cutting the jobs and if we have to then we will cut more jobs so we can get to the number that we actually need and in his opinion we have more people than we actually need right now. At some point in time when he can go by and see people hanging out and not doing work then you can cut down. Why would we do what anyone else would do.

Mr. Melick said that we need to smarten up.

Mr. Sworen said the budget will go up next year on the percentages of pay and it will continue to go up each year.

Mrs. Yard stated that we lose 70 a year out of the 600 employees. That is the turn over.

Mr. Sworen said the bottom line is that you are looking at 30 people a year and we are not going to cut 30 people a year.

Mr. Peterson said that we could cut 15 this year and 15 this year. He doesn't understand why we can't do this because it needs to be done. He says he can do and he will do and he is all for it.

Mr. Mathews said that what you are going to save is the Senior Clerk Typist and Receptionist in those offices because you are pumping down people. He said this can't happen in 2008.

Mr. Peterson said we can start now and then worry about next year.

Mr. Mathews said he has already made some cuts that he doesn't see to be visible but he is willing to go along with it because it is the Boards budget. We will do whatever you want to do.

Mr. Melick said it is not achievable.

Mr. Peterson said we have to come at this and figure out how to make tough decisions but at this time you can't go back to the tax payer.

Mr. Holt asked what the focus is because he has lost track as to what the dialog is about.

Mr. Peterson stated that Mr. Melick is worried about next year and Mr. Sworen is worried about this year. They would rather raise the rate than cut further into the surplus.

Mr. Mennen said he thinks we should do everything the same and keep the rate the same. He said he started it and he doesn't think we should come off of this and he thinks we should do everything that we can and he thinks that we can do it. Taking money from people to begin with is still taking and we should do everything that we can to avoid this.

Mr. Sworen does not disagree with Mr. Mennen at all but he feels that the tax rate should remain flat this year. And if we want to make additional spending reductions not budget reductions but spending reductions then we can look at the tax rate and see what it would be raised in revenue. He is concerned as we move forward that if we remove too much we are just going to cause more of a problem.

Mr. Peterson said that we could blame it on the state now because they are using the County as a bargaining chip in these situations. And we are going to come back after the budget to talk about these other cuts and other issues once the budget is completed.

Mr. Balogh asked if we have a consensus. There are three that agree with the figures.

Mr. DeSapio said for conventionalizing if she keeps her present staffing and then saying you are going to eliminate two sheriff's officers. If it is the case that her office sticks out like a sore thumb then it will come to an argument. You are going to have to explain how you came up with these figures and if the judge is going to agree with it or not. One is a reduction in salaries because the Board expects her to hire people at a lower salary than those leaving. She cut out money with the security guards so you have to say it is nice that she did that but it was in the budget for last year. The one thing we have not talked about was last years budget had another 30,000-40,000.

The public hearing for the consideration of adoption of the County Budget for Hunterdon will take place on Monday, April 07, 2008 at 7:00 p.m.

The Hunterdon County Board of Chosen Freeholders recessed at 6:00 p.m. and reconvened in Executive Session at 6:08 p.m.

There being no further business to come before the Board, Director Peterson adjourned the meeting at 7:03 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Denise B. Doolan
Clerk of the Board