



County of Lackawanna

Lackawanna County
Government Center
123 Wyoming Ave
Scranton, Pennsylvania
18503

Meeting Minutes

Board of Commissioners

Wednesday, November 6, 2024

10:00 AM

Commissioners' Conference Room

Call to Order

Present 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

Reading and Approval of Minutes

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this be Dispense with the Reading and Approve as Prepared. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

Opportunity for the Public to Address the Board (Agenda Items Only)

Tom Coyne, Scranton: Last session I brought in a imaginary check that was written for \$15 million and ripped it up to show the incredible savings of ripping up a non spent allocation of funds but in that meeting was brought it to attention from one of the attendees here that I needed to take a look at the Home Rule Charter. Looking at the Lackawanna County Home Rule Charter Section 1.1.10 3, it clearly says that this body does not have the authority to raise taxes above 5%. The Home Rule Charter as I quote, upon imposition of such a tax, any millage increase which exceeds 5% of the preceding year's rate of millage shall be effective only if approved by a referendum of the qualified electors of the county. Looking at that and reading it, that tells me that you have an option of choosing 5% as your maximum or if you decide to go 33% at that point, according to your Home Rule Charter which you swore an oath to uphold and defend, you have 5%. If you go to 33%, it immediately stops dead until the next election cycle where it has to go before a referendum. It's time to sit down make some hard decisions. Look at the ARPA funding. I know there was an argument between 17 million 11.3 million and 8 million, but I think at this point you're stuck with having to take some of it back out and use it for your loss prevention to give yourself time to work towards a solution on this for another year because legally you don't have the authority to put through a 33% tax increase. you're not above the governing body of the city of the county and as a matter of fact the governing of the body of the county specifically limits to you in your powers on what you're what you're allowed to do this is the latest Charter that's out on the County website so it's not an Old Charter pull it up yourself and validate it you're bound by the law.

Solicitor Don Frederickson: Commissioners, that's completely inaccurate. Back in 2006 the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania, in the case of Moskowitz versus Cordaro and Lackawanna County struck down that particular provision of the Home Rule Charter. At that time, Commissioners Cordaro and them did impose a 35% tax increase. It went up to the Commonwealth Court on a review and the court said that this particular provision violates the Home Rule Charter

Act and therefore it's inapplicable so it was stricken down by the court.

Tom Coyne: Why that's not reflected in the current Home Rule Charter that is on the website?

Solicitor Don Frederickson: It's case law.

Joan Hodowanitz, Scranton: I know you have the first reading of the proposed budget on today's agenda so I need to address Commissioner Chermak's counterproposal. He presented it on October 29th but nobody in the audience, especially us taxpayers, had the opportunity to ask any questions and he wasn't present at the meeting on October 30th when you had your public session in this room so I would ask Commissioner Chermak to explain to the taxpayers two issues that I'm sure they would like answers to. The first one is your proposal eliminating nine part-time and 38 full-time positions in the Office of Youth and Family Services. Everybody remembers the staffing crisis in that department that led to the loss of its license, so the question many of us have is how can HR recruit for positions in that department if you eliminate all these positions? If I were a candidate looking for a job with the county, I would hesitate to apply under those circumstances. The second issue is you propose restoring a 2.5% cost of living adjustment for nonunion employees and according to your own figures that equates to \$421,000 but you need to keep in mind, once you impose it in 2025, it continues forever on except that it compounds every year so that in future years, it can grow. If they get a 2.5% cost of living adjustment in 2026, 27, 28, that grows to \$453,500 so you need to explain your rationale on that. The larger overhanging question, the elephant in the room is how do we bring in additional revenue to pay for personnel cost increases. Take a look at the police union collective bargaining agreement between 2012 and 2027. They get a 3% pay raise every year over 16-year period that compound pounds into a 59.3% salary increase. You need a counterbalancing increase in revenues to be paying that kind of thing and that's only one union. My own feeling is in future contract negotiations whoever represents the county is going to have to be a lot more demanding of the unions because you're not in a position yet to have revenue coming in where you can be that generous. 3% a year doesn't sound like much until you compound it year after year after year so Commissioner Chermak, if you would answer those questions because this is our first opportunity to hear from you.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: The approach that we took on our proposals for the budget was basically starting from scratch and we took the approach of a zero based budget. When I said, all right well look at there's some remaining funded but unfilled positions that have been there for a long time, we're going to start from scratch here. We're going to take them all out now. As far as OYFS goes, we have firms in here that are supplying people. We have consultants and you know things like of that nature so right now that is functioning and it's functioning as well as it can be at this point, but the other part of what I'm trying to say is with a zero based budget, when we put this whole proposal together it's these are these are thoughts and ideas that my very highly qualified team suggested, so my answer to that is when a department looks at some of my proposals, they would say to me, we can't eliminate this or we can't eliminate that, so my answer is we'll justify it and if you justify that mine is wrong and we'll look at it. Now if there's positions that need to be added back in, we'll add them back in but on the other hand I want to know where we can save in a different section of your department so it's a give and take thing. My proposals are proposals that don't necessarily have to be etched in stone but it starts the conversation. I am trying to protect the taxpayers. It's their money. As far as the cost of living goes, first of all, our employees here do a great job. They work hard. In the real world, in the business world, they're

extremely underpaid. I know we combat that a little bit with a very good health care plan, which that helps a lot of people that want to come here and work but as far as taking away the 2.5% increase and talks about increasing contributions and payments to their health care and then on top of that, we're going to implement a 33% tax increase. I mean that's pretty harsh on an individual. Now our union people are all getting their increases because it's in their contract so to me, when I look at the people that are not in the union, I say it's extremely unfair to those folks. They're the ones here doing the hard work so once we come up with a plan and if we're taking some things away and it starts with the unions and when it goes across the board and when everybody is on the same playing field then we'll talk about not giving increases but just to take it easily off of the people that have no contracts or no union to support them is, to me, is totally unfair. They rely on this and again they're not certainly not overpaid by any stretch of the imagination so in fairness to everyone here that works for the county, once we have a system in place where everyone gets doesn't get something or does get something, it should be across the board so that was my reasoning for that. My proposal wasn't all cuts. We also added back in the overtime for the sheriff's department. The sheriff's department does a tremendous amount of extra things for us. We have buildings. We have magistrates. They have to be there. They have to transport juveniles to different states and it takes a lot. Even last night with election night, we have a bunch of the sheriffs here and they're on overtime but they're working to make sure everything goes smoothly and there's no issues so we added that back in because in my opinion and over the past however many other years, the sheriff uses that so to me to take it out, doesn't make sense because we're going to have to pay it somehow at the end of the year. Griffin Pond animal shelter every year, we give those people \$200,000 a year to assist with operating their facility which I'm sure is a drop in the bucket but people have to understand when a police officer or if there's an issue with an animal in Lackawanna County, that's typically where it goes and there are people that take care of it so I thought to defund that would be devastating so we added that back in. I think the decisions that we made and the proposals that we made were were a great start to try not to initiate a 33% increase and it brought a lot of conversation and I think it's a great starting point. My wife works at Keystone College. They were on the brink of shutting the doors. The investor came in and the first thing they did was gut that place. They got rid of people. They got rid of programs and they started from scratch. That wasn't an easy thing to do but they're on the right track. Hopefully that college will survive. That's just the basic approach that I've taken to this and again it starts the conversation. We need to start somewhere and we need to protect the taxpayers hard earned tax dollars.

Bob Bolus, Scranton: As far as Griffin Pond goes, taking the money from the shelter as far as I'm concerned as criminal. I've been donating fresh pet dog food to them for the last four or five years and as we speak today I have a vehicle in route from fresh pet in Bethlehem, PA to Griffin Pond with donated fresh pet dog food that keeps them going and to take any money from them go up there and see what these people do with the animals, it's criminal. Number two, as far as I'm concerned sitting here looking at ordinance 240265 should be tabled. You have a lot of problems in here. You're cutting the sheriff's department yet you'll give the District Attorney's Office all kind of money for the most incompetent district attorney we've ever had. He has refused to prosecute black and white crimes by the Throop Police Department because of his personal vengeance against me. You cannot be giving money away to a prosecutor that has selective enforcement in his program. He's supposed to be

the district attorney for all the people and this is the guy who wants to become a judge. You're throwing money all over. I brought up about the University of Scranton and their violation of the rule of God. You have not addressed it. You turned around, gave the hospital tax exempt status. Look at the money their CEO gets yet you took our money from it and you want to raise the taxes. You can't give our farm away just because it's political around here and we've had enough of that. Don't listen to your so-called consultants because they're damn clueless because the real world speaks for itself and you haven't addressed any of the issues I just brought up and they're only a tip of the iceberg. I'm an alumni of Penn State and they need help they're the educators of the future, not just kiss butt to the University of Scranton and these hospitals that are taking our money. You got to take the hardcore effect and treat it as a business. Get rid of your consultants who are just here for a paycheck and are lost in the real world. Kids can't even write their name anymore and you guys are allowing that to go on. You got to change the structure of this county and you got to change the structure of your thinking. It's not about you people or your political allies. It's about the people right here, the taxpayers, the senior citizens. They can't even afford to put gas in their car today or pay the taxes. You got many areas in this county that you could cut and you're not even looking at it, you're just adding and adding and adding.

Tara Mondak: Good morning, Commissioners. My name is Tara Mondak. I'm the associate director of client relations with Penn State Extension here in Lackawanna County and I'm joined by my colleagues Jennifer Mercero, our newly hired client relationship manager, and David Mezersmith, the business operations manager. We're here today to request your reconsideration of the proposed budget for Penn State Extension and Lackawanna County's budget. For over 110 years, Penn State Extension Lackawanna County has been a cornerstone of our community, providing invaluable resources and support to our agricultural producers, families, and businesses. Extensions programs, resources, and technical expertise in agriculture, youth development, community health, have not only enhanced our local community and economy but they've also improved the quality of life for countless residents and we partner with many of the organizations to strengthen communities all around Lackawanna County. Today I'm joined by agricultural producers, volunteers and supporters of Penn State Extension who can attest to the profound impact of extension's work. We also have letters of support that are part of the budget packets I've included and shared with each of you. From helping farmers adopt sustainable practices, growing their businesses, partnering with community organizations in the Valley Community Library, city of Scranton, to promote sustainability environmental health and engaging community, empowering our youth through 4 programs and the like, delivering critical educational programs in our schools that no longer happen in our schools, and with community partners through community based programs like Master Gardeners and our Master Watershed Stewards. We're enabling communities to battle food insecurity and food safety with our food families and communities program resources that are right here in Lackawanna County just down the road. Those benefits of extension are far-reaching and essential. We've worked to align the strategic priorities of the county particularly in supporting those farms, the family-owned farms here, and producers who are generating goods equivalent to \$16.2 million and continuing to find ways to serve 216,000 residents right here in Lackawanna County. The people here with us today are prepared to share their experiences with extension and how we've impacted our community here. Reducing the funding for extension would jeopardize those critical services, weaken our progress that we've made, so we urge you

to continue investing in extension, ensuring that our community remains strong, resilient, and prosperous I want to thank you for your time. I know this is a very difficult decision you're having to make given the situation the county is in and so we want to remain a vital resource for you and a true partner going forward so thank you for your consideration.

Dan Naylor, Benton Township: I'd like to speak concerning the Cooperative Extension Program. I think each of us would say that at an early age there was different either organizations or programs that had a tremendous impact on your life whether it was Boy Scouts or whether it was football or anything of that nature. To me I'd have to point to the 4H program. At a very young age I remember going to the barn in the middle of the night to see my first calf born know and that calf was named Joby and I raised that calf. It was through the 4H program that taught me different ways of handling that and showmanship of that calf. Later on, in 4H one of the programs that I went to was the legislative breakfast in Harrisburg and I had the opportunity to sit with at that time Senator Bob Mellow, was his first term and representative Joe Wargo and John Vipond and knowing Joe Wargo for a number of years his family was friends of ours. He said, what do you want to do in your life and I said well someday I might have the opportunity, I'd like to run for office. Bob Mellow said, oh that's a dirty business but if that's a passion of yours it's only as dirty as you'll ever make it. I have pursued that and it had a tremendous impact on my life but then I watched as my kids had the opportunity to be in the 4H programs. I can remember my daughter Mandy coming home with her first skirt, hem was a little bit off but she had that opportunity and it was because of the 4H program. Later on as I took over our dairy farm there was many times where I turned to the extension agents and had the opportunity to discuss what was going on with my farming operation what was taking place with the crops and was given sound advice as to what I needed to do, what sprays I needed to use, what tillage practices I needed to use. I came up here this morning without a note because I wanted to make sure that you understood my passion and my conviction that we need to make sure that we continue to fund The Cooperative Extension program.

Alan McLain, Madison Township: I'm a member of the Planning Commission in Madison Township and I'm a lifelong Farmer and the president of the Wyoming Lackawanna County Farm Bureau. In that role I represent a total of 477 members, 350 of them being from Lackawanna County. Some are even in this room today. I'm here this morning to speak on behalf of the reinstatement of full funding for the Penn State Extension in Lackawanna County. As a farmer, the work on the farm is a 24/7 365-day proposition. There's not much time to do extensive research on issues, products, or new methods. Farmers are able to rely on the extension to have already done the research and provide us with the education and support we need on many fronts. In an area where the extension has provided specific service to my farm is in soil samples. Soil samples are taken annually from my fields and the extension provides chemical analysis of those samples. From that information I'm able to determine the proper types and amounts of fertilizer, lime, etc to apply to the fields for optimum production. Whether we are farmers with 50 years under our belts or are brand new farmers, we need help with environmental issues such as sustainable farming, regulation changes, crops, and productivity technology advancements, and profitability. The Penn State Extension provides this crucial assistance as a community member. Penn State Extension provides educational programs specifically made for young people such as the 4H Youth Development, which is a program that encourages young people to develop in leadership citizenship and life skills. There are programs for adults as well

such as the Master Gardener program. With so many people wanting organic products, these programs provide community education and support to encourage sustainable gardening, health, and nutrition. There's a great more deal that I could reference but I'll stop here. I believe that the Penn State Extension partners with the local community, volunteers, schools, farms, small businesses, and corporations to address the community needs, foster engagement, and serve the specific needs of Lackawanna County and I strongly recommend the full reinstatement of Lackawanna County to the Penn State Extension.

Carlin Preate: I'm a retired CPA. I was formerly partner in charge of the Northeast region for Parente Randolph who later merged into the present day, Baker Tilly. I'm very familiar with Lackawanna County finances spanning over 25 years as I was the lead partner on the audit of Lackawanna County when Parente Randolph was performing the independent audits. Having said that, because of my background, I was appointed chair of the bipartisan budget study commission back in 2021 after a millage increase associated with the pension thing in 2021, but our efforts were thwarted by Commissioners Notarianni and Domenick and really stonewalled by CFO Durkin because we weren't getting enough information and we were quickly disbanded. Having said that, I've been involved with the finances over the years and I've been, obviously even though I'm no longer involved in public practice, I keep up to date with respect to what's going on with the county and I follow trends and I follow things and I've had an opportunity to look through this budget and quite candidly, yes there is a structural deficit and everybody understands what a structural deficit is. It's really you back out one-time revenues against normal expenses, and based upon my analysis the structural deficit for 2024 was 13 million, it could have been 15 million, but again it's how you look at grants and things of that nature, but having said that if the structural deficit is 13 million or 15 million, why do we increase taxes 33% and generate 31 million? So in other words, if we were looking at a structural deficit of 13 million, well we need to fix that coming into 2025, why does it go from 13 or 15 million to double that to 31 million because that's basically what a 33% tax increase does. Well where did that money go? Why is the expenses going up? When I look at the trends from 2021 to 2025 the spending is way, way above inflation. It's way above the assess valuation of the county. Looking at the numbers, in 2023 the budget was \$150 million. In 2025, this is two years now, it's \$189 million so it's a \$40 million increase. Well wait a minute, \$40 million on \$150 million, that's way beyond inflation. What's going on here? Yes, there is a spending problem. The assess valuation which is based on the millage is not going up. We're not in one of those counties that are growing, that expanding, that we're having a lot of business, new people coming in, we just don't have that. Let's drill down, take a look at some of the items that are involved. One question I have here folks is tax revenue. If I look at the millage and the and the assess valuation over the last 5 years, we are way off in under collecting the taxes. It's probably over \$20 million, \$25 million, that we have not collected in taxes. These go into with delinquent taxes. I know it goes to tax sale, it goes judicial sale, but these things are never resolved and in the meantime, those failure of people are not paying the taxes, of course it's going on the other taxpayers. Let's take a look at the budget. Let's take a look at the expenditure side. The salaries and wages are about 70% of the total budget and again Commissioner Chermak mentioned about unfilled positions. Yes, that's probably \$8 or \$9 million. We got Cadillac coverage on the medical. Why do we have Cadillac coverage? Nobody else in the county has Cadillac coverage. That's part of the unions but we got to do a better job of negotiation contracts and services. I didn't even get

into all these other line items here folks I'm just telling you there is a lot of fluff in this budget and we need to be transparent and open about it and let's talk about it because there's things buried in this budget that the taxpayers don't know about and we need to find out what those answers are.

Len Dobson, Peckville: Along the lines of what Mr. Preate had laid out, there are so many hidden things that are in there. For example, the COLTS, they doubled since the last year from \$1 million to \$2.2 million. Was that increase anticipated based on the \$1.9 from 2024? We talked about telephone and postage but again where's all this money going to? Why is it budgeted to increase by 32%? We had asked to sit down with you guys and possibly with PFM and decide what's going to happen. Can we drill down into this stuff and look at it? I heard you guys say that we were reckless that the budget Chermak had proposed was not accurate, we didn't have our figures right, etc but yet how reckless is it to push through a 33% increase without knowing the answer to some of these questions? A little bird told me we haven't even finished our financial statements for the county yet for 2023 and we're doing a tax increase. They're only on the month of March. PFM - they haven't finished their work as we all know what they said in their meeting. They said there are more things to look at besides what they laid out and what did they lay out? 45 years of being in business with and being in management, I have never seen a program, gentlemen, where they pay you for you, your family, and your wife, they pay everything. I've been in businesses where they had to make cuts, the first thing they did is they took away on the 401K plan they were contributing to. There are a lot of cuts that we can make here and I'm asking you once again, let's sit down together on a bipartisan basis. Let's not make this about politics. Let's make this about these people in the county here and I'm going to leave you with a thing that happened. When Chris asked me to do this I was with Mr. Preate, the first time right before covid and doing this and he's right, we were stonewalled. We couldn't see any of the figures. We couldn't make any kind of decisions but yet Chermak did by the way balance the budget back then but here's the thing when he asked me I was reluctant to do this again and again I'm here volunteer. I'm begging you to get together with all of us. Let's do it together.

Suzanne Green, Benton Township: I am here to speak about some of the items on the agenda. I did notice that there's an increase in mills to the arts and culture from the 2024 level of 1 mil to 1.25 mills in the 2025 budget. I'm at asking that that continue to go to the 2024 level so that that some of that savings can actually help fund the Penn State Extension as they are asking and it's something that is actually used by our community so I'm asking that that request by Penn State Extension be considered and approved and included in the budget. Also a few weeks ago I did ask for how this increase in tax rate from up to 33% increase will impact the community and whether an analysis has been done on the impact for our community and especially our senior citizens, the folks who are on fixed incomes so I'm wondering if that review or analysis has been completed and if so where is it so that the public can review it. I've been informed by someone that the 2023 financial statements have not been completed I want to know why financial statements from 2023 have not been completed and when the completion date will be. That's one thing that I think all of us should be concerned with, that there should be some accountability for financial statements to be reviewed prior to. The increase in Colts on the budget 2025 budget, it goes from \$1 million in the 2024 budget to \$2.27 million in the 25 budget with no explanation at all. The actual this year for 24 is listed as \$1.9 million so what's the increase about why was it budgeted at \$1 million in 24 and now \$2.27 in 25. We need an

explanation for that. I do think that it's great that you guys are listening to the public. I do appreciate that very much and I do consider that we are part of the team, that we are in partnership. I do speak with every one of you and I do appreciate that very much and your staff too.

Laureen Cummings: Most of the questions that were I had wanted to ask have already been asked so I'm not sure how you're going to answer them since you weren't here so maybe Gary or Chris Chermak could address why we got here and why these questions that everybody asked here had happened because it did go up. I mean I'm looking at these budgets, I remember standing here in 2022 asking why are we taking out a loan for \$15 million when we have a supposed budget revenue of 25 million and that was the end of the year and I was told just because. Didn't make any sense to me and the audits, they needed to be done so why weren't they done?

Frank Serafini, Moosic: I would like to thank the Commissioners for signing my watcher papers, was a real great experience. I was at the Moosic Community Center and I was able to observe three wards and most of the people who came in to vote certainly can't afford a 33% increase but I think I have a great idea and that is that if you were to assess the political ads, you would pay this budget off in about 105 minutes because it was out of control and I know more about abortion now than I ever wanted to know but I have to say that in the bankruptcy that occurred in Philadelphia under Governor Rendell and he was the mayor at the time was not solved by a tax increase, it was solved by David Cohen, an attorney for Randell, going to the politicians at the time and asking the state and federal politicians to cover their bankruptcy because what will happen now because most of the people work in warehouses and make 50-60,000 a year, they're not able to make these payments for their home and their mortgage so they will essentially be homeless and about the only thing they'll be able to afford is a tent but there is a way to file bankruptcy. Why let the people file bankruptcy individually. Let Lackawanna County go bankrupt and then see what the politicians do for you. You have Cartwright and Casey who's a resident. I'm sure there's something they could do for their hometown and right now it's critical for the people that I spoke to at the Moosic Community Center that something be done and I'm sure you're trying. I'm sure it's not an easy project but the problem I have is that the assumption with politicians and this happens in the state also is that in a four-year term raise the taxes as high as you can. It happened in Moosic as high as you can the first year because in four years everybody will forget it and we'll have tons of money to spend to make them think that they're living in nice little area but I drive the streets they suck. They're terrible. I drive I look go around no lights. You walk through Scranton, you think you're in a ghost town. It's not like we're paying taxes to live in a metropolis like you have in other areas. We're living in a slum. This Lackawanna County is turning into a garbage dump and it's horrible and I hope there's something you can do about it but we have to balance the budget and not on the backs of the taxpayers and when you ran for office I'm sure you had an idea that Notarianni and Domenick destroyed the budget spending and I would have hoped that you might have had some inkling as to how to handle this and hiring an accounting firm to review the budget and them coming back and saying, well the only answer is raise taxes 33%. I mean anybody in this room could have told you that's a good answer because that'll definitely balance the budget but if there's anything possible that you feel you can cut or do to help the taxpayers because in Moosic, I know we have a new warehouse coming in a million square foot 1900 new vehicles it's going to be tough on the streets. We have a charter school coming in and you know what happens with the charter school, you end up putting a burden

on the taxpayers so I wish there's something. I ran out of ideas only because bankruptcy to me is the easiest form of getting out of it and David Cohen works for Comcast if you could possibly contact him and ask him how we managed to get Philadelphia out of their deficit which was worse than you've got, I think that would behoove the taxpayers as an effort in the right direction but I thank you very much I know it's not easy and it's not going to be easy from this point on and trying other sources of income is going to be even more difficult but if there's anything that you could possibly do to help this the people out. They were pathetic yesterday coming into the polls and the number one thing on their mind wasn't Harris and Trump, it was 33% tax increase and I think that swayed most of their vote but thank you very much.

Proclamation Presentation

[24-0267](#) Proclamation declaring November 6, 2024, to be "Age Friendly Communities Day" in Lackawanna County.

Ordinances - First Reading

[24-0265](#) Ordinance 295
First Reading
Annual Budget for the County of Lackawanna for the year 2025

Attachments: [Ordinance 295.pdf](#)

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Let's just say that there was \$17 million left in ARPA funding we could use. Would you recommend using that to plug a budget deficit?

CFO Dave Bulzoni: Well, I would answer that question with a question. So if that's the case, how would you make up that difference in fiscal year 2025?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Correct, thank you. Now let me ask you another question. Did you meet with Commissioner Chermak and Carlin Preate and his team for a few hours?

CFO Dave Bulzoni: I did. We sat down and they presented some good ideas, some of which we incorporated into the review of the initial budget, where we were able to reduce the expense number by about 8 million.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: When you met with them, did they not say, and Mr. Preate who got up here before, did he not say in that meeting that a tax increase was unavoidable based on everything that you had just cited?

CFO Dave Bulzoni: Well the discussion really was, would the county have been better off using incremental adjustments over the years as opposed to being in a position where we're faced with one large tax increase now? That's a sound recommendation and it comes from someone who really understands the process and I wouldn't disagree with that. The challenge is that you know if you go back to 2017, I think where the County's fund balance was a reasonably healthy 25 million, at that point when the fund balance started to decrease and it was it was being used for operations, that's when the incremental adjustments really should have been considered to keep up with expenses. Now the other side of that of course is you really have to look at the other side of the structural issue and that's really trying to look at the management of expenses and not just revenues.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: And when people get up and they say, why did this budget go up x amount like 20% and why did this go up? Now we sat at this very table with every department director and we went through every single line item and the ones that had increased, and you can correct me if I'm wrong, really increased for reasons outside of our control, am I correct in saying that for inflationary reasons? One example I can use is in the IT department our Microsoft license went up considerably. Do we have any control over that as County Commissioners? Can we just get rid of the Microsoft license and not use computers anymore?

CFO Dave Bulzoni: I've said that before and the departmental budget hearings were a very good exercise because it gave the Commissioners an opportunity to sit with all of the department heads to go through every line item on their budget and really be able to understand what the justification is for those costs. There are costs that we have now that we didn't have previously. The issue relative to cyber security has created costs for the County that have to be addressed. Those costs really weren't inherent in the budget process 5 years ago and yet we can't neglect those costs. These are really important to be able to address principally for the safety of the County. The costs relative to the Office of Youth and Family Services - I think we poured through that budget pretty significantly and the difficulty with that budget is that because of a lack of personnel, a lot of those programs had to be outsourced and your cost increase when you go to third parties to provide those same services that we probably could in house for a lot less so I'm only touching on a couple areas. There really are a lot of items that I think can be viewed by Commissioner Chermak and his group within those departmental budgets and I think it really sheds a lot of light on the process and how we arrived at where we're at right now.

Commissioner Chris Chermak: So people have to understand, what Dave has to do, he's got a monumental task trying to keep this County functioning and I have all the respect in the world for him. I was one of the Commissioners that hired him and I think he does a tremendous job but since you're still under oath, so I've sat in these meetings with Dave and with Carlin and it starts to almost sound like the teacher on Charlie Brown to me when they start talking, all I hear is I don't understand some of the things you're talking about, but you folks do but I mean I take the simple approach. I mean is there, can you honestly say in 150 60 70 80 million budget, there are no cost savings that we can find and that was the approach we took to at least raise the question and say okay, there are things that can be saved and there are cuts that can be made. I reference Keystone College, again, I mean they floundered for years trying to do things the way they they always did it. Well the new company didn't do it that way. They slashed. They did everything and they got it to a point where it's almost zero and start from scratch and that was my approach. It's a difficult one but my job here is to guard the taxpayers money with my life and to operate this County as efficiently as we can and to utilize all the good people that are here and that that's my approach.

[24-0266](#)

Ordinance 296

First Reading

Authorizing the Issuance of Tax and Revenue Anticipation Notes, Series Of 2025

Attachments: [ordinance_lack_county_tran_bond_issue_2025\(2417486.3\).docx](#)
[Draft Terms Sheet Lackawanna County TAN.docx](#)
[Legislative Cover Sheet 10 30 2024 TRAN.docx](#)
[Ordinance 296.pdf](#)

Resolutions

24-0273

Approving Current Payables

Attachments: [3H50KH2J.pdf](#)
[3H50KH2I.pdf](#)
[Res 24-0273.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

24-0268

Entering into an Agreement with DebtBook

Attachments: [DebtBook Lackawanna County OF D MSA 08 05 2024 \(1\).pdf](#)
[DebtBook Service Level Addendum.docx](#)
[Lackawanna County -DebtBook.pdf](#)
[Debt Book Memorandum.doc](#)
[Legislative Cover Sheet 10 09 2024 Debt Book.docx](#)
[Res 24-0268.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

24-0269

Adopting an updated Fund Balance Policy

Attachments: [COUNTY OF LACKAWANNA FUND BALANCE POLICY.docx](#)
[signed Fund Balance Policy 15.pdf](#)
[Legislative Cover Sheet 10 30 2024 FUND BALANCE POLICY.docx](#)
[Res 24-0269.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: On the question - the debt book that we just voted on, the fund balance policy, and next the debt management policy - these are the initiatives that Commissioner McGloin and I, upon taking office, we promised people that we were going to turn the financial condition of this county around. Obviously these are aren't the sexiest things to talk about and vote on and it probably doesn't grab everyone's attention like other things do

but as Mr. Bulzoni said when we took office, one of the most striking comments in the report from our debt rating agency standard and pores, was that the county really lacks strong financial management and there were several weaknesses that were identified. This legislation and the next one that we'll vote on and the debt book, they begin the process of rectifying these issues. The fund balance policy is going to promote financial stability and resilience, as Mr. Bulzoni mentioned, a fund balance policy establishes a Target level of reserve funds ensuring that the county has a financial cushion for unexpected expenses or revenue shortfalls and this stability is essential to maintaining public services even in times of economic downturns or in times of emergencies so it really provides the county with a framework for setting long-term financial goals. All of these policies that we have put forth today and that we're voting on they demonstrate our administration's commitment to fiscal responsibility and prudent financial stewardship and it's another example of our proactive approach to governance rather than reacting to issues only when they arise so this long-term outlook will help position the county in the future as a model of good governance and effective public administration.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

[24-0270](#)

Adopting a Debt Management Policy

Attachments: [Legislative Cover Sheet 10 30 2024 DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY.docx](#)
[COUNTY OF LACKAWANNA DEBT MANAGEMENT POLICY.docx](#)
[Res 24-0270.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

[24-0271](#)

Ratifying CDBG Modifications and Revisions

Attachments: [CDBG Legislative Cover Sheet.docx](#)
[Res 24-0271.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

[24-0272](#)

Authorizing the filing of Applications with the Statewide Local Share Assessment Account Grant Program

Attachments: [Legislative Cover Sheet-LSA Statewide Resolutions.docx](#)
[Res 24-0272.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Resolution be Adopted. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

[24-0262](#)

Appointments to the Lackawanna County Women's Commission

Attachments: [Appt 24-0262.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Appointment be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: On the question, this commission has been in place for a number of years. We're just simply reestablishing it to help ensure that the needs, the voices, and the contributions of women in Lackawanna County are heard and are valued. There are several other vacancies on this committee. I think there's 27 total spots if I'm not mistaken so if there are any women out there in Lackawanna County who want to make a contribution and serve on this Committee, just please submit your letters of interest and your resume on the County website. You can find the information under boards, authorities, and commissions, and we'd be happy to have anyone who is interested in serving and I know in the past when this committee was active, they did some really great projects so there's a lot to offer.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

[24-0264](#)

Appointments to the Workforce Development Board

Attachments: [Appt 24-0264.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Appointment be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

[24-0263](#)

Appointment to the Disability Action Committee

Attachments: [Appt 24-0263.pdf](#)

A motion was made by Matt McGloin, seconded by Chris Chermak, that this Appointment be Approved. The motion carried by the following vote.

Aye: 3 - Chris Chermak, Bill Gaughan and Matt McGloin

Opportunity for the Public to Address the Board

Bob Bolus, Scranton: I heard here today - how much money this that and the other but I didn't hear one cut now one single cut from Bulzoni or anybody else. How we become more efficient, you got to cut expenses. You can't just keep making the people pay, pay, pay and think there's a well there. There isn't. It's going to go dry. You haven't mentioned one thing here in your budget proposal or anything how you intend to cut expenses. All I've heard is how much more money we're going to spend on this that and the other and not one single cut. The problem I get is that you've never ran a business so you know what a business is about on what you do to survive here. It's that you could just take on hammer. The taxpayers- make them pay no matter what the story is. Well as our learned solicitor quoted before during this year when it was raised

there were numerous flaws to this budget right now and they can be challenged legally, no if, ands, or buts even though it's been adjudicated once before. There's always another doorway into it and that doorway is open right now. I think this budget should have been tabled, re-evaluated intelligently and practically. It has not been done that way and I just don't see where we can survive in this community.

Solicitor Don Frederickson: Commissioner, if I can just say one thing Bob with regard to the tax exempts. The county assessment office is currently working with the city of Scranton in doing a comprehensive review of all the tax exempts in the city of Scranton so that may result in some findings.

Carlin Preate: I just wanted to respond to Commissioner Gaughan's invoking my name when we had a meeting with CFO. Yes, responsible County activity should have been increasing taxes at least to the rate of inflation about 3 or 4% over the last four years. The only time we did that was in 2024 this past year but if we did increase the taxes at 3 or 4% the tax increase this year would not have been 33% it would have only been 15 or 14 % so again I just wanted to clarify that. I want to bring up a couple other points I didn't have a chance to look at some cost cutting measures in some of the departments. I don't want to get into that but I do want to indicate here that one of the things that we need to do is we need to look at how do we make government more efficient. We spent a lot of money on technology. We spent a lot your it budget are out of sight why don't we look at consolidation of row offices. It's in the charter. I know that but we should look at the charter. Consolidation of row offices just like every other counties there where you go to one office, you pay your taxes, you file your wills. We don't need all the different row offices and we'd have to go to various different locations. We don't need that. It's all on computer. You go right up to the window just like in any other counties and, "what are you doing? You're filing a will? Okay here. Oh you're paying your taxes? Okay you go right on the computer?" That's what happens. We don't need all of these separate departments, going to separate different locations. The other question is, why do we need 10 district justices? We probably could get away with six. It's the way the county looks at doing business. How are we doing business more efficiently? Prison - we spent \$34 million on the prison. Well wait a minute and I know it's a big expense and there's overtime and this that and the other but should we look at privatization of the prison? I don't know if it works but we should have that studied or maybe privatization of the management? I don't know. Maybe we can save money. As I mentioned earlier, we have contracts of \$25 million for contracted services. It doesn't get bid but do we need all those contracted services or should we bid them? I love the resolutions that were passed by about the general funding and quite candidly I have a list of best practices that the county should follow in terms of looking at its finances. You had a resolution today of approving accounts payable. Well, wait a minute you know what? Why don't we have a list of what's the bank balances? What's the cash in the bank balances? What is the aging of our accounts payable? How much money have we collected? We should be getting regular reports from the treasurer's office and from some of the key department heads I mentioned about delinquent taxes. Why don't we get reports from delinquent tax taxes on a regular basis? A quarterly basis? We need to have information. The county needs to be more transparent which will help with the bond rating but if everything is in secret? The public has a right to know what's going on. Who's pay, who do we owe money to? When we transfer money between funds, one of the problems that I saw in these budgets, we transfer money to these authorities without any proper resolution. I don't know if we're complying with the charter. All of a sudden we transfer

money to the Performing Arts Authority. It's not in the budget and then they never repay us back. Folks, there is ways that we can save money we can be more efficient and I've only scratched the surface. I've only scratched the surface on best practices and all I'm saying is what if we really wanted to help? We want to help you guys but if you don't want to let us participate into this process, what are we doing here? You're shoving everything down everybody's throat and we're taking it on the chin but people can't afford it. People cannot afford it. We have to do business more efficiently and more effectively.

Tom Coyne: I understand there's a reluctance to use the Recovery Act. I understand that you consider it a one-time payment but I also understand that both of the Commissioners who put forth this budget put forth the argument that paying the minimum balance on a credit card gets you nowhere, that as you pay a minimum balance, the balance keeps rolling forward and increases and something that takes you five years now takes you 20 years because that interest continually accrues. In the same principle, if you have a credit card balance of \$8,000 and you get \$2,000 from the IRS and it's a one-time payment, it's not unreasonable to take that \$2,000 and apply at least some of it to that credit card debt to stop the rolling debt moving forward. I'm not saying taking everything from the a from the Recovery Act funds. I'm saying at least take a look at it and see if there's some things in there that you can trim down a little bit, remove some of the funds to take away that principle that credit card balance that's rolling forward that you say don't pay the minimum. I think in avoiding even looking at it, you're avoiding the opportunity to use some of that funds to reduce the debt right up front before the taxes come in and that only leaves more money in the reserve moving forward to grow for the city and the county. If it's 33% and you take a section of that money and put it in there, maybe you'll have a little bit more excess to go to all the increases that are necessary so I'm not saying rip everything down. I'm saying at least take a look and see if there's something you can pull out of there to put at that debt. The last comment was when I had brought up my look at the Home Rule Charter. Council made a comment about me playing an attorney. I find that very offensive and demeaning, an informed citizen should look at legislation. I may not have access to Lexus Nexus and be able to take a look at all the legal proceedings and be aware of them, but when I look at a county document on there trying to be an informed citizen in his own government, sure I make errors, and sure I'll reference what the council had said in this meeting and review it and learn for myself because I am not an attorney but the snarky response back was intentionally demeaning and meant to belittle and that is unprofessional behavior before this body. An informed citizen is not what we should be abusing as our government.

Joan Hodowanitz, Scranton: I want to mention something no one's mentioned yet and it's to complement the County's Election Board, its staff, and all your poll workers. I don't know about other voters but I went to vote at 7 a.m. at Washington West apartments. Long line, thoroughly painless process. Compare Lackawanna County to Luzerne County. They made ABC World News last night and not for a good reason so maybe someday you'll take pity on those people and show them how it should be done. I'm sure there were hiccups but nothing like there was in Luzerne County so good job. I always look at, download, and print out audits, union contracts, and your budget proposal, all 98 pages of your workbook which backs up the millage increases that you propose and I had a lot of questions because I looked at individual lines and some of them just what? Like page 21, Human Services, the wages, salary, staff \$1,335,924 and there's no breakout. There's no explanation. How is

a citizen to look at that and say, well how many people is this paying? Where do they work? What are their job titles? What did they do? I asked the question and I was told among other things that this will all become clear when you get your digital budget book and so I'm hoping that that's coming in the near future and that that will be online so that the general public can access it because as I said before in a budget, the devil is in the details and unless you want to explain 98 pages of a workbook, you know it has to. Bill you remember when you were in city council and the operational budget they had there and that you would see a personnel breakdown of each department. You could see all the people how many were authorized, what their salaries were from year to year, we have nothing like that in your county budget. We need to see that kind of level of information. Now, last week there were two articles in the paper about health care costs. One was, expect higher costs next year for your health care benefits even though this was not intended for governments it applies basically to everybody and the other one on November 1st, how taxpayers are helping health insurers make even bigger profits. Local governments often face extra fees when employees get out of network medical care but some don't track the insurance charges or even know about them I hope this does not apply to Lackawanna County. Maybe somebody should, this is on November 1 in the Scranton Times, download this article and see are we are we being I don't want to say screwed over because it's very unladylike but you know this is something we ought to be looking at and I agree with the prior speakers, especially Mr. Preate. You have a lot of people in Lackawanna County that are a Brain Trust that offer good suggestions, even if they're bad suggestions, it opens you up to discussion. One of my recommendations, however, is I'd like to see all the collective bargaining agreements for the county on the County's website. I did find a couple of them but look at this - the prison, three documents, the police arbitration award through 2017 with annotations made by the computer, and two MOUs for each five-year period following, but there's not a current collective bargaining agreement for the prison that's been retyped. Why not? It's a problem that the city of Scranton has, getting them to get these documents out. This is where you see that the prison employees have been getting 3% pay raises since 2012. This is where you can look at their health care benefits so I recommend that you get those online.

Katrina Bower, Jessup: I'm here today to hopefully get some clarification considering some very important issues. Every time I've ever been up here, I've always spoken about life safety, emergency services being prepared. I found it pretty astonishing that I read an article dated on October 24th from a Wilkes Barre news entity, PAhomepage, stating that a Lackawanna County man was charged with rape assault and allegedly abuse in one of this building. You guys know about this? CYS has been your top priority, one of your top priorities, but I keep saying to you all, finance is fine and dandy but you could have all the money in the world but if you lose a life, you really can't put a price tag on somebody's life, a child's mental health from being abused. We have a provisional license. It looks like it's going to expire on November 15th for CYS and I don't know how something like this is going to help and I have not seen any safety protocols procedures anything implemented to the best of my knowledge or put into place because it's basically not being put in our news for us. Good, bad, and ugly, we still need to know what this world is. We need to know the world is not kind and if you could just close your eyes and just picture, did your children ever use the bathroom here? Did they ever come to see you at work? That type of stuff should not happen.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Excuse me, but what you're insinuating and let

me just say this the incident that you're talking about happened well before we ever took office and that's all I'll say about it.

Katrina Bowen: I'm just bringing up the fact that you should put our children of Lackawanna County as a priority and clearly this is not a priority because why wouldn't it make our news then? Why did it make Wilkes Barre? Why are we finding out stuff from Wilkes Barre? We're in Lackawanna County. I'm sorry that like the truth hurts you. You give us the truth every day but when we give it back to you it's like back away. I spoke here three times and every time I spoke here, I was decent I was somewhat polite. I mean, I'm entitled to speak here at these meetings to the best of my knowledge and I'm pretty confident enough to speak but I'm just trying to see where you are as our commissioner with our temporary provisional license is because our next commissioner meeting is on the 20th, so it expires on the 15th. Do we have an extension? Are we working on this? I don't care about my taxes going up as long as my children are safe. I don't care. I really will go to work, do the same thing every day and do what I have to do but this is a county building. Children should be safe. End of story. CYS was your number one priority. You got rid of Bill Browning but how many boards does he advise for that we probably are paying for consulting? I mean let's get honest. These are children. I don't know what else to get through to you. This is important. It is so important the fact that we have to read about it in another news and entity not in Lackawanna County and it was two weeks ago it was posted. It was an article. No one knows about it though. It's available for the public. It's been posted. There's an article on it for two weeks but nothing in Lackawanna County. Nothing from our commissioner saying how we're going to keep our building safe. This happened here, an alleged abuse involving a child in this building. All I'm asking for you is to please put the safety of our residents first. Honestly, finances and everything is fine and dandy but again you don't have nothing if you lose somebody's life and you can't put a price tag on the damage that is going to do to somebody. Money isn't everything. Fix our finances. You're doing a great job at it. Make this county safer, please for our children. You guys live in it. It's simple. Do better.

Solicitor Don Frederickson: Commissioners, the incident in which she speaking about, it occurred back around 2020 they believe. It was recently disclosed when the child was brought in basically disclosing that there was abuse going on. It was continuing over a number of years. It was a boyfriend of the mother of the child. Allegedly one incident did occur here during a visit at CYS. It was not a supervised visit but it was a visit in the CYS facility because at the time they did not have custody of the children however the court did not order supervision. It was just a visit and supposedly an incident occurred here in one of the bathrooms. CYS has become aware of it. They have revised their policies and are working on developing that but it's paramount to them, the safety and welfare of the children of course at all times.

Len Dobson, Peckville: On the issue of the budget here, I just wanted to clarify some of the things that have been said because we've heard them a number of times and it just seems like it's not really clear on the ARPA funds. In no way were we ever insinuating that we should use those all the time to just cover the debt. What we're saying right now is that the debt, we understand the debts there and hey it's possible that 33% might be up there I don't think so because men like Mr. Preate and such looked at these figures and they know them better than any of us because I mean he's done this for so long. He's a very brilliant man but you know with these figures what I understand about ARPA is that one point in time, these funds are going to be gone and that's it, they disappear so all we're saying is on a temporary basis why don't we put a

stalemate on the 33% and again it's possible, maybe it's 16%, maybe it is only 6.3%. We don't really know that because we haven't really drilled down into a lot of this stuff and one of the things that I heard and I'm not making any pointing any figures or anything but one of the things that I heard is that when you guys do meet with these department heads, they give you a summary. You don't know what those figures are beyond the summary. Mr. Preate brought up a lot of different figures and what are those figures what constitutes those figures and what constitutes the increases in those figures and I really think that we should all sit down just to quote the good book, there's safety in a multitude of counselors. We're offering a chance to take a whole bunch of counselors together from all spectrums. Some of the people are Democrats that met with us, some of the people are Republicans. Again, we don't care about that. We care about this 33% and if we can get it down, you guys are heroes. You just signed your next election for yourself. You know Mr. Bolus brought up some wonderful points and everything on different cuts and things like that. I almost thought he was looking at the budget himself because there are different things and I honestly I didn't do much with the numbers but I was looking at different aspects. Here's one just for example, the pest control. I'm going to pick that one because my father was a district manager of a pest control company. What they're paying for rodent control for their buildings you guys are getting ripped off. Somebody's not doing their job so my suggestion is this: what should have been done is they should have got with these department heads and said kids, we need to do a 25% cut across boards. You tell us how we do this and do that behind closed doors not in front of the public or anything because you don't want to freak out your employees and get them all worried if they're going to lose their jobs and such figure out which ones are viable. I mean that's kind of what we did. That's why we put the money back in for the 3% and the cost increase and that was really unfair to take and pull one group just because you can hit them and take the money from them and leave all the unions alone. And the union contracts are coming up too, by the way, and we need to talk about those but all I'm saying once again is please let's all get together and do this let's pick a time and a date where we can all do this and look at some of these numbers and see why are they off because they are off there are some of the anomalies in here that don't make any sense and it's good and healthy to at least look at them and decide.

Amanda Sigona, Taylor: I'm here to talk about three things, ARPA, budget hearings and OYFS. The APRA dollars, I do have a concern with those just because they are required to be obligated by December 31st of this year so when you mentioned earlier in the meeting there's \$5 million left that's unobligated that's really concerning to me because we could lose it so Commissioner Bill Gaughan: No, it can go into a specific line item and we can have you talk to Kristin Magnotta afterwards but it we can put that into a line item and not lose it.

Amanda Sigona: It would be great to have like some sort of public plan in terms of how the rest of the ARPA dollars.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: If we were here from the beginning, I would have done it that way but we came in in January.

Amanda Sigona: But, even now like that \$5 million, where's it going to go to? What's the plan with it? What's the justification for if we're going to use it or lose it? I feel like people's imaginations go, well why don't we just use it in the budget? If we knew what it was going to be used for it might help weigh that weigh that. The other thing is I urge you to have a meeting where the public can hear for each department in the future. I know I said that before but I that's a huge concern of mine because you know we see this worksheet but there's

no narrative to it and so if there's no narrative to it. If there's no time to do that at least you could bring them forth and I really like how in the meetings they have to defend each of their proposals to you. I think it would be great if they could defend their part of the budget as part of that and not in like a defend way but just you know explain what the department, what's going on in the department, what are their initiatives. It could be a really positive thing and it might be really great way to for people to get educated in the community and then OYFS specifically about OYFS. That's another one where that would be a great exercise. I'm really concerned about this \$10 million increase. There's no proposal. There's no nothing and the lines that have been increased are things like operational expenses or indirect costs and it's just like what does that even mean? So to me when I'm looking at that I'm thinking, what is going on there and what I'm really hoping is that you all have a plan from the director there. That you've reviewed and you say, okay this \$10 million increase that makes a lot of sense we can do that and that's awesome if you have that. That's great that you feel comfort in that but that hasn't been transmitted to the public. There's no transparency there so when the public's looking at a \$10 million increase to a department that's failing, they don't see any plan and without a plan there can't be any confidence so you can't just say trust us. We have someone in there, she has a history of doing great things. Maybe she has a history but where's her plan? Where's the written down explanation so this \$10 million, I'm sure that's a hefty percentage of that 33% increase and so justifying that I think we'd go a long way so those are my three things but I think just overall what I'm trying to say is transparency would be excellent and I know that seems like a an after thought kind of thing like if we just stick our head down and make the budget and do everything right that will be enough but I think at sometimes the appearance of doing well is almost just as important, not for political reasons, but in order for people to have confidence in their government, that's really important so that's everything I had to say. Laureen Cummings, Old Forge: Thank you for answering so many questions, Commissioner Gaughan. I think you did an excellent job and I appreciate the time that you're taking here today even though you're very not feeling very well so thank you so much. I was wondering about reassessment costs and where I could find those in the budget, if there are any and they should be ongoing and the question I had is, you're going to raise taxes by this amount but they're supposed to be raised less 10% I thought the year before the reassessment?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: The year of and the reassessment will go through in 2026.

Laureen Cummings: Where would the cost be for that throughout the budget?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: I believe that the cost is borne out in ARPA. The reassessment, not in this administration, but was paid for by the previous administration using the American Rescue Plan Act funds. It should be in the economic development line item in the budget.

Laureen Cummings: Do we have any idea of what the costs are Gary? For appeals and such?

Controller Gary DiBileo: Those costs would be under the Assessor's Office.

Suzanne Green, Benton Township: I did look through the budget just now and I did not see that if the costs are included in Economic Development although there is contracted services in planning commission. Last year 2024 budget amount in planning for contracted Services was 893 and actual year-to date so or I believe it's actually an estimated amount for 24 is 188 and then budgeted 609, is that for the reassessment? Is that the contracted services for re assessment?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: No that's no it.

Suzanne Green: Something else you can answer after, I have a couple more questions sir. I did get a chance to take a look at the policy that you've just went through which is for the fund balance, increasing the fund balance, commitment to remain at least 12%, had previously been at 5%. The procedure for that includes once the external auditor has reviewed the County's financial statements for the prior year and has confirmed the fund balance of the general fund. The budget director and the CFO will convey to the board the amounts and assignments of the fund balance which will be included in the financial statement. Here's the problem. You don't have the financial statements for 2023. Those are late. Those should have been completed at least months ago. I don't know if there's a reason for that but there's an issue in hand in that you cannot comply with your new policy because you do not have the information at hand right now. You don't have completed statements. You don't have accountability in your offices for completing those statements. That's an issue and it's something that should be addressed to actually look at a budget to know what you're looking at for even the next year after that so that's one of the things that you know you'll have to handle as you go through. On the election, I do want to commend the staff here. Beth Hopkins' team was stellar yesterday with opening the mail-in ballots. I was here at 7 a.m. stayed the entire day until all counts were done and Beth Hopkins team at least until they were completed about 3:00 or 4 in the afternoon were on top of everything. Everything looked right. We had a lot of watchers. There was opportunity for watchers to look at things and I do appreciate that very much so thank you to Beth for that and I want to give her public appreciation for that. Kara Francis, Roaring Brook Township: Just want to go back to the budget. We have one question. What was the actual cost of the construction for the medical building? Do we know?

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: I don't know off the top of my head but we can get you those figures.

Kara Francis: That'd be great. Thank you. Just three things that I'd like to maybe just mention. It's really hard for the public to actually have a have a prepared statement when we don't know what the actual agenda is. Today's agenda went on this morning onto the website. If there's any possibility that you could get us the agenda potentially maybe 5 days before a public meeting.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Ma'am I'm sorry the agenda was posted on Monday. We're required to post 24 hours before the meeting.

Kara Francis: The public meetings were amazing, the budget meetings in the evening. It's really hard for a lot of us to get here during the day. If there's anything we could do to potentially get these meetings in the evening. Just one other comment. They did a fantastic job with the election. It was amazing, very smooth.

Commissioners' Other Business

Commissioner Chris Chermak: Well again I want to also thank the Election Department, Beth, and Glenn, and everybody else. It's a small but mighty team and they did a phenomenal job. They do it every year. I don't know how they do what they do but they do an excellent job. If there's any questions, I know my some of my team members are here for my finance team. If anybody has any other questions before we leave we'll be happy to address them if possible. We'll continue working on this. I'll just add that growing up in my family business and working for my grandfather and father, they didn't accept the word can't so can't is not my vocabulary except for this I can't wait to go to

the restroom so I'm going to excuse myself right now.

Commissioner Matt McGloin: Really quick, just want to thank Beth and Voter Registration for the hard work, time, and dedication that they put in. What a wonderful job and without a doubt, one of the best throughout our Commonwealth. Just really quick a couple points. For me, trying to lower taxes was certainly a priority of mine before I entered office and I think certainly remains one hopefully one day but the reality of the situation is that Commissioner Gaughan and I inherited a County on the brink of collapse with a massive structural deficit and Commissioner Gaughan and I are working tirelessly every day to find solutions while still addressing the county's financial crisis but just really quick I'd like to acknowledge a few other priorities that our administration has fulfilled since taking office. In just this short time, Commissioner Gaughan and I have made great strides in restoring integrity to local government through transparency, accountability, the creation of a new code of conduct. I think we've done a great job empowering small businesses, for example Commissioner Gaughan and I have granted 29 small business grants through the Combat Inflation Grant Program for small businesses throughout Lackawanna County which we proudly distributed. When it comes to controlling crime, we've made great progress by partnering with the city of Scranton to develop an evidence-based Community Violence Intervention Program that focuses on preventing violence in our community so Commissioner Gaughan and I remain committed to make Lackawanna County a better place for all and we'll continue to lead with transparency, respect, and dedication and just really quick I certainly appreciate everybody's comments today and even before being in this position that I'm in as an elected official, I'm an American. I have a wife. I have two kids. I hope gas is a dollar. I hope eggs are 99 cents but here at the county, difficult decisions need to be made and they need to be made every single day but at the end of that day, I'm still rooting for each and every one of us roughly 220,000 residents of the county to succeed, certainly hoping as a county, as a state, and certainly as a country as well.

Commissioner Bill Gaughan: Just a few things. We have talked about this budget at nauseum over the last month. We introduced it on October 15th for the Home Rule Charter. We stood in front of the people of the county on multiple occasions, in the down valley, up valley and here in Scranton and we explained exactly what was going on and I really honestly believe that we gave you the truth. I just want to check through a few things today again just to make the point that you hear all these comments that are just not true. There's so much misinformation that Commissioner McGloin and I did not cut anything, we have to make more cuts. We cut 90 positions out of the budget. That's almost 10% of the workforce. Prior to this, we cut the entire department of health, \$3.5 million that Commissioner Chermak was for, and advocated for, but didn't know how he was going to fund it. We cut that almost immediately upon taking office. After analysis, we instituted a hiring freeze. We put a hold on all purchasing other than for Public Safety an important essential operations and we're finally paying bills on time in the county. Remember, we inherited an operation here in Lackawanna County where there was almost \$19 million in unpaid bills so we've changed that. Healthcare was brought up today. We agree, the health care costs are out of control. They're rising by 9% next year, about \$2.8 million so what did we do? We literally took it upon ourselves, starting with us because this has to be negotiated with the bargaining units, and we increased co-pays, we increase deductibles ,and we're doing a number of different things with healthcare but we started with us. We started with the Commissioners and the administration and the

management and we're not going to know the savings until the open enrollment period is over but we know that they'll be significant. We cut overtime costs in the budget by \$1.25 million that Commissioner Chermak is advocating to put back in the budget so when we talk about savings that I don't know how that makes sense. We established priority based budgeting which is, instead of zero based budgeting, it's a different way of doing it and that will be a priority of ours, taking a look at the budget according to actual priorities rather than just how we've done it this way, and therefore we're going to continue to do it that way. In terms of revenue, we implemented the cash fest program, working with the treasurer's office. Other counties have implemented that and they've seen millions of dollars in revenue so we're hoping that that ends up panning out for next year. The pension plan, something that has come up. We're finally funding the pension plan. I could go on and on and on and on and on but one thing I will say is that we told you, we promised all of the taxpayers of Lackawanna County, that we were going to tell you the truth and we have told you the truth and it is uncomfortable. We're not gaining any additional friends by doing it but we told you that we were going to give it to you straight. Commissioner McGloin mentioned this earlier. We both have small families with small children. We have parents who are senior citizens and we understand the frustration. We truly, truly do and we've heard from all of you over the last month or so all over the county but the reality is this county was driven into the ground by the previous administration including Commissioner Chermak. Commissioner Chermak did not show up to any of the budget hearings. Zero. Then put forward a document and then didn't answer any questions about it as one of the former Commissioners correctly pointed out. I mean we put forward a plan and then we sat there. We listened to your comments and we answered as intelligently and as educated as we could all of your questions. He put this together. I could rip this apart line item by line item it by line item because the numbers are literally incorrect. We talk about the budget team that he put together. I got to tell you this is wrong and again I did this at the last budget hearing and I'll just give you a quick example. Someone got up here today and talked about the Office of Youth and Family Services. It's been one of our top priorities since we took office in January because that was an agency that was floundering and I'm happy to say today that we believe that we're on the right track. His proposal, if you want to call it that, eliminates dozens of case workers. Dozens of case workers who are literally charged with protecting and taking care of the children and the families in this county and then he incorrectly cites the figures in here saying that they're going to save all this money when we're reimbursed for these positions 80% by the state government. 80% by the state government. He eliminates positions in our 911 department and those positions are funded 100% by the state government but yet uses those as savings to try to make everybody I guess feel nice and warm inside that there's some alternative plan that's going to save the county. It is complete nonsense. It says there's \$17 million in ARPA funding and he's going to plug the whole plug the budget with that. Nonsense. There's not \$17 million. There's five in unobligated funds so what I'm here to tell you ladies and gentlemen is that's an empty chair right there. It was empty for the month when we had when we listened to the people of this county. He ran out of here like a coward because he is one and he put forward a plan that isn't worth the paper it's written on but we're giving you the truth and that's the way that it's going to be but we are here answering to the people answering to the people of this county and unfortunately he ran out of here with his tail between his legs because he knows in his heart this is incorrect so thank you.

Adjournment

This meeting was adjourned at 12:42pm.