

SPECIAL MEETING NO. 2/2021
SPECIAL MEETING #2

TOWN BOARD MEETING
TOWN OF ALDEN

November 12, 2021
7:00 P.M.

The Special Meeting of the Alden Town Board was held at 3311 Wende Road on Tuesday, November 12, 2021 at 7:00 P.M.. Supervisor Adamski called the Meeting to Order and Councilwoman Pautler led in the Pledge of Allegiance. The Roll Call was taken by Deputy Town Clerk Eisensmith.

PRESENT: Dean Adamski, Supervisor
Colleen Pautler, Councilwoman

RECORDING SECRETARY: Joanna Eisensmith, Town Clerk

OTHERS PRESENT: Jennifer Strong, Town Attorney
Residents

7:00 PUBLIC HEARING FOR on 2022 Preliminary Budget

Notice of Public Hearing was read by the Deputy Town Clerk

Supervisor Adamski stated the object of the Public Hearing is to get the public's input on the 2022 preliminary budget.

Sarah Miller, Irving St. – questioned how Town Board bases pay raises? Councilwoman Pautler and Supervisor Adamski stated they are based on a 2% tax cap. Mrs. Miller went on to ask if department head recommendations are taken into consideration? Councilwoman Pautler stated they submit a proposal for consideration. Mrs. Miller asked why the Court was changed from 1 full time employee and 1 part time employee to what it is currently with only 1 part time employee? Supervisor Adamski stated the belief was more work could be done by 2 part time employees versus a full time employee. Mrs. Miller went on to state that for the past year she was worked as the only Court Clerk for the Town of Alden, being paid only as a part time employee. She questioned why she was given a \$0.30 pay increase. She went on to reference the Town of Alden Employee Handbook which states employee performance reviews are to be completed annually. To date she has not had a performance review but welcomes one. She questioned why one has not been conducted. Supervisor Adamski stated that was the responsibility of her supervisor and none have been submitted. She questioned if any departments had submitted performance reviews. Supervisor Adamski stated none have. Mrs. Miller questioned again, what are pay increases based on if performance reviews are not being conducted. She went on to state that when the Town Justices met with the Town Board for their budget meeting they only requested Sarah Miller be given a full time position and they did not request pay increases for themselves. She noted Justice Cole stated it would be a disservice to our community to lose Sarah. Mrs. Miller went on to add that the request for a full time position was denied based on the need for health insurance. Councilwoman Pautler stated she did not remember health insurance being discussed. Supervisor Adamski suggested Mrs. Miller go back and talk to the Justices to find out how hard they actually fought for her. Mrs. Miller confirmed that in the 2021 budget Supervisor Adamski secured \$6,600 for the Budget Officer role. She went on to question the Highway Superintendent also receiving a stipend for Parks manager and questioned who else receives money in addition to their salary. Supervisor Adamski stated the Town Clerk receives a stipend for being registrar and FOIL Officer. Mrs. Miller went on to give comparison in what other neighboring communities the rate of pay for their court clerks. She also noted that none of these municipalities have 2 correctional facilities like Alden does.

Laura Loehr, Henskee Rd. – noted she has previously worked in a field that dealt with budgets. It would be helpful to have a list of changes for ease of comparison. Mrs. Loehr noted that at the previous Board meeting Tom Malecki had stated there were only 4 minor changes to the budget. She noted that changes were made on pages 1,2,3,4,15,16,17,19,20 and 38. She also noted some changes had detailed

explanation while others did not. Questioned why estimated revenues went down but all other changes were increases. Supervisor Adamski stated interest is at zero, recreation department fees are down and court fees are down. Referenced page 5, under personal services, council members 2 as well as justices 2; that is very helpful in comparison to page 29, highway funds does not list what the service is or for how many employees. Supervisor Adamski explained it was for the Highway Department. There is not a number referenced because they don't know how many employees will pull from that line. Mrs. Loehr noted it would be helpful to know that there are 4 highway employees that could pull from those lines. Asked what progress has been made with contract negotiations. Supervisor Adamski noted the Mayor had sent an email and he responded that the required information has not been received. Mrs. Loehr suggested maybe a mediator be utilized. Because she had not heard of it previously, questioned why there was such a large cut in the Assessor's salary. Supervisor Adamski stated historically the Assessor role was part-time. Mr. Sivecz, clarified and offered more detailed information. Mrs. Loehr questioned why the cut for such an important position, the comparison to other Towns is quite large. Supervisor Adamski stated there is not a reduction in pay, his schedule is going from 3 days per week to 2 days per week. Mrs. Loehr questioned the lines in the Assessor's budget and questioned the part time receptionist position. Councilwoman Pautler stated that was an error and will be corrected for Part Time Assessor Trainee.

Melissa Goff, Lavender Ln. – Questioned the Constables having multiple lines in the budget including one labeled as Court Officers. Noted they also are paid per session for Court. Asked if the Town is reimbursed by the private groups when they are at events such as car shows and other events. Ms. Goff went on to state that is a waste of taxpayer and that the Town should not pay the Constables to attend private events. Councilwoman Pautler stated the events are not-for-profit. Ms. Goff stated then those organizations should pay the Constables for their services not the tax payer. She also went on to state that as a Councilperson on the Town Board who is also a member of a group that uses the Constables that that is a conflict of interest. Went on to question the budget line for the senior shelter that was previously said was being moved? Ms. Goff stated she was in attendance at the public hearing for a grant where it was stated that it was going to be moved and so was the concession stand. Why the need for \$19,500 in repairs? Supervisor Adamski stated that he would look into that.

Tom Weisbeck, Broadway – Referenced page 11, special items. Questioned exactly what the items were for, what associations the Town belongs to, what sort of judgements and claims are included. Supervisor Adamski noted the Town is a member of the Association of Towns and another association he could not remember. He stated he could make a call to get an answer on the judgments and claims. Mr. Weisbeck asked if there are any outstanding claims that could result in future judgments. Jennifer Strong stated there is 1 stemming from an accident in the Town Park. Mr. Weisbeck went on to question the unallocated funds and questioned where these are paid from. Supervisor Adamski asked for a moment and made a phone call to get clarification. Mr. Weisbeck also questioned what line the Town pays insurance from. The \$65,500 accounts for all of our insurances Supervisor Adamski stated. And the \$5,000 in judgements and claims is a reserve fund.

William Sivecz, East Alaura – read the following statement. Supervisor Adamski stated this was “grand standing” and this public hearing was not the place for it. However, he did allow Mr. Sivecz to continue.

November 12, 2021

Good evening.

Mr. Supervisor, Madame Council Ladies, I appreciate the opportunity to address your Board tonight as we review the 2022 Town of Alden Preliminary Budget in this open forum.

Before I get into the bulk of my remarks I would like to cite a portion of the Town of Alden Employee Handbook adopted January 5, 2021.

"...Our practice is to treat each employee as an individual. We seek to develop a spirit of teamwork; individuals working together to attain a common goal.

In order to maintain an atmosphere where these goals can be accomplished, we provide a comfortable and progressive workplace. Most importantly, we have a workplace where communication is open and problems can be discussed and resolved in a mutually respectful atmosphere. We take into account individual circumstances and the individual employee.

We firmly believe that with direct communication, we can continue to resolve any difficulties that may arise and develop a mutually beneficial relationship."

I rise this evening to discuss the drastic reduction in the salary for the Town Assessor {Budget Account line A1355.100} and Town of Alden Assessment Office. The proposed reduction in the Assessor's remuneration represents a cut of over 31% and a reduction in the Department budget a cut in excess of 13%. From a review of the Preliminary budget, with the exception of most of the elected officials, raises are included for Town personnel. The only position having pay reduced is that of the Town Assessor. Additionally, the Assessment Department is the only department slated for a reduction.

The incumbent assessor is the longest tenured employee in the Town Hall, having served the Town for 17 years. He has been unanimously appointed and reappointed to the statutory 6-year terms on five separate occasions, most recently in 2019; where I note, then Councilman Adamski and Councilwomen Pautler, voted in the affirmative to approve the reappointment to another 6-year term. During his tenure, the incumbent Assessor has never received a negative performance evaluation or been presented with any verbal or written disciplinary warnings. In fact, he has plaudits from previous Supervisors, Town Board members, attorneys, outside assessment contractors and the residents of Alden.

The incumbent holds the New York State professional assessor designation. A designation that is attained thru experience, successful completion of a course of assessment and appraisal study and finally, sitting for examination of Real Property Tax Law and Regulations, as well as, completion of demonstration appraisals of residential and commercial property utilizing cost, market and income appraisal approaches.

The position of Assessor is multifaceted and specialized in nature. It requires:

- Public Relations skills
- Statistical and analytic skills
- Awareness of market and economic trends
- Legal interpretation abilities
- Strong mathematics knowledge
- Real estate appraisal competency
- Strong information technology abilities

Over the 17-year tenure, the incumbent Assessor has provided professional, open, transparent and equitable service to the residents of our community. Without regard to political affiliations, gender or race the incumbent has been accessible, listened to resident concerns, openly explained assessment procedures, including property exemption requirements, ownership counseling, property deed corrections, institutional knowledge and much more. The incumbent Assessor has been a strong team member, readily stepping outside of the Assessor position duties in designing the Town's computer network, serving as the Town's technology first responder, establishing and maintaining the Town's website, representing the Town position in non-assessment issues during public meetings, producing specific reports for other Town Departments and composing the Town's monthly newsletter.

In 2019, the incumbent Assessor announced his retirement from full time service. In conjunction the Town Board it was agreed that he continue service on a part-time basis and provide hands on training to a successor. At the January 2020 Town of Alden reorganization meeting a Deputy {or assistant} Assessor was appointed. The Deputy started her employment that January until

March 2020 when the Town Hall was closed due to Covid-19. In April 2020, the Deputy received an official lay off notice and was not permitted to return to service until the end of June 2020.

The workflow in an Assessment office is cyclical as follows:

- November – March: Property Exemption filings & County/Town Tax preparation
- March – April: Property data collection and valuation
- May – July: Property grievance period
- August – October: School Tax preparation

In a meeting occurring on October 19th and again in a meeting with the Deputy on October 27th the Supervisor inquired as to why after two years the Deputy was not ready to assume the position of Assessor. The Supervisor is obviously overlooking the fact that the Deputy entered her position without any experience or knowledge of the position, as well as, during the office's "busy" period, due to Covid-19 shutdown, lost exposure to the office and four months of training.

Additionally, again due to Covid-19, the Governor issued Executive orders waving the renewal requirement for property exemptions and requiring assessment complaint hearings to be held remotely. With these Covid orders and policies the Deputy could not be exposed to three main areas of assessment procedures: exemption processing, field data collection and assessment complaints. To date the Deputy Assessor has completed some of the required Assessment Courses and has achieved a level of competency in property sale data processing, senior citizen and STAR exemption processing.

The Deputy has had limited exposure to:

- **Veterans', agricultural land/building commercial and non-profit exemptions;**
- **Physical property data collection and valuation;**
- **Property subdivisions and mergers;**
- **The full Board of Assessment Review complaint processes.**

The Deputy not gained any experience in these areas:

- **Gas well and special franchise valuation;**
- **Tax certiorari process and negotiations**
- **Standard and/or custom data report processing.**

Here is a market salary for the position of Assessor. The Town of Alden has historically allocated funding for the Assessor position within the market range. The proposed allocation for the position dramatically places the Assessor salary outside, on the low actually to lowest} end of the market range. The most acceptable method in analyzing assessment salaries by the number of parcels among comparable sized neighboring communities. In this comparison, neighboring community salaries are:

Town	Parcels	Salary	\$ per Parcel
Darien	1,839	\$23,569	\$12.82
Attica	1,960	\$21,689	\$11.07
Bennington	2,167	\$22,500	\$10.38
Marilla	2,343	\$25,500	\$10.88
Pembroke	2,481	\$20,578	\$8.29
Alden (2021)	3,803	\$30,300	\$7.97
Newstead	4,570	\$45,740	\$10.01
Alden (2022)	3,803	\$20,727	\$5.45

From this comparison, it is obvious the Town has been receiving a very fair salary agreement from the incumbent Assessor.

- **The average market salary by municipal parcels is \$10.57 per parcel**
- **The 2021 Town of Alden salary is nearly 25% below the market average**
- **The 2022 Town of Alden proposed salary is over 48% under the market average.**

The proposed reduction if enacted does come with potential consequences in service and training levels in the Assessment Department.

- **Potential reduction in office hours**
- **Reduced availability for Alden residents and other Town Offices**
- **Reduced response turnaround time for property owner, attorney, real estate agents and outside appraiser inquiries**
- **Reduced hands-on training availability for the Deputy Assessor**

This evening I respectfully request the Town Board reconsider the 2022 budget allocation and reinstate the 2021 Adopted Budget funding for the position of Assessor, along with a salary increase commensurate with the overall average 9% increased proposed for all other Town employees.

Thank you for your patience and attention.

WILLIAM P SIVECZ, IAO
898 West Alaura Drive
Alden NY

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:15 P.M. Supervisor Adamski adjourned the meeting.

Alecia Barrett
Town Clerk