

**These minutes were approved by the Board of County Commissions on May 28, 2025. Full texts of resolutions appear at the end of this document.*

The Board of County Commissioners of the County of Warren met in Budget Session in its offices in the Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building, Belvidere New Jersey on January 4, 2025 at 9:01 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by Director Sarnoski and upon roll call, the following members were present: Commissioner James R. Kern, Commissioner Deputy Director Lori Ciesla and Commissioner Director Jason Sarnoski. Also attending were County Administrator Alex Lazorisak, County CFO Kim Francisco and Deputy Commissioner Clerk Tracy Matlock.

After leading the flag salute, Director Sarnoski confirmed with the County Administrator that the meeting notice complied with the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter 231, P.L. 1975. He then turned to County CFO Kim Francisco for an initial overview of 2025 budget ordinances and proposals.

Chief Financial Officer Mr. Francisco, started by stating the budget introduction dates have been extended this year and we have to adopt by April 30, 2025. It's usually completed in March. For the CAP, a 2.5 percent increase in the Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for 2025. We usually do a resolution for 3.5 percent. This is standard information.

Mr. Francisco presented the Tax Levy, explaining the tax rate went down this year by two cents. It was 54.71 cents and has been going down every year for several years. The levy has been growing slightly. Warren County is a good place to live. The rates are going up nicely, so our budget is growing at a slower pace than the growth and the equalized tax rate is going down. He mentions the equalized tax rate as we don't control each town. But we can control the equalized rate.

Next, Mr. Francisco turned to our debt service. This month in January we have an interest payment due, a principal payment due in July. In August, we will have no debt.

Mr. Francisco said everything he is presenting today is preliminary; it's not a finished product. He discussed the surplus. At the beginning of 2024 there was \$30 million surplus. We used almost \$7 million in the budget, bringing the total to \$23 million and we replenished \$13 million. The year ended with \$36 million in surplus. He explained the surplus is not earmarked toward anything, it's to balance the budget. We take the budget, minus the participating revenue, minus the tax levy, the surplus makes it up. He cautioned we do not want to use it up in one year; it should be stretched over several years.

Next, Mr. Francisco approached the subject of revenues, stating they are stable. In 2024 we met our goals and came in approximately \$2 million over the budget. The County Clerk, the Surrogate and the County Sheriff all met their goals. He pointed out the census for inmates from Hunterdon County was down. We budgeted \$1 million based on 2023 budget. We earned just under \$900,000, which is still good, but a little bit off. This is due to bail reform.

Mr. Francisco also pointed out an increase of approximately \$100,000 for the Office of Aging and Disabilities. This is due to an increase from \$95.00 per month, per case to \$150.00 per month,

per case from Care Management. This was the first increase in twenty years. Temporary Assistance and Social Services (TASS) budgeted \$4.2 million for reimbursement and once again the TASS Department came through and received \$4.3 million, meeting the goal. Revenues are stable.

Mr. Francisco turned his attention to interest. In 2022 we received 0.25 percent for our investments. In 2024 it was up to 5.36 percent. Now it's going back down to 4.64 percent. We won't earn quite as much. It's a good thing we are not borrowing when interest rates go up.

The equalized county tax rate has gone down because the ratable rates have grown higher than the levy increase.

Capital Improvement Fund – because we are a pay as you go county, we keep some money in savings and replenish it every year. We started with \$4 million, completed some projects, and we have \$1.5 million going into this year.

Other trust accounts:

- The Bicentennial – \$200,000 was allocated. We spent about \$27,000. There is \$171,000 going into our final year.
- Shippen Manor - Someone left Shippen Manor in their will and we received approximately \$197,000. This money is to be used for maintenance of the building and for maintaining the display of items in the building. It's in a trust fund and Corey Tierney, Land Preservation Administrator, will manage that. It's restricted for Shippen Manor use only.
- Storm Damage Appropriation – From July we did the emergency appropriation of ordinance for \$20 million, which was a conservatively high amount. If we don't spend it, there's no harm; we cancel. We spent \$3.3 million in cash and we have encumbered \$3.3 million of work to be done for Lommason Glen. The balance available of \$13.3 million. FEMA reimbursement to date is \$1.3 million. We spent \$3.3 million cash out, got \$1.3 million back. He expressed its better than he thought it would be.
- Pension Payments for 2025 –Our pension bill is only going up \$49,000, just under \$6 million. That's less than one percent of an increase. We had two good years, in 2024 it only went up \$11,000, but in 2023, as you may remember, went up almost \$500,000.
- Psychiatric Hospitals – In 2025 the bill is \$663,000 down over \$264,000. That follows an decrease in 2024 of \$172,000 following the decrease in 2023 to \$450,000. That's three good years in a row. Shout out to Shawn Buskirk, Human Services Director and her staff. We cannot control who goes to the hospital, but we can make sure they are Warren County residents.
- Employee Health Care – The appropriation is going up four percent, or \$600,000 on a \$15 million appropriation. He still considers this a favorable news. The State plan went up 16% this year. Following 19% the year before. Probably by 15% the year before that. The rates are astronomical to the State plan and ours. We meet with our team every year and we're still one of their best clients. One of the things that contribute to our increase are the new injectable drugs. They are very expensive. He heard it can cost \$3,000 for a pen that you may get several shots out of it.

Next. Mr. Francisco discussed budget appropriations and starting by saying some things went up due to inflation:

- Roads and Bridges – These budgets have been combined for 2025. Roads and Bridges are supervised by Calvin Inscho. By combining their budgets, collectively, their budget is going up about \$78,000. The price of materials and supplies, concrete rocks, stones, guard rails, etc. have all gone up.
- Insurance - Multi-line insurance, workers compensation and liability, has all going up. John Daly gave him the price of 8%, almost \$200,000. Other organizations are looking at a 20% increase.
- Corrections Center – Grocery bills, medical services and operating supplies have all gone up. Their budget has increased approximately \$200,000. The increase of 3% in the daily rate with Hunterdon County will help.
- Utilities – Are going up approximately 1% due to the new buildings coming on.
- County Clerk and Board of Elections – Their budgets are going up due to election requirements. A brief discussion took place about whether or not there is offset from the State and if it's an anticipated revenue. It was explained the State does provide funding, however, it's always a year behind.
- Aging and Disabilities – the nutrition budget is going up.
- Vo-Tech – They requested a 2.5% increase about \$114,000, and \$1.5 million in capital.
- The Community College – is requesting a 4% increase, \$102,000, but no capital this year.
- Public Information – Requested an increase of \$80,000 for the newsletter.
- Planning- Had an increase of \$40,000 for GIS software support program.
- Open Space – Is doing well. There is \$29 million in the cash fund, which is about ten years' worth of the levy. The budget went up this year about \$2.2 million. There weren't many purchases. Open Space is healthy.
- Open Space Tax Levy – Brought in \$2.9 million and we did purchase a new SUV for Corey last year. Interest was \$1.45 million, which was about half of what we brought in. The interest is equal at one cent. It's a healthy fund. It was discussed that years ago it was up to six cents. We've continued to grow the surplus and reduce it by four cents. We're doing a lot of farms, public parks and other projects.
- Library – The levy was \$4.72 million in 2024, it was the same for a few years. With the increase of ratables, the tax rate has dropped last year by approximately 4.10 cents. This year we're in a position with the Catherine Dickson Hofman Library (CDH) branch mostly behind us, we could look at the levy this year. We could drop a few hundred thousand, nothing drastic. We still get \$62,000 from the Town of Phillipsburg with their agreement, this is the fifth of six years. We are budgeting \$6,000 for the replacement of the library van and put money aside every year so when their van goes, they have money to buy it. We'll have to discuss how much to put into the capital improvement, but after we talk about the levy. Right now, there is over a \$1 million in there to start. CDH took us down. Now we need to start building the fund for maintenance to the other branches. Discussion took place about one of the libraries is now fifteen years old and maintenance is going to be needed. Also discussed was the combination of the Library IT with the County IT departments, which should cut costs. Internally this is still being discussed. If the two are combined, it was noted the costs will still come out of the Library budget for the Library IT.

Mr. Francisco continued on and commented this year he and Jill Butcher, Assistant Library Director, have been working together on the Library budget. If the levy is adjusted, the \$1.45 million

is where there is room to play with.

Mr. Francisco went back to Land Preservation and the ending balance of \$30 million which is really good.

With the finishing of his presentation of the preliminary budget, Mr. Francisco stressed because this is the first day of budget meetings, this I just a preliminary budget and no way the final product.

Next on the agenda is Shawn Buskirk, Human Services Director. She gave an overview of the Office of the Adjuster, stating the office is now fully staffed. Mental health background checks have decreased significantly, commitments to state, county, private and special psychiatric hospitals have gone down and involuntary outpatient commitments have decreased. Payment to the state institutions has decreased over the years and she is looking forward to continuing that reduction as well. The increase in the Adjuster's budget is for contractual salaries. There is no increase in the operating budget.

Next Laura Richter, Associate Director/Mental Health Administrator/Substance Abuse Coordinator, gave an overview of the Human Services, Division of Administration budget. There is no increase requested in the operating expenses other than personnel. Funding for outside agencies remains the same. They are requesting two paratransit vehicles and requesting additional monies for youth shelter, noting this is the final year of a ten-year contract.

Ms. Richter gave a summary of where they are with the opioid settlement funds. It is just under \$1.7 million. Local Advisory Committee on Alcoholism/Drug Abuse (LACADA) conducted a survey and results indicated a lack of knowledge about what services are offered and the possibility of starting prevention efforts with children, specifically those who have been impacted by the opiate epidemic. Discussion took place regarding coordinating of efforts and not duplicate efforts of the various departments receiving funding.

Ms. Richter next looked at transportation expansion, noting most recovery meetings are held between the hours of 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. Transportation only runs until 6:00 p.m. Extending the hours can also increase availability for employment opportunities for those in recovery who may need employment.

Budget estimates for the total programming is just under \$720,000, which is under the \$1.6 million that they have for all of these five different recommendations.

- The Navigator Role is a civil service position.
- Six Week Summer Camp – there isn't a lot of summer camps in the County and if there is, its cost prohibited for some of our families. The estimates given were from Michael Neu, Department of Education, who knew of a program that cost \$125 per student and it was estimated based on 100 students. Location is yet to be determined. Food costs were based off of USFDA reimbursement rates.
- For an after school program, this cost is based on paying for a teacher for a two hour program for two schools. It's based on 40 students (20 at each school) and based on the USFDA rates for transportation. Transportation would only be one way because students would only need

to be transported home from school. This rate can also be decreased if we coordinate with a school that may already have late bus hours.

- Transportation for Recovery Meetings /Employment opportunities - Using the 2025 hourly driver rate for Easton Coach, the fuel cost, the wait time for bus drivers, the dispatcher still needs to be on when the busses are out running.
- Marketing Campaign – Comcast Commercials for a six month campaign; just over \$21,000. Billboards annually for about \$10,000 for an estimated cost of \$55,000.

A brief discussion took place about the possibility of advertising in the County newsletter which goes out to all residents, 3 to 4 times a year. This will help cut costs for advertisement.

With Ms. Richter’s presentation being complete, Lauren Burd, Director for the Division of Temporary Assistance and Social Services (TASS) was next on the agenda.

Ms. Burd noted TASS exceeded their revenue goals in 2024 by \$150,000 which will go to county surplus. The 2025 budget reflects a 1.26% increase in projected operating cost, which is due to contracted services.

Ms. Burd discussed the increase in Medicaid applications due to the State adding extension COVID cases back into the monthly redeterminations. TASS has been able to keep up with these applications despite the eight vacancies the department has. It was noted these positions are entry-level and due to civil service titles, personnel need to grow in the agency in order to qualify for the civil service title.

They were reimbursed for Medicaid totals at the maximum of \$1.4 million. They have consistently improved with the backlog. In 2016 the backlog was over 26%, today it is at 0.16%.

Homeless population had an increase of 42% between 2023 and 2024. A Homeless Stakeholder Committee was created to combat this issue. They’ve created work and focus groups regarding housing and homelessness, mental health and substance abuse, access to transportation services, and food security and nutrition. They continue to increase the services to populations that really need the help and support. This concludes Ms. Burd’s presentation.

The final presentation from the Department of Human Services is from Steve Unger, Division of Aging and Disabilities Services. Mr. Unger went over a few highlights such as the hiring of a new Veterans Coordinator. There will be a Veteran’s Resource Fair on April 3 at the Belvidere Manor. They have a new meal vendor. Costs of nutrition meals, rent increases, and Manpower fees have all gone up. He is requesting:

- An increase of \$114,797 for the Congregate Meal Program (\$68,035) and for the increase transportation costs (\$46,762).
- \$100,373 for the Home Delivered Meal program. There is a 27% increase in meal costs.
- The total increase requested for the nutrition program is \$215,170. The senior population is continually increasing. Last year was about 27,000 and this year is 31,260 seniors over the age of 60. It is roughly 27% of the County’s population.

Mr. Unger did bring their suggested donation per meal up to the advisory council and the suggested donation for 2025 is \$4.00 per meal up from \$3.00. The estimated revenue for 2025 is \$265,000, \$115,000 from Federal Financial Participation reimbursement and \$150,000 from New Jersey Assistance for Community Caregiving (JACC) reimbursement and clinical assessments. He has no new position requests, promotions, or salary adjustments. This concludes Mr. Unger's presentation and the overall presentation of the Human Services budget.

There were no questions from the public on the Human Services budget presentations. Ms. Ciesla concluded by saying she gives the Department of Human Services a lot of credit. They deal with our most needy residents.

After a ten minute break the Board reconvened at 10:46 a.m. Information Systems Director, Robert Sidie was next on the agenda.

Mr. Sidie noted the Information Systems department does have a sizeable increase request for 2025. The bulk of this is to provide funding for salaries. He referred to the organizational chart and said he expects to fill these positions during 2025.

A brief discussion took place regarding the increase of the Information System Budget and it was noted an increase was expected. The question came up as to where the funds will be coming from to cover these positions. The funding will be coming from both the Library and Public Safety budgets to offset some of the costs. There should be no cost for the position at Public Safety because there is already a vacancy there that hasn't been filled. As far as the Library, there is a reorganization happening, so some of those funds will go to the Information System's budget.

Mr. Sidie discussed the three fire walls protecting the three separate networks and explained the significant expenses for his department which includes the Finance Plus system, document management system, Office 365 and PC and Network Security which is the cost of the carbon black software license as well as cost of our fire wall licensing. All of these prices have gone up since last year. These are necessary programs that have to be updated otherwise insurance will not cover.

Next Mr. Sidie went over projects that need to be addressed such as the on-going security implementation of camera deployment, the master keys system and the deployment of Wi-Fi throughout the County.

Other projects Mr. Sidie is working on include:

- Development of some basic AI functionality within the County. He plans to have the policy to the County Administration in the near future. Commissioner Kern complemented the work Mr. Sidie has done with AI.
- The phone systems will be upgraded to a cloud-based system and we will stop paying for support costs for that and be able to eliminate the consultant.
- New servers will be needed. They have to replace all the switches at all the Library branches. They are all very old. The capital expense should be on its normal track. The Library will pay for this expense. It will go through Information Systems and then be reimbursed through the Library account.
- Building security improvements still need to be worked out. There is money left over from previous years. \$100,000 will be moved into IT's budget. Buildings for this project include

all the garages, the Human Services building, Blairstown Library. There are a good number of cameras to be installed.

With no further questions, this concludes Mr. Sidie's presentation of the Information Systems budget.

The Board took a few minutes for a break and allow for set up of the next presenter.

Next on the agenda is Dr. Will Austin, President, Warren County Community College. He discussed full time tuition fees, citing Warren County Community College is the best value compared to surrounding area community colleges. He noted a little over 1% increase every year in funding for the past twenty years of his presidency. In 2004, the County allotment was \$2,035,280 to \$2,555,184. He doesn't anticipate being able to continue this for the next few years.

Dr. Austin went over more details for 2026 budget.

- County support - \$2.6 million, about a 4% increase
- State support - at the FY23 level, (referred to as level funding) which will be a cut
- Enrollment – anticipates being stable at current levels
- Current staff – not looking to add any new positions
- Major increases – in non-salary costs such as health benefits, software, maintenance/utilities.
- Inflationary Costs - He expressed the main issue is the inflationary costs increases, in payroll and benefits, particularly with future negotiated contracts. He feels they couldn't have done it without the grants they received the last few years. Most of these have come in the area of robotics and drone initiatives and the expansion in agriculture.

He highlighted some things at the college:

- Contemplation Garden – The dedication will take place in the spring. The project came in on budget after some modifications were made to honor Chuck Haytaian. Everything worked out well.
- They have three new degrees (precision agriculture, agri-business, business communications) and two more coming by fall (AI and robotics).
- New initiated accountability structure, which has helped with DOGE type things.
- They were able to maintain a fiscal responsibility, however there is nothing else left to cut.

A discussion took place about what the college's budget anticipations may be for next year's budget. It is thought they will be requesting another increase. There will be little difference.

Also discussed was the possibility of a new Governor coming in and merging institutions. Right now we have control over the county college. He gave the example of Hunterdon County. They have no say and have paid Somerset County approximately \$5-\$6 million over the past decade for 1,500 students. By maintaining control of our own, Warren County has been in that \$2-\$2.5 million range for twenty years. If mergers came to fruition, we would want to be with Sussex County.

Dr. Austin presented a special request for a Counter-UAS position, saying for \$175,000 we can have the best drone program in the country. He feels he can get the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) previous Head of Counter-UAS to set up the program. Dr. Austin informed the Board Warren County College trained all six law enforcement officers at the FAA. They do all the training for everybody throughout the country such as for jails and wind turbine farms and he feels they have to learn how to make more money at it. He thinks they are going to see millions of dollars in the federal and state levels, for the next couple of years in grants. These are going to be lucrative, six figures jobs. There are going to be jobs in law enforcement, sports franchises, critical infrastructure, and warehouses.

Dr. Austin concluded by stating the General Operating Aid is \$2.8 million. They need \$102,207 from the County. If they do the Counter-UAS position, he suggested to do it temporarily. It would be similar to the dual enrollment subsidies. For example, the Operations would be \$2.4 million the dual enrollment. The \$175,000 would be separately. This way it will be obvious what was done in the future. The Counter-UAS position should pay for itself within two years.

At 11:55 a.m., a motion was made by James Kern III, second by Lori Ciesla for adjournment for an hour for lunch and to reconvene for the continuation of the budget reviews.
Recorded vote: James Kern III, Lori Ciesla, Jason Sarnoski: yes

At 12:56 p.m., a motion was made by James Kern III, second by Lori Ciesla to go back into session and continue the budget reviews.
Recorded vote: James Kern III, Lori Ciesla, Jason Sarnoski: yes

After a lunch break the Board reconvened at 12:56 p.m., Mr. Sarnoski asked Derrick Forsythe and Amy Barkman from the Warren County Technical School to come forward to present their budget. Mr. Forsythe started by giving an overview of the high school's programs. They have twelve career offerings. In addition to the LPN program being offered to adults, they also offer Welding and Construction Technology programs to adults as well. Current enrollment is at 406 students for grades 9-12.

Next Mr. Forsythe addressed the Long-Range Facility Plan. They have been able to accomplish the following, due to the support of this Board:

- Welding ventilation
- Construction dust collection replacement
- Repaired the main entrance off of Route 57
- Replaced a walk-in freezer in their kitchen

He continued and spoke of the status of some items on their Needs Assessment. They have moved up the project of roof leaks from year 5 to year 3 due to a mold issue they discovered in September 2023. Several classrooms had to be relocated for approximately six weeks until everything was identified, mitigated and cleaned. They have been able to avoid any further mold issues. They had a roofing company fix any roof leaks that they were aware of. The roof they are asking for help with replacement has been out of warranty since 2017.

Mr. Forsythe turned to projects that are on the Needs Assessment that they have not been able

to get to:

- Lightning Suppression System
- Electronic Locking System
- Fire Suppression System
- Exterior Door Alarm System
- Roof Replacement, this is in addition to the roof project they just spoke about
- Boiler Replacement

He went into further detail about the roof membrane they are thinking about replacing on area #4. Again the warranty expired in 2017. This roof covers approximately a third of the building. This roof needs constant attention and they have been patching leaks quite frequently. The estimated cost for the replacement is \$2.4 million.

There is another roof area that needs attention and was included on the Needs Assessment. This is the area on roof area #1, which includes the gymnasium. The warranty ends in March 2025. The estimated cost to replace the gymnasium roof membrane is \$600,000.

He commented they have been making a great deal of progress on the items from the Needs Assessment. The installation of the new sewer/septic line project near Route 57 was the most recent one to be completed.

Mr. Forsythe asked Ms. Barkman go over some of the budget highlights. She emphasized she is only highlighting what she knows at this point in time.

- Health benefits –Projected increase of \$190,000. They are being told to expect a 14% - 22% increase.
- Utilities – They are expecting a 20% increase. The County will take a look at the Tech School's utility rates and compare to the County's rate which is only 3% increase.
- Salaries – Approximately \$165,000 which reflects a 3% increase for certified staff and 3.5% increase for non-certified staff. They are in year 3 of a 4 year contract. Negotiations will begin at the end of this calendar year.
- Payback to sending districts – as a reminder, four years ago there was a debacle where the school owed back \$1.5 million for tuition. They only owe \$175,000 at this point in time.
- Savings of \$170,000 (\$110,000 for the restructuring of administrative staff and \$60,000, beginning July 1 for a contracted counselor no longer needed).

Ms. Barkman moved on to the requests for funding:

- Increase in the operating budget of 2.5%.
- For the roof they are requesting a commitment of \$1.5 million.

The next topic Ms. Barkman discussed was the anticipated revenues. They won't know their state aid figures until the end of February. As a result, she has budgeted flat. Tuition from LEAs went up a little bit - \$1,031,130. She noted they will see a decrease in grant money for the multi-year Cares Act which won't impact them too much. Revenues for this is \$324,507. It was noted last year the Board gave the school \$500,000 for the septic and the operating budget was a 2% increase.

A brief discussion took place about what happens to education at the Tech School if the roof fails. Would it shift to virtual learning? Virtual learning could be permitted by the DOE if the school is shut down for 3-4 consecutive days due to mold. They would need Commissioner of Education approval. It was suggested since the County and the Tech School are using the same architect, DI Group, that a large roof replacement package be looked into in hopes of cutting costs. The Board understands the needs of the school. The Board will work on it. They are okay with the 2.5% increase in the operating budget since the school has cut administrative costs. It sounds like they have money in their capital reserve and they do not want to expend it all for emergencies.

Lastly, Mr. Forsythe approached the subject of the possibility of adding an additional program sometime in the future. Because there is savings on the salary side, they might be able to pull off a thirteenth program, however, space will be an issue. He is proposing to move their administrative staff to the building that houses the County Superintendent of Schools. The space vacated by their board office could be turned into another shop. He mentioned the possibility of a fine arts or creative arts program such as theater. He would like to work with the Board to survey community members and county residents, to see what the interests would be. It was noted the County Superintendent of Schools is currently housed in this building so relocating that office would need to be considered. Mr. Forsythe said there is the possibility of using their current space. They are hoping a new program would bring in an additional 40 students per year. He reminded the Board the current board of education office was previously used for their childhood development program. Walls were put up to create office space. They are now having issues with ducts in two of the offices, so there is no heat in them. He thought he would introduce the possibility of a new program to the Board before spending any additional money on their board offices. County Administrator and Public Works Director will look at capital potential and the budget there. The Board congratulated Ms. Barkman on her upcoming retirement. Mr. Forsythe introduced the incoming School Business Administrator, Donna Williams who will start in early March.

Ms. Sarnoski asked if there were any questions or comments about the Tech School or the College from the public. Hearing none, the Board continued on with the agenda.

The last budget presentation for the day is from the Library. Jill Butcher, Assistant Library Director, started by giving a background of her experience at the library. As of next month, she will have been with the Warren County library for twenty-three years. She started as a reference librarian /technical services, head of reference, moved on to her current position as Assistant Director.

Ms. Butcher gave an overview of the library system citing it serves seventeen townships within the County and the Town of Belvidere; there is an increase in the number of programs the library offers and the number of attendees at the various branches as well. The library's app was accessed 49,000 times and the website 436,000 times.

Next Ms. Butcher discussed what the Library is looking forward to this year:

- The reopening of the Catherine Dickson Hofman Library branch in the spring of this year. She thanked the trustees of the CDH Library Association. Last month they purchased \$27,000 worth of equipment for the new MakerSpace. They have also committed several thousand dollars for programming for next summer and next fall.
- Also in the spring, they will be joining MAIN 2.0, which will include Morris, Sussex,

Somerset, Warren, Hunterdon Counties, Sparta and Hackettstown. The cost for this year is approximately \$60,000. She estimates they will save around \$55,000 in vendor services. Will provide patrons with access to 4 million items.

- New integrated library system in May of 2025. It's an open-source system. She anticipates a savings of \$7,000 over the current system.
- They are hoping to do a system-wide inventory. She explained the RFID tags are on all of their materials and have all the equipment necessary.

Ms. Butcher discussed the 2025 budget increases she is requesting, pointing out a 3.6% increase in salaries and wages. There will be a 3.75% decrease in total salaries and operating expenses compared to 2024. She highlighted some increases for this year:

- Salary adjustments - for seven long-term staff members, which will total \$17,000.
- Electronic Media – an increase of \$35,000
- Materials budget at CDH Library – \$10,000. She would like to have a small opening day collection of best sellers.

Budgetary decreases include:

- Savings of \$28,000 due to the joining of MAIN. They will be able to drop their individual subscription for a number of services such as foreign language service, digital magazines, an on-line account registration, CloudLibrary, etc.
- Savings of \$7,000 - migrating to the new Koha system. Price is less expensive than the current system they are using.
- Savings of \$4,000 for postage costs. By joining MAIN, the system will generate notices for them and they will no longer need to do mailings.
- Savings of \$27,000 for inter-library loans –In 2024 they borrowed approximately 1,500 items from other libraries. Many of these items came from MAIN. She is anticipating the cost to be cut in half.

Ms. Butcher spoke of current and future staffing needs. There are currently 35 employees across all branches, including administration and branch services. There are 31.8 full time employees, the South West branch has the most employees, 7.2 full time, and it's the busiest branch. She made note this year in order to qualify for state aid, they have to have another professional librarian on staff. They currently have 5 and the minimum is 6. They are currently searching for a branch manager for the Richard D. Gardner branch. She is hoping to add an additional part-time employee at each of the branches. The libraries are open 60 hours each week and that's the minimum hours to receive state aid. These positions have already been approved. A discussion took place about having student assistance helpers again. The library has moved from this due to the minimum wage increases.

Next Ms. Butcher discussed the capital expenditure requests:

- North East Branch - there is fading, chipping and peeling of paint on the exterior of the building, approximate cost is \$75,000.
- Richard D. Gardner Branch - they are requesting a new self-checkout machine, citing this one was the first one purchased and nearing life expectancy. She also mentioned the self-checkouts are widely used. Cost is \$11,000.

- Catherine Dickson Hofman Branch – Several items were discussed
 - \$20,000 to move all the materials back
 - \$33,000 for security gates and self-checkout
 - \$4,700 for appliances
 - \$7,500 for TV monitors
 - \$2,500 for storage cabinets

Mr. Sarnoski made the point that in the fifteen years he has been a Freeholder/Commissioner, a whole new library system has been put in place with \$0 debt with finished construction. It was noted these expenses will come out of the library budget. The Board has been saving money in anticipation of maintaining the buildings. He also mentioned the library equalized tax rate stating it's the lowest it's been since 1990. The average a county resident is paying is less than what they paid in 1991. We have a good Library Board who works hard, watching every penny, making sure our library programs are what we want them to be. He thanked Ms. Butcher for stepping up when the former head librarian retired and he wished her luck in her position. The library has a pretty solid budget and joining the MAIN is going to save money. He feels the Board is providing a great library for the tax dollars. Many people from our towns, who have their own libraries, pay to be a part of the County's library system.

The Library presentation ended with comments from the Administrator, CFO and the Board saying Ms. Butcher stepped up and this is the best library presentation they have seen. Very well done. Mr. Kern also thanked Ms. Butcher and the library board for all they have done during what was a difficult year.

PUBLIC COMMENT

None.

ADJOURNMENT

On motion by James Kern III, seconded by Lori Ciesla, and there being no further business before the board, the meeting was adjourned at 2:06 p.m.