

BOROUGH OF EDGEWOOD
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CALL TO ORDER

President Schaefer called the meeting of the Borough of Edgewood to order at 7:04 pm in the Municipal Building.

ROLL CALL

Upon roll call, the following responded: Mr. Bright, Mr. Wainright, Mr. Wilson, Dr. Petrolla, Mr. Fuller and Ms. Schaefer.

Mayor Cook and Solicitor Barry were also present.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR

President Schaefer asked for items from the floor to receive public comment on the proposed 2015 Edgewood Borough Budgets.

Tom Herward - 322 Dewey Ave.

Mr. Herward said he was opposed to cuts to the C.C. Mellor Library donation in the Borough's 2015 budget. Mr. Herward is president of the Allegheny County Library Association (ACLA), and spoke about how the Borough's cut would affect the Library's funding from ACLA and the Regional Asset District. He also said C.C. Mellor Library was in the top 5 libraries in ACLA for fundraising.

Audrey Waldock - 131 LaCrosse St.

Ms. Waldock spoke opposing cuts to the C.C. Mellor donation. She said FEMA recognizes libraries as providers of essential services, and as such she believes it is the Borough's responsibility to provide more funding. Ms. Waldock said it is the responsibility of the borough to provide for the health, safety and welfare of residents and in the case of an emergency, the library would help provide these services.

Carl Bolton - 131 LaCrosse St.

Mr. Bolton strongly opposed cuts to the Borough's donation to the C.C. Mellor Library. He said the library provided a sense of community and that he believes the Borough does not provide enough funding to the library in a good year. Mr. Bolton made suggestions of 2015 budget expenditures he believed could be cut, including printing physical newsletters, Community Day, and street paving.

Christine Probert - 1008 Walnut St.

Ms. Probert spoke as chair of the library board to oppose the proposed decrease in the Borough's donation to the library. She explained the relationship between the Edgewood Club and the C.C. Mellor Library, and stated the Club provided in kind donations by allowing rooms to be used for community groups.

Christine Telfer - 129 Lloyd Ave.

Ms. Telfer read a letter she previously distributed to Council opposing the cuts to the 2015 donation to the library. She said she uses the library on a regular basis and it has been important to her, especially using the computers

when she did not have internet or working computers at home. She believes the library helps provide public access to information, which is essential. She also commended the programs run by the library, and the cultural impact they have on the community.

Louise Steiner - 120 Beech St.

Ms. Steiner spoke to echo the sentiments expressed by the other speakers. She said the Edgewood community lost its local schools and that the C.C. Mellor Library is especially important to creating a sense of community. She asked if money from recycling newspapers could be used for funding the library.

Jelena Janjic - 181 Gordon Ave.

Dr. Janjic spoke about the importance of the library to the community. When she immigrated to the United States in 2000, she said the library provided their first safe haven, and access to information. She said her son now enjoys the children's programming. She said her family moved to Edgewood because of the neighborhood school and neighborhood library, and that the value of the library cannot be measured in dollars.

Andrew Miller - Regent Square Civic Association

Mr. Miller presented a letter to Council from the Regent Square Civic Association urging Council to increase its proposed donation in 2015.

Jenn Alfieri - 204 Oakview Ave.

Ms. Alfieri urged Council to allocate funding to restore Dickson Park. She said her children do use the park, but that several areas are overgrown and not cared for. She hoped to see at least a picnic table or garbage can, and hoped for further discussion about a possible dog park. She also said the library is an integral part of the Edgewood Community and hoped Council would restore its donation to the 2014 level.

Ruth McGregor - 416 Locust St.

Ms. McGregor said she believed it was critical that Council restore its funding to the C.C. Mellor Library to the 2014 level. She said that as a former member of the library board and former Mayor, she had never seen so many people turn out to a Council meeting, and that the library was very important to the community.

Bruce Rosenthal - 156 W. Hutchinson Ave.

Dr. Rosenthal commended Council for the job that they do for the community, and asked that space be found in the 2015 budget to update Dickson Park for revitalization and specifically he is hopeful that a dog park can be created.

Tonya Walter - 122 Lincoln Ave.

Ms. Walter said that the library is the most important place in Edgewood for her family, and that it is the first place where they reached out to their community. She and her daughter attend the programs and it's where they go on cold winter days and where they refresh themselves in the summer. She said she supports continuing funding to the library because it is a safe place for children in our community.

Suzan Lami - 321 Maple Ave.

Ms. Lami said that in most communities, residents would be addressing Council about the proposed property tax increase, but in Edgewood people care about the community and are instead asking that Council maintain the current

level of support to the library. She said the library is critical to the community and made such a difference to her children's lives when they were growing up. Ms. Lami said the library is the heart and soul of the community.

Harry Winslow - 113 Washington St.

Mr. Winslow said he used to teach English at Gateway High School, and would buy books for his students from the C.C. Mellor Library's book sale. He said this helped him and helped his students, and wouldn't have been possible without the library.

President Schaefer addressed the audience in order to clear up some unintended misinformation that was distributed. She stated that the Borough Council was not an adversary to the library, and that the Council supported and will continue to support the library. She said Council members have looked for grant opportunities for the library, and hand delivered a grant application for the library. President Schaefer explained the Borough's budget process, and that while the library is not a department of the Borough, the Borough's proposed budget allocates \$10.31 per capita to the library. She said C.C. Mellor is a regional library, and the other communities in its service area were giving: Forest Hills \$1.54/capita, Wilkins \$0.28/capita, Churchill \$0.50/capita and that Edgewood's donation is three times as much as the other municipalities combined. President Schaefer explained how the RAD funding formula placed a demand on struggling Borough budgets by turning well-meaning donations into budgetary expectations/necessities for the libraries. She then explained the Borough's budget priorities and the items that would be costly in the future. President Schaefer said she hoped that whatever was ultimately decided with the library, this would lead to continued open dialogue and community understanding.

Mayor Cook spoke as a former council member and member of the library board. He said that Council does not and has never made decisions about the library lightly. He encouraged all in attendance at the public hearing to volunteer with the library. He suggested the creation of a 'friends of the library' board that could coordinate volunteers for events like Community Day. Mayor Cook said public involvement is also critical.

M-1 Mr. Fuller moved to adjourn at 7:55 pm. Second by Mr. Wainright.

DISCUSSION: None

The aye vote on the motion was unanimous. **Motion carried.**



Julie P. Bastianini, Borough Manager

Council's Response at the end of the Public Meeting

Thank you for your time and your comments.

I wish to assure you that as individuals and as a Council we understand the place the C.C. Mellor Library has for the residents and friends of Edgewood, for our own families. My daughter was a dedicated volunteer there from high school through obtaining her Masters degree.

We have donated in the past, we will continue to support the library.

Various communications may have inadvertently given our residents the perception that Council is an adversary to the library, that the decrease in our proposed budgeted donation was done covertly and without care. That is not the case. Our budget meetings were open to the public and were advertised. At the December 1st meeting Council voted to make the proposed budget available for review, and it was distributed the next day.

- When we received a letter of inquiry by the library Board (dated December 1) our response was sincere regarding what issues and looming expenditures are before the Borough and the letter was hand delivered the following day.
- Although the C.C. Mellor Library is not a department of the Borough or under any Boroughs' purview, the local municipalities of Forest Hills, Braddock Hills, Wilkins, Churchill, and Edgewood all contribute to it. Last year's Edgewood's donation was not .02% of our budget, it was 1.36% or \$40,000. The proposed budgeted donation this year is 1% of our budget or \$32,000:\$10.31/capita.
- In 2015 Forest Hills (which has a branch of the library) is slated to donate \$1.54/capita an \$850 increase, Wilkins \$0.28/capita, Churchill \$.50. While their residents have access to the same quality programming, Edgewood's total donation is more than 3 times the amount of the other boroughs combined.

Edgewood Council cares about the library. And a \$32,000 donation or 1% of Borough revenues is not an insignificant donation for a small municipality to make to a separate entity and might otherwise be seen as such except that funding (or extra funding revenues) for the Library given by the state and RAD for 2016 are tied up by a *formula* determined by the state and approved by ACLA. This formula has a number of different factors: these include the amounts the local governments give/population served/time and supplies used in outreach. It is tying the municipal donations to a formula that unfortunately turns the well-meaning municipal donation into a library budgetary expectation/necessity.

The strain of this is not just felt in Edgewood. In conversations with other municipal officials who also carve out funds to support their local libraries, this formula puts an inordinate demand on municipalities and the need for higher and higher municipal donations. This model of funding by this particular formula will be more and more difficult for municipalities to sustain and threatens Library programming and outreach. We're hoping with Mr. Herward's leadership in ACLA, and support garnered from other municipalities, we could work to get the formula revised to the benefit of the local Libraries and the municipalities who support them. Together, with other elected officials we could go to the RAD Board to request the formula be revised. I don't believe they intended it to become a burden on municipalities.

The Borough Budget is based on the estimated real estate value as certified by Allegheny County. A few years ago with the assessed value increase, we kept our tax rate flat. Now, there are no longer monies in the state budget for our representatives and senators to use to support municipal projects as in the past. We are responsible for Public Safety, infrastructure repair and maintenance and legislative work: ordinances, adherence to federal and state mandates, inter-municipal cooperation organizations and agreements (to keep Edgewood at the table and a voice in regional negotiations which impact us, and grant applications which we would not be eligible for on our own).

- With every successful real estate appeal, we have to pay back the tax money previously budgeted for and collected. We anticipate more appeals in 2015.
- We are under a Federal Mandate as a region to repair and maintain an aging infrastructure in order to uphold the Clean Water Act. We have evaluated our sewer systems and are systematically repairing and maintaining them with more mandates and controls looming in the very near future. Legislatively we are working to partner with the other 82 municipalities to develop a comprehensive wet weather plan. Our

efforts have been discussed with the EPA who is considering our "wet weather adaptive management plan". Using green solutions to cut down on wet weather overflows will take planning, implementing, and maintaining. All which will have an added cost.

- Last year we took out a \$1million loan to jumpstart our much needed street paving program which had been waiting for 5 years. We are continuing with our paving plan and beginning to pay off the loan.
 - Our aging urban forest has been evaluated and is in need of care to keep the beauty of our tree lined streets. Some trees need to be pruned while others must be cut down because of safety issues and replaced.
 - We had a \$167,000 emergency sewer and infrastructure repair this year. And with our aging infrastructure we must anticipate that there will be more.
 - There is a cost to update our codes and ordinances.
 - A cost to update our parks and recreation plan in order to consider a dog park, to begin to revitalize Dickson Park as so many residents have asked. . The \$10,000 in the budget for "Recreation", is dedicated to pay for the plan update.
 - Costs to replace police cars, DPW equipment and vehicles, the cost of salt, water, electric, gas costs all have risen.
 - Community Day, that builds community and promotes our community organizations.
- These are a few of the things that impact the Borough's budget.

As I shared with the Library Board President in our letter, we know that folks can go through both our budgets and find things to cut. Some email suggestions to Council have been to:

- Cut down on the number of police
- Cut down on snow and ice removal
- Cut staffing
- Cut Community Day
- Cut legislative activities
- Cut street paving

Where the Library staff are known and cared for by all of you, the DPW worker (basically on call 24/7) who leaves his warm bed to plow our streets in the middle of the night, or leaves a family event to take care of a Wilkesburg sewer overflow or a fallen tree in the middle of a storm is not known to you. Both contribute to the wellbeing of the community both deserve to have the training and the tools necessary to do their jobs safely and professionally. Our crime statistics are down because our officers are well trained and watchful, and work to de-escalate problems, effectively work cooperatively with other departments to catch the crooks and keep the Borough as a walkable community day and night.

Whatever is ultimately decided with the budget, it will be done so carefully and thoughtfully. Our hope is that there will continue to be open dialogue and community understanding from this. And that the Library Board will be revitalized and be able to have regular meetings with a quorum present. (I know Christine [the Library Board Chair] has struggled with that.) We all have a care and a responsibility for our community and the many things that make Edgewood-Edgewood... safe and cared for streets, green trees, well-tended parks, community building activities, partnerships with other communities that bring precious grant funding and cost effective solutions to infrastructure needs; the maintaining and of dedicated Borough personnel, as well as a Volunteer Fire Department, symphony, and Library.

Thank you.