

**ERIE COUNTY BUDGET COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

DATE: August 18, 2026

2027 BUDGET WORKSESSIONS

	Present:	Alternate Name:
Richard Jeffrey, Erie County Auditor	<u>X</u>	<u></u>
Kevin Baxter, Erie County Prosecutor	<u></u>	<u>Jason Hinnners</u>
Caleb Stidham, Erie County Treasurer	<u>X</u>	<u></u>
Janice Baum, Fiscal Officer	<u>X</u>	<u></u>

Others: Brenda Hurst, Chief Fiscal Officer, E.C. Auditor's Office and Kathy Herchler, Treasurer's Office

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 9:01 AM to begin the day's 2027 budget work sessions with the following subdivisions:
Erie MetroParks, Sandusky Library, Village of Bayview and Perkins Township

ERIE METROPARKS

Those present representing Erie MetroParks were Melissa Price, Executive Director, Beth Ferback, Financial Administrator, Sue Daniel, Admin. Coordinator, Margaret Murray and Troy Wisheart, Commissioners and James Peters, Legal Counsel

Mr. Stidham began with saying that the MetroParks has 1.1 authorized mills and last year, the Budget Commission suspended collection of .25 mills. Coming into this year, there was an estimated \$4.7 million that was unencumbered and asked how much had been moved into the capital fund. Ms. Ferback responded with \$1.7 million. Mr. Stidham asked what the estimated revenues and expenses would be for 2026. Ms. Ferback expects revenue to be approx. \$7 million and expenses to be \$2.8 million (without the transfer to capital). Mr. Stidham asked what changes in operations to change the figures. Ms. Price said that she was still a new director last year and they surveyed the community and published a strategic plan in 2025. This plan addresses deferred maintenance and infrastructure that is now starting to be addressed. Mr. Stidham asked why there is still year-after-year carryover if they moved \$1.7 million into capital and what accounts for the \$600k increase of expenses from the prior year. Ms. Ferback responded with an increase in utilities and fuel with the new building. Mr. Stidham asked if any new positions were added with Ms. Price replying that the new positions are accounted for, but not filled.

Ms. Price also said that there are a lot of capital projects started and encumbered, but not yet completed. Ms. Ferback mentioned that a few of the projects listed on the capital projects list would be paid out of the General Fund (3 projects totaling \$75k).

Mr. Stidham stated that there is no way that they will get to \$2.8 million in expenses unless something major happens. Ms. Price asked Ms. Ferback what she thought comprised the difference. Ms. Ferback said that a lot of projects still have to be paid: expensive furnace fixes and equipment fixes. Mr. Stidham inquired what is deemed a capital versus a General Fund expenditure. Ms. Ferback said they use the strategic plan to determine what gets paid out of the Capital Improvement Fund and everything else would be General Fund.

Mr. Hinnners asked if the \$1.7 million last year was for land purchase with Ms. Ferback responding they moved \$600k into the Land Acquisition Fund.

Mr. Jeffrey encouraged to change the methodology of considering needs versus wants and to identify actual needs. Ms. Price said that the capital work is a result of what the public wants - and asked how a park or smaller entity be good stewards without maintaining what they have. Erie MetroParks has a total of 3,300 acres and 30 miles of trails to maintain. The Rotary playground will be 25 years old in 2029 that has an estimated replacement cost of \$500k.

Mr. Peters said that the land acquisition is an unknown factor and they were extremely conservative with the amount of money moved into that fund. They have several instances each year to purchase land, but unknown on the cost.

Mr. Stidham said the statute gives a check and balance for the amount of money that a jurisdiction can carryover - should have money to operate, but not have an excessive amount. He stressed that the Park Commission should not have the mindset of the Budget Commission "taking money away" and focus on being in the position to give money back to the citizens because of their responsible spending. Mr. Stidham believes that the MetroParks has healthy funds with a stable income stream and are in a position to give back .25 mills again. Ms. Price responded with stating that they will desperately need a levy when the current levy expires and their currently cost the

taxpayers so little. Ms. Ferback added that suspending any millage will affect some of the capital projects moving forward. The public has given great feedback and are happy with how the MetroParks are being managed and are excited for the new services. Mr. Stidham said he has to pushback, respectively. Mr. Peters said that will be damaging for the next levy. He reminded the Budget Commission members that it took 15 years to get to the position the MetroParks are in today. He believes that this will negatively impact donors and will shrink the reserves. Mr. Hinnners spoke and said that the Park District is different than any other entity that comes through that have different opportunities and is important to determine how to work together with one another. He believes that it should be allowed to play itself out for 2027 and the millage should not be suspended. Mr. Wisehart spoke and said that he has been on the Board of Directors since the Park District was basically coming out of bankruptcy. They have turned it around and are fiscally responsible, saving money and now feel like they are unable to save for the future. He stressed that they are now a healthy park district and the last levy passed with flying colors. Mr. Stidham stressed that the responsibility of the Budget Commission is determining the need for levy money collected and the State law tells them they do not want large amounts of carryover. Ms. Price respectively disagreed and said that the law is unclear. Mr. Peters said he agreed with Mr. Hinnners statement that the Park District is different and will create a short life span of the MetroParks. Mr. Stidham asked what they believe should be an appropriate carryover amount. Ms. Price and Ms. Ferback will follow-up with carryover figures.

Session adjourned at 9:39 AM.

SANDUSKY LIBRARY

Those present representing the Sandusky Library were William Rutger, Executive Director and Craig Davis, Fiscal Officer

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 9:42 AM.

Mr. Davis began with stating he is still new in his position and first time in front of the Budget Commission. The said that property taxes and the Public Library Fund are their major revenue sources. For the 2027 budget, some increases for salaries, increase with security (now contract with the City for a full-time officer) and an increase in building maintenance costs (project in the works that is estimated between \$3-5 million). Mr. Stidham asked what the current balance was in the capital fund with Mr. Davis reporting around \$1.8 million unencumbered and looking to add additional this year. Mr. Stidham stated that for an entity to be as stable as the Library with approx. \$4.7 million in carryover and after less than 2 years, have a large increase in expenses and want to make sure that the Library is spending money on things that are good for the community and actual expenses versus responding to the perception that they should spend down the money so it isn't taken away. Mr. Davis said that they have hired a community impact manager, getting out in the community more and are recognizable in the community and this all takes money. Mr. Stidham asked what was accounting for the \$2.8 million in expenditures. Mr. Davis said \$750k transferred to capital, \$535 transferred out and staffing costs. Mr. Stidham asked what was accounting for the staffing change. Mr. Davis explained they have hired a few additional positions and have several long-time employees that will be leaving within the next few years and are now focused on cross-training. Mr. Rutger added that his predecessor focused more on bringing people into the Library. His focus is more on going out into the community and bringing in more programming that requires more employees to cover.

Mr. Davis also made note that the PLF is only giving estimates of the first six months of 2027 and will be losing some money. Mr. Jeffrey said that is a challenge and wondering how to estimate the 2nd half amounts. Mr. Stidham stated that is something major happens and the PLF disappears the Library will either have to pass a levy or cut services. The purpose of carryover is to be able to get through several months and weather the storm. Mr. Rutger questioned if 4-6 months is long enough and reminded the Budget Commission that they are a unique situation because they are an Association Library, and need to have approval before getting on the ballot - the last time in Margaretta Township, they were not on the ballot because the school did not support them being on the ballot. Mr. Stidham understood but said it is about good stewardship with carryover amounts and should be in a position to give a little portion back to the taxpayers and should consider as such. Mr. Davis appreciated the comments and mentioned they already gave back \$140k with the County's piggyback. Mr. Stidham said he did not think this is straightforward and suggested giving back a small amount as a one time deal.

Mr. Stidham moved to adjourn at 10:03 AM.

VILLAGE OF BAYVIEW

Those present representing Village of Bayview were Marsha Schenk, Clerk/Fiscal Officer and Larry Gwinner, Mayor

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 10:06 AM.

Mr. Gwinner said last year they had \$85k in carryover and would be spent down fast. The Building is almost complete (nearly \$89k total) to store equipment. Storms have created major issues with trees falling and continual clean-up and they do a lot of work themselves to save money. East and West Bayview Drives are deteriorating, as the County never did anything when they redid the sewer lines several years ago. Mr. Stidham said that the Village has big hurdles with a small tax base. Ms. Schenk added that the Village has experienced several big storms that have caused flash floods, storm water issues and the Village has old pumps that are failing. Mr. Gwinner said they are very vulnerable and have limited resources to handle issues.

On motion of Mr. Stidham and seconded by Mr. Hinners, to approve the budget as submitted.

	AYE	NAY
Richard Jeffrey	X	
Jason Hinners	X	
Caleb Stidham	X	

Mr. Stidham moved to adjourn. Session adjourned at 11:34 AM.

PERKINS TOWNSHIP

Those present representing Perkins Township were Tim Coleman, Jim Ommert and Jim Lang, Trustees, Alexis Koch, Fiscal Officer, Dave Murphy, Fire Chief, Jeff Musser, Police Chief, Ashley Ohlemacher, Asst Administrator and Gary Boyle, Administrator

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 10:19 AM.

Mr. Boyle began with reviewing the General Fund. They have not collected the full levy amount the past couple of years and are now looking to collect the full levy. The General Fund supports several departments, is helping with the new fire station building, the County-mandated water line upgrades, rec programs and salaries to name a few.

Mr. Stidham inquired on the transfers out and what the \$550k building expense is with Mr. Boyle stating it was for a building that has been on hold since 2019 and will go for bid in the fall.

Mr. Stidham said that the Township needs to submit a realistic budget, not an inflated one, as the budget submitted does not allow the Budget Commission to get a real picture. The culture of the Township needs to change and submit a true budget. He stressed the budget submitted was disingenuous and need to work on for the future. Mr. Stidham inquired about the cost of the fire station and how much has been spent, borrowed, total in the Fire fund and how much the General Fund has contributed to the construction. When asked what will happen with the existing stations, Mr. Coleman said the Board will vote, but have tentative plans to sell them. Mr. Boyle added that they proceeds of the sales will help to cover the costs associated with furnishing the new station.

Mr. Stidham said the General Fund has been running around \$1 million carryover year over year. Mr. Coleman spoke of the transfers out of the General Fund - a lot with parks and rec (upgrades and evaluates the safety of the parks annually, added amenities. Mr. Boyle said the Township has 13 parks and are looking at other upgrades, with rough estimates of \$90-100k per park to upgrade.

Mr. Coleman spoke about the safety services they provide, with an estimated 16 million visitors each year that drive down 250 between Bogart Rd and Perkins Ave. Chief Musser said that figure is reported by the Greater Sandusky Partnership and is the primary hub that is continuing to grow with a growing need for more police and fire services. The Chief spoke of the aging vehicle fleet, the need of more employees, the cost of upgrading technology (Tasers, body cams, cruiser cams) that will need to be addressed in the near future.

Mr. Stidham recommended that Mr. Boyle and Ms. Koch work together on a tax budget to get actual figures because he cannot understand what is true. He mentioned that the Police Fund carryover has doubled from 2022 to 2025, but is still an acceptable carryover figure, and encouraged the Township to work with the County's EPICC Board to help with funding some of their public safety needs.

Mr. Boyle spoke of the Fire fund and the aging vehicle equipment - current ladder truck is 30 years old. Mr. Coleman said they shop around for reliable, used equipment and use Fuelman for their fuel, which is saving the Township approximately \$500k. Mr. Boyle added they use sourcing organizations for gathering quotes and getting the best price.

Mr. Stidham said they have more than a full year carryover and have been generous to give back almost half of their millage the past two

years and encouraged the Township to consider suspending a portion once again.

Mr. Boyle added that their road program levy brings in approximately \$1 million annually. Birchwood will be a multi-year project that will cost costs an estimated \$1.5 million, with Westwood Estates costing just as much. The General Fund helps to subsidize the road program.

Mr. Coleman said they would work on adjusting the budget.

Mr. Stidham moved to adjourn. Worksessions adjourned for the day at 10:53 AM.