

**ERIE COUNTY BUDGET COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES**

DATE: August 3, 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

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM to begin the day's 2027 budget work sessions with the following subdivisions: Oxford Twp, Groton Twp, Berlin Twp, Berlin Heights Village, Huron Twp, Milan-Berlin Library and Milan Twp

OXFORD TOWNSHIP

Those present representing Oxford Twp were Melissa Pelletier, Fiscal Officer and Lisa Crescimano, Assistant Fiscal Officer. Ms. Crescimano informed the Commission that the 2027 budget was prepared with wants, not needs, and gave an overview of the Township. They received a \$25k grant from the EPIC and are also applying for others to help with making their bathroom ADA compliant. The Township is saving for a fire truck. They are expecting a small carryover balance going into 2027. Discussion regarding the EMS services with Perkins Twp - costs will be a bit higher (3 yr contract). Groton Twp will get EMTs there first to administer aid before the ambulance arrives.

Mr. Stidham mentioned the large tax revenue decrease for 2026 & 2027 on the tax budget. Ms. Crescimano mentioned that she has always been conservative with revenues when preparing the budget. Mr. Stidham made note that the Budget Commission needs an accurate, honest representation of the financial outlook. Ms. Crescimano understood.

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

	AYE	NAY
Richard Jeffrey	<u>X</u>	<u> </u>
Jason Hinnners	<u>X</u>	<u> </u>
Caleb Stidham	<u>X</u>	<u> </u>

Session adjourned at 9:16 AM.

GROTON TOWNSHIP

Those present representing Groton Twp were Dennis Schreiner, Renee Schoen, Ron Brown, Trustees and Dana Smith, Fiscal Officer

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 9:16 AM.

Mr. Schreiner highlighted a few items that the Township is working on: Bemis Road will cost somewhere between \$260-\$270k where they will receive a \$200k reimbursement (\$50k will go back into the Road fund and the remaining will be used for their facility: replacing doors, crack sealing, etc.) Mr. Schreiner also spoke of the uncertainty of Emerson Creek, the solar project and the EMS contract. For EMS, they are currently charged \$11,000/year, but going forward will be 3-4 times the prior contract (high 30ks/low40ks).

Mr. Stidham commended the tax budget, but questioned the special revenues being high and wondered what was happening. Mr. Schreiner said that it had been accumulating over time as a result of conservative spending and saving for future large projects. Mr. Brown mentioned that the Maple Avenue funds had been sitting there for awhile and never gets spent. Mr. Stidham encouraged them to see if they can move the money to use for any other purpose.

The tax budget that was submitted did not have any revenue listed for the Road & Bridge Fund. The Trustees clarified that this was an oversight and they do not want to suspend the levy. Ms. Smith will amended.

Mr. Jeffrey recommended creating a capital fund in order to set aside monies for upcoming projects. Mr. Hinnners mentioned they could reach out to Mr. Bennett in the Prosecutor's Office, the Auditor of State or the Auditor's Office for assistance.

Mr. Stidham suggested the Township could afford giving up 1 mil of the General Fund levy for one year.

Mr. Schreiner mentioned how the Township collaborates with other local jurisdictions: road paving with Perkins Twp, sharing equipment/costs with Groton and Florence Townships.

No motion made to accept the budget as submitted (Township to add Road & Bridge to budget).

Session adjourned at 9:38 AM.

BERLIN TOWNSHIP

Those present representing Berlin Twp was Kathy Deehr, Fiscal Officer

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 10:02 AM.

Ms. Deehr reported the Township was in the process of purchasing a fire pumper truck (approx. \$900k) and doing a bit of road paving. They do have some excess money from the Nexus pipeline, but the surplus will be gone. They are continuing to struggle with the ongoing ambulance issue. Mr. Stidham asked what the solution was. Ms. Deehr said they are still unsure - trying to push for being charged on a per call basis. Nothing is agreed upon yet, but the estimate is \$80-100k (current costs between \$33-35k) and will most likely have to go on the ballot for a levy.

Mr. Hinners asked about the other funds for capital outlay. Ms. Deehr said the budget is \$473k - spending on fire turnout gear and outfitting the new pumper truck.

Mr. Stidham reminded Ms. Deehr that the Budget Commission has the statutory obligation to examine the budgets and need a more realistic budget than having a balance of \$0.38. Ms. Deehr said she would do it differently to present it better, but has always budgeted 100% because of when Perkins Township hired an attorney to challenge the Local Government Funding budget.

Mr. Stidham said he understood but still need an honest representation of the budget. Ms. Deehr asked how much carryover is appropriate. Mr. Stidham said it was hard to compare, but each individual entity needs to give an accurate tax budget. He said he does understand the significant carryover for the fire fund because of saving and purchasing the truck.

Mr. Jeffrey mentioned that he is coming up with a better way for preparing the tax budget - using a "fill in the blank" type document for it to be easier. Years ago he would say a 25-30% carryover would be appropriate, but after COVID, you can't necessarily say that. Need to focus more on needs versus wants.

Ms. Deehr said that Berlin Twp is the most fiscally responsible with no new levies in a long time, and always very minimal. Mr. Stidham gave kudos but requested better figures when preparing the tax budgets.

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	

Session adjourned at 10:21 AM.

BERLIN HEIGHTS VILLAGE

Those present representing Berlin Heights Village was Kathy Deehr, Fiscal Officer

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 10:22 AM.

Ms. Deehr informed the Budget Commission that the Village is working on pavement projects and two major tiling projects. which should use up the remaining surplus of the Village. The paving project is being completed through the County Engineer's Office. The biggest issue is a storm sewer outlet that is plugged. The storm sewer runs through a wooded area and is in poor shape. Mr. Stidham inquired about a total of \$1.3 million in capital transfers. Ms. Deehr spoke of a joint project with the Township for a culvert on Hill Rd. And reiterated about the storm sewer running through the woods and may have to borrow money. The woods stay wet, so they have a hard time getting machinery in.

Mr. Stidham spoke about the Village have two times the revenue than expenditures (taking out capital) and would be helpful to have more details on the capital projects.

Ms. Deehr said they want to construct a maintenance garage to house equipment that is currently sitting outside, but

the main concern is the storm sewer - unknown if it will cost \$400k or closer to \$1.2 million - and there are needs to be addressed before anything else is started. These projects will take care of all the leftover surplus. The Police fund budgets for a full time Chief and four part time officers, but have a hard time filling the part time positions. They will most likely have to start paying benefits. Mr. Stidham said that the Village could approach the Sheriff and ask for an arrangement, with Ms. Deehr replying that they already cover for them when needed and just cannot compete with the salary ranges and benefits of other departments.

Mr. Stidham again mentioned wanted specifics on the capital needs and projects of the Village with Ms. Deehr responding that she understood and will make changes of how she prepares the budget. Mr. Stidham asked about the timeline of the sewer. Ms. Deehr said they are currently trying to build a road to get into the woods where the cleanout is located and hoping that will fix things. If not, the project could cost more than \$1.2 million and will hopefully be done within 3 years (they have the easements now).

Mr. Jeffrey mentioned that the focus should be on needs versus wants, which is the local jurisdiction's decision, not the Budget Commissions.

Mr. Stidham said that the Village form of government is the most ineffective. The tax base is just not large enough to support the financial needs of the Village. He reiterated again that he would like the list of capital projects and the timelines.

The Village has continually had around \$200k in surplus annually the past couple of years. Ms. Deehr mentioned the Nexus money received will get less and less each year, meaning the surplus will get less and less each year, especially with the large drainage project with the storm sewer.

Mr. Hinnners inquired where Ms. Deehr will show the projects in the budget. Ms. Deehr replied that she will move them to the capital projects fund. Mr. Jeffrey mentioned that it should be a solid, concrete project before moving money into the capital fund and Ms. Deehr agreed.

Mr. Stidham asked if the Village would ever consider voluntarily suspending any part of the General Fund millage. Ms. Deehr replied that as of right now, no. There are too many unknowns regarding the large sewer drainage project that need to be addressed. Mr. Stidham said that as a County, they should try to be part of the solution even if you aren't part of the problem. The County Commissioners have given up their inside millage for 3 years. He suggested Ms. Deehr pass along the message to the Board and give serious consideration to it. Ms. Deehr said that the surplus will be spent down, there is a levy renewal coming up and the residents will decide. The Village prioritizes the worst projects first and all General Fund surplus gets earmarked for the drainage projects.

Mr. Stidham moved to adjourn. Session adjourned at 10:55 AM.

HURON TOWNSHIP

Those present representing Huron Twp were Gordon Hahn, Trustee, Tammy Rutz, Admin Assistant, Matt Dewey, Fiscal Officer and John Zimmerman, Zoning Inspector

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 11:02 AM.

Mr. Dewey passed out copies of reserve funds for the building department and fire departments. He reviewed the estimates for the construction updates of the meeting room, storage and administration areas, along with the replacement of equipment and vehicles within the next several years. Mr. Stidham asked what the \$440k transfer out of the Cemetery Fund was for. Mr. Dewey and Mr. Hahn explained those funds were for paving the existing road and adding a new road to the new columbarium.

Mr. Hahn said that they decided to purchase the smaller columbarium with the ability to add on at a later date and the Township is now the sole caretaker of the Scott Cemetery.

Mr. Stidham said that it would make sense to give up .4 mils of the General Fund for next year. Mr. Hahn responded that they have had a lot of expenses with the Fire Department - and General Fund contributed \$800k to the Fire fund last year. A truck was purchased and salaries are the highest expense going forward. Mr. Stidham reiterated that the Township has a healthy balance with \$6 million in the General Fund and could afford to give back the .4 mils (GF) and continue to give back .2 mils in the Cemetery Fund. Mr. Hahn said that the Trustees will discuss it at their meeting that evening. Mr. Jeffrey asked that the focus be on what is a need versus what is a want. Mr. Stidham said to speak with the Trustees and encouraged suspending the .4 GF mils and .2 of the Cemetery mils.

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

MILAN-BERLIN LIBRARY

Those present representing Milan-Berlin Library were Sharon McNichol and Chris Wolf, Board Members, Chuck Plumb, Board President, Zach Rospert, Fiscal Officer and James Tolbert, Director

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 11:34 AM.

Mr. Rospert reviewed the highlights of last year - building expansions and upgrades that have been in progress - have set up capital funds and have approved more transfers from the investment funds than any other year with the reduction in the levy funds collected. Mr. Stidham mentioned that between \$260 - \$270k was suspended by the Budget Commission last year, but there has been a \$360k decrease in revenue and questioned what accounted for the remaining difference. Mr. Tolbert wanted it noted that Huron County matched the reduction, but the Huron County Auditor felt that Erie County shouldn't have done as such, but had to follow suit. Mr. Stidham asked if the investment earnings were down because of withdrawing money. Mr. Rospert said yes and the higher yield investments came due and newer rates are much lower. They have just over \$2 million in STAR Ohio and their Trust funds (includes over \$800k of principal in the Harvey Trust fund that cannot be spent). Mr. Stidham asked how much is operating versus capital. Mr. Rospert said that operating expenses total over \$1 million/year. Mr. Stidham asked how much was available in capital. Mr. Rospert responded with approximately \$772k between all the capital funds. Mr. Stidham said that hypothetically would be over \$1 million with including the amount of the Harvey Trust that is allowed to be spent. Mr. Rospert said yes, if the Board approves. Mr. Stidham asked about the Bookmobile garage. Mr. Rospert said that between the building and the green space landscaping, approximately \$575k. Ms. MacNichol and Mr. Plumb added that it was more than just a "garage," has space for more programming and a meeting area. Mr. Stidham questioned how many students that the Bookmobile served and Mr. Tolbert said that it has only been operational for a short time and will get that figure to Mr. Stidham. Mr. Stidham mentioned that they should be cognizant of the money being spent and that a lot of money has already been spent on the Bookmobile and his advice is to be mindful. The Budget Commission suspended \$262k last year and still have \$500k available and asked if there was any room to give back anything again for next year. Mrs. MacNichol said that the Board hasn't discussed it and reiterated that they do try to be good stewards of public money, but also don't want young children crossing the street and want it to be a safe place for kids. Mr. Plumb mentioned that they have a nice library and want the new building to reflect that. He felt the library was penalized last year and had to move money to cover expenses. He understands and is trying to be respectful and do the right thing for everyone. Mr. Stidham said to not view it as punishment but to view it as rewarding the citizens. Mr. Plumb said that the Board is concerned with the uncertainty of PLF funding through the State. Mr. Stidham said that the Library is in a great spot and asked if the Board would consider giving any more back. Mr. Jeffrey said the Board needs to refocus the mindset to needs versus wants.

Mr. Stidham moved to adjourn. Session adjourned at 12:05 PM.

MILAN TOWNSHIP

Those present representing Milan Township were Greg Cumston, Kevin Riddle and Amber Baehr, Trustees and Zach Rospert, Fiscal Officer

Mr. Jeffrey called the meeting to order at 12:06 PM.

Mr. Rospert began with speaking about the Township's biggest uncertainty is the North Central EMS contract. The increase of the new proposal is more than double the cost of prior years. This will use up the first Fire fund in entirety. The other Fire Funds are where they should be. He spoke of the General Fund having a healthy balance, but the Shawmill Rd project will be substantial and will most likely require a transfer from the General Fund to help offset the cost. The hotel tax collection has been increasing.

Mr. Jeffrey asked if they knew the cost for the EMS services. Mr. Cumston said there are no parallels to how they have been before with the very minimum being over \$100k - more than double what is currently charged. Huron Twp is holding things up, and will cost Milan Township even more if they opt out. Mr. Jeffrey asked if they would be interested in Countywide EMS services. Mr. Rospert and Mr. Cumston said that the Township submitted a letter to the Blue Ribbon committee but nothing had come to fruition. They mentioned that North Central EMS tries their best, but are just stretched too thin. The Township did purchase a used ambulance last year and are starting to outfit it.

Mr. Stidham stated that in reference to the General Fund, State law has changed and statutorily the Budget Commission has to address carryover balances. He said the Trustees need to look at the 1.3 (inside) millage and give up a portion of it. Mr. Cumston did want to note other needs of the Township: roof leaks, monument and historic buildings needing work, there is pending litigation on McIntyre Rd, the Shawmill project could be \$500k, the ambulance service issues. Road maintenance is needed on Kelly, Shawmill and Old Plank roads. He said he understands the need to address, but the Trustees are working on dwindling down the balance and asked for more time before suspending a portion of the collection. Mr. Stidham said he has heard the same story since 2021 and having 3 full years of carryover is too much and would be appropriate for the Twp to voluntarily give up some. Mr. Cumston asked when the decision needs to be made with Mr. Jeffrey stressing the need to make a decision soon.

Mr. Hinnners inquired about the capital outlay budgeted. Mr. Rospert said that \$586k for 2026 is tied to the Townhall and for 2027 the Shawmill project, siding on the Townhall and could have some carryover remaining.

Mr. Stidham requested that the Township come back for the regular Budget Commission meeting on 8/26 with more information and the Trustees agreed.

Mr. Stidham moved to adjourn. Worksessions adjourned for the day at 12:29 PM.