

EAST ORANGE PASSES TRANSITIONAL YEAR BUDGET

BY WALTER ELLIOTT

EAST ORANGE : The East Orange City Council unanimously passed their 2011 Transitional Year municipal budget at about 7:30 p.m. here Sept. 19 - about 27 hours before Orange's council introduced theirs.

East Orange wrapped up their temporary six-month spending plan approval process with a presentation by City Administrator Jillian Barrick and Chief Financial Officer Victoria Walker plus a final question-and-answer session from the council.

What Barrick and Wilson presented, on behalf of Mayor Robert Bowser, and the council approved is a \$65.6 million outlay between July 1 and Dec. 31. The property tax rate, as with the 2011 State Fiscal Year Budget remains at \$3.18 per \$1,000 of assessed value. There are no salary increases in the TY 2011 budget and hiring is limited to filling retirement vacancies and posts with critical city functions.

"The TY2011 budget is proportional, or about half, of SFY2011's budget with a few exceptions," said Barrick to the council and a chamber gallery audience of 37. "Summer programs like youth employment and recreation are front-loaded. Programs funded by grants have not been finalized and we don't expect to get reimbursements for Hurricane Irene overtime and cleanup until next year."

Bowser and his administrators are meanwhile developing a Calendar Year 2012 municipal budget for council consideration.

This city becomes the first "Local

Orange transitional budget process underway as well

Talk" municipality to pass a budget to formally cover the last six months of this year during their timetable shift. East Orange, Orange and Irvington have decided either late last year or earlier this year to switch from a State fiscal Year Budget model to a Calendar Year plan.

Calendar Year advocates have said that having a Jan. 1-Dec. 31 timetable makes quarterly tax bills easier to correspond. What property owners receive on their first two quarterly bills, under a July 1-June 30 State Fiscal Year timetable, are actually tax rates and figures from the latter half of the previous fiscal year.

Montclair Mayor Jerry Fried said, to "Local Talk" Sept. 21, that his township has been on a Calendar Year budget, "as far back as I can remember." The mayor cited two other disadvantages to a Calendar Year budget.

"The municipal business administrator has to present a budget on or before Jan. 15, so he's under the gun from Day One," said Fried. "In the last budget cycle, the council did not pass a budget until five months into the year (May)."

Fiscal Year advocates say that the municipalities would be more closely following the state budget, including the timetables to receive financial aid. Trenton has traditionally followed the July 1-June 30 Fiscal Year while the

Federal government runs on an Oct. 1-Sept. 30 timetable.

East Orange, Orange, Irvington and other municipalities who switch to Calendar Year budgets have to enact a six-month Temporary Year budget.

While East Orange has finished its process three months in, Orange's council started their part of the process 10:15 p.m. Sept. 20. Their 6-1 approving vote was actually a three-step process since the resolution was a late addition by At-Large Councilman Elroy Corbitt.

Resolution 257-2011 was allowed to be "walked-in" on two unanimous votes. The first allowed Council President Tency Eason to suspend the order of business; the second permitted Corbitt's late addition onto their consent agenda.

Council members Corbitt, Eason, Linda Jones-Bell, Edward Marable, Jr., Rayfield Morton and Donna K. Williams passed the resolution. Hassan Abdul-Rasheed was the lone dissenter.

The ordinance starts a minimum 28-day period for the council to consider, change and ultimately adopt Orange's TY2011 budget. It represents the passing of Mayor Eldridge Hawkins, Jr. and his administration's proposed spending plan into the council's hands.

The ordinance also sets Orange's schedule of departmental budget hearings. Those sessions, as presented by Acting City Clerk Shinell Smith are:

- Oct. 11, 7:30 p.m. - Administration and Finance departments.

- Oct. 12, 7 p.m. - Planning, Community Services and Fire departments.

- Oct. 17, 7 p.m. - Public Works, Engineering, Library and City Clerk.

- Oct. 19, 7 p.m. - Court, Law and Police departments.

The council's vote came about an hour after resident Bruce Meyer's public comment. The Orange Citizens Budget Advisory Meeting member urged Orange's elders to make best use of the transitional year budget's opportunity.

"It's been my experience in four of the last five years that the council would first spend and then come up with a budget to fit that spending," said Meyer. "We have a six-month window of opportunity to get our fiscal house in order."

Orange, like East Orange and Irvington, has been running on temporary monthly budgets since July 1.

Orange will also have to present its plan to the Local Government Division of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. That office is to approve the proposed budget like it has had East Orange's - and is weighing Irvington's.

"We've had to suspend our TY2011 budget process until we hear from DCA's Local Government office," said Irvington Township Clerk Harold Wiener to "Local Talk" Sept. 21. "Mayor Wayne Smith introduced the budget on July 20 and public hearings were held on Aug. 23.