Jason Howarth

Is Kittatinny, Pennsylvania getting hit with hard times and financial woes? That is the question on the minds of the 17,000 citizens that populate the city. Mayor Gustavus G. Petykiewicz announced the city’s 2016 budget plan, which a balanced version of said budget needing to be signed and approved by the mayor and the city council by December 1, 2015. The town’s budget and future have been in doubt since the Susquehanna Steel Corporation decommissioned one of their plants blast furnaces and laid off 1,000 employees earlier this year as a result. That alone has mayor’s back against the wall as he scrambles to balance the city’s budget with less property tax value on the plant and fewer working citizens.

Mayor Petykiewicz does have a plan, but ideas aren’t very popular. As it sits in the mayor’s proposal the city tax rate would modestly increase from four mils to 4.3 mils. Next, the mayor plans on an increased focus on tourism to make up some the difference going forward. However, in order for this plan to work the city will need a special riding mower to clean and maintain the shores of White Deer Lake and a new snow plow truck for the city. The mayor also made clear that maintenance of the city’s roads needs to continue in spite of the increased cost of asphalt, saying that “not fixing things like that equals a recipe for disaster”. The police are also suffering from the city budget woes. The city’s police needs a new police cruiser which will cost $54,763, replacing the oldest cruiser in the force’s three car fleet. Police Chief Roman Hruska confirmed the need for a new cruiser, but stated he had a big issue with the mayor’s proposed budget. In particular, Hruska made note that the police force would have to cut two officers and the early police shift would then be covered by the Schuylkill County sheriff’s deputies. Hruska said that he “won’t stand police protection to be cut for 1/3 of each day”.

The city council has an even more unenviable task of creating a budget that works for everyone. Denelda Penoyer the president of the Kittanitty City Council says the budget proposal cannot pass in its current form. Penoyer acknowledged many of the same issues of the police chief, while reiterating many of the mayor’s ideas behind some of the other drastic changes in the upcoming budget. Penoyer said that things like garbage services would still be provided, and the cost will $30 per month added to the citizens’ water bill, instead of being part of the property tax. Penoyer ensured the citizens the council will working on the budget vigorously and will meet every Tuesday until the budget’s due. Lastly, Penoyer encouraged input from the citizens of Kittanitty so the council could the best decision that the people would agree upon.

Kittaninny is not the only small American city struggling. Out of 17,000 people 1,700 are wage-earners, many employed by the Susquehanna Steel Corporation. There are other solutions that have been discussed, in particular a city tax increase from four mils to five mils. This would cost each citizen an extra $100, meaning for properties valued at $100,000, (most of Kittaninny’s houses) $500 would be due in taxes. However, this increase could cover everything in the mayor’s current budget proposal and still leave the city with some temporary surplus income. It will be most interesting to how easy or hard life in Kittaninny becomes when the city council the finalized 2016 city budget for sure.