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video about city  
council meeting...

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## **Morganton City Council Meeting by June 17, 2013 – Budget Public Hearing**

At the beginning of this public hearing, the mayor of the city, Mel Cohen, greets the audience, thanks everyone for the presence and announces the purpose of the meeting, namely the discussion of the presentation of the budget. The elected officials and the advisory committee remind the audience that the topic of the discussion is the increasing tax rate proposal. The mayor asks the citizens to come to the podium one by one and state their complaints. He asks the audience to be attentive to the time limitation, namely 3 minutes for each citizen, and to mention only those things that were not yet discussed. After that, the first speaker is invited and the public hearing begins.

Analyzing all the complaints of the citizens, one can notice that the people in general are not satisfied about the changes in tax rates, they are not pleased with the mayor's conditions (time limitation and no repeating of the things discussed by the previous speaker). One woman is objected to speak, because her topic doesn't concern the budget, so she is disappointed in the denial of her right to speak. But there is still respect and polite attitude, so the meeting is held in a moderate way. No one raises his voice or insults anyone. The mayor, in his turn, explicitly answers all the given questions and, as for the time limitation, he reminds that it is him who sets the timetable and the rules of the public hearing and it must be obeyed.

I think it is obvious that the meeting is generally convenient to the public: both the day and the location are in the order of things. The only thing that really bothers the audience is the matter of the meeting itself, namely

paying higher taxes.

The spectator can see that the staff present at the meeting consists of 6 people, but only the two of them are active and communicate with the public – the mayor and Sally Sandy, the female city manager. These two give the reasonable answers to all the questions and seem deeply involved in the process. Surely, it is always rather difficult to come to consensus of opinion in many questions, because the polemic happens between two different groups of interest. In spite of this, the meeting reminds of a dialogue rather than a quarrel.

The role of the citizens is the most important at the meeting, I suppose, because they are the representatives of all the city population, they are the feedback which is necessary to obtain as a result of the decisions made and the actions taken. To my mind, people are always “the test laboratory animals”, because every change, that the government decides to make, is tested on people. If it is a good change, it will lead to prosperity, but if it is not, it will be cancelled, but it will still stay in people’s minds and affect them in a negative way. People who participate in such meetings have an active social position and thanks to them, the government is controlled and criticized. I am not sure they can really influence the government’s decisions, but they are still the notable part of the politics process.

The spectator might have not noticed any media at the public hearing, because of the camera position, but I suppose that there must be some press representatives, at least those who make the video of the meeting. Of course, not all the people present at the meeting had their word, some were just taking notes and there was also the one who videotaped everything on

his telephone. I think that the role of the media is especially important on such occasions, not only because the media representatives are more factually prepared, but also because they are the ones whose job is to discover the truth no matter what. They are professionals, that is why they are more insistent and confident of what they say.

There is another group of audience present at the meeting – special interest group, that is to say the retired, the unemployed and the disabled people.

Their main “special interest” is the objection to pay the increased taxes having the fixed income. One of the speakers mentions that tax rates have already been increased last year, so he doesn’t know what to expect later on. The increasing tax rates are a great problem for the people with the fixed income, because they can’t influence their income anyhow, but they have to give the bigger part of their money for paying taxes. To my mind, it is completely understandable and fair to make a complaint about this.

There are some public land-use issues addressed at the meeting. The spectator can find out that the citizen of Morganton is in the face of the property devaluation. One of the speakers mentions that this problem will lead to the loss of the Morganton inhabitants because they just can’t afford the way things are. The citizens feel bad about the increasing of the electricity and cable rates. There is a high unemployment in Morganton, and all the proposed increasing tax rates are just in bad time.

The spectator might have noticed some agenda items related to land-use issues at the regional level of government. The mayor says that the staff is not happy to increase the tax rates, but it is something they just have to do, because they depend on the supreme authorities. Taxes are increased when

the expenses grow up, so this is an irreversible process. The mayor pays the same taxes, and he is affected in the same way.

In general, I can say that the staff recommendations are followed, though the citizenry objection to the budget hasn't influenced the final decision of the appointed officials during the meeting. The budget is approved, the taxes are going to be increased anyway. But I am sure it is still useful for the authorities to know the opinions of the Morganton residents and I believe that the citizens are capable to influence the City Council.

As far as I understood, at the meeting there were no issues related to grants from higher levels of government, but I am sure that such questions are usually discussed at public hearings.

I feel that the Morganton City Council meeting was worthwhile, because, as we know, everything can be done by money to develop the city: therefore this public meeting was gainful. After watching the video of it on youtube.com, I got inspired a lot. I admire the socially active part of the citizenry and render honors to them. Will I ever go to the public meeting unless I am required to do so? I think, yes. I will probably watch a couple of videos like this again and I hope to even attend the City Council meeting one day. Such activity helps to learn more about the city that you live in and to understand the processes happening not only on the level of the city or the country, but also on the level of the whole world. To me, it is a question of self-respect and the obligation of every responsible human being.

## References

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