
TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: April 29, 2010
Time of Meeting: 7:30 P.M.
Minute Page No: Page 1 of 8

Mayor Bettina Bieri called the Special Meeting Joint meeting of the West Milford Township Council and the West Milford Board of Education (BOE) to order.

The Board of Education President called their meeting to order, read their adequate notice statement and requested a roll call vote.

Adequate Notice Statement

Mayor Bieri read the following statement:

Please note that in accordance with Chapter 231, Public Laws of 1975 of New Jersey, adequate advance notice of this special meeting was printed in the Herald News in its issue of April 28, 2010; copies were provided to the Record, Star Ledger, Suburban Trends and Greenwood Lake News and posted continuously on the bulletin board in the main corridor of the Town Hall and on file in the Office of the Township Clerk.

The Board of Education President asked for a moment of silence.

Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Bieri and the BOE President led all in attendance in a salute to the flag.

Agenda No. I

Roll Call

Present: Councilmembers Philip Weisbecker, Joseph Smolinski, Michael Ramaglia, Robert Nolan, Marilyn Lichtenberg, Daniel Jurkovic, Mayor Bettina Bieri.
Absent: None.
Also Present: Township Attorney Fred Semrau, Township Administrator Kevin Boyle, Municipal Clerk Antoinette Battaglia,

Agenda No. II

Purpose

Mayor Bieri noted that the meeting was originally advertised as being held in the media center of the Westbrook School. However, due to the large turnout it has been moved to this larger room at the same premises and a note has been placed on the door of the media center-advising residents of the new location. She stated that the primary purpose of this meeting is to afford the Councilman ability to gather information regarding the defeated school budget and hear from residents. To that end, she stated that comments from BOE members and the public alike are welcome. However, she stated, the Council is gathering facts and it is unlikely that any action will be taken tonight.

Township Attorney Fred Semrau advised that he has proffered an opinion whereby he recommends that Council President Smolinski recuse from this discussion as his wife is employed by the school district.

The BOE President, Lynda VanDyk asked for the floor to begin the meeting. She stated that the BOE had public meetings during the budget process where all matters were open and transparent adding that the only matters that were not addressed in a public forum were matters relating to personnel issues. She stated that the Board welcomes public comment and an opportunity to discuss the budget with the Council.

Mayor Bieri stated that the Mayor & Council is also appreciative of this opportunity to engage in open dialogue with the Board and the public. The common goal is to allow for the provision of a quality education to our children in a cost conscious and effective manner. She advised that the State Department of Education has promulgated a letter outlining the process and related procedures. In that communication, they clarify that municipal officials can make suggestions regarding the school budget. The BOE does not have to abide by those recommendations but they must adhere to the amount the Council proposes cutting or appeal to the State. She asked that the public recognize this process.

Agenda No. VI

Public Comments

The BOE President and Mayor Bieri opened the meeting to the public after advising that there is a five-minute limit for each speaker.

Jo Ann Drozd, 48 Belford Drive, West Milford stated that she has been a resident and taxpayer of West Milford since 1984 and has been a West Milford teacher since 1987. She stated that the only budget that voters have a say in is the school budget. She stated that Governor Christie is being unduly harsh on schools and has asked the middle class to bear the brunt of this fiscal crisis. She stated that, as a rule,

TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: April 29, 2010
Time of Meeting: 7:30 P.M.
Minute Page No: Page 2 of 8

teachers do not drive luxury vehicles and new employees in the teaching profession do not have luxury health benefits; they participate in HMO's. New administrators earn lower salaries and teachers contribute to their pensions. The cost of this defeated budget will mean increased unemployment and will have a negative impact on the local economy and local businesses. The resulting shortage of teacher's means that crowded classrooms will have a negative impact on the quality of education; after school programs and extra help will be a thing of the past; people will move out of the community; and with reduced funding for education property values will decline. She asked that the current level of education be maintained, not destroyed. If one thinks education is expensive, try the cost of ignorance.

Ryan Hoffman, 6th Grade Westbrook student heard that some Board members want to close some schools in town. He stated that some of the favorite teachers may lose their jobs and closing schools is a bad decision. This may keep taxes down for now but it will have long-term effects and he urged the BOE to think ahead. He hears his parents share anecdotes about their school experience and he wants to have similar memories. The BOE should research and do their homework before closing schools and affecting the children who are the future. Kids need a solid education and Board members who care. He urged the Board members to support students.

Billy Gaffney, 6th Grade Westbrook student stated that he represents the kids in this school district who wish to attend Macopin School next. He has great memories from his experience at Westbrook but it is his right of passage to move on to Macopin which will be a great experience. It is time for him and his classmates to enter into that new environment. He received an email last night about the potential closing of Macopin School and he has circulated a petition to oppose that measure. He will be seeking signatures but has been told by the principal that he cannot do so during school hours.

Al Demarest, 463 Warwick Turnpike, Hewitt stated that he has grandchildren in the West Milford school system and he hopes that the Township Council keeps their eyes on the ball. He wants them to take a fair approach to this budget and listen to the Governor who said that no school district should be cut more than 5%. By limiting cuts to administrators, the Council can realize savings without impacting the classroom. He stated that West Milford has a good school system and this process should not be divisive. The voters did not intend to see school closings but rather to cut the administration. He asked that the Council be mindful of the long-term effect of their decision.

Lisa Lyons, 18 Linwood Road South, West Milford stated that her child attends school in West Milford and she as a parent has been receiving a lot of negative emails about this budget process. The recent elections, she said, were a turf war with our children caught in the middle. A position on the BOE is not about power but it is about doing what is best for our children. She interpreted an email sent out by BOE member John Aiello as a threat and, as a parent, she is frightened that the children will suffer from these power plays. She urged everyone to cease engaging in ego trips and do what is best for the children.

Gregory Cherametto, President West Milford Education Association and 30-year Teacher stated that this district is now at a crossroads with the choice to either move forward or backwards. The BOE and Council each have unenviable jobs as part of this process and during these difficult times. While cuts must be made it is important to effectuate that with the least amount of damage possible to each child currently in the school system and for those children who have yet to begin their education. During the election, candidates were vocal about a desire to make the school district better. Now, there is talk about closing Macopin School. If this must be done, it would be irresponsible to do so without a study and due diligence. Anything less is educationally irresponsible. There should be clear direction about what would happen to the science labs and what measures will be taken to provide this curriculum to our children. Irrational decisions will harm every child. He urged parents to become proactive, stop being bystanders and take back the school system. Not all decisions should be made based on finances and he urged people to be rational and well informed.

Dave Richards, Ringwood Lane, Hewitt read from a prepared statement written jointly by himself, his wife and Mr. Foody all of whom recently won election to the BOE. His statement conveyed that they propose to eliminate a sufficient number of supervisors to save \$1.1 million, close an elementary school to save \$1 million and replace certified nurses with registered nurses. They also want to realize savings by monitoring the purchase of supplies. He stated that the members-elect are concerned about busing and do not believe that kids attending Macopin School should be on the same buses as High School children.

Don Partington, Snake Den Road, West Milford stated that he has children in the Maple Road school and he is very pleased with the teachers who have taught his kids. They are very professional and as such he cannot understand why they need excessive supervision. He is concerned about rumors that custodial staff may be eliminated and that these services may be outsourced. He is tired of feeling threatened and intimidated and is concerned that children are now coming home from school with such concerns. Parents are taxpayers and should not be subject to threats. He stated that residents cannot afford another \$500 in taxes but they do expect a reasonable increase. He supports Governor Christie who is making hard decisions. He asked both the BOE and the Council to do the right thing by our children. He asked that seventh and eighth graders not be mixed with High School kids.

TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: April 29, 2010
Time of Meeting: 7:30 P.M.
Minute Page No: Page 3 of 8

Kathleen Doherty-Hewins, 44 Shadyside Road, Hewitt is a twenty-year resident of West Milford who originally move here for the beautiful scenery and excellent school system. Times are different now. Her husband has not had a raise for years and his workweek has been reduced from five days to three days. Taxes have more than doubled in twenty years. Both of her children received an outstanding education in West Milford and she recalled that when they were young they looked forward to transitioning from elementary school to middle school at Macopin. This formula prepared her children for the transition to High School and as a result they participated in advanced placement courses. She has been an educator for years and has worked in the West Milford middle school for nineteen years. This is a vocation and not a career. She loves teaching middle school and acknowledged that it can be challenging to work with 14-15 year olds every day. She stated that the Macopin School has applied for and received a number of grants over the years. The staff at the school believe in the students and everyone works well together. She urged the BOE to research options rather than randomly closing Macopin School.

James Foody, Kashaqua Trail North, Hewitt stated he does not know how the rumor about closing Macopin School got started but he and the other members-elect to the BOE do not want to close this school. These facilities cannot be duplicated. He said that the Superintendent of Schools, when anticipating that the school budget would be defeated, recommended closing an elementary school, not the middle school. He asked everyone to erase that concept from their minds. He stated that his son attended Macopin School and traveled to school with High School kids who were pushing drugs. Thus, he believes that middle school children should not be bused with high school children. He suggested staggered hours to prevent that from happening.

Jennie Villaneuva, 18 Post Brook Road North, West Milford said that she is sickened by what is happening in West Milford. She condemned Governor Christie for cutting \$3.3 million and she stated that closing any school in this town is a bad idea. This would simply be a band-aid and reflects shortsighted vision for the district. She commended the custodial staff and relayed an anecdote about how they helped and calmed the children in the school. It would be folly to outsource these services and have strangers intermingling with our children. This concept also applies to the school nurses. It is important that our children build positive relationships based on trust with those who are providing for their care. While she does not want to see elevated taxes, she does want her children to receive a quality education. She suggested that Governor Christie should freeze his salary and not allow our children to bear the brunt of this economic climate. She urged parents to voice their opinion.

Joe Whalen, 28 Orleans Lane, West Milford has been following the State's actions for some time. The Governor's policies are creating pain and hundreds of qualified teachers will be unemployed as a result. His social policies are uncaring and he is giving back to people earning over \$400,000 while punishing those earning less. He asked that the Council and BOE use foresight and think decisions through with an eye toward long-term solutions and effects. Governor Christie, he said, has turned this state upside down within months and lots of people will suffer. She urged people to keep politics out of the process and make wise decisions.

Karen Romer, 113 Hewitt Road, Hewitt thanked the BOE members and the Council for the time they invest for this community. She stated that she is concerned about cuts being proposed by newly elected members to the BOE and she urged them to balance the need to realize cost savings against compromising the quality of education in West Milford. By cutting technology and language we are eliminating proficiency in skills that future employers want. Our children, she said, are facing many challenges and the BOE should not make hasty decisions that can have a lasting impact on a child's life. She urged the Board to keep Macopin school open stating that it provides a wonderful transitional environment for kids and parents. She reviewed some of the skills children learn at Macopin and how those tools help them when they proceed to high school and beyond.

Jennifer Cedeno has a seven-year old child who attends Paradise Knolls. Her child came home from school crying because of rumors about the school closing and her child is not alone. These elementary schools are mini-communities that allow West Milford children to grow in healthy environments. Every school in West Milford is necessary. Her son is in high school and he is doing well in large part because of the nurturing environment when he began his education.

Kristin Zakar, 12 Raven Court, West Milford teaches physical education at the high school as well as 7th and 8th grade. She opined that integrating 7th & 8th graders with high school students is not a good idea for a number of reasons. First and foremost, class sizes in the middle school provide a safe learning environment. Secondly, there is a huge divide in the maturity level of 7th & 8th graders as compared to the kids in high school. In her opinion, closing Macopin is ridiculous and potentially devastating. She commended the custodial staff at Macopin who contribute to the overall experience of the children.

Colleen Oroho thanked Mr. Foody for providing clarification about rumors about school closings. She stated that she is a product of the West Milford school system and the quality education was a significant

TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: April 29, 2010
Time of Meeting: 7:30 P.M.
Minute Page No: Page 4 of 8

factor when she and her husband decided to raise a family in West Milford. She is proud to be from West Milford and urged everyone to be proactive in this process rather than assume a reactive stance.

Thomas Antonucci, West Milford stated that this has been a difficult year in West Milford during which he has attended many BOE meetings. He stated that the BOE has options worth considering before deciding to close a school. He has attended high school graduations in West Milford since 2004 and feels honored to have witnessed these kids grow up within our school system. Having attended many BOE meetings, it would appear that some Board members measure education by the related tax impact. He stated that this is not an accurate barometer and he urged the BOE to proceed with caution and make educated decisions especially knowing that impact they have on our children.

Alyson Romer, 113 Hewitt Road, Hewitt stated that she has heard rumors about closing Macopin School. Despite prior comments contradicting those rumors, she wishes to be heard. The practicality of the middle school experience is a process which eases the pressures of going from an elementary environment to a high school environment. If Macopin is closed, she and other students could not participate in the junior honors society or be a mediator. She stated that the teachers at Macopin are amazing and some would lose their jobs if the school were closed. Her father attended Macopin School when he was a child. Many of her peers in the school system have fears about what could potentially happen to them if the school is closed. She urged the Board and the Council not to close the school and said that losing these teachers would be harmful to children's education.

Karen Shaban, 5 Post Brook Road, West Milford feels that there is a bait & switch going on here. Closing schools in West Milford is ridiculous and if this is a tactic to soften the blow of closing an elementary school rather than the middle school, it is not fooling anyone.

Debra Santalucia, 5 Circle Boulevard, West Milford stated that her daughter is devastated at the prospect of Macopin School being closed. The staff there, including custodians, are wonderful and very professional. They help all the kids.

Mike Peglia, Pompton is proud to be a teacher in West Milford. He commended the children who spoke tonight. He stated that closing an elementary school in this district will have an adverse effect on education. He lamented the fact that the budget was defeated when most budgets in Bergen County were approved by the voters and he opined that the drug epidemic is not a school problem but rather a society problem. He is proud of this community where kids and parents contribute so that the future generation receives an education which will allow them to be great leaders. He urged the elected officials to make educated decisions to provide for the future of these children.

Lisa Curran stated that no amount of money can replace the comfort her son received within the West Milford school system three days after his friend passed away.

Faith Delaney, 94 Apshawa Crossroad, West Milford advised that he is the Principal at Maple Road School. He acknowledged that the Council is faced with difficult decisions and, as such, he urged them to retain professional help. He stated that the Passaic County Supervisor reviewed the budget and could not find any area that could sustain further cuts. Any cut will have a deleterious effect on this district and he said that a school district cannot function without administration. He reviewed some of the functions of administrators. He suggested that restructuring the administration may be more effective without causing harm. The current fiscal situation is creating hardships for everyone but the Council must reach solutions based on wisdom, thought and care. It is of the utmost importance to provide the best possible education for our students and this can be accomplished if everyone works together to accomplish that one goal.

Jim Gorab, 69 Morris Avenue, West Milford stated that the voters defeated the school budget because they are fed up. The 21% voter turnout is pathetic and cannot be viewed as a mandate. The children, who do not have a voice in the process, are the ones who are hurt the most by these actions. West Milford Township, however, is compelled by law to provide a thorough and efficient education for our children and the State dictates how that is accomplished. There are nine core areas in the educational process including learning 21-century skills. He cautioned against closing the middle school because it will increase classroom sizes to a level that cannot provide for a quality education. Additionally, without the proper facilities the Township will be facing the improbable task of providing a 21st century education in 18th century facilities. Additionally, there would be inherent problems with busing small children long distances forcing them to ride for extended periods to get from one area of town to another. West Milford teachers are diligent and work with increasingly fewer resources. The administrators put together the best possible budget which was repeatedly cut and tweaked before the final draft. Then the Governor took away \$3.3 million. There is no room for additional cuts without facing an inability to meet the needs of today. Our kids need a good education to survive in the world today.

Donna Lewandosky, 5 Malorey Road, West Milford urged the Council to be cautious and mindful not to hurt our children. She stated that mock elections were held at each of the schools and the budget passed.

TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: April 29, 2010
Time of Meeting: 7:30 P.M.
Minute Page No: Page 5 of 8

Gerry Goodman, 7 Bergen Drive, West Milford asked that the Council review senate bill S1701 which dictates the maximum amount that can be cut in any line item contained in the school budget. He also cautioned about making cuts that, in the future, cannot be reinstated or restored and cautioned that this could happen if administration is cut too deeply. He recalled that certain BOE candidates ran on a platform that included a need to address the drug problem in our schools. This problem cannot be addressed if programs are cut and with a 2.5% proposed levy cap for next year, programs that are cut may be gone forever.

Matt Conlin, 23 Orleans Lane, West Milford advised that he is the student representative from West Milford High School Student Council. As such, he reports to the BOE and did so when the mock election at the high school reflected the budget being adopted by 695 of the voters. This clearly indicates that students want to continue with programs and educational initiatives currently being offered in the school district. He and his fellow high school students fear for incoming students if reckless cuts are made to the budget. He has received an excellent education throughout his thirteen years in the West Milford school system. He stated that many West Milford High School students are being accepted to colleges and have a solid foundation to build successful futures. He has heard many grown ups speak about property taxes but he believes that those signs that appeared throughout town during the BOE elections saying "Fed Up" did more damage to property values than the cost of education ever will. He is disgusted at the thought that the BOE would close Macopin School, an act that certainly will not help alleviate the drug problem in town. The students must be guaranteed a safe, healthy environment in which they are to be educated.

Doug Ott, Stephens Road, West Milford commended the Township Council for working diligently this year on the municipal budget without injecting politics into the process. He expressed concern that the recent school board election may have made it appear that the school district is spending school funding in a foolish manner which, he said, is not true. He stated that everyone has worked hard on this budget. Residents repeatedly assert that taxes are too high but he has not heard that anyone wishes to seek a school close in town. They want elected officials to adopt budgets that are reasonable and keep tax increases to a minimum. It would be draconian to think that taxes will not increase because expenses increase every year. He urged that the Council consider only sensible cuts.

Rosemarie Resigna, Oak Ridge is a parent, taxpayer, and 36-year employee of the Board of Education. She has been witness to a host of problems throughout the years but cannot recall a year that has been as sad as this. She expressed hope that the elected officials have heard the people who spoke tonight and recognize that the word from Trenton is that these budgets should not be cut by more than 5%. The governor has already cut \$3.3 million from the budget which brings the number very close to that 5% baseline. It is shamefully upsetting to believe that the measure of quality education in West Milford is linked to a zero tax increase.

Christine Sauerteig-Pillar, 80 Paradise Road, West Milford stated that the BOE cannot close Paradise Knolls School because this is more than just a school; it is a neighborhood for our children. The teachers are involved and interested in their students. It is a fantastic school which instills a belief in her that she is investing in the future every day when she takes her children to school.

Wayne Gotlieb, 20 South Ridgfield Road, West Milford stated that he is speaking as a resident and not a BOE member. He stated that he is speaking to make note of an item that should be on tonight's agenda but is not. He does not expect that it will appear on a future agenda either. The subject matter pertains to a letter in the local papers penned by fellow BOE member John Aiello. Mr. Gotlieb stated that he wants the public to know that BOE members are held accountable to a code of ethics which they must uphold, obey and enforce. BOE members cannot direct employees of the school district, make personal promises on behalf of the district or make any deals on behalf of the district. BOE members cannot denigrate school officials. There is an employee/employer relations act which disallows BOE members from interfering with employees, restraining or coercing them or organizations with which they are affiliated. The BOE functions in accordance with their duly adopted bylaws. These bylaws prohibit BOE members from interfering with administration and from giving direction to employees. The bylaws dictate that BOE members will behave in a respectful manner toward other BOE members. Mr. Aiello violated all these principles and the Board should discuss this matter in a public forum.

There being no more comments from the public Councilman Weisbecker moved to close the public portion of the meeting.

Moved: Weisbecker Seconded: Nolan
Voted Aye: Weisbecker, Smolinski, Ramaglia, Nolan, Lichtenberg, Jurkovic.
Voted Nay: None.
Motion carried.

TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: April 29, 2010
Time of Meeting: 7:30 P.M.
Minute Page No: Page 6 of 8

Discussion of the Defeated 2009/2010 School Budget

Superintendent Colefield stated that the budget process is intended to cause dissension in town. She stated that she would like to clarify statements that took things out of context. Non-tenured administrators did receive pink slips. She stated that she took exception to receiving an angry letter that accused former administrator Gilmartin of rubberstamping her budget. The Passaic County Superintendent of Schools scrutinized the West Milford budget more than most because he is aware of his former position as a West Milford Superintendent. It was said that she said that Paradise Knolls would be closed after she and Business Administrator Cea visited all eight schools and cautioned that the Governor's cut of \$3.3 million from the budget would result in hard choices. Other possible adjustments were reflected on page 37 and parents were told that no school could be closed by September because time would be needed to do research. This is not an endorsement. It is there to reflect the serious nature of this budget. She is here to do her best for West Milford and all options were presented as a possibility. Parents were upset at the possibility of closing an elementary school and no one wanted to cut custodial staff; everything is on the list of other possible adjustments. People do not have to agree with each budget line item, this does not mean there is waste. There were budget presentations held in public forums where it appeared that parents were not adverse to courtesy busing cuts. By law, the school district must provide busing to students outside a two-mile radius. Supervisors have not been cut. Their titles have been changed. Residents have made repeated comparisons to Paramus so she called their Superintendent and learned that he has made similar recommendations and cuts. She advised that West Milford has six supervisors; must have principals in schools; must have a superintendent; and must have a Business Administrator. She reviewed some of the functions of these positions. She provided an overview of her specific career path and qualifications. She advised that Macopin School was identified as a school in need of improvement five years ago. She stated that replacements have not been hired for each person that has retired which led to duties being expanded for administration. The BOE renegotiated entry-level salaries. These and other measures have resulted in a fiscally responsible approach to providing a sound education to our children. Macopin School is no longer rated as being in need of improvement; all scores throughout the West Milford school district have increased and consistency has reigned for the past five years.

Business Administrator Steve Cea stated that the budget presented in January knowing that there would be state aid restrictions. The first draft reflected zero state aid increases and it was believed that West Milford would be poised to address state aid reduction. Ultimately there was a 20% reduction in state aid or 5% of the budget. Additional meetings were scheduled to guide decisions, discuss all options and hear from members of the public. West Milford has satisfied the \$3.3 mill cut in state aid and is expecting twenty retirements in the coming months. Many items were not palatable to public or to the board. All potential options have been reviewed for feasibility including the potential closing of an elementary school. However, no decision has been made and such action would require significant research and study. At this time, no decision has been made about any school closings.

Board member John Aiello asked what it would cost to replace the twenty retirees. Bernice Colefield stated that staff is working on that but cautioned that it is difficult to calculate because there are a number of considerations including buyouts. Mr. Aiello stated that it is not true that \$3.3 million was cut from the budget and stated that he would like to close the Macopin School because it would be better, in his opinion, to keep the children in the elementary school for longer because there is greater control. Moving a child from elementary to middle school in West Milford is in effect equivalent to moving them to another town. He wants an opportunity to persuade other members of his views. There is a need for dialogue and communication. There has been too much rumor and gossip and not enough time spend to find common ground.

Board member Greg Bailey thanked the Mayor & Council for coming tonight. Every year when budget fails the Council has a tough job. He has served on the BOE since 1996 and would never favor closing a school unless the Superintendent and Business Administrator recommends it. Even then it would be painful. He stated that he has faith in the professionals that work for the board. Members are sent to the board by the electorate to bring certain qualities to the table and to work within the system. He will fight cuts proposed by Council because he has faith in the budget presented and because a lot of work went into that budget. He believes the proposed \$277 increase is reasonable. It's not easy but we must preserve a quality education and he will continue to support the school administration. Noting that the hour is late and he must go to work tomorrow, he left the meeting.

Board member Wayne Gotleib advised that in recent contract negotiations the BOE extended the school day by fifteen more minutes per day for the middle school. Over a 180 day school year that equates to 45 days and brings the middle school it into conformance with the high school work day. If there is a lot of turnover among senior staff, that is a potent rationale to have adequate supervision. Superintendent Colefield's remedy two years ago to address deficiencies in school performance was to have increased

TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting
Date of Meeting: April 29, 2010
Time of Meeting: 7:30 P.M.
Minute Page No: Page 7 of 8

supervision. That was negotiated with bargaining units to allow for communication between supervision and teachers. There was a well devised plan approved by the board to implement this process to enhance academic achievement in this school district. He asked the Council to preserve these well thought out changes.

Board member Marilyn Schultz stated that she did not start the rumor about Macopin closing. She stated that one of the bargaining units did approve a giveback. Mr. Cea reviewed the givebacks of the West Milford Educational Association which were also offered by administrative staff. The WMAAS also agreed to 1% reduction in salary toward benefits which equates to a savings of about \$350,000.

Marcie Babbit compared last year's budget failure to this years failure noting that turnout was greater this year. She urged the Council not to look at the magnitude but to focus on how people voted. As a parent with elementary school kids, she commended Mr. Cea and Ms. Colefield for their hard work. It is rash to suggest closing any school without doing due diligence. Such actions need a thorough and complete study before making any such decision or recommendation. BOE members must invoke sound judgment. Since the budget was defeated, she suggested that perhaps parents would consider paying for courtesy busing rather than deal with a school closure.

Board member Tim Foley thanked the Council for their patience. He stated that ultimately this process results in the Council giving the BOE a number and the Board then decides where to make the cuts. The Council must respond to the vote without hurting the kids. He stated that they should anticipate additional savings of about \$80,000 in retirements. He stated that teachers, custodians, and administrators have agreed to contribute to health benefits equating to a savings of \$375,000. He stated that he does not agree with a lot of Governor Christie's policies and no one school district should have to cut more than 5%. The BOE went through this budget and could not find cuts. If you keep cutting other things, eventually it hurts programs and kids. He thanked the bargaining units for their reasonable approach to this financial challenge. There has been a lot of discussion about supervisors and people want better education at a lesser cost. By increasing supervision the West Milford school district has accomplished that in a cost effective manner. Macopin School is a melting pot reflecting the various communities in West Milford and this environment evens out the transition to High School. He asked the Council to support these hard fought measures and changes. Some programs cut thirty years ago have never been recovered and we must not allow that to happen again.

Board member Lynda Van Dyk stated that additional cuts will impact the children. Closing Macopin School will mean that the district loses a unique and important facility. There is a drug problem in this town and reducing options for children will increase the drug problem. Closing Macopin would be devastating. She expressed hope that newly elected board members will understand the full scope of their job. She hopes Council will consider the children and recognize that the people who work in this district live in this district. Every decision affects every other decision. With bumping rights you will lose the lower paid positions, not the over \$100,000 jobs. She has served on the board for thirteen years and enjoyed it all but she will not be serving after reorganization.

Mayor Bieri thanked the BOE members for their comments. She stated that, with Council President Smolinski's recusal, any committee formed by Council to spearhead this process would be limited to two members. Council members Ramaglia and Jurkovic agreed that not only do they want to establish such a committee, they each wish to serve on it. The Council gave consensus for such a committee with Councilwoman Lichtenberg serving as an alternate. The BOE agreed to a committee comprised of members Babbit, Foley, Aiello and Carter with Mr. Gotlieb serving as an alternate.

Councilman Weisbecker stated that the Council wishes to proceed swiftly because they are acutely aware of the statutory time constraints. They have listened to everyone who has spoken and are aiming to move forward.

Councilman Nolan thanked the public for coming tonight and for speaking. He also thanked the board especially the two outgoing members. He asked for an explanation of the difference between certified and registered nurse. Ms. Colefield advised that certified nurses can teach also. Councilman Nolan clarified that the concessions made by the bargaining units came after the budget was defeated.

Councilwoman Lichtenberg asked for breakdown of the anticipated twenty retirements. Ms. Colefield advised that three are from administration and the remainder are teachers.

Councilman Jurkovic thanked the Board for taking time to explain the budget and their thought processes after all their hard work. Thanked Lynda Van Dyk and Marilyn Schultz for their service on the Board and assured everyone that the Council has heard those who spoke and hopes to do right thing. He thanked everyone for speaking.

