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**TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY**

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting  
Date of Meeting: May 18, 2009  
Time of Meeting: 8:00 P.M.  
Minute Page No: Page 1 of 5

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Mayor Bettina Bieri called the Special Meeting of the West Milford Township Council to order.

**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 advertised in the Herald News in its issue of May 17, 2009; 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.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

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

Agenda No. I

**Roll Call**

Present: Councilmembers Philip Weisbecker, Joseph Smolinski, Marilyn Lichtenberg, Daniel Jurkovic, Mayor Bettina Bieri.  
Absent: Councilman Schimmenti, Councilman Nolan, Township Attorney Fred Semrau.  
Also Present: Township Administrator Kevin Boyle, Township Clerk Antoinette Battaglia.

Council President Smolinski advised that he will recuse from discussions on the school budget.

The Board of Education called their meeting to order and asked for a moment of silence. The Business Administrator, Steve Cea, read their adequate notice statement and took a roll call of BOE members. Mr. Cea introduced Cathy Davenport, the County Business Administrator who is attending tonight to represent the Department of Education and answer questions about relative statutes. She is here as a resource to assist in this process.

Agenda No. II

**Purpose**

Mayor Bieri advised that this joint meeting has been scheduled to discuss the school budget that was defeated by the taxpayers at the recent school board elections. She introduced Mr. Pladdys who was hired by the Council to assist them in determining where cuts can be made to this budget.

Mr. Pladdys thanked the Council for his appointment. He reviewed his qualifications advising that he is a retired school business administrator. For the past five years he has been working as a consultant and assisting many municipalities in this process. He has reviewed the West Milford school budget and has submitted a report to Council recommending cuts of \$340,000.

Agenda No. III

**Discussion of the Defeated 2009/2010 School Budget**

Councilman Weisbecker stated that he would like to hear from the BOE about the potential for stimulus funding from the State of New Jersey. Mr. Cea stated that the Federal Government has provided additional resources to schools in the form of Title 1 funding which totals \$1.2 million. These funds cannot be used to supplant existing programs and the parameters are definitively set with only 15% of the funds set aside for regular education. Training programs are being scheduled for June at which time all restrictions will be disclosed but the funding is designed to be applied to non-recurring costs. Mr. Pladdys stated that he is aware of these funding initiatives and that there are a host of related restrictions.

Councilman Jurkovic asked Mr. Pladdys how his proposed cuts to food services will impact cafeteria staff and the children who use these services. Mr. Pladdys stated that the school is funding this service for the first time this year and he recommends prices for non-lunch items such as snacks be increased to make this service self-funding. He recommended cutting \$150,000 from a reading program that is based on each child's individual development program. Councilman Jurkovic asked if the BOE has considered acting as a service provider to other school districts for special education to generate revenue. Mr. Cea advised that West Milford already provides such services whereby other districts send children to the West Milford self-contained special needs program. This program has seen fluctuations in enrollment and West Milford is listed in Passaic County as a host community. While this program does generate

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Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting  
Date of Meeting: May 18, 2009  
Time of Meeting: 8:00 P.M.  
Minute Page No: Page 2 of 5

---

some revenue priority is given to the needs of West Milford students. In response to Mayor Bieri, Mr. Pladdys stated that he does not believe that his proposed cuts will have a negative impact on the quality of education being provided. While the Township Council must recommend specific cuts from specific line items, the BOE has discretion as to where they will actually make the cuts and they will do so based on the educational needs of the school district. Councilwoman Lichtenberg asked about attrition and retirements and Mr. Pladdys stated that any anticipated retirements and replacements are reflected accurately in the budget.

Mr. Cea, at the behest of the BOE President, reviewed the process by which the school budget is developed each year. The state of New Jersey is delaying the second aid payment to schools which has created a greater need to keep fund balances at the higher number reflected in the budget. The Governor has mandated that food services in each school district become self-sustaining and thus the BOE has adopted a corrective action plan. The subsidy outlined in that plan will act as a bridge to make the program self-sustaining. He stated that he worked with Mr. Pladdys during this process and both he and the BOE members are very cognizant of the current economic conditions. This concern led the BOE to present a budget that is below the CAP.

Ms. Colefield, the Superintendent of the West Milford Schools, stated that each district utilizes reading specialists in specific ways to meet the special needs of their respective districts. The reading specialists see students in the first and second grades based on recommendations received from the teachers. These reading specialists also serve as the testing coordinators for their respective buildings and are proficient in the stringent State-mandated testing programs. West Milford does have special needs students and the reading specialists must monitor those situations ensuring that reading programs are on tract and that the students are meeting required standards. These programs are early intervention programs designed to assist teachers when they identify special needs. These programs are mandated to diagnose special needs although she estimates that the school system could work within the proposed cuts and fill the void through other programs.

BOE members John Aiello and Midge Touw asked for an opportunity to speak at this time. The BOE President, Mr. Foley, advised that such opportunities will be provided when the Council has concluded their discussion and had their queries addressed.

Councilman Weisbecker recalled that he has been through this process many times in his tenure as an elected official. The school budget is very large and taxpayers want cuts. He asked for an overview of proposed capital projects contained in this budget. Mr. Cea advised that this budget contains two primary capital projects. The first would replace the boiler at Maple Road School and would be funded through the capital reserve funds resulting in no impact on the tax levy in this budget. The second major capital project is a reallocation of funds what were previously charged to operating for paving projects and this change was recommended by the Auditor. The BOE has a sixteen year rotating cycle for replacement of desks and this is funded through the operating accounts reflected in office supplies. Discussion ensued about paving projects and shared services with the municipality. Mr. Cea advised that the BOE has considered shared services with the municipality in the past and have utilized the services of the municipal Engineering Department which helped reduce costs. They have contracted with the Morris County Cooperative and one BOE member often donates labor for paving projects.

In response to Councilman Weisbecker's questions about transportation, Mr. Cea advised that the BOE has a replacement schedule for vehicles that is intended to minimize the financial impact in any one year. The BOE generally enters into lease/purchase agreements with five-year payouts. The school district is mandated to replace buses every twelve years and the West Milford school district only replaces cars when the existing vehicle is no longer functional.

Mr. Cea advised that there are nine bargaining units that represent school employees and the six of those bargaining units are currently in contract negotiations. Currently employees pay copayments and deductibles as a contribution to health insurance and there have been no increase to staffing levels in administration for quite some time. Mr. Foley advised that mediation has been scheduled with the bargaining units so the BOE is limited in discussions at this time.

Councilman Weisbecker stated that the current economic conditions demand action from the Council and he would like to see this budget cut by \$500,000. Mayor Bieri stated that the voters overwhelmingly defeated this budget and while the Council is not here to redo the entire budget, any help from the BOE in this process is appreciated.

Mr. Foley thanked the Mayor and Council for this inclusive approach and opened the meeting to comments from BOE members. Mrs. Carter stated that she does not agree that the school administration has done a good job drafting this budget. Administrator, she said, should be required to teach classes too and the retiring music teacher should not be replaced. Mr. Aiello stated that Mr. Pladdys has not mentioned stimulus funding and he believes that the school district can use about \$400,000 stimulus

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**TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY**

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting  
Date of Meeting: May 18, 2009  
Time of Meeting: 8:00 P.M.  
Minute Page No: Page 3 of 5

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funds for tax relief. Administrators, he said, often manipulate programs to make them qualify for stimulus funding. The BOE drafted a budget that is under the CAP. However, if the budget were linked to inflation, the budget would be significantly over the CAP. He stated that an example of waste can be found in the appropriations for supplies. He stated that Mr. Pladdys' report is very vague and does not indicate that he looked at the possible \$1.2 million cuts previously recommended by the school board. Ms. Colefield stated that West Milford's administrative costs are very comparable to state comparisons and they are under the State medium which demonstrates efficiency. Thus far, there has been little guidance provided as to how stimulus funds can be utilized but what is known at this time is that federal stimulus funds cannot be used to offset ongoing costs. Mr. Aiello took issue with these comments and Ms. Davenport invited him to attend the workshops in June. Mr. Carter took issue with the State's method of comparing administrative costs from district to district. Mr. Gotleib stated that West Milford is unique in many ways and cannot always be compared to other districts. He stated that administrative costs have been cut time and again to provide for special needs programs. School transportation exceeds one million miles per year. Another BOE member stated that the proposed cuts to the food services will be devastating. This program funds the salaries and equipment and the staff has been diligent in trying to make cuts and generate a profit. These employees are all Township residents.

Councilman Weisbecker asked if enrollment numbers have changed in recent years and what the projections are for upcoming years. Mr. Cea stated that there has been reduced enrollment and the numbers have been consistent with Passaic County live birth data. As a result, the school district has seen a reduction in elementary school staffing levels but without dedicated buildings for specific grades it is difficult to reduce staffing further. Enrollment figures are generally cyclical and approximately 330 students will graduate this year. Mr. Aiello expressed agreement with Ms. Carter's comments about cafeteria workers and stated that it is incumbent upon the BOE to scrutinize the budget line by line in the future to reduce the number of times these budgets are defeated by the voters. In his opinion, teacher conferences should be cut. Ms. Davenport advised that professional development programs for educators are mandated and each teacher must have a professional development plan. While there may have been waste in the past, teachers now attend workshops to address their needs and meet State requirements. The BOE does not pay for hotels or food and there is a significant amount of in-house training. These cost-saving measures have reduced expenses while assuring that West Milford teachers comply with certification mandates. Mrs. Touw agreed with comments made by Mr. Aiello and Ms. Carter. In her opinion, the Board should have spent more time and been more involved in this budget. Mrs. Babbit stated that the proposed \$150,000 cuts to the reading specialists will have a negative impact on that program and the students who participate in it. She asked the Council to reconsider this cut saying that the kids need this core help. Councilman Jurkovic stated that the voters have sent a very clear message and a \$500,000 cut to this budget is not as responsive as the Council should be to the will of the voters. Mayor Bieri agreed adding that a \$500,000 cut represents less than 1% of this budget. She heard that the BOE had other cuts in a prior budget and she asked if those cuts would work. Ms. Colefield stated that the budget the Mayor is referring to would significantly and negatively impact the school district especially programs. Councilman Wiebsecker stated that he is proposing a \$500,000 cut because he understands that if Council cuts too much the decision can be appealed to the State and ultimately the State could reject all the cuts proposed by Council. He believes that \$500,000 is both reasonable and doable. Mr. Foley stated that State aid has actually decreased this year because the BOE made the full contribution to PERS. As always, the BOE has made every effort to be fiscally conservative and 70% of this budget covers labor costs.

Agenda No. VI

**Public Comments**

Mayor Bieri opened the meeting to the public advising that there is a five minute limit for each speaker. Mr. Foley also opened the BOE meeting to the public.

Andrea Borrelli, 50 Charcoal Road, West Milford stated she has lived in West Milford for nineteen years and has three children. She is concerned that children are being viewed as dollar signs. Voters are dissatisfied with the economy and the school budget is a victim of this dissatisfaction. People do not want waste but they also do not want to see essential services cut. Her son works with a reading specialist and it is an essential component of his education. She recalled that classrooms were overcrowded in the past and her daughter continues to struggle to regain what was lost in her education during that time. Cutting programs and increasing class size is not the answer for West Milford students who deserve access to all programs. She recommended demanding contributions to health benefits and initiating salary freezes rather than negatively impacting our children's education. Children are arbitrary numbers.

Jim Novack, Larchmont Drive, West Milford stated that children who were subject to overcrowding and split sessions in the past survived. The school district should be downsized to reflect the decreased enrollment in this district. He has observed that buses are rarely filled to capacity and recommended reducing the number of buses. Administrators and senior staff should teach speciality courses and all

**TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, NEW JERSEY**

Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting  
 Date of Meeting: May 18, 2009  
 Time of Meeting: 8:00 P.M.  
 Minute Page No: Page 4 of 5

employees would contribute toward health benefits. He recommended that the Council cut \$500,000 plus the \$340,000 recommended by Mr. Pladdys and he stated that he is dissatisfied with Mr. Pladdys' work.

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

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

Councilwoman Lichtenberg recommended that the Council cut \$500,000 using the line items recommended by Mr. Pladdys. Councilman Jurkovic agreed stating that while he does not wish to adversely affect the children this recommendation represents less than 1% of the overall school budget.

Agenda No. IV

**Action Items**

~ Resolution 2009 -209 ~

**RESOLUTION OF THE TOWNSHIP OF WEST MILFORD, COUNTY OF PASSAIC, STATE OF NEW JERSEY CERTIFYING THE 2009 / 2010 SCHOOL TAXES TO THE PASSAIC COUNTY BOARD OF TAXATION**

**WHEREAS**, on April 21, 2009, the general fund tax levy for the base budget and additional spending proposals of the West Milford School District were defeated by the voters at the annual school election, and

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 18A et seq. the Board of Education did submit the budget documents to the Municipal Governing Body for review and certification of the taxes to the County Board of Taxation; and

**WHEREAS**, the Mayor and Council of the Township of West Milford have reviewed the defeated school budget and have hired a consultant to assist them in reviewing the aforementioned budget; and

**WHEREAS**, the Council finds and determines that the following line items contained in the annual school budget for the school year 2009/2010 can be reduced without negative affect upon the thorough and efficient provision of public education in the Township of West Milford School District:

Budget Line No.	Budget Acct. No.	Budget Account Name Explanation of Cuts	Total Revision
01670	n/a	<b>From 01670 Appropriation Balances 6/30/10 (est.) To 01660 Amount Budgeted in FY 09-10</b> An additional \$150,000 is recommended to be included from fund balances thereby increasing this revenue to \$950,000 leaving \$1,106,581 as an estimated appropriation balance as of 6/30/10 in 01670.	310,000.00
15630	11-424-100-179	<b>Salaries of Reading Specialists</b> The need for reading specialists is based upon student evaluation. A budget revision of \$150,000 for this line is reasonable.	150,000.00
07550	11-000-310-930	<b>Transfer to Food Service Fund for Deficit</b> Food service should be a self-supporting line item.	40,000.00
Total General Fund Budget Revisions			\$ 500,000.00

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Governing Body of the Township of West Milford, County of Passaic, State of New Jersey that they do hereby certify to the Passaic County Superintendent of Schools the following amounts related to the General Fund to be raised by local taxation for the Township of West Milford School District for the 2009/2010 school year:

Total General Fund proposed on the ballot: \$48,113,275.00  
 Revised General Fund: \$47,613,275.00  
 Total Reduction to General Fund and Debt Service Fund: \$ 500,000.00

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Minutes of: Township Council Special Meeting  
Date of Meeting: May 18, 2009  
Time of Meeting: 8:00 P.M.  
Minute Page No: Page 5 of 5

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**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Governing Body does hereby certify that review of this revised budget affirms that it is sufficient to provide a thorough and efficient education for the student body in the Township of West Milford.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** by the Governing Body that a certified copy of this resolution be filed with the Board of Education and the County Superintendent of Schools no later than May 19, 2009.

Adopted: May 18, 2009

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

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Agenda No. V

**Other Township Business**

None.

**Adjournment**

There being no further business to come before the Council, the Township Council adjourned the meeting at 9:32 p.m. and the BOE adjourned also.

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

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Approved: July 22, 2009

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MAYOR BETTINA BIERI  
PRESIDING OFFICER

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ANTOINETTE BATTAGLIA  
TOWNSHIP CLERK