

EAST WINDSOR REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT HIGHTSTOWN, NJ 08520

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL JOINT MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION,
EAST WINDSOR TOWNSHIP, AND HIGHTSTOWN BOROUGH OFFICIALS TO DISCUSS
& HEAR PUBLIC COMMENTS REGARDING THE DEFEATED EWRSD SCHOOL
BUDGET DATE: MAY 11, 2010 HHS Cafeteria 7:30 pm**

The two host municipalities of the East Windsor Regional School District held a joint meeting on Tuesday, May 11, 2010 to review the defeated 2010 district budget. The EWRSD Board of Education was also in attendance.

ITEM 1. WELCOME

Board President Alice Weisman called the meeting to order at 7:38 p.m. and read the Open Public Meeting Act Statement as follows:

“Written advance notice of this meeting has been given in accordance with law. Minutes of this meeting are being kept by the Board Secretary and will be made available promptly to any member of the public requesting them from the Board Secretary at the Administration building 25A Leshin Lane, Hightstown, NJ. Minutes will be provided at cost and in accordance with Board policy.”

Ms. Weisman asked “Are there any Board members present who believe this meeting to be in violation of the Open Public Meeting Act?” No one objected. “There being none, we may proceed.”

Members Present: Paul Connolly, Bruce Ettman Suzann Fallon, Bonnie Fayer, Christine Harrington, Bob Lavery, Susan Lloyd, Kennedy Paul , and Alice Weisman.

Members Absent: None

Also Present: Michael Dzwonar, Interim Superintendent
Kurt Stumbaugh, Business Administrator/Board Secretary
David Coates, Board Legal Counsel

Fire Code Compliance: Ms. Weisman made the following announcement: “In compliance with the fire code of the State of New Jersey, I call your attention to the emergency exit for this room, which is located.....” (Ms. Weisman pointed to the emergency exit.)

ITEM 2. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Ettman moved, seconded by Ms. Fayer to approve the agenda as submitted.

On a roll call vote of the Board, motion to approve was carried unanimously.

ITEM 3. DISCUSSION: 2010-2011 EWRSD BUDGET

At this time the meeting was turned over to East Windsor Township Mayor, Janice Mironov. The East Windsor Township and the Hightstown Borough meeting was opened.

ITEM 4. OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

Ms. Mironov then proceeded to open the meeting for public comment.

Summary of the Public comments:

Mr. Robert Thibault of Hightstown commented on the tax increase. Does not want our taxes to go higher. Taxpayers and people in the private sector have not received raises in this economy for years. The budget should be cut further. The community voted down the budget and hopes the Board and the two councils make wise decisions on what to cut. Suggested to cut the budget 1.7 million dollars and commented that teacher's salaries should be cut before programs.

Jim Fidler of East Windsor commented on the line item cuts for community use of District facilities. Feels that non-educational items should be cut first before instruction is cut. We receive less State aid but more State mandated programs with no money to support them. This is a big problem.

Terry Tuliszewski of Hightstown asked the municipal representatives to not make any further cuts to the school district budget. The Hightstown tax rates are higher than any other community in Mercer County. She fully supports the teachers in refusing a pay freeze. Collective Bargaining is the mainstay of the protection of the public employee's rights. Any changes to the agreement should be negotiated in good faith. Frustrated by the borough council's unsuccessful efforts regarding the undeveloped rateables / properties in Hightstown. The current tax situation would be helped by increased rateables and more industry in the community. Do the right thing and do not cut the school budget any further.

Mario Ribeca of Hightstown commented on the letter he received stating that due to budgetary constraints his contract would not be renewed for 2010-11. He read from his own letter that he wrote in response which he sent to the Superintendent and Board of Education. He spoke of the dedication and loyalty he devotes to his job. His letter described the value he and the maintenance and custodial staff bring to the District. He supported the budget and encouraged his fellow workers to do so. Stressed the many maintenance needs of the District and itemized the many projects that are accomplished in house that would otherwise be out sourced at a much greater cost. Asked that the Board and Councils take a close look at the long term effects of not rehiring himself and his coworkers.

Michael Winkler of East Windsor commented that more money does not directly guarantee instructional improvement. Cutting programs cannot benefit the district. More cuts would be short sighted. How are we helping our children by such actions?

Stu Dolgon of East Windsor commented that as a former Board member he knows how difficult it is to formulate a budget that is both adequate to provide a quality education to our children and have as minimal impact on taxes as possible. He proceeded to detail the whole budget process. The reduction in State aid resulted in a decrease of 4.25 million dollars. When a budget is defeated a legally defined process starts where the municipalities make the final determination on the tax levy portion of the budget. The host municipalities must ensure that the budget is sufficient to ensure the residents of this district that their children's education would not suffer greatly. Noted that additional cuts still cannot detour 6 years of great progress that the District has seen. This is progress that has been documented and verified by the NJ Department of Education. He asked to please balance the needs of the community with the needs of our children. He recognizes the difficulty facing the municipalities to come up with a thorough and efficient budget.

Gary Lucas of Hightstown commented that the budget should be cut further and expressed sympathy for the "RIFed" (Reduction in Force) teachers. Feels that the untenured teachers were thrown under the bus by their tenured co-workers. The layoffs are a result of the no give back by the teacher association. The message is clear that taxpayers want budget reductions and feels certain there is unnecessary spending that can be addressed without a problem. Cut the budget further and let's move forward.

Mayor Mironov commented that she received two letters regarding the topic of tonight's meeting, One from Lisa Ernst of Hightstown and one from Janice Haddock East Windsor, and assured that any calls, letters or emails received are and will be shared amongst the councils.

Diana Kaiser of East Windsor said she is fearful of the future school budgets and the impact on students. Cannot support the blame on the teachers. The blame lies with the reduced State aid. If the community does not step up to support our children we will be losing our valuable progress and investment in them.

Sandra Trenholm of East Windsor commented that parents definitely support the teachers. At the PLD School, 36% of students are Hispanic and 14% are Special Ed. We need the support and programs to help them, and noted that the programs that are cut already will directly impact them. Also, PLD has had four administrators in 4 years. The front office staff is gone. We need stability in the schools. Voting in anger hurts the kids of middle to low income families. Please make any budget cuts responsibly and hopefully not too many.

(End of Public Comment Session)

Mayor Mironov added she will continue to consult further with the EWRSD Board of Education as both East Windsor and Hightstown municipalities work through the process. Next meeting is on May 19, 2010.

Mayor Mironov adjourned the meeting on the behalf of the municipalities.

Ms. Fayer moved to adjourn the meeting on behalf of the Board of Education.

Kurt Stumbaugh, Board Secretary