

**BOROUGH OF WATCHUNG**

**SPECIAL MEETING  
MINUTES  
7:00 P.M. – MAY 18, 2010**

**MAYOR'S STATEMENT:** Mayor Albert Ellis called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM and made the following statement: Under the provisions of N.J.S.A.10:4-6 et seq., notice of the time and place of this meeting was given by way of special notice to the Courier News, Echoes Sentinel, and Star Ledger, and posted at Borough Hall.

**SALUTE TO THE FLAG, SILENT PRAYER, AND ROLL CALL**

Mobus [ A ] Black [ P ] Franklin [ P ] Joren [ P ] Pote [ P ] Nehls [ P ]

Also present were Administrator/Clerk Laureen Fellin, Attorney Michael Cresitello, and Deputy Clerk Michelle DeRocco. Although not present at Roll Call, Councilman Mobus arrived at 7:05 P.M.

There were 30 members of the public present.

Mayor Ellis explained the process set forth by statute that needs to be followed by the municipality after a school board budget has been defeated. He said both the local and high school budgets were voted down on April 20th, and the Governing Body has until May 19th to review and revise the school's budget. It then is submitted to the County Superintendent, Trudy Doyle, who reviews it and either accepts it or rejects it. He said if Ms. Doyle approves the recommended reductions, the school boards must accept the money amount, however, they can make the cuts in whatever areas they want. Mayor Ellis said the High School's budget must be reviewed and agreed upon by the Governing Bodies of Warren, Long Hill, and Watchung.

Mayor Ellis advised the schedule for tonight's meeting. He said the Resolution will be read, and after comments from the Council, the meeting will be opened to the public for any questions or comments. He said the meeting will then be closed, and the appropriate resolution will be voted upon.

**DISCUSSION:**

Councilman Franklin read R1 (copy attached):

Defeated High School Budget / 2010 - 2011

There being no comments from the Governing Body, the meeting was open to the public for questions and comments.

Karen Grayboyes, Carrar Drive, questioned if the recommended cuts to the High School's budget include charging a fee for sports, and if freshman sports will be eliminated. Councilman Franklin explained that it does, for what are considered "rental athletics" such as ice hockey and swimming, because these sports must use a rental facility, and added that the elimination of freshman sports had been discussed. Ms. Grayboyes asked if all three towns must agree on the recommendations and Councilman Franklin said Watchung, Warren, and Long Hill all did agree, adding that Green Brook has no say. He said the school must accept the levy reduction, however, does not have to agree to the recommendations.

Alex Drigan, Vail Lane, asked what the percentage of increase of the total budget was, and Councilman Franklin explained it was 3% above the levy which is a little under the State cap of 4%. Mr. Drigan asked why the school would not produce a flat budget and Councilman Franklin explained the budget can be lower than in previous years, but the levy can increase; if revenues are not coming in, you have to depend on taxpayers to make up the difference. He said the high school lost all of its state aid - \$1.6 million. He explained this makes for a higher levy. Mr. Drigan said in this day and age, no one is

receiving raises and the defeated budget was a message from the people. Mr. Drigan said everyone wants to help the children but at a certain point you cannot. He said this should be a clear message moving forward - the schools must be more efficient, as we are in our homes.

Wayne Osborne, Cardinal Drive, asked if the teachers made any concessions and Mayor Ellis said they gave up their tuition reimbursement, which amounts to about \$208,000. Mr. Osborne said the teachers really have not gotten the message, times are bad and they must "get real." Mr. Osborne commended the town for taking steps such as refurbishing vehicles, however, the school seems to continue spending as in the good old days. Councilman Franklin advised the Governing Body cannot touch the teacher's contracts and have done all they can to avoid cuts to the kid's programs. Councilman Pote said this does not mean the Governing Body did not try and Councilman Franklin added that he has been told that the Board of Education is still in discussion with the teachers.

Chris Listorti, Spencer Lane, said a big issue is the outsourcing of transportation. She said she agrees that more concessions could have been made, however, no one had even asked the bus drivers to make concessions before outsourcing. She said teachers and the people who are paid the least are being hurt the most. Ms. Listorti suggested eliminating a superintendent next year, or changing it to a part-time position. She said a lot of fat could be trimmed, citing the acquisition of an experienced football coach and his six-figure salary. Ms. Listorti said there has to be accountability and suggested de-regionalizing. Mayor Ellis replied that the Borough has been exploring the issue of funding for the Regional, however, he does not have answers at this time. He said Ms. Listorti has brought up some good points and should bring them up at a school board meeting.

With no one else desiring to be heard, Mayor Ellis closed the discussion on the Watchung Hills Regional High School's defeated budget to the public and Councilman Franklin moved R1:05/18/10, seconded by Councilman Black and unanimously adopted upon roll call vote.

R1:05/18/10 Determining General Fund Tax Levy - Watchung Hills Regional High School  
Defeated Local School Budget / 2010 - 2011

Councilman Franklin read R2 (copy attached):

Defeated Local School Budget / 2010 - 2011

There being no comments from the Governing Body, the meeting was open to the public for questions and comments.

Alex Drigan, Vale Lane, asked how the local school budget will affect the tax levy, and Councilman Franklin explained that it came in at the 4% cap, and the recommended cuts will bring it down about 1/2%. Mr. Drigan said this whole process has him perturbed and said prior to the vote on April 20th, all parents received a letter from the school stating the teachers were in negotiations. He said this was not proper. Councilman Franklin clarified that it is a month later and there have been no negotiations. He added he has been told they are meeting as this meeting is taking place. Mr. Drigan asked that if the teachers were to give anything back at this point, if it would affect the levy and Councilman Franklin said it would not. Mr. Drigan asked if their surplus was normal and Councilman Franklin said they are trying to keep a fund balance for next year, which is going to be especially bleak if the 2 1/2 % cap is implemented. Councilman Franklin added that the Governing Body did not make up the school budget, yet had less than a month to tear it apart, in addition to reviewing the high school's budget and working on the municipal budget. Councilman Mobus pointed out that the school budget makes up 60% of the municipal budget, yet only 24% of the voters came out to vote in April. He said he hopes that if school voting gets moved to November, maybe that percentage would change.

Ofrat Gilady, Oakwood Road, said Watchung is a small district and asked if it is necessary to have a superintendent, and Councilman Franklin said the local school's administrative staff is above the recommended ratio of administrators/students, however, he said an administrator (Charles Miller) was cut. Mrs. Gilady said she believes the district can do very well with just a principal and Councilman Franklin explained the Governing

Body cannot make those decisions. Councilman Mobus advised Mrs. Gilady to express her opinions to Dr. Malyska and the school board members. Councilwoman Joren said residents elect the school board members and Mrs. Gilady should let them know how she feels.

Theodore Hsueh, Sequoia Drive, asked how the Board of Education arrived at their numbers, and Councilman Franklin said the Board made their own cut prior to the 4% cap. Councilman Franklin said the Governing Body tried not to cut any faculty and reviewed the student to teacher ratio, to find out that class sizes are already into the 20's. He said they also reviewed the support personnel such as the custodial staff which consists of a head custodian and 8 staff. He said staff wage increases this year were at 1.9%, so after the 1.5% payback for health benefits, the staff would still have had a .4% increase; however, they never considered it on the give-back side, therefore, the monies had to be pulled from somewhere else. Councilman Franklin said the Borough's employees were given a terrible hit - 12 furlough days, salary freeze, and the implementation of the 1 1/2% payment to health benefits. Mr. Hsueh said there were 6 or 7 revisions to the school's budget prior to the vote, with no information made available prior. He said the same about the Borough's budget, that he had attended a meeting two weeks ago, however, the proposed municipal budget is still not posted on the webpage.

Lynda Goldschein, Sherwood Drive, asked if the school board can appeal the recommendations and Councilman Franklin said they could. Mrs. Goldschein said she feels more could have been cut and year after year "courtesy busing" comes up. She said the district is required to have a seat for every child, however, the buses go around town with only a few seats filled.

Ed Sarrico, Hillcrest Road, said two budgets were voted down, however, the teachers are still getting raises, and this Governing Body is approving a tax levy. Mayor Ellis suggested to Mr. Sarrico that he get involved in School Board meetings. Councilwoman Joren explained that the district lost state funding, laid off a principal, reduced the staff by 7, and the administration took freezes. She said they did do a lot, but a lot is state mandated. Councilman Franklin said "special education" costs add up and are mandated. Councilman Pote said now is the time to get involved, as the teacher's contract is up next year.

Mary Delamielleure, Valley Drive, asked what the next step is and Councilman Franklin explained that the amount of the budget reduction is set in stone, however, the school board can take it from anywhere they want. He said he is still hoping for a phone call from the school advising of a "give back." Mayor Ellis added that the school has 10 days to appeal the recommendation, and this completes the Governing Body's roll in this process.

Paula Barrameda, Mountain Boulevard, said although she has never been involved in a school budget, she finds this process very frustrating and silly that the State can mandate without offering solutions. She said it does not make sense to get rid of the younger, lower-paid teachers, or to get rid of Spanish on this level. She said the school should get rid of the courtesy busing and asked if the Governing Body looked into overtime costs. Councilman Franklin explained that the teachers are not usually paid overtime, that they receive a stipend for extra tasks, such as a cheerleading coach. Councilwoman Joren said that would be in their contract and cannot be touched.

Karen Grayboyes, Carrar Drive, said this meeting is counterintuitive, having public input and then passing the resolution. She asked how she can have input in the future and Mayor Ellis said she can write to or email the Governing Body. Mrs. Grayboyes asked if mandatory residency was reviewed and Mayor Ellis advised that it is the responsibility of the Board of Education. Mrs. Grayboyes said there is a very highly compensated teacher teaching "gifted and talented" students who are small in number and asked if any follow-up is done for this program to weigh the benefits and Councilwoman Joren advised that this is not the venue for this discussion. Mrs. Grayboyes said she has made these points to the Board and they have not been well received.

Mr. Drigan said this will continue and unless the Board of Education listens, we will be back here next year.

Mr. Osborne said he is overwhelmed by how the system works, and can pretty much guarantee no changes will be made. He said the biggest problem is the Board of Education not listening to the public.

Mayor Ellis advised all that the next Board of Education meeting is on May 27th and urged all to attend and make their voices heard.

With no one else desiring to be heard, Mayor Ellis closed the discussion on the Watchung Local School's defeated budget to the public and Councilman Franklin moved R2:05/18/10, seconded by Councilman Black and unanimously adopted upon roll call vote.

R2:05/18/10 Determining General Fund Tax Levy - Watchung Borough Schools

Mayor Ellis thanked all in attendance for coming.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Council, the meeting was adjourned to the call of the Chair and the next regularly scheduled meeting to be held at 7:30 PM on Thursday, May 27, 2010.

Respectfully submitted,

Michelle DeRocco, RMC  
Deputy Clerk