

SPECIAL MEETING WITH THE BOARD OF EDUCATION - MAY 10, 2005

Mayor Ganz called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

PRESENT: Mayor Ganz, Deputy Mayors Etlar and Weinstein, Councilmembers Caan and McCarthy.

ABSENT: Attorney Lustgarten

ALSO PRESENT: Manager/Municipal Clerk Kwasniewski, and Assistant Municipal Clerk Bojanowski along with the Board of Education Members: Superintendent of Schools Bruce Watson, Board Secretary Paul Stabile, President Elyss Frenkel, Vice President George Frey, Eugene Banta, Ed Carter, Joshua Gillenson, John Mancinelli, Dr. William Thimmel, Mary Monahan Wallace and Dan Zino.

Defeated School Budget:

Mayor Ganz welcomed everyone to what he hopes will not be an annual meeting. He would like them all to come to a common ground. Superintendent Watson made a presentation, giving out packets to everyone. He spoke about reasonableness and hoped that word prevailed. He talked about today's challenges that the schools must face such as the new 2% Fund Balance Law, effective July 04-S1701, abandoning the CEIFA Law, the revision of the Core Content Standards, stable rateables, the State of New Jersey drop in State aid, the first payment of the Bond Referendum is due and the school reforms IDEA/NCLB Extraordinary Aid.

President Frenkel stated that she hoped that they take into consideration that they do this for the kids. She felt it would take time to digest what Superintendent Watson has to say.

Deputy Mayor Etlar asked how many people are employed by the Board of Education. Superintendent Watson said there are 660 people plus part-time people and those who are on a contracted basis. Deputy Mayor Etlar stated the budget was rejected by the voters and the Council is charged to make a cut. He suggested they cut \$1.1 million dollars.

Superintendent Watson asked that the Council at least leave in items such the Science and Literacy programs.

Deputy Mayor Weinstein stated that he would strongly suggest they look into changing their health insurance coverage. President Frenkel stated that unfortunately the health benefits are negotiated into the contract. They can explore this at the next negotiation.

Eugene Banta stated that he had negotiated the last two contracts and it was a struggle to get reductions. He felt it was very difficult to get the union to agree to something like that. Councilmember Caan stated that the way the Borough's contract was written they were allowed to substitute a similar plan. He suggested they look into a plan that will save them money. He said the Borough has saved over \$700,000 by switching the plans.

Vice President Frey stated he did not think the people who voted no on this budget realize what the programs are. The children's education will suffer. He asked the Council to cut \$600,000 to \$800,000.

President Frenkel stated that the last time the budget was defeated the Board of Education had to cut the drivers education program. The parents were charged for the course and the taxpayers saved \$11 a year while the parents had to pay \$180 for the drivers education program. She was going to ask the Mayor and Council to cut nothing.

Deputy Mayor Weinstein asked if there was anymore surplus to be used. Superintendent Watson stated they were at the lowest level since he has been here. He advised that under the new law they cannot use surplus and they cannot transfer funds between it. He said they can no longer use surplus to lower taxes.

Councilmember McCarthy commented that the 140 children that were removed is a credit to the Board of Education. He wondered if they can go after the parents of these children to pay Fair Lawn. Superintendent Watson stated that every student removed did not cost \$11,000. They would be spending more money on legal fees.

Superintendent Watson pointed out that when they put the budget together they work on it from September through June. They go through all of the departments. He reminded the Mayor and Council that they are a people driven operation with a 2.4 million dollar budget.

Dan Zino stated that they have spent weeks going line by line. They have made cuts to the bare bones. They are not getting what they want which are programs for the students. The referendum has increased the budget by 7%.

John Mancinelli stated that they do consider line by line. They talk about productivity. They look at a budget the way big businesses do.

Mr. Zino stated that every board member looks at how the district is run. They saved hundreds of dollars by implementing new software. Regarding health benefits, they looked at the State plan and saved thousands of dollars.

Public Comments:

Carol O'Brien, 23-17 Cambridge Road, requested that the Council take the time to review the budget. She felt the budget being voted down was not a mandate for the Council to cut the budget. The residents voted no because of the increase in property taxes.

Robert Gulack, 4 Bancroft Place, spoke about Larry Hockman who received three tony awards on Broadway and that is the type of contribution that Fair Lawn graduates make to the world.

Arlene Liebman, 40-02 Ackerman Drive, stated the kids today will be affected tomorrow.

Cindy Yuskaitis, 16-03 Eberlin Drive, stated the PTA has spent years educating the people of what their votes does since the schools cannot lock their doors when the budget does not pass.

Alida Mancinelli, 13-18 11th Street, was discouraged that the budget was defeated. She realizes that if the Council slashes the budget it will take years to fix the damage. She begged the Mayor and Council to think of what their actions will do.

Anita Seidler, 4 Bancroft Place, stated that people pick the town to live in because of the schools.

Ellyn Miller, 22-19 Radburn Road, asked the Council not to make cuts. She hoped they would cut as little as possible.

Jeannie Baretta, 12-02 Fair Lawn Avenue, suggested using a bigger room and echoed what the other people were saying.

Lisa Kafer, 12-31 Fair Lawn Avenue, hoped that the Board will look at other programs to cut besides academics.

Dr. William Thimmel, 0-44 Saddle River Road, stated that as a taxpayer and a member of the Board of Education for 8 years, he does not know how to trim anything else from the budget since they have made every effort to make all the cuts possible.

Lucy Kourtesis, 39-12 Garvey Place, stated people have chosen this town because of the schools. Everyone is interested in keeping Fair Lawn a great place to move to. She wondered if there were other places they can cut besides the school budget. She asked them not to cut the budget.

Nara Hess, 16-01 Eberlin Drive, said she was disappointed that people were not educated to what the budget was.

Nancy Wallace, 10-05 Campbell Road, stated she would never vote against the school budget. She would vote cuts in Federal, State and Municipal budgets. She felt it is the people who do not come out to vote that ruin it.

Tim Murphy, 17-11 Parmelee Avenue, felt that no one understands the effect their no vote has, for example, on the marching band.

Kathleen Mariniello, 27 Wayne Road, stated she was proud to live in Fair Lawn. She felt they cannot cut the programs. She suggested that they reconsider what they are saying.

Pam Coles, 34 George Street, stated she has never left Fair Lawn, she has two kids in the school system. She felt that they cannot operate this as it was 25 - 30 years ago. The need far exceeds the demand. She said they needed a creative budget that is for the future. The children are our future. She suggested cutting \$400,000.

Bruce Ryan, 12-29 Edward Street, stated he has two kids in the school system. He would like to see them go through academics and cultural programs.

Ray Orlando, 12 Arlington Place, stated he supported his sons education and would not have a problem supporting the budget now.

Louise Orlando, 12 Arlington Place, stated that 20 years ago she was president of the PTA, She knows there are many that are seniors who vote for the children. She urged them to continue to support the programs. She stated that she could not imagine cutting any percentage from the budget. She asked each of them to please consider what the Board of Education said.

Susan St. John, 1-14 Lambert Road, stated she is in all different schools. She equates kids as flowers and if their budget gets cut it will stifle them.

Amy Plotch, 17 Bancroft, said she moved here in 1995 because of the school system. There are new programs that have come along which are essential. She is proud to live in a town with excellent services.

Superintendent Watson stated that out of respect to the Mayor and Council and on behalf of the Board of Education they understand the challenge ahead. He suggested they reconvene, look at the data and discuss it and come back with something that is reasonable. He thanked the Council for hosting this meeting. He felt it created a positive team in resolving this issue.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Deputy Mayor Weinstein and a second by Councilmember McCarthy, the meeting was adjourned to the Regular Meeting at 7:21 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Marilyn B. Bojanowski, RMC
Assistant Municipal Clerk

The undersigned have read and approved the foregoing minutes.

David L. Ganz, Mayor

Councilmember Allan Caan

Deputy Mayor Martin Etlar

Councilmember Owen McCarthy

Deputy Mayor Steven Weinstein