

A special meeting of the East Amwell Township Committee came to order at 7:20 PM. Present were Mayor Peter Kneski, Deputy Mayor Linda F. Lenox, and Committee members Timothy Martin and Larry Tatsch were present. Committee member Patricia A. Cregar was absent. Township Administrator Timothy Matheny was also in attendance.

In compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act, a copy of notice of this meeting was filed in the Clerk's Office, posted on the bulletin board, and sent to the Hunterdon County Democrat, Times of Trenton, and Star Ledger on April 23, 2010.

The purpose of this meeting is to receive an update from the Mayor on the East Amwell Township School budget. The public is invited to attend. Action may or may not be taken.

Mayor Kneski explained that he and Mr. Tatsch had a brief update from school officials on Friday regarding the defeated school budget. He outlined the process as he understood it, i.e., the school comes to the governing body, who may or may not make cuts, the County Superintendent reviews the budget as a final determination, and the Township ultimately must certify the amount to be raised by taxes. There is no public hearing required, and the certification must be made by May 19. This process also applies to Hunterdon Central Regional High School since their budget was also defeated.

Mr. Tatsch spoke about the School Board and School Administrator providing the best budget possible for taxpayers, which did not pass and now falls on the municipality to review and determine any other cuts without affecting a thorough and efficient education. Cuts cannot affect core curricula or school standing and test results. He spoke about the short amount of time the municipalities have to review the budget, noting that the governing body is working with the School to find the appropriate area for the cuts. Mr. Tatsch noted that their proposed budget was a .58% increase over the 2009 budget, or \$41,000. Using that as a starting point, all those present at the Friday meeting agreed that even a "relatively small decrease" and elimination of an increase would make a "meaningful difference" to the residents. A suggestion was made to look for a 1% decrease (i.e., the .58% plus an additional .42% decrease) or a tax point amount of approximately \$78,000.

Mayor Kneski commented on a follow up phone call from the School regarding the fact that they did not get the numbers across correctly at the meeting, i.e., they did not include the capital budget. He mentioned that the School will go to the teachers to see if they are willing to open up their contracts for further negotiations and possibly look at operations.

Deputy Mayor Lenox arrived at this time.

The teachers are in a current contract to receive a 3.5% increase for a three-year period. Mr. Tatsch explained that the School "is bare-bones, just like us," however, the School will look at teacher negotiations to find the 1% reduction. He further explained that the salary they negotiated was before the budget process and the tremendous cut in state aid; it was noted that the Administrator advised that even with their salary, the teachers were .5% lower than other municipal schools. It was also noted that the teachers will now be paying 1.5% toward their health insurance, which in fact, would mean that they are getting only a 2% increase in salary with this negotiated contract. It was unclear what further negotiations would be reached; however, there is a short deadline to address the budget.

Mr. Tatsch also stated that Hunterdon Central High School is negotiating their contract now and talking about a zero increase.

Mayor Kneski was not sure how the School Board and Administration would meet the goal; however no cuts to the core curriculum or special education were being made. Consolidation of classes is part of the budget plan, as well as position cuts for teachers and staff through attrition and retirement.

Motion by Mr. Tatsch, seconded by Mr. Martin, and it was carried unanimously to adjourn the meeting at 7:34 p.m.

Teresa R. Stahl, RMC/CMC
Municipal Clerk

