

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF
THE TEANECK TOWNSHIP COUNCIL
HELD IN THE MUNICIPAL BUILDING COUNCIL CHAMBERS ON
THURSDAY, APRIL 22, 2010

Mayor Feit called the Special Meeting of the Teaneck Township Council to order at 7:10 p.m., and asked all those present to rise for the Pledge of Allegiance.

ROLL CALL

Present: C. Gussen, C. Hameeduddin, DM. Parker (arrived 7:14 p.m.), C. Honis, C. Katz, C. Toffler, Mayor Feit.

Absent: None.

Also Present. S. Turitz, Esq. , Ferrara, Turitz, Harraka & Goldberg Esqs.; W. Broughton, Township Manager; K. Ragone, Assistant to Manager; C. Loschiavo, Senior Clerk.

MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by Resolution #322-09, setting the 2010 meeting dates and Resolution #91-10 amending the 2010 meeting dates, sending a copy to THE RECORD, THE SUBURBANITE, THE BERGEN NEWS/SUN BULLETIN, THE JEWISH STANDARD, and THE COUNTY SEAT, filing a copy in the Township Clerk's Office and posting it on the Municipal Building bulletin board, and the Mayor hereby directs that this statement be included in the minutes.

Mayor Feit explained that this added Special Meeting was to discuss the School Board Budget that was defeated by voters this week. He explained that the Township Council will review the budget and make recommendations to the School Board. First, the Council must ascertain how this will take place. At this point, no budget documentation has been received, therefore Council will not be sending any recommendations to the Board at this meeting, and this will be done at a later date. The deadline for recommendations is May 19, 2010. Additional documentation from the Board of Education will be made available on Monday, April 27, 2010. Mayor Feit said the Council may consider adding an extra meeting, if necessary and there will be a discussion setting the venue for the future meeting. Additional discussions will include Council reviewing the issues at hand as a whole or a subcommittee would be established to provide for more flexibility. Also, the budget may be sent for an independent review. Logistical issues would enable Council to move forward in their decision making. Good and welfare will follow the same format as Council meetings. Mayor Feit also reminded the public that three more Council meetings will follow between April 22nd and the May 19th deadline for the Council's budget recommendations.

MEETING OPEN TO THE PUBLIC FOR GOOD AND WELFARE

Mayor Feit inquired whether any member of the Council had any comments prior to opening the meeting to any comments from the public.

None.

Mayor Feit declared that any members of the public who wished to be heard come forward and state their names and addresses for the record. Comments were limited to five minutes per person.

Howard Rose, 575 Northumberland Road – discussed his concern about the school board budget as well as, the Board Of Education (hereinafter referred to as "BOE"). He spoke about the status of the economy; homes for sale or in foreclosure; the cut to school aid from the State; his stance on the school budget; and his interpretation of the school budget. Mr. Rose also discussed the responsibility of the Council to direct the BOE on how to spend their funds. He also discussed the returns of the school budget vote.

Mayor Feit read information that is available on the State Department of Education Website that gives guidelines as to what can and cannot be done by the municipal government reviewing the school board budget.

Joshua Wassman, 1130 East Laurelton Parkway – discussed the economy; property taxes; the hope of good schools being available for children; property values in coordination with school quality; alternative cut backs for the public schools; and third-party assistance to review the school budget.

Michael Hoffman, 36 Hamilton Road – recognized students for their attendance at tonight’s meeting; spoke about the burden on taxpayers; military spending; and fringe benefits, such as healthcare.

Brian Thorne, 311 Van Buren Avenue – spoke as a representative for Teaneck High School students; he discussed the protest the students participated in due to the budget failing; his decision to remain in the Teaneck public school system; the effect of the budget cuts on the quality of education; and benefits that current students have that may never be seen by upcoming students.

Emily Rosenblum, 851 Club Road – discussed her experience at Teaneck High School and is very proud of her education, she will be graduating on June 24, 2010; spoke about her extracurricular activities; told a story about her decision to remain in the Teaneck public school system; spoke about equal opportunities to play sports in the public school system; the success she realized by playing sports in her public school career; mentioned the GPA requirements for playing sports at Teaneck High School; and spoke about the value of being a student athlete.

Dr. Henry Pruitt, President of Teaneck Board of Education – spoke about the BOE’s preparation of a budget prepared under cap that resulted in 21 layoffs; the budget cut by the Governor two days later; not destabilizing the education system for political purposes; the Council’s job to review the budget and make recommendations; the coming changes and restricting under a new Superintendent; and requested the Council come up with the smallest possible number of cuts for Teaneck’s public schools.

Rifger Rappaport, 747 Mildred Street – spoke as a member of Helping Each Other Achieve Longevity (hereinafter referred to as “HEAL”) and discussed its nature as a girls’ mentoring organization aimed at helping students become politically involved as well as helping one another. She further discussed the effect of budget cuts on varsity sports and extracurricular activities; the positive effect of extracurricular activities on colleges and universities; asked the community to invest in these programs; and requested the Council keep these programs in mind.

Keith Kaplan, 670 Ramapo Road – conversed about the Governor’s new proposal to allow towns to come up with their own decisions to deal with school budgets; the rate of Teaneck’s proposed school budget increase; the layoff of 21 school teachers prior to the vote on the budget; the need for a school audit; asked if Council had reviewed last year’s school budget since the failing of the previous school budget; and discussed his own recommendations and actions undertaken by other towns regarding their own school budgets.

Patricia King Butler, 624 Ramapo Road, Co-President of the Parent Teacher Organization (hereinafter referred to as “PTO”) shared her feelings regarding the school budget; the diversity of the Township; the Township’s coming together during a time of crisis; the fear generated by the budget’s failure; the need to carefully re-examine the budget; and read a statement from the PTO Council into the record.

Linda Mazen, 1115 Emerson Avenue – spoke about New York City public school budgets’ availability online and transparency; everyone’s right to have access to a clear and open budget; the United Federation of Teachers’ stance on forgoing salary increases this year; and the effect of salary cuts on a personal level.

Dari Yuranday (sic), 194 Kings Court - suggested that the students have a say in what is cut from the budget; classroom sizes; the reason and impact for the recent student protests; and the importance of education to the students of the Teaneck public school system.

Lee Turner, 1149 Margaret Street – discussed his decision to move back to Teaneck for high school; his decision to attend public school; the turnout of students at the Special Meeting of the Council; his starting of the student protest and its mentioning in the news; Advanced Placement and Honors Classes’ importance to students; his feelings on Advanced Placement and Honors Classes for college applications; and the impact of increasing class sizes.

LuAnn Foreman, 1126 East Laurelton Parkway – spoke about her understanding of a good public school education; budgets cuts in the private sector and at philanthropic organizations; the ranking of the school system; the need to critically look at the school budget; methods for parents to subsidize sports activities and extracurricular activities; and the drastic and meaningful decisions Council is faced with.

Yantel Laurel, 136 Ward Plaza – discussed her experience in Teaneck High School with students and teachers; the effect of property tax increases on parents; and asked Council to consider the children in their decision.

Jonathan Kepecs, 599 West Englewood Avenue- discussed statistics relating to salaries of public school teachers in the State of New Jersey and in Teaneck; suggested students ask their teachers what they can sacrifice for the school budget; and further suggested teachers take a pay freeze to prevent job losses.

Jake Levine, 911 Red Road- spoke about his school career in private and public school systems; the quality of the teaching staff at the high school; and the effect of property tax increases on the educational system.

Mike Pleasants, 1652 Irene Court- suggested that sports should not be cut because of their positive impact on students’ grades; the familial feeling sports teams offer; requested students be made aware of where the budget cuts will be coming from; and the effect of said budget cuts.

Sam Abell, 765 Washburn Street- confirmed a previous speaker’s comments about the success of sports and students’ grades; congratulated the newly-elected BOE members; suggested the amount of classes teachers teach be raised; the affordability of property taxes on retirees; the unemployment; and salaries for public school employees; and the students’ roles as pawns in this debate.

Rebecca Drewton, 541 Martense Avenue- confirmed that the students who spoke tonight are not pawns and were not sent by anyone; she asked that the Council go easy on the schools’ budget and that the students really do care about their education.

Katelyn Richards, 464 Kipp Street- spoke of her extracurricular activities; her career in private and public schools; and reiterated the students’ request not to have money poured over the school, but for the Council not to devastate the students through the budget cuts.

Erica Godfreid, 184 Hillside Avenue- spoke about her willingness to pay for a good education for her daughter through higher taxes; her support for Teaneck public school teachers’ salaries; the need for Council to hold Special Meetings on the budget in larger rooms to accommodate the large crowd; upcoming elections; and encouraging two potential voters to run for local office.

Rochel Boretta (sic), 18 Cranford Place- discussed her family’s decision to move to Teaneck because of the quality of the education; her experience of teachers offering extra help after school; sports; the Forum; that public school education is a right and not a privilege; and asked Council to remember that the students of today will be the leaders of tomorrow.

Jordan John Taylor, 88 Broad Street- spoke about his mother’s reason for moving to Teaneck for its quality of education; his extracurricular activities and its effect on college applications; and the diversity of the students and how it brought students together.

Mildred Tucker, Sheppard Avenue- shared her feelings for not changing the venue for this important issue when it was changed for less important issues; the Council's education; letters written by councilmember's commenting about their support; and the upcoming Council election.

There being no further persons wishing to speak at this time, Mayor Feit declared that the public comment portion of the meeting was now closed.

Mayor Feit discussed that the venue cannot be changed less than forty-eight hours as per State law. The Council scheduled this meeting after the results of the budget vote were announced and were not aware of the protest that occurred yesterday.

C. Toffler discussed her yes vote for the school budget. She informed the audience that she graduated from Teaneck High School in 1959 when it was ranked as the second highest rated high school in the country. C. Toffler referenced Proposition 2.5, which limited property taxes in California and Massachusetts to 2.5%. She spoke about her daughter's education at the Brookline school district at a time when parents had to provide all of their children's school supplies. When C. Toffler's daughter reached Brookline High School, the effects of the 2.5 % cap kept honors and AP classes, but everything else was cut from bells, exit signs and property maintenance. She added that when money is taken out of a school system, children start losing respect for themselves. C. Toffler stated that she would be horrified if the decision is pushed to the municipal election and asked the members of Council to say how they voted and to take the awful responsibility to decide what needs to be cut in the budget. She believed that the teachers of Teaneck should accept a pay freeze and stated that if there was anything in her capacity to do so, she would meet with Union leaders to do so. She commended the Teaneck High School students for coming out to the Special meeting; spoke of her father, Theodore Ley, and his motion to integrate the school system in Teaneck. Finally, she suggested Council include a representation of the students to work with them to see where appropriate cuts should be made.

C. Katz thanked the students for coming out to the Special Council meeting; reminded that the Council should not make decisions that are penny wise and pound foolish; the importance of the success of public schools and its direct effect on property taxes in the Township. He felt it was important to come up with informed and deliberative decisions based on facts and information and to come up with cuts that have little or no impacts on the education of our children. C. Katz felt that the Council needed to spend time and energy to properly review and understand the school budget; he suggested the use of a public education consultant to help bring peace of mind to all, to carefully review each line item and to submit recommendations to Council. Further spoke about the need to carefully review this budget for students, teachers and tax payers; and the need to take a different course of action to prevent defeated school budgets from becoming an annual trend.

C. Honis spoke about her career as an educator and their reaction to seeing the students' protest and comments at tonight's meeting. She proclaimed that she will not sacrifice the needs of the students that are brought to the Council; shared comments about the difficulty of cutting items from an educational budget when many of her Council colleagues are not familiar with the workings of an educational budget. She hoped that tonight, the Council can hopefully begin the process of coming to a happy medium; commended the adults on their appropriate behavior; and the need to have a thoughtful eye to the needs of education and process of taxes.

DM. Parker thanked the students for coming out to have their voices heard and their participation in democracy. DM. Parker discussed the prior review by the nine (9) Board of Education members and their proposed layoff plan and reduction of \$500,000 from the prior year's school budget. She discussed her yes vote on the school board budget; her disapproval of C. Katz's suggestion to have a third party review the school budget given the presence of the Youth Advisory Board, the Financial Advisory Board, a Public School Board, an Administrator on the School Board and a Superintendent. She spoke about the irresponsibility of spending the public's tax dollars in an economic crisis to review the school budget and her dedication to reviewing the budget as a Councilmember.

C. Hameeduddin discussed his family's gratefulness to the Township for what it afforded and continues to afford them; his involvement in a Teaneck public school education; clarified to the

students that the budget failure is not an all or nothing concept; suggested that the students be involved in the public policy process; and welcomed emails and phone calls from students with questions.

C. Gussen shared his experience as a student athlete in his high school and college career and how sports reveal one's character rather than build it. C. Gussen spoke about his wife's employment as a public school teacher; healthcare costs teachers are asked to contribute; clarified tonight's task of determining the process to address the responsibility of cutting money from the budget. He informed the audience that the Council will receive their copy of the school budget on Monday and that the Council must certify their modifications to the State by May 20th. He felt that last year's one million dollar cut to the school budget was a decision made politically expedient and would fight to not allow this to happen again. He pledged to work to assure that a thorough and efficient education would be provided to the students of Teaneck and in a manner that tax payers could afford.

C. Toffler added that one item cut from last year's school budget was to fund a backup generator that C. Gussen allegedly claimed the Township was never without power for more than a couple of hours.

C. Gussen responded that there were data backup systems and battery power that would be far cheaper than said generator.

C. Toffler remarked that this was one of the items that the Board of Education "put back" this item and this was how the process occurred.

C. Gussen spoke in favor of performing a cost-benefit analysis for the purpose of educating the Council on the budget.

Mayor Feit felt this year's failed school budget was in need of a third party to review the school budget.

A roll call was taken regarding the expenditure of funds to allow a third party to review the school budget.

In Favor: C. Gussen, C. Hameeduddin, C. Katz, Mayor Feit.

Opposed: DM. Parker, C. Honis, C. Toffler.

The majority of Council was in favor of having a cost-benefit analysis being undertaken by a third party.

The Mayor polled Council to either establish a subcommittee or committee as a whole to review the budget. A majority of Council voted to review the budget as a committee of the whole.

Mayor Feit asked Councilmembers to take time between meetings to review the information and to raise questions at a meeting in order to receive answers from the School Board in a faster manner.

Ms. Loschiavo informed the Mayor that the Richard Rodda center is not available for April 27 and May 4; the Library was not available; and the Board of Education did not return a response to the Clerk. Mayor Feit felt it was necessary to have a larger venue and asked that the High School be sought for an alternative venue.

Council discussed the issue of not being able to have the budget meetings cable casted live from alternate locations. Mayor Feit felt that the sacrifice was necessary in order to accommodate the additional crowd. C. Toffler stated that many watch the meetings from their homes.

The Mayor suggested the Council have an additional meeting, as the deadline to make a decision regarding the school budget is approaching. C. Gussen was in favor of setting an additional meeting date given the turnaround time from the Auditor to the Council with his

recommendations. C. Toffler remarked that setting a meeting date after the Municipal election to act on the school budget and municipal budget was appalling.

Mayor Feit offered the Council alternative dates at the end of April and the Council held off on setting additional meeting dates and locations.

Township attorney S. Turitz clarified to the Council that the Board of Education does not have to accept a line item or number.

ADJOURNMENT

Mayor Feit moved to adjourn the Special Meeting at 11:48 p.m. Seconded by C. Gussen.

In Favor: C. Gussen, C. Hameeduddin, DM. Parker, C. Honis, C. Katz, C. Toffler, Mayor Feit.

Opposed: None.

Absent: None.