

SPECIAL WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

May 17, 2011 – 6:00 p.m.

The West Amwell Township Committee met on the above date at 6:05 p.m. Present: Mayor Molnar, Committeemen Fisher and Rich. Also present were approximately 25 Township and area residents as well as school board members.

In compliance with the Public Meetings Act, Mayor Molnar announced that this Special Meeting was called pursuant to the provisions of the Open Public Meetings Act with notices faxed to the Hunterdon County Democrat and the Trenton Times on May 12, 2011. A copy of this notice is and has been available to the public and is on file in the office of the Municipal Clerk.

Attorney Faherty led the assembled group in the pledge to the nation's flag.

The meeting was recorded via digital recording system.

DISCUSSION & CONSIDERATION OF RESOLUTION FOR SOUTH HUNTERDON REGIONAL DEFEATED BUDGET:

Mayor Molnar addressed the crowd and stated that discussion would be limited to ½ hour as there were other items on the agenda to be addressed. Mr. Fisher relayed that the agreement was for a \$117,000+ cut to the budget. Also noted was that prior to the recent meeting in Lambertville, there appeared to be a level of contentment with this number and that the Committee would like to keep it at \$117,190.

Lisa Levine, a Stockton school board member, relayed that South's budget was under the 2.0% cap imposed by the governor and that the proposed decrease would have a ripple effect throughout the school. She noted that South was selected for the School Choice program; has filled every available slot; and, sees this as a vote of confidence in that the school has something to offer...something that others find attractive...a gem. The Committee was requested to give the school a chance to take something that is growing; make it great; and, use the opportunity to relieve the tax burden for all.

Marie Collins commented that she was surprised by the decision in Lambertville and reviewed the discussion and vote on the cuts. She also noted that the school had applied for more extraordinary aid but received \$20,000 less than budgeted for and urged the Committee to reduce the cut to \$100,000 in light of the referenced shortfall.

A brief exchange over the amount of money spent to repair a relatively new boiler; bidding; and, the surplus situation ensued. It was relayed that there was no option to the former and that it had to do with water sediment; that they have State and County oversight on these types of purchases; and, that the school is in a death spiral due to the surplus situation where it can't be replenished and is drawn on in order to make shrinking caps.

Jill Myers relayed her particular situation and involvement, especially with the local education foundation and noted that since last year over \$20,000 in grants to support programs has been raised for things not covered in the budget. The group is now receiving requests for items such as teacher training, guest speaks, etc. She requested that the Committee now give back to those who support the schools.

That the Township Committee is not at fault over budgets that have been knocked down the past five years was relayed by Mr. Fisher; the budget is the job of the school board; and, they need to sell it to the public, which is not happening. Mrs. Collins countered a concerted effort to get out the vote was made but that it seemed to move more voters to the 'no' side; however, this is only place where the voters get to vent their anger. She offered that the Board worked hard to cut creatively and that there is no fat to remove. Also noted was that voters unanimously re-elected the current Board members.

Nicole Claus acknowledged the difficult position that the Township Committee is in and noted that although the budget was voted down, the margin has narrowed. She appealed to the Committee to drop the number to \$100,000 to avoid County involvement; indicated that Stockton will follow the Township's lead; and, stressed that South students deserve what other students get; and, that the school stands to lose even more if the budget issue goes to the County.

Dave Beaumont inquired where the \$117,190 number came from and was informed that it was the number to keep the budget flat. He then questioned how this thorough and efficient level

claimed last year as sufficient can be sufficient next year if there is less money to operate given fixed costs. He also inquired where the cuts would come from. Mr. Fisher relayed the list that the municipalities agreed upon.

In response to a question from Mr. Rich about the County's role, Mrs. Collins explained that the County acts as the Governor's surrogate but that this administration is not a friend of education. She would like to think that the Committee and Board are partners in creating community here and finds it incredible that there's an argument over \$17,000. She realizes that both entities are between a rock and hard place but wants to help with a compromise. Any cuts made hurt all programs which in turn hurts the kids.

Mr. Rich refuted the comments in circulating e-mails that the Committee is not a supporter of South. He offered that they want West Amwell and South Hunterdon to have top notch education and that they are not here to cut education. However, the voters said 'no' which means they do not want their taxes to go up; there was money for raises from those that cried poverty; and, that unnecessary spending must be controlled. Mr. Rich proceeded to review a listing he had prepared called "Just the Facts" concerning the budget (see attached). Ms. Collins again mentioned the \$20,000 of extra aid that did not materialize; requested that the reduction be limited to \$100,000; noted that at some point the Committee has to trust the Board; that the Superintendent brought professional development in-house during the day to provide this opportunity at no cost and that this saving is being missed; that there's more learning than ever before; that the quoted Administrative number is wrong; and, that line items have portion of other things contained within. She also reviewed how administrative costs have been kept under control and that the teachers said no to a give back of a half percent. Ms. Claus relayed that the secretarial staff costs had been reduced last year with two retirements.

Celeste Mosby, a new Board member at South, suggested that a line by line examination of the budget be conducted jointly as they have nothing to hide. She also commented on the accomplishment of having 26 school choice applications and being accredited by the State. That department chairs have been lost and Board members are involved in community outreach as there's no money to hire a PR person were also mentioned. Ms. Mosby stated that there is no fluff in this budget; that they trusted the process; the school has done everything asked of them; has no idea where to find \$100,000; wants to work together; and, remarked that grants paid for some of the items in the budget details.

Karen Conlon relayed that both no and yes voters are represented here tonight, as was true in Lambertville last evening when the Council voted no to the \$117,000 figure as a cut too deep. The \$100,000 compromise vote had not been planned but arrived at after a lively discussion.

A brief exchange ensued over the hand shake agreement arrived at by the three municipalities and that there is an obligation to the yes voters as well as the ones who voted no.

Gail Brewy requested that there not be cuts to programs because the kids deserve a top level education; that it's her responsibility to see to that; and, the job of the elected officials is to support education. With South's kids on the path to getting into college, any cut would be too much. Mrs. Brewy also mentioned that for property values to be stable, there needs to be a strong school district and pleaded for the Committee to support the kids and not cut more than \$100,000 as it will affect the kids.

The Clerk was instructed to read the resolution as prepared.

RESOLUTION #80-2011

An resolution Certifying the General Fund Tax Levy for the South Hunterdon Regional High School for the School Year 2011-2012, By the Governing Body of the Township of West Amwell, County of Hunterdon, State of New Jersey

WHEREAS, the voters of the Township of West Amwell in a duly held election, did fail to approve the General Fund Tax Levy Budget of the Board of Education of South Hunterdon Regional High School for the school year 2011-2012; and

WHEREAS, the Education, Budget and Appropriation Law, N.J.S.A. 28a 22-37, requires the Governing Body of the Township of West Amwell, after consultation with the South Hunterdon Regional Board of Education, to determine the amount which is necessary to be appropriated in such budget and to certify to the County Board of Taxation the total amount so determined; and

WHEREAS, the Governing Body of the Township of West Amwell consulted with representatives of the South Hunterdon Regional Board of Education on Tuesday, May 10, 2011, and has thereafter determined the amount necessary to be appropriated;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Governing Body of the Township of West Amwell, County of Hunterdon, State of New Jersey, that the following determination is hereby made:

- 1. The original tax levy on the ballot for the base budget \$7,929,856
- 2. The amount of reduction to the tax levy for the base budget \$ 117,190
- 3. Approval of second question \$ 50,000
- 4. The amount of tax levy being certified for the base budget: \$7,862,666
- 5. Specific line items reductions:

Account Number	Description	Amount
a.	Salaries	25,000
b.	Bank Fees	13,000
c.	Asbestos Abatement	30,000
d.	Custodial Services	12,000
e.	Administrative	37,190

- 6. Supporting reasons for reduction: Based on a review of all data provided by the Board of Education, meetings with representatives of the Board of Education, numerous public hearings and consideration of the public need, it has been determined that the reductions set forth herein can be effectuated without a reduction in programs or negatively impacting upon the education of the students.
 - a. A review of the overall budget of \$10,096,116 reflects the recommended reduction of \$117,190 is just over a 1% reduction (1.16%), and a 1.5% cut in the levy.
 - b. All three municipalities strongly support the reduction in administrative line items causing the reduction in staffing in the secretarial positions, facility manager position and/or any other area in the Administrative offices.
 - c. All three municipalities did not support a cut in programming, specifically the Agricultural program for the following reasons:
 - i. It would negatively impact the education offered to the students currently attending South Hunterdon Regional High School,
 - ii. It would negatively impact the School Choice program South Hunterdon Regional High School enrolled in and would not attract the students needed to support the ten million dollar budget which would lower the cost per pupil,
 - iii. For cultural reasons, it would negatively impact the three sending districts as farming is part of their heritage and considered to be a legacy for the students,
 - iv. There are other ways for the school board to reduce the budget by \$37,190 by reducing the staff of the Administrative line item which would not negatively impact the education of the students attending South Hunterdon Regional High School.
- 7. The revised budget is sufficient to provide a thorough and efficient education with all of the supporting reasons listed in paragraph five (5), items i through iv.
 - a. A reduction in support staff or administrative staffing will not impact the level of education offered to the students attending South Hunterdon Regional High School.

8. There was an additional general fund tax levy considered by the voters to fund a formal feasibility study to examine whether there are educational benefits to the students and/or financial savings to the taxpayers by creating a South Hunterdon pre-k through 12th grade all purpose school district. This question was approved by the voters with 429 yes votes and 340 no votes and will not result in a permanent increase in the district's tax levy.
9. The implementation and continuation of the following is vital to the community:
 - a. South Hunterdon Regional High School Work Group – a group of elected officials and community members organized to help guide the high school in the preparation of their budget and programs and review the procurement practices.
 - b. Completion of the Feasibility Study ratified by the voters on April 27, 2011.
 - c. Review and implementation of the Special Needs Audit/Assessment completed in December of 2010.
 - d. Holding regularly scheduled meetings in the home town of the sending districts in order to offer accessibility to the voters of each community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this resolution be forwarded to the South Hunterdon Regional Board of Education, Superintendent of Hunterdon County Department of Education, and the administrator of the Hunterdon County Board of Taxation.

Rich motioned to approve the Resolution and Fisher seconded. Roll Call: Rich-aye, Fisher-aye, Molnar-aye

A temporary adjournment was called at 7:04 p.m. to allow the Planning Board to set up for their meeting. The Township meeting was moved to the small meeting room and reconvened at 7:10 p.m.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION ON POSSIBLE ROAD PROJECTS FOR BOND ORDINANCE:

After a lengthy discussion about which roads should be included in the bond ordinance, type of work and costs involved, timing issues, and which projects might rank well for a State grant, the decision was to go with Old York Road, Section 1 and Rocktown Hill. Mr. Clerico will work up project estimates and get them to the Clerk and CFO by Monday.

AUTHORIZATION TO ADVERTISE SALE OF POLICE VEHICLE:

Attorney Faherty has advised that this should be an advertised sale like was done previously for other items and must be authorized by resolution. It was agreed that an auction resolution for the former Perrine property and the two water buffalos, as well as the 2003 Crown Vic would be prepared for the next meeting. Minimum bids were set as follows: house - \$100,000; water buffalos \$500.00/each, police vehicle \$700.00. The Road Supervisor will be contacted to see if there is any DPW equipment to be sold.

Hal Shute suggested that Green Acres be asked about possible interest in the property for public access parking.

PLAN ENDORSEMENT SURVEY:

Although a letter was sent previously that the Township was no longer interested in this effort, an e-mail from Mr. Ableman has requested that the survey be completed and returned. Mr. Fisher offered to do this on behalf of the Township. It was agreed that questions 1 and 4 should be answered 'no.'

OPEN TO THE PUBLIC:

Dave Beaumont offered that South should be proud of such as graduate as Mr. Rich. He was amazed at what was presented and analyzed concerning the school. Unfortunately, he also overheard some inappropriate comments from those that were not happy. Concern over what to tell the public and the risks vs benefits of going to the County was also expressed.

Rob Tomenchok spoke briefly about negotiated labor agreements and his take that fact finding should be the first step, not the last. He also commented that the County will probably never review the thorough and efficient standard but perhaps should. Also mentioned was that the public has no confidence in South and that bad feelings abound as all that is given is platitudes and rhetoric.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:07 p.m. on motion by Fisher, seconded by Molnar.

Respectfully submitted,

Lora L. Olsen, RMC
Township Clerk