

MINUTES

WATERTOWN TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL MEETING

SWIFT MIDDLE SCHOOL
MEDIA CENTER
250 COLONIAL STREET, OAKVILLE, CT 06779
TUESDAY, JUNE 30, 2009, 7:00 P.M.

PRESENT: Elaine Adams, Chairman
Gary Bernier
David Demirs
Richard Fusco
Carl Mancini
Raymond Primini, Vice Chairman
Paul Rinaldi
Thomas Winn

ABSENT: Richard DiFederico

OTHERS PRESENT: Karen Baldwin, Superintendent of Schools
Charles Frigon, Town Manager
Frank Nardelli, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director

1. Call Meeting to Order

Ms. Adams, Chairman, Called the Special Meeting to Order at 7:00 p.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Ms. Adams, Chairman, led the Pledge pf Allegiance.

3. Roll Call

Ms. LaForme, Clerk, executed the Roll Call.

Ms. Adams: Before we open Public Participation, I just want to say first, thanks to all the Council Members for coming tonight, I know you had to break plans to be here and I apologize for that. What had happened was a couple of Council Members, I guess after thinking about it, wanted to address this again, so tonight the only way it can be done is to amend the motion. It's not a reconsideration because it wasn't that night, it would be to amend the motion if the Council chooses to do. By the same token this is a special meeting called specifically with the Board of Education's budget dollar amount so all comments would have to be kept to the Board of Education's dollar amount. At this time I will open Public Participation.

4. Public Participation

Eric Weihrauch, 360 Straits Turnpike, Watertown, CT 06795

Mr. Weihrauch: On the subject of the Town budget, I believe the first budget you had at \$61,000,000 was a fair and good budget.

Ms. Adams: You have to keep it just to the Board, okay? It's a special meeting. You can come on the 20th and . . . thank you.

Mr. Weihrauch: On the Board of Education budget, what really bothers people unfortunately it circulated around the \$234,000 for two people. It's being really emphasized in the paper and some people think those jobs weren't needed, so maybe if we have these people there now, maybe we shouldn't have and a lot more people would be voting for the budget. This is what I'm saying.

Guy Buzzancco, 399 Artillery Road, Watertown, CT 06795

Mr. Buzzancco: My 5 year old starts Kindergarten at Judson this Fall. I wanted to bring him with me tonight for visual impact but my wife thought that might be exploitation. I just wanted to point out a few things about the school system he'll be entering this Fall.

- He is entering a school system where there are more children in 7th grade classrooms than in any other 7th grade classroom in our DRG.
- He is entering a school system where there are more children in 2nd grade classrooms, than there are in any other 2nd grade classroom in the State.
- He'll be entering a school system where our 5th graders Math CMT's were next to last in our DRG.
- And where our 3rd graders CMT Reading scores were the absolute worst in our DRG.

As we all know, the foundation that we get in our elementary school years determines what happens in later years, and as you might expect the results aren't that great. 60% of American high schoolers scored better on the Math portion of the SAT's than Watertown High School students did last year. 60%. We can do better than that. We can send my son and the 259 other children that will start Kindergarten this Fall to a school system that is something better than worst than average, and we can start tonight by passing a budget amount that will preserve the teachers and the quality of education as it stands right now and start us on a path to build from there. Finally, I just want to remind us all that we cannot fix the economic problems of this Town by breaking our school system. Thank you.

Ms. Adams, Chairman, Closed Public Participation at 7:06 p.m.

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5. Consider an Amendment to the previously adopted motion of June 23, 2009 “increasing the Board of Education 2009/2010 budget by zero percent (0%)”

Ms. Adams: That was the actual motion that was made and that is what, if the Council chooses, it can amend that motion. I'll open it up to discussion. We do have Karen Baldwin here if there are any questions.

Mr. Winn: I have a couple of things and it may (inaudible) the school budget and I want to talk about our Town.

Ms. Adams: Keep it to the Board of Education's budget, it's a special meeting.

Mr. Winn: This is about our school budget from where I came here 19 years ago and I came here because the school system was an excellent school system in the State of Connecticut, I moved here because it was an excellent town. I've been here 19 years and I have watched the school system deteriorate and I decided to become involved in the Town partially because of that. We do need to fix the school system, I have no doubt in my mind. I am for education and that's why I decided to become involved in this Town and the budgetary problems that we have. I may get stopped, but this Town needs a tax base that we've never even ever implemented.

Ms. Adams: You're kind of getting off the (inaudible).

Mr. Winn: Talking to the Board of Education, if I can't talk to what I need to talk about, I might as well not even be taking, cause in order to talk about our school budget, in order to talk about the economy, what's going on here, I need to talk about the Board of Education, I need to talk about the Town Council, I need to talk about Planning and Zoning, and I need to talk about stuff in this Town.

Ms. Adams: That's where we can't . . . it's not posted, Tom. You need to talk only about the Board of Education.

Mr. Winn: Okay, let me finish.

Ms. Adams: I'm sorry, but that's the way (inaudible).

Mr. Winn: If I can't do that, there's no sense in me saying another word until I get to be able to say again, as usual . . .

Ms. Adams: On the 20th you can address all of this.

Mr. Winn: Then I'll address those issues on the 20th, because it's more than just this budget.

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MOTION: (Mr. Fusco, sec. Mr. Primini) I move to amend the previously adopted motion of June 23, 2009, “increasing the Board of Education 2009/1010 budget by zero percent (0%)” to increase the Board of Education 2009/2010 budget by one percent (1%).

Discussion: **Mr. Rinaldi:** What was the motion?

Ms. Adams: The motion was, in order to amend the motion he stated the motion first, and he is amending the motion to reflect a 1% increase in the Board of Education budget.

Mr. Rinaldi: If the motion on the floor is for 1% I’m going to have to support it. I don’t think it’s enough, but I’m going to have to support it, because I’m afraid and concerned that if 1% does not get approved, I know where this whole thing is going to wind up and I’m not willing to take that chance.

Mr. Mancini: I want to start off by saying that first of all not how I feel about this 1% or not, but I think that this meeting may actually be illegal because it says to amend the motion, or whatever

Ms. Adams: That was the motion that was made, right.

Mr. Mancini: You can do it, but it has to be done at your next meeting, that’s what the paper says that you sent to us. This is not really our next meeting. This is a special meeting for this purpose only.

Ms. Adams: Specific to the agenda, right.

Mr. Mancini: And it also states here at your next monthly meeting. People out there may contest this. I’m not saying I’m fighting it, I’m just letting you know that there may be people out there that can say this shouldn’t have happened until our next meeting, and even though this is our next meeting because you called a special meeting, that was the only purpose.

Ms. Adams: It was researched, Carl.

Mr. Mancini: Okay, I just wanted to make sure.

Ms. Adams: As I said Carl, I do appreciate Council members cancelling their plans to come here.

Mr. Mancini: (Inaudible) I did say I didn't want to vote on it last week, and there were other members on this Council that said they didn't want to vote on it last week, they wanted more time to think about it, and we felt that we were forced into voting the way we did, and we asked the Board of Education to make some kind of commitments, we would like to know where our money was going, we'd like some bang for our buck, okay? There are things here that I don't like. I don't like eliminating \$5,000 from the graduation for Swift School. Pardon me? We were told by Ms. Baldwin it was \$5,000.

Ms. Adams: It was her recommendation to the Board of Education, not that the Board had accepted that, but that's what it was.

Mr. Mancini: She said we're saving \$5,000 by eliminating the graduation, fold it into something else at the High School, but I'm against eliminating \$5,000 from your budget and depriving these kids of a graduation. I'm against raising Pay to Play from \$85.00 to \$110.00 and I'm against getting rid of the sports programs and making it intramural programs. That's not a lot of money. We were told, read in the paper yesterday or today that you were going back to the Unions. Has anybody come back to you with anything? Probably not, cause why should they.

Ms. Adams: Do you want her to answer that question?

Mr. Mancini: If she would afterwards, I was just wondering if we have anything from the Unions, has anybody given anything, or are they just saying the Town Council is going to be forced into giving us money. We don't have to do anything, but that's what's happening here tonight. But I wanted some kind of a commitment last week, I wanted them to think about it for a week and have a meeting, I wanted another meeting tonight, okay, but I want graduation, I don't want to deprive these kids of graduation for \$5,000. I think the Board of Education should be ashamed of themselves that they are eliminating a graduation for these kids. So that's where, I'm not saying I'm not going to support this 1%, but darn it all, give the kids something back too.

Ms. Adams: Karen, did you want to address the

Ms. Baldwin: What Mr. Mancini is referring to is a series of what I called in last week's presentation Tier 1 reductions, some reductions that we could take initially that were presented to the Board of Education on Monday, June 22nd, that do not result in position elimination. Pay to Participate we had in our 2.7% budget, we had an initiative to slowly phase that policy out and so we had an initiative that where in the 2.7% budget it was at \$85.00. Now faced with reduction we need to move it back to where it has been which is \$110.00 which puts back into the Board's budget or saves \$37,000.

In terms of the middle school intramural initiative, eliminating athletics and proposing intramural, that saves about \$25,000. Those two initiatives alone are roughly \$62,000.

Then taking a look at middle school graduation, and coming up with a different program is roughly \$5,000 in savings and that proposal itself came from middle school staff. Councilman Primini asked us in April or May when we met in front of this group to make sure we speak to our staff about any cost savings measures or reductions that they could come up with and that was actually one of them. I want to highlight to the Council though, that this was presented to the Board of Education Monday, June 22nd, presented to you on Tuesday, the 23rd, the Board also had questions and concerns relative to items on the Tier 1 list as well as items for reduction as it relates to getting to 0%, 1%, or 1.5%. So that work continues to be fluid as we examine that.

Ultimately I did have some initial conversation with the Watertown Education Association, the representatives of the W.T.A. the teacher's union, our largest group, and I don't think that the Union is expecting anything from the Council. I think the Union, in any form of concession bargaining, expects some sort of quid pro quo, that if we were to ask them to give something up, that the Board has to guarantee them something, and certainly in the original 2.7% what the Board said we would save would be positions and at this juncture we can't and so the W.E.A. has very respectfully declined to entertain concessions at this juncture.

I did have initial conversations with the AFSCME representative, the State representative for some of our non-certified groups, and they were empathetic as well, but at this juncture with potential position elimination they, too, were not meeting favorably our request to possibly come to the table and think about concessions.

Mr. Mancini: Can I respond? And there is also \$37,000 in new found money, you know savings from a bus, elimination of a bus.

Ms. Adams: Transportation (inaudible).

Mr. Mancini: Transportation from Polk to Heminway, that that money was in your original budget, then last week all of a sudden you said that you negotiated a deal where you don't have to have that bus any longer. That \$37,000 was in the original budget and now it's not. Why can't you put some of that money towards the graduation for the kids? Why can't you put that into the sports program for the kids?

Ms. Baldwin: Well first off it's not newfound money and we didn't negotiate a deal. When faced with the prospect, when the referendum failed on June 16th, obviously we were prepared to get to zero and so we have to look at all accounts, salaries and wages, benefits, professional services, transportation, utilities, maintenance, operations accounts, and so in looking at all accounts, the increase in the transportation account is due to, we budgeted another bus because of the need to move children from Polk to Heminwy and so we worked with First Student, and we're holding them responsible to get us the transportation system in place without that bus and so they are working vigorously to accomplish that so that we can save that money.

Ultimately the decision for us, Mr. Mancini, is a Board decision about where those dollars get redeployed to, whether it's Middle School graduation, or some other program or position that the Board thinks is important, but clearly we are hearing you that middle school graduation was an important celebration and milestone from your perspective that should be preserved.

Mr. Mancini: Thank you very much, and can I ask another question? Tomorrow is July 1st, and your new business manager starts, your assistant superintendent starts, that means Mr. Miller is gone, he's not going to be working any longer, right?

Ms. Baldwin: He'll do probably consulting work with us as we close out the Judson project and start up the Polk for P.B.C., so I would imagine you may see him at a P.B.C. meeting somewhere down the line, maybe July 15th.

Mr. Mancini: But he won't be working as status quo?

Ms. Baldwin: No.

Mr. Mancini: If he was I wanted to know where that money was going to come from. Okay, thank you very much.

Mr. Bernier: I certainly supported 1% at the last meeting, I supported 1.5% and 1.2%. To address an earlier speaker about these two positions, indeed that is what has been through this town. What I probably did not make clear the last time, this money is already in their budget, these are full time positions that have combined some other positions, and more importantly, I was a member of the Board of Education, all we do is supply a bottom line. Yes, we need to look, we need to pull and I'll tell you, the Finance Subcommittee this year on both the Council and the Board's side, as well as staff, have gone further than we've ever gone before, in part that's why we're so late into this process, but we met, we knew it was a very difficult year, we came forward as a group on many occasions, it's not found money, but a clarification of money allowed us to continually bring that number down.

I think it was a very open and transparent process and it's a very difficult year. I'm opposed to everything that Carl is, I'm opposed to losing teachers, but at the end of the day, that is a decision that is made by the Board of Education and staff, and we are tasked with providing them a bottom line number. I wish it could have been 2.2% or 1.8%. 1.0% is on the table and I most certainly can support that.

Mr. Primini: I didn't make the last meeting, I was at my own son's high school graduation. I thought the meeting would have been about an hour, I was shocked when I received a call at about 10:00 when I was pulling into my driveway that the meeting had just gotten out. I want to emphasize the urgency of getting this done tonight is that in all fairness, there will probably be some layoffs, and unfortunately it's the newest teachers that will get laid off, the lowest paid ones, and in all fairness to them, some of them might be looking for jobs right now, in fairness to them they need to know if they're going to be here or to start looking for another job. I really think that's a sense of urgency in getting this going right now in all fairness to those teachers who might be around. I'm not a big fan of this right now cause in doing the math we are just going down from 23.12 to mills to 22.49, so that's really not, the mill rate itself is really not a big cut when it comes down to it, but I'm not in favor of it, I agree about the graduation and unfortunately I'm hearing from parents that I know have kids going to the High School, their kids are coming home earlier, whatever, it seems like they have more study halls because there are no classes. I mean how much farther do you really go in all fairness to the kids like that too? I hope this passes tonight. I'd like to see us all in agreement on this.

Mr. Rinaldi: I know I'm being repetitive, but the last meeting I expressed my concern that the only thing we've ever done in all the years I've been here is give the Board of Education a bottom line, that's all we can touch. What they do with that money is their business. Now I've heard a lot of complaints and concerns about various aspects of the Board's budget. I believe that you know if we think we're going to accomplish that, we're not, cause I think what's going to happen is instead of what we think we want, is that they're going to wind up taking its toll on teachers and kids and programs. I too, I was in favor of 1.5%, but obviously I'll do the 1% just to put this thing to bed.

Mr. Fusco: Please get out the vote, cause if we have to do this again, after this time we're really going to be in trouble. This is going to feel like a picnic to us so if you can get out the vote, fine; if you don't, you know where we are headed, so it's all up to you now.

Mr. Bernier: I'm smiling and it is not funny, one of the things I did learn since last week is simply that if somebody gets a hold of you about a Board issue, I try to call it, I try to explain to them that these positions were already in the budget, but put them in contact with the Board of Education and the school system. That's the right place for these questions to be answered. I gave them my best, hopefully I gave him the right answer, but I will say that I did learn that a Board issue should go to the Board and I would urge that if you do get these kinds of calls, to please ask them to get a hold of the Board.

Mr. Mancini: I also will tell you, I will support this 1% tonight, but I challenge the Board of Education to try and get this, at least this graduation for the kids, \$5,000, some way, some how for these 8th graders; they deserve it.

Ms. Adams: I think they heard you, Carl, loud and clear because I know exactly what you're saying, it just seems like a cut that just does some really widespread (inaudible) damage at the very least. Last week I supported 1.5%, 1.2%, and 1.0%, but I couldn't support 0%, I didn't think that was the way to go. I'm very concerned. I, too, served on the Board of Education, and to hear about these test scores and to see what's happening to the quality of our education . . . this Town for years has just, budget, we've had problems here, education especially, I will support the 1%, I would have gone higher, but I will go with the Council and the 1%; it's better than zero.

Mr. Mancini: I am definitely going to support the 1% and it would have been nice if it were higher, but it's not. I do have a request for the Board of Education for the members here and maybe the Board can talk, I think this budget is tenuous, I think there's a lot of dissent in the town, and if the Board of Education would just talk to the Town Times, write Op Ed pages, and attempt to have the Town understand what your thinking is, it has nothing to do with trust, it has nothing to do with how hard the Board of Education works. I've met a lot of the Board of Education members over the last week or so, they are hard working and good people, but I think if the Town understands where the Board of Education is coming from and what's going on with our education system, they feel that they're part of the decision, and I would just hope that the Superintendent and the Board of Education writes some letters, talks to (inaudible), I support the budget.

Mr. Mancini: Frank, do you have what the tax rate is going to be?

Ms. Adams: I think Frank has about 18 different scenarios.

Mr. Mancini: We're talking about 1%, so I don't want to hear any other numbers except 1%.

Mr. Nardelli: On the 1% increase to the Board, the new mill rate would be 22.79. That again, now this is just for the residential real estate, it's about an average of about an 8.2% increase. The motor vehicle taxes will go down, personal property taxes of all the businesses will go down, and the industrial account will also probably see a reduction or not much of an increase cause they didn't go up as much, their revaluation. But that's just an average.

Mr. Mancini: That's an average tax increase of 8.2%.

Mr. Nardelli: On the residential real estate only.

Mr. Fusco: Can we get a number for the budget amount to be approved?

Ms. Adams: Frank will get that (inaudible).

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

6. Consider an Amendment to the previously adopted motion of June 23, 2009 placing on the voting machines: "Question 1. Shall the Fiscal Year 2009/2010 School General Fund Budget be approved in the amount of \$35,205,816?"

MOTION: (Mr. Bernier, sec. Mr. Primini) I move that the previously adopted motion of June 23, 2009 setting the ballot be amended, for question number 1 only, which shall read as follows: Shall the Fiscal Year 2009/2010 School General Fund Budget be approved in the amount of \$35,557,874?"

Discussion: None

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

7. Adjournment

MOTION: (Mr. Primini, sec. Mr. Bernier) to Adjourn the Special Meeting at 7:32 p.m.

Discussion: None

MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY

Special Meeting Adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Elaine H. Adams, Chairman
Watertown Town Council

Approved: _____
Lynn M. LaForme, Clerk