

PRINCETON TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING
May 15, 2007

A special meeting of Township Committee and Borough Council was held on this date at 7:00 p.m. in the main meeting room of the Princeton Township Municipal Complex, 400 Witherspoon Street to discuss the recently defeated school board budget.

NOTICE OF MEETING

The Clerk read the following statement.

The following is an accurate statement concerning the providing of notice of this meeting and said statement shall be entered in the minutes of this meeting.

Notice of this meeting as required by Sections 4a, 3d, 13 and 14 of the Open Public Meetings Act has been provided to the public in the form of a written notice. On May 11, 2007 at 9:10 a.m., said schedule was posted on the official bulletin board in the Municipal Building, transmitted to the Princeton Packet, the Trenton Times, the Trentonian, and the Town Topics, and filed with the Township Clerk.

ROLL CALL

The Township Clerk then called the roll.

Present for Township: Mayor Marchand, Mrs. Bergman and Messrs. Goerner, Liverman and Miller.

Absent: None.

Also Present: Mrs. Monzo, Messrs, Pascale, and Schmierer.

Present for Borough: Mayor Trotman (7:15 p.m.) Mrs. Benchley, Karcher, Trelstad and Messrs. Goldfarb, Koontz, Martindell.

Also Present: Mr. Bruschi.

JOINT SCHOOL BOARD BUDGET

Mayor Marchand began the meeting by stating that it has been sixteen years since the last school board budget was defeated. Peter Martin, CPA, CVA, was hired by the governing bodies to review the school board budget, meet with the Township and Borough Finance Committees and make recommendations. A consensus was reached by the Finance Committees that cuts to the school board budget could be made that would not effect programs.

Mr. Martindell asked if there was a report for the public. Mayor Marchand said that there was a draft and once it was final it would be made public. Mr. Martindell said that if there is a prepared report then it should be in the public domain.

Mr. Goldfarb moved approval of the proposed resolution. Mr. Goerner said that he appreciated the motion to approve the resolution but said that he hasn't seen where the cuts to the school board budget are coming from. He said that the goal was to have the consultant outline the agreed to cuts that did not effect programs. Mayor Marchand said that she would like to have a report from Peter Martin.

Mr. Martin said that his report is a draft and not final. The deepest cut in the budget that could be made would not affect the excellence of the schools. He said that there are very strict mandates on what is to be done.

Mr. Pascale said that Mr. Martin came up with \$3.4 million in possible cuts to the school budget. All the members of the Finance Committees accept Mr. Martindell approved \$1.050 million in cuts that would not affect school programs.

Mr. Goldfarb said that the issue was not what could be cut without effecting programs. If something is cut from the budget this year then it would have to be cut in subsequent years. He said that the school board is facing the same CAP issues as the Borough and Township.

Mr. Martin said that he was engaged to look at every single line item then work with the school board. He said that there are \$1,050,000 million in cuts to the school budget and that the resolution is in a format that is required by the State of New Jersey. He said that the item that everyone keeps referring to is a draft analysis, not a report and will not go out in any way shape or form.

Mark Freda, Fisher Avenue, said that he was curious why the document was not being released to the public.

Mayor Marchand asked the attorney if Mr. Martin's document was indeed a public document. Mr. Schmierer said that if it was not in final form then it should not be released. However, with both governing body's approval and Mr. Martin's permission it could be released as it is his work product.

Mr. Martin said that he would look for a compromise as there are significant gaps in the analysis and the answers are not all there.

Mr. Martindell offered a motion to release Mr. Martin's report. Mrs. Trelstad seconded the motion. Mayor Trotman said that the motion was policy decision on the circulation of a document which Mr. Martin did not want to make public. Mrs. Benchley said that she was not sure if they had the right. Mrs. Trelstad said that she thought Mr. Martindell wanted to discuss not release Mr. Martin's document. She said that she withdrew her second. Mayor Trotman said that the motion failed because the second was withdrawn.

Mr. Martindell offered a motion to discuss the items identified without releasing the report. Mrs. Trelstad seconded the motion which was carried unanimously by Borough Council.

Mayor Marchand opened the public hearing.

Mark Freda, Fisher Avenue, thanked the governing bodies for their work. He said that the school budget defeat is a wake up call. He said that Princeton has a wonderful school system, but the real issue is what the public is willing to pay. There is a message in this defeat, he said, and that balance has to be maintained.

Frank, Subjack, 31 Journey's End Lane, said that we need to get an understanding of the cost per student, as we are approaching \$17,000. He asked if people look at what other municipalities are doing in terms of cost per student, as we are approximately \$4,000. above state average.

Mr. Goldfarb said that our teachers have longer tenure factors. People come to the Princeton system and stay.

Michael Mostetler, President of the School Board, thanked the governing bodies for their time, noting that education in Princeton is good at a fair price. He said that budget meetings will begin next January. He said that the list is long, and we have an expectation that other municipalities will be paying what we are. Mrs. Trelstad said that she attended the school board budget presentation and noted that questions were not entertained at the information meeting. She said that the school board needed to be more open with the public.

Susan Lowe, Overbrook Drive said that other municipalities are not trying to emulate us.

William Sutphin, 501 Jefferson Road said that the way the governing bodies preceded with the budget review was a great improvement from 1974 when he was a member of Township Committee, and holding an open public hearing was another improvement. He suggested that each line item be reviewed and have a careful record so that the Commission has a hard time overturning the recommendations for cuts.

Mayor Marchand then closed the public hearing.

Mayor Marchand said that over the years we have learned from mistakes made in the past and that it was really wonderful when there is an agreed upon philosophy.

Mayor Marchand said that Mr. Goldfarb has offered a motion to approve the resolution. Mr. Koontz seconded the motion.

Mr. Martindell offered written remarks dated May 15, 2007 which he paraphrased for the governing bodies and the public.

Mr. Koontz said that in hindsight the process may not have been handled the same way. We hired a consultant, trusted our finance committees and expected them on our behalf to do what Mr. Martindell said that they did not do. We expected leadership, especially from the chairs.

Judy Wilson, Superintendent of Schools said that there have been 4% raises applied across the board, noting that teacher negotiations will begin mid year 2008. The School district is working on interest and revenue sources noting that cost drivers are all over 4%.

Mr. Koontz noted that a lot of money is spent on the autism program. Ms. Wilson said that autism is the fastest rate of classification nationwide.

Mrs. Trelstad said that she had a lot of questions about the entire process and felt trapped to make a decision now or in five more days.

Mrs. Benchley agreed that the process is absurd but that they have made a good faith effort and a good first step. She said that she would vote for the resolution because they were in a box.

Mrs. Karcher said that they did more than posture in the first two hours of the finance meeting and that she objected to Mr. Martindell's characterization of the meeting. She said that they came to a compromise at the end of the meeting, and that the process was good not bad.

Mrs. Trelstad said that they were copied on a memorandum dated May 2, 2007 with questions. She thought that the answers were evasive and that there needed to be better explanations in a timely fashion.

Mr. Koontz said that the most important message was sent by the voters and there needs to be a balance, noting that they had made a step in the right direction tonight.

Ms. Wilson said that the schools provided over 2000 pages of documentation.

Mr. Martindell said that the prior years fund balance has a history of being underestimated.

Mayor Trotman said that there is a motion on the floor to adopt the resolution as presented.

The motion was carried by four affirmative votes with Mr. Martindell and Mrs. Trelstad voting in the negative.

Mr. Liverman said that he has spoken to so many people since the school election. He said that the questions to the school board were easily answered and extremely versed and that they covered a large amount in a short time. He said that Princeton offers a lot of unique things especially education. The Township view has been well defined and we have received a lot of paper since April 17. He said that he would be voting yes for the resolution.

Mr. Goerner said that it has been an interesting process, while frustrating for the school board. He said that he did not attend the finance committee but was brief about the meeting upon his return from his trip.

He said that he was comfortable discussing the report from Peter Martin, noting that they were only accepting five of nine items. Mr. Goerner said that while he was not qualified to pass judgment on all issues, he would support the resolution. He noted that Mr. Freda's statement is key, and that communications on the budget is key.

Mrs. Bergman said that she was honored to serve with her colleagues. She said that the three entities need to share more information with monthly meetings. She said that she was confident that we followed the process and have come to a good conclusion. Could we have done better with more time, probably not. Mrs. Berman said that she supports the resolution.

Mr. Miller said that he too supported the resolution. He said that he attended the same meeting as Mr. Martindell and came away with results of true negotiations, with compromise. He said that there was meaningful discussion of the budget and no target amount of reduction to start with.

Mayor Marchand said that she was away when the process began. She had 400 emails and voicemails when she returned, noting that it was not hard to get into the issue of the school budget. She said they came out of the process with a fair recommendation and a decision that was not taken lightly, and one that was well informed.

Mr. Goerner offered a motion to approve the resolution as presented. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Bergman and carried unanimously.

There being no further business the meeting was adjourned at 9:50 p.m.

Linda S. McDermott
Township Clerk