

## SPECIAL JOINT MEETING – SCHOOL BUDGET

The joint meeting of the East Windsor Township Council, Board of Education of the East Windsor Regional School District and the Hightstown Borough Council was called to order at 7:30 p.m. by Mayor Robert Patten and Mayor Janice Mironov.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Superintendent of Schools Ron Bolandi.

East Windsor Township Clerk Cindy Dye, Hightstown Borough Clerk Candace Gallagher and Board of Education President Rick Perez each read aloud a notice certifying that each body had met the requirements of the Open Public Meetings Act.

Following East Windsor's roll call, Ms. Gallagher called the roll for the Borough Council:

### ROLL CALL

	PRESENT	ABSENT
<i>Mayor Patten</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Laudenberg</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Quattrone</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Sackowitz</i>	✓	
<i>Council President Schneider</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Sikorski</i>	✓	
<i>Councilmember Thompson</i>	✓	

Also in attendance: Candace Gallagher, Borough Clerk/Administrator; and Frederick Raffetto, Esq., Borough Attorney.

The Board of Education proceeded to approve the agenda, conduct a roll call for their body, and to adopt a Resolution authorizing them to enter into executive session at this meeting.

Mayor Mironov stated that this is a "challenging situation," and that all input from the public has been carefully considered. Representatives of the three bodies have met informally to exchange information and comments, she said, and "we are now prepared to move forward with the process that we are required to conclude within the next couple of days."

Mayor Patten stated that consideration of the East Windsor Regional School District budget following its defeat at the hands of the voters is an important responsibility for the governing bodies. "Our role," he said, "is to consider those who expressed their concerns not only at the polls, but at last week's meeting." He stated that they must make an effort to represent all community members, "not the least of whom are children who have no voice of their own on these matters." He said that it is important that cuts made to this budget do not harm the students. "In subcommittee meetings," he said, "we have looked for ways to respect the wishes of the voting constituency while providing for the educational needs of our students." We have reached that compromise, Mayor Patten said, and asked the Borough Clerk to read aloud Resolution 2005-135. Following her reading, the Resolution was moved by Councilwoman Laudenberg and seconded by Councilman Quattrone.

**Roll Call:** Councilmembers Laudenberg, Quattrone, Sackowitz, Schneider, Sikorski and Thompson voted yes.

**Resolution adopted, 6-0.**

**WHEREAS**, in an election held on April 19, 2005, the proposed East Windsor Regional School District budget for the school year 2005-2006, with a proposed general fund tax levy in the amount of \$47,452,931.00, was defeated in all but one voting district, by a total of 1010 votes to 633 votes; and

**WHEREAS**, N.J.S.A. 18A:22-37 provides that if the voters reject any items of a budget submitted at the annual school election, thereafter, the member governing bodies of each municipality within a regional school district shall consult with the board of education and determine the amounts which they deem necessary to provide a thorough and efficient system of schools for the regional district for the ensuing year; and

**WHEREAS**, joint open public meetings of the Hightstown Borough Council, East Windsor Township Council, and East Windsor Regional School District Board of Education, to hear public comment and to review the defeated budget, were held on May 10, 2005 and May 17, 2005; and

**WHEREAS**, these budget adjustments are being made in consultation with, and with the concurrence of, the East Windsor Township Council and the East Windsor Regional School District;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Borough Council of the Borough of Hightstown, County of Mercer, and State of New Jersey, as follows:

1. The following sum shall be raised by taxation in the East Windsor Regional District and certified to be necessary to provide a thorough and efficient system of schools:

Current Expenses: \$46,452,931.00

This represents a reduction of \$1,000,000 from the 2005-2006 proposed budget, in line items as set forth on the attached listing.

2. The Municipal Clerk shall forward a copy of the Resolution certifying the amounts to be raised for current expenses to the East Windsor Regional School District, the East Windsor Township Council, the Hightstown Borough Tax Assessor, the Mercer County Superintendent of Schools and the Mercer County Board of Taxation, no later than May 19, 2005.

*MAY 17, 2005*  
**POTENTIAL BUDGET REDUCTIONS**

Description	Amount	Line #
General Supplies Student Furniture – EMK	\$ 30,000	02680
General Supplies Student Furniture – HHS	30,000	02680
General Supplies Student Furniture – MHK	7,500	02680
General Supplies Student Furniture – PLD	10,000	02680
General Supplies Student Furniture – WCB	5,000	02680
Tuition County Special Services School Districts	120,000	06310
Evaluations Purchased Professional Services	80,000	06610
Enterasys Maintenance	56,000	06860
Salaries for Pupil Transportation (Bet Home & Sch) Sp Ed	46,447	07220
Transportation Supplies and Materials	10,500	07320
Maintenance Services ADA	10,000	07622
Transportation Social Security Contributions	3,553	12230
Equipment Maintenance Truck	40,000	08160
Equipment School Buses Special (One 5 passenger)	25,000	08190
Equipment School Buses Special (Two 20 passenger)	96,000	08190

Adult Education Instruction Salaries	17,753	08980
Adult Education Support Salaries	39,655	09060
Adult Education Employee Benefits	19,592	09070
Adult Education Purchased Services	3,000	09080
TOTAL EXPENSE REDUCTIONS	650,000	
Budgeted Fund Balance – General Fund	350,000	00121
TOTAL DECREASE GENERAL FUND TAXES	1,000,000	

Councilwoman Laudenberger stated that this action is a model of two communities working together for the benefit of all."

Councilman Thompson noted the "eloquent outpouring of support" and said that the message is clear that (1) taxes are too high and residents are dissatisfied; and (2) the education of our children is of paramount importance to all. "While I am still concerned about the impact of these cuts," he said, "I feel we have struck a balance."

East Windsor Township Clerk Cindy Dye then read aloud East Windsor's Resolution 2005-144, which read substantially the same as Hightstown's Resolution 2005-135. The roll was called and the Resolution received a unanimous vote of approval.

Following brief comments by Mayor Mironov, Mr. Lippman and Mr. Daniels, the East Windsor Regional School District moved that the 2005-06 annual budget be approved with a general fund tax levy of \$46,452,931.00. Following comments by Mr. Bolandi and members of the School Board, a roll call vote was taken and the motion was carried unanimously.

The floor was then opened for public comment.

## PUBLIC COMMENT

Following is a summary of comments heard:

Torry Watkins, 68 Meadow Drive, Hightstown:

- He said that those who voted against the budget "deserve understanding and not scorn," and "don't seem to understand what's going on." We must help them understand that we are being victimized by a regressive property tax system.
- Objected to teachers and coaches "arguing for their own special interest." "A sense of community should be restored."
- He is heartened by the number of people "who are beginning to get it," but criticized the NJEA as one significant body that doesn't.
- He said that the budget prepared by the school board was a responsible, bare bones budget and he was sorry that the respective Councils "saw fit to cut \$1 million." "One the dust settles," he said, "I hope that we as a community can all come together, rally around the subject of property tax reform and move forward."

Mark Madonia, 224 Sunset Avenue, Hightstown:

- Concerned about his kindergarten-aged son moving into district from Mercer County Special Services division, and that cuts made tonight will impact those programs. "You made cuts you had to make," he said. "I was sad to see the budget was voted down."

Bernard Lerner, 2 Sheffield Road, East Windsor:

- Commended both councils for "doing their due diligence, and not touching programs that the kids need," including athletics and arts.
- "Trenton gets 80% of their budget paid for by state, and their instruments are in better shape. I hope both councils will let the State House know that this is unacceptable."

Lisa Ernst, 106 Hausser Avenue, Hightstown:

- "We need to use this as an opportunity to not let this ever happen again. We have to get the voters out, and get a positive message out."

Eugene Sarafin, 600-628 South Main Street:

- Suspects "ignorant collusion" and violation of the Open Public Meetings Act. "The law says we should know why you made those cuts."
- Would like to see one administration handle both governments.

David Abalos, 30 Shadowstone Lane:

- He has no children in the school district but is willing to pay more in taxes to meet the needs of the families here. He is impressed with the current administration, which has a new "energy, passion and vision" that will show results.

Ronald Schechter, 2 Exeter Court, East Windsor:

- The music program has been cut in all but one of the last eight years. The football field hasn't been improved since the school was built 40 years ago. "Safety should be the primary concern," he said, and "music is not just about fun and merriment."
- "When we have to cut, should special ed students suffer? Should we cut teachers and cram more students in a room? Or do instruments go out the window? I have no idea of where we're trying to get the tax rate to and what that means in terms of cuts." To deny resources to the school at this stage would be detrimental, and to assign blame isn't practical. Changing the way to Abbott districts are funded might help.
- We were "hit with an assessment of \$450,000 this year for expenses incurred two years ago by the Mercer County Special Education District. Why not hold them accountable for their overage?"
- One way to save is by getting together with other districts and sharing common costs.

Kelly Giblin, 51 Wendover Road, East Windsor:

- The Board's responsibility is to make sure that the next teachers' contract is more reflective of today's economic times than of what the teachers want.
- People who voted against the budget are not against the students. "A young lady complained that she couldn't afford \$3,000 to fix her instrument. That's how much my taxes have gone up in the last few years, and my family can't afford it either." He said that he voted against the budget not to cut programs "but to get your attention," and "doesn't buy 'bare bones' when looking at the teachers' contracts.
- He believes in Mr. Bolandi's vision and his work, and does not "equate test scores with teachers' performance." He asked the Board to "please be responsible with my tax dollars."

Len Millner, 17 Exeter Road, East Windsor:

- Congratulated and thanked both Councils for their handling of this. "The voters spoke," he said, "and you respected what they said. You made a reduction – not catastrophic, but substantial." He thanked and congratulated the school board for accepting the change.

Amanda Porter, 214 Stockton Street, Hightstown:

- Thanked everyone, especially the Board of Education members, who "worked exhaustively to make the budget as lean and responsible as you could, in fact left nothing to cut without causing pain. It is disturbing to think that you have to build in waste to allow for that possibility."
- Parents must take more responsibility to be advocates and ambassadors. If more knew what happens here, this budget wouldn't have failed."
- She heard talk of cuts in adult education and plans to make that program self-supporting, and asked the Board not to make ESL classes cost prohibitive.

A.J. Groves, 14 Logwood Lane, East Windsor:

- "We can't sleep well watching the erosion of educational quality while watching escalating costs. Fiscal responsibility should be equally balanced with quality education. He is disappointed that \$1 million was cut from the budget and hopes it does not come out of academic or other programs that support efficiency of learning.
- Thanked Mr. Bolandi for inviting that we hold him accountable. The bottom line could be improved by controlling expenses or increasing revenue. "Please increase the revenue coming into the township. Increase commercial business."

Leonard Baskin, 49 Stonehenge Drive, East Windsor:

- Congratulated all involved in this process. "We have seek additional funding and look out for ourselves," he said. Agrees that regionalization of the two towns should be explored to save money.

Andrew Astarita, 45 Twin Rivers Drive, East Windsor:

- Attended many meetings in past years, and lost faith in the previous Superintendent. Teachers were afraid of him. Now, "70% of the teachers say great things" about Mr. Bolandi, and he will stand behind him.

Following the public comment, Mayor Mironov thanked all in attendance and adjourned the meeting at 9:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Candace B. Gallagher, RMC  
Borough Clerk