

A Special Meeting of the Township Committee of the Township of Washington was called to order by Mayor Roehrich at 7:30 PM.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Comm. Babb, Murello, Vice Mayor Short, Mayor Roehrich

OTHERS PRESENT: Administrator Coppola

ABSENT: Comm. LiaBraaten

Adequate notice of this meeting was sent to the Daily Record and the Observer Tribune on August 25, 2016 and was posted on the bulletin board in the Municipal Building on the same date. This meeting is being held at the Washington Township Municipal Building, 43 Schooley's Mountain Road, Long Valley, New Jersey. Notices of this meeting were sent, as there were requests.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Mayor Roehrich stated that members of the Regional Board of Education are present to provide information about the school funding question that will appear on the November ballot. The ballot question deals with school funding and not the deregionalization. Regional Board Members are present to share information and cannot share their personal opinions about the topics discussed. Residents are encouraged to make informed decisions for themselves.

PRESENTATION – West Morris Regional High School District Board of Education (WMRHSDD BOE)

Lisa Woodring, Vice President of WMRHSD BOE, **Robert Strobel**, President of WMRHSD BOE, and **Doug Pechanec**, Business Administrator of the WMRHSD BOE were present.

Lisa Woodring stated that a subcommittee of the WMRHSDD BOE was put together to look at the school funding formula in 2015 to answer questions from the community. The funding formula is currently based 100% on equalized home values. The committee presented an option that would be based 50% on student population and 50% on equalized home values.

Robert Strobel presented a history of regional school funding formulas and proposed changes to the WMRHSDD funding format. The presentation is available on the WMRHSD BOE website.

The proposed funding formula question on the November 8th ballot would need to be passed by all 5 municipalities in the regional district in order for the funding change to pass. This ballot question is the only action the WMRHSD BOE can take with respect to the issue per NJ state law.

Comm. Murello asked the WMRHSD BOE to clarify the percentage of students that attend WMRHSD by municipality. **Robert Strobel** clarified that 48.8% of the regional school district is made up of students from Washington Township.

Comm. Murello asked if students had an option to go to either of the two high schools in the district. The board stated that students could go to either school. **Comm. Murello** stated that the tax impact presented is based on per \$100,000 assessed value of homes, and that an average Mendham resident would see an approximate \$800 decrease in their taxes while an average Washington Township resident would see an approximate increase of \$600 with the 50/50 formula.

Vice Mayor Short asked if there was any population study information available. **Robert Strobel** stated that there was not.

Comm. Babb asked for clarification on how often the number of students attending WMRHSD is calculated. **Robert Strobel** stated that a physical count on October 15 of each year is used in their calculations.

PUBLIC PORTION – Mayor Roehrich opened the meeting to the public, and asked that questions for the WMRHSD BOE be about the presentation only.

Walt Cullen, 9 Laurel Ct, wanted to clarify that numbers used for elementary and regional students does not include any children that attend private school or go out of district. **Robert Strobel** confirmed that only students attending public school and the regional high school are included in the numbers.

Leslie Mule, East Maple Ave., asked why Washington Township residents should vote for the change in funding. **Lisa Woodring** stated that the question should be posed to the Township Committee and not to the WMRHSD BOE.

Tim Daly, 40 Schooley's Mtn. Rd., asked what the WMRHSDD's motivation was in presenting a change in funding. **Lisa Woodring** stated that a committee was formed in 2015 in answer to complaints and questions about funding from other municipalities.

Bob Malone, 11 Falcon Lane, stated that if Washington Township voted the funding question down, would there be any recourse from the WMRBOE. **Robert Strobel** stated that there would not.

Ann DeFries, 6 Hilltop Terr., stated that it might be in her best interest to vote for a tax increase to ensure that the vote did not impact the regionalization. **Ms. DeFries** asked if other allocation amounts had been considered. **Robert Strobel** stated that the 50/50 allocation was what the WMRHSD BOE determined should be presented.

Carol Grobels, 19 Fleming Ct., asked what residents would be getting for their tax increase, if the referendum passes. **Robert Strobel** stated that this is a referendum question put forth by the WMRHSD BOE after decades of funding questions from the community.

Jason Koestenblatt, 23 Coleman Rd, asked that if this referendum passes, will it be locked in for 10 years. **Robert Strobel** stated yes any additional funding changes would have to happen after 10 years, but if the referendum does not pass the question could appear next year.

Dave Weippert, 231 E. Mill Rd., asked if the WMRHSD BOE considered true values of homes. **Lisa Woodring** stated that the board used equalized valuation that comes from the state and it removes disconnect between the assessed and the market values of homes.

Michelle Riccordella, 11 E. Maple Ave., asked that if the referendum passed, when it would take effect. **Doug Pechanec**, stated that the change would go into effect for the 2017-2018 fiscal year, which begins July 1, 2017.

Kevin Daley, no address provided, asked where population numbers came from. **Robert Strobel** stated that student numbers are actual counts of students attending schools as of October 15 each year. **Mr. Daley** asked if it cost the same amount to run each school. **Lisa Woodring** asked Mr. Daley to email him that question.

Unidentified resident, asked if the 50/50 funding was modeled after another municipality. **Robert Strobel** stated that he could not answer that question but encouraged residents to research other funding formulas. **Lisa Woodring** stated that there are 5 other regional districts in New Jersey that have a funding formula other than the 50/50 that is being proposed on the referendum.

Angel Garcia, 7 Markham Dr., asked if the funding formula changed, would it impact curriculum. **Robert Strobel** stated that the funding referendum question only deals with a funding change, nothing else.

Unidentified Resident, asked if the new funding formula would change budgets at each individual school. **Robert Strobel** stated that the funding question only deals with funding change, nothing else.

John Wolfe, 5 Evergreen Place, asked if the referendum question has been determined yet. **Robert Strobel** stated that it was created. **Mayor Roehrich** explained that the WMRHSD BOE is present to share facts, an interpretation of the question and its impact should be discussed by the Committee and the Washington Township residents.

Jason Koestenblatt asked how information would be shared with residents. **Mayor Roehrich** stated that an open discussion would occur when the WMRHSD BOE is finished. **Lisa Woodring** stated that the WMRHSD BOE information is on their website and can be shared with other residents.

Vice Mayor Short asked if a teacher brought his/her children into the district to attend the school they worked in, how those students would be counted. **Lisa Woodring** stated that this is a very small number and the WMRHSD BOE could not answer that question.

Unidentified resident asked if the state has any impact on the funding. Robert Strobel said no, the board could pose this question, but they have no impact.

There being no further questions or comments, Mayor Roehrich closed the meeting to the public.

The members of the WMRHSD BOE left the meeting.

PUBLIC PORTION – *Mayor Roehrich opened the meeting to the public.*

Jason Koestenblatt, 23 Coleman Rd., stated if we vote no, he expects the remaining 4 municipalities in the regional district to strongly pursue de-regionalization of the school district. Mendham Borough is on record as being willing to move forward with the de-regionalization process. **Vice Mayor Short** stated that the Chester Township change in taxes is less than \$10 per \$100,000 and they will be coming out with a position statement shortly. He has reached out to Mendham. To de-regionalize the WMRHSD would take 3 out of 5 towns to approve, as well as an overall majority of voters in all 5 districts, and the process takes several years, according to the State Dept. of Education. One town cannot be put at a disadvantage while another gains an advantage. Vice Mayor Short researched assessed values of the Mendham High School is \$12 M higher than Central High School.

Michelle Riccordella, 11 E. Maple Ave., asked if there was any benefit for Washington Township residents to vote for the funding change. **Mayor Roehrich** stated that the only possible benefit would be that the funding change could quell the thrust for other municipalities to pursue de-regionalization.

Susan Goodhand, 83 Fawnridge Dr., wanted to know if the Committee had looked at tax impact for the Township if the regional board of education was dissolved. **Mayor Roehrich** has not seen a study, but estimated that the impact would be \$1,200 or more per household if the regional school district were dissolved.

Delores Peccorari, no address provided, asked if residents voted to accept the new funding formula, would budget allocations to either high school change. **Comm. Murello** stated that the WMRHSD BOE stated this was a funding question only, not a budget question.

Keith Ryan, 10 E. Mill Rd., wanted to know what the tax impact on Mendham would be if the regional school district separated into their own districts. **Mayor Roehrich** does not have those numbers.

Tim (no last name stated, no address given) asked how quickly the regional school district could be dissolved. **Mayor Roehrich** said he believed it would take at least three years.

Suzanne Ballengee, 140 Kings Highway, stated that this dissolution has been discussed for decades. She encouraged all residents to vote no on November 8.

Kayla Scheckel, 392 Naughtright Rd., asked why no research has been done by the Committee to provide residents with projected tax numbers if the regional school board splits. **Mayor Roehrich** stated that the Committee is not in favor of splitting the regional school district, so they are not going to undertake a costly expense of a study. Washington Township was in favor of looking at the impact of a K-12 district; but the other four municipalities were not interested in looking at that option. **Ms. Scheckel** asked what residents should do to educate each other. **Vice Mayor Short** stated that if a resident group forms and collects less than \$2,400 they do not have to file as a political group. The Committee cannot take a position on the vote. The Committee can share facts.

Dave Weippert, 231 E. Mill Rd., asked what is going on with possible development on Kings Highway. **Vice Mayor Short** sits on the Planning Board, and has not heard from the Kings Highway Development Group in nine months. **Vice Mayor Short** does not believe they will have a large number of rental units. The land has not been rezoned by the Township Committee at this point.

Maria Weippert, 231 E. Mill Rd., asked if the WMRHSD BOE has given any indication that they are going to pursue splitting the regional board of education. Mayor Roehrich stated that the WMRHSD BOE has not given any indication.

Leslie Mule, E. Maple Ave., asked if the Committee could send out a Honeywell alert, which is operated by the schools, reminding people to vote. The Committee will look into discussing this with the local schools. **Administrator Coppola** stated that the Township will post the WMRHSD BOE information shared tonight on the Township website. Ms. Mule asked for clarification on students going to WMRHSD and Washington Township's contribution. **Comm. Murello** stated that Washington Township sends 48% of the student population to the regional high school and funds 34% of the budget. **Mayor Roehrich** stated that a \$500,000 home in Washington Township contributes more to the regional school budget than a \$500,000 home in Mendham, because the Washington Township tax rate is slightly higher than Mendham's.

Teb Brooks heard that there would not be an interpretive statement on the ballot. **Mayor Roehrich** stated there would be an interpretive statement. Mr. Brooks asked if the Township could issue an interpretive statement. **Comm. Murello** stated that the Committee could not release an interpretive statement.

An unidentified resident stated that she believed that the State of New Jersey was trying to get school districts to consolidate and wondered what the chances are that the State would approve a dissolving our regional school district.

An unidentified resident asked **Vice Mayor Short** if he felt there was a grass roots effort to dissolve the regional school district. **Vice Mayor Short** stated he believed there was a group in Mendham that wants to have their own high school. He reiterated that any dissolution of the regional school would take years and that it will not be permitted if the quality of education would deteriorate.

An unidentified resident suggested that residents get the word out and promote this issue as the opposition to the flea market was promoted 6 years ago.

Michelle Riccordella, 11E Maple Ave. asked for clarification on who wrote the ballot interpretive statement. Mayor Roehrich stated that the attorney for the WMRHSD BOE wrote the statement.

An unidentified resident acknowledged that Washington Township sends a majority of the students to the school district (49%) and pays less than (34%) the majority. She wanted to know if there was a per student cost available for each school. **Mayor Roehrich** stated there was not a large difference between per student cost at Mendham and Central.

An unidentified resident stated that the person from Mendham Twp. who started the grass roots effort to change the funding did not send his four children to public school.

Jeb Brooks, address not provided, stated that residents should look at the facts and educate themselves. Accurate unbiased information needs to be distributed and shared. **Mayor Roehrich** stated that the WMRHSD BOE has provided facts.

An unidentified resident asked if there will be any additional meetings before the election. **Mayor Roehrich** stated that the Committee would need to discuss that possibility, but felt there was a good chance there would be another meeting.

Young Jan, asked what would be the worst case scenario if the change in funding is adopted. **Comm. Murello** stated that if the funding formula changes Washington Township taxes will increase and the education of our high school students will not change.

An unidentified resident asked if there are any trends residents should be aware of. **Mayor Roehrich** and **Comm. Murello** stated that the number of students in Washington Township is decreasing at a faster rate than the other Municipalities.

Vice Mayor Short reminded residents that they could not take a public position on this vote, but that Committee Member's contact information is publicized and residents should feel free to contact Committee members with questions.

Mayor Roehrich closed the meeting to the public.

Motion to adjourn was made by **Comm. Murello**, seconded by **Vice Mayor Short**. All were in favor.

Meeting Adjourned at 9:10 P.M.