

City of Lambertville
SPECIAL JOINT SESSION OF MAYOR AND COUNCIL
TUESDAY, 7 P.M., MARCH 29, 2011
JUSTICE CENTER, 25 SOUTH UNION STREET, LAMBERTVILLE
MINUTES

The Joint Meeting of Municipalities and School Boards was called to order at 7:06 p.m. by Mayor DelVecchio with a statement of compliance with the Open Public Meeting Act, with an advertised meeting notice on the March 24, 2011 issue of the Beacon, sent to the Beacon, the Democrat, the Times and the Herald, posted on the bulletin board at City Hall, on the City's website at www.lambertvillenj.org, and sent to assorted individuals via the list serve of the City's Website.

CITY OF LAMBERTVILLE ROLL CALL.

Present: Councilwoman Asaro, Councilman Sanders, Councilwoman Warner (arrived at 7:25 p.m.), Council President Stegman, Mayor DelVecchio.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE.

Mayor DelVecchio led the public in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mayor DelVecchio asked the members of the public to remain standing for a moment of silence.

MOMENT OF SILENTS

Armed Services

Mrs. Ege led the public in a moment of silence in recognition of the Lambertville citizens and all others serving with the United States Armed Services.

Christopher Eick

Mayor DelVecchio led the public in a moment of silence for the Eick Family who lost their son, Christopher.

WEST AMWELL TOWNSHIP ROLL CALL.

Present: Mayor Molnar, Deputy Mayor Fisher.

STOCKTON BOROUGH ROLL CALL.

Present: Councilman Andrew Dougherty.

SOUTH HUNTERDON REGIONAL BOARD OF EDUCATION ROLL CALL.

Present: Marie Collins, Nicole Claus, Celeste Mosby, Laurie Weinstein and Cheryl Carpenter.

Also present: Nancy Gartenberg – Superintendent, Kerry Sevilis – School Business Administrator.

WEST AMWELL ELEMENTARY BOARD OF EDUCATION ROLL CALL.

Present: Robert Tomenchok, President.

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LAMBERTVILLE BOARD OF EDUCATION ROLL CALL.

Present: Steve Wolock, joined the meeting after the budget hearing at the Lambertville Public School.

STOCKTON BOARD OF EDUCATION ROLL CALL.

Present: None.

Mayor DeVecchio of the City of Lambertville asked those members present representing municipalities and school boards to introduce themselves.

After introductions, Mayor DeVecchio informed the members of the public that this meeting is to discuss best practices in shared services, joint collaboration, and the update on 2010 budget negotiation commitments from the failed referendum at the last school board election.

SHRHS Update on 2010 Budget Negotiation Commitments

Mayor DeVecchio asked Councilman Ward Sanders and Councilwoman Asaro to comment regarding the SHRHS Workgroup. They gave the following presentation:

Today's Fiscal Landscape: The state faces extraordinary financial challenges, taxpayers feel overburdened, and state leaders have made clear that local governmental units and schools have to operate more efficiently. There are laws and regulations in place to encourage municipalities and schools to look at shared services, efficiencies, and to work together. Municipalities and school boards can no longer work in their own silo, and have to look past state political boundaries and work with others to seek economies of scale and shared services

Origins: The Work Group was established in 2009 as a result of negotiations that occurred between the town councils of Lambertville, Stockton and West Amwell and the school board as a result of a failed bond referendum in Lambertville (Failed 68% to 32%) and West Amwell (Failed 41% to 59%), but which was approved in Stockton (Passed 55% to 45%). During the process many citizens and town councils expressed concerns about the fact that SHRHS per pupil costs are the highest in the state and substantially higher than any state averages or medians.

The Mission: The mission of the Work group is to first, clearly understand the factors that contribute to the high per-pupil costs at SHRHS. This will require a clear understanding of SHRHS's budget process and the key factors influencing the budget. The Work Group shall develop a baseline set of facts/data from which to rigorously review the cost-drivers at SHRHS. Second, the Work Group shall explore cost-saving measures and make written recommendations to the SHRHS Board and administration for consideration.

Composition

- Two (2) members of the Lambertville governing body (Ward Sanders, Beth Asaro - - councilpersons)

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- Two (2) residents of the City of Lambertville (Drew Gitomer and Larry Simms - as appointed by Mayor Del Vecchio)
- Representatives of the Township of West Amwell governing body
- Resident(s) appointed by the Township of West Amwell
- Representatives of the Borough of Stockton governing body
- Resident(s) appointed by the Borough of Stockton
- Representatives of the South Hunterdon Regional High School Board of Education
- Hunterdon County Superintendent

Meetings/Discussions: The group met periodically at the SHRHS library over the past two years. Meetings were designed to last no more than 1.5 hours, and generally lasted at least 2.5 hours. At a minimum, the following areas were reviewed: Special Education, Programs, Personnel, Extra Curricular, and Facility Operations.

Work Group Recommendation:

Because consensus building with such a large group was difficult and time was limited, the Work Group did not work toward developing consensus recommendations. Individual members made specific recommendations and provided them last year to the SHRHS Board. This year, more time was spent on going over specific areas

Observations of Councilman Sanders:

- I am, by nature, a consensus builder rather than an ideologue. As Work Group Chair, I wanted to nurture an environment for a frank exchange of ideas, in a collegial atmosphere. I hope that I did that.
- I think the Work Group has served to provide a greater understanding of SHRHS's budget process and the key factors influencing the budget.
- I think that the mere existence of the Work Group may, just may have provided a continuing sense of urgency to the concerns about SHRHS's high per pupil costs.
- Conversations were civil, but they were often passionate.
- I think a couple of things were agreed upon:
 - A key cost driver for SHRHS is its small size. I think there was a lot of agreement to explore the impact and desirability of both regionalization and redistricting.
 - Special education costs were high. Special education represents a broad spectrum of students from those that need "extra" help to those with serious disabilities. The goal here, I think, is to avoiding the need for classification through interventions including better support services. I hope that the audit required by the municipalities was a positive step in addressing this concern.

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- While everyone in these meetings is donating time and energy, in this and other settings, I think there is utility in continuing the work of the Work Group in 2011, regardless of what happens with the Budget vote. I would suggest, however, that we spend some time ensuring membership among all communities and a perhaps a revised mission to ensure that it continues to be productive.

Councilwoman Asaro commented that she learned a lot from the participants of the committee. She thought the cost per pupil should be added to the metrics of the five year plan.

Deputy Mayor Fisher of West Amwell added that it sounded like the group was moving in the right direction. He felt the shared services through the South Hunterdon Renewable Energy Cooperative were a good example of shared services. He felt the workgroup was a good avenue to use in selling the school.

Mayor Molnar of West Amwell Township commented that every year the budget goes down and South needs to focus on selling it to the public.

Mayor DeVecchio of the City of Lambertville asked if the group was supportive of the workgroup changing the focus to shared services.

Councilman Andrew Dougherty of Stockton thanked everyone for their input and appreciated the time everyone put into it.

Rob Tomenchok, Board President of West Amwell Elementary School, asked that the record reflect that Lambertville Board of Education could not be present as they are introducing their budget tonight.

Mayor DeVecchio acknowledged and thanked Nancy Gartenberg of South Hunterdon for their support in the recent flood threats. He informed the members of the public that the school is the site we use to house the flood victims. We were lucky and the river's flooding impacted Lambertville minimally.

Five-Year Plan

Nicole Claus, Board Member of South Hunterdon Regional High School spoke on behalf of the Board regarding the Five-Year Plan which was required as part of the municipal approval of the 2010/2011 budget. She felt it was a great idea to change the focus of the SHRHS Workgroup. She stated that the Five-Year Plan addresses the cost per pupil. Councilwoman Asaro acknowledged that it did speak of the cost per pupil, however, it would be in the best interest of the School to put it on the front of the packet. Celeste Mosby, the Principal at South Hunterdon commented that the Five-Year Plan was a very rewarding experience. In the spirit of sharing and doing the required research, it helped them to make better decisions. She stated that the board took all of the input seriously and is very supportive of shared

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services. Mayor DelVecchio stated that we should all look at what we do to see if we can do it more efficiently together.

Ms. Claus informed the members of the public that there were two drafts of the Five-Year Plan. Celeste Mosby commented that this was a holistic process which contained sub goals. This was a really important step for everyone and was very detailed. The Five-Year Plan is available on the school's website.

Mayor DelVecchio asked if there were any questions from the public. There were none.

Joint BOEs Collaboration: Regionalization Feasibility Study

Robert Tomenchok gave an update. He said the press release was approved by all of the school boards and would be sent out shortly. The wording on the question has been approved.

Special Needs Audit

Nancy Gartenberg, the Superintendent at South Hunterdon Regional High School gave a brief overview of the special needs audit which was a requirement of the joint municipal approval of the 2010/2011 budget. She stated the consultant spent two months in the sending districts of each of the school districts reviewing the in district and out of district placements. This is a large portion of the budget. The transportation is also very costly. The results of the study were presented to the members of the public on December 7. There were four separate reports produced which were distributed to each of the respective sending districts for their review and information.

There were some recommendations of the study which cannot easily be accommodated, such as the planning time for teachers to meet with the Child Study Team. They are looking at the general education program prior to the student being classified. They have a lot of students who are classified with Specific Language Disabilities. The school board reduced the number of students they were sending out and were able to save \$450,000 over the past couple of years.

Cheryl Carpenter, SHR School Board Member commented that the common theme is to improve articulation. Marie Collins, also a school board member said that aligning the plans up the ladder will help. They are working Social Studies curriculum for grades five, six, seven and eight. Robert Tomenchok of West Amwell stated that the schools have been working together on the curriculum but they need to do it more. He stated that West Amwell has 260 students. West Amwell's special education number is high, and Lambertville Public School's number is higher for special education. One new classification makes a huge difference in the budget.

Best Practices in Shared Service

The Hunterdon County Shared Services Report was discussed. Rob Tomenchok, President of

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West Amwell Township BOE was part of the committee who completed the report. He stated the report is available on the County's website.

There was discussion of being creative about crossing the river and sharing services with New Hope Solebury School District and reaching out to Mercer County. The Governor has asked us to look at shared services and this is climate for change and we need to look at the impediments to shared services.

Mayor DelVecchio commented that the City participated in a Shared Services Study which was funded by a grant for Police Services which was completed but failed to be implemented. The South Hunterdon Renewable Energy Cooperative was initiated through volunteers and didn't cost the participants funding and it was successful. He also commented that the City of Lambertville is open to all areas of shared services.

Nancy Gartenberg of South Hunterdon Regional High School stated that they are interested in shared services. They are currently sharing the following services with the sending districts and other area schools: special education, transportation, child study team, professional development of educators, program/curriculum development, facility use, student information management software, cooperative purchasing.

Mayor DelVecchio informed the members present that the City was able to save money by changing the joint insurance fund. The City also looked at health benefits but is too small to find a package that is lower than the State Benefits Plan. The Sweeney bill was discussed.

Nancy Gartenberg of South discussed school choice. She stated South was one of seven schools who are interested in the School Choice program. South could handle forty additional students, freshmen through juniors, without increasing the current staffing. The open house held was very well attended. Students from East Amwell, Hunterdon Central attended. The funding would be paid in the following school year.

South is interested in shared services in the following areas: snow removal, paving, garbage removal, and masonry services.

Mayor DelVecchio asked for comments from other municipal representatives and then from the public. There were no comments.

OTHER BUSINESS - POLL HOURS.

City of Lambertville

Mayor DelVecchio announced that the City of Lambertville is meeting on Monday, April 4 to introduce the City's budget and adopt the resolution for the referendum. If Mayor and Council approve the referendum the poll hours will be from 7 AM to 9 PM, April 27, 2011.

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If they do not approve the resolution for the referendum, the poll hours will be from 3 to 9 PM, April 27, 2011.

PUBLIC COMMENT.

Julie Prew from West Amwell Township stated she is excited about School Choice and asked why the municipalities and school districts weren't working on redistricting. It seems like that is off the table. Robert Tomenchok, President of West Amwell School Board responded by saying that it was a difficult process. If they were to pursue East Amwell, for instance, becoming a part of the South Hunterdon Regional School District, East Amwell would need to obtain approval from each of the sending districts in their current regionalization area and in the three sending districts from South Hunterdon. This is an impossible task and requires everyone to be supportive. Mayor DelVecchio suggested she start a letter writing campaign and referenced the post cards started by the Library to change the funding process for Municipal Library's which were formed under the 1/3 mil law. That led to a bill in the Senate which was recently signed into legislation by the Governor.

Janine MacGregor of Lambertville commented that she thought Governor Corzine was going to mandate regionalization but it did not happen.

Dave Beaumont of West Amwell thanked everyone for the public meeting and said it was very enlightening. He asked the Municipal representatives if they were supportive of the school board's budgets. Mayor DelVecchio responded that he is in the process of doing the City's budget and haven't reviewed the schools budgets yet. He also stated that the Municipalities are at an unfair advantage when the budget is defeated and they have 19 days to review and make recommendations on the school's budget. Rob Tomenchok of West Amwell stated he felt this was an unfair question.

Deputy Mayor Fisher of West Amwell stated that he didn't want to be in the position of approving the school's budget. He said that if he wanted to approve their budget, he would have run for school board.

ADJOURNMENT.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia L. Ege

Cynthia L. Ege
CMR, Acting City Clerk

Approved at the April 20, 2011 Regularly Schedule Session of Mayor and Council.