

**MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING
MUNICIPAL COUNCIL - TOWNSHIP OF EDISON
MAY 3, 2010**

A Special Meeting of the Municipal Council was held in the Council Chambers of the Municipal Complex on Monday, May 3, 2010. The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m. by Councilmember Mascola, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Present were Councilmembers Karabinchak, Lankey, Mascola and Perilstein.
Councilmembers Diehl, Prasad and Tomaro were absent.

Also present were Township Clerk Murphy, Deputy Township Clerk Kenny, Township Attorney Kemm and Cameraman Ellis.

The Township Clerk advised that adequate Notice of this meeting as required by the Open Public Meetings Act of 1975, has been provided by a Special Notice sent to The Home News and Tribune, The Star Ledger and the Sentinel on April 28, 2010, and posted in the Main Lobby of the Municipal Complex on the same date.

The Board of Education then called their meeting to order.

Present were Board of Education members Anes, Bonderowitz, Dickinson, Iyer, Maeroff, Romano, Silagy and Van Pelt.
Board Member Ward arrived at 7:15 p.m.

Also present were Acting Superintendent DiMuzzio and Business Administrator Michaud.

Mr. Maeroff read the adequate notice for the Board of Education.

Councilmember Mascola said the Council will not take a vote on the budget this evening. This is an opportunity for the Board of Education to explain their budget. The Council can ask questions and the public can speak and voice their concerns. He said May 12th is the tentative date to vote on the budget. The public has six minutes to speak. There will not be a rebuttal permitted in order to allow everyone an opportunity to speak. He asked that everyone be respectful of the comments and points of view of their fellow residents. The Council will not tolerate disrespectful remarks. He advised that the meeting will not go past 10:00 p.m. If a lot of people have not spoken, a second meeting will be scheduled.

President Maeroff explained the statistics regarding a full day kindergarten. The School Board was compelled to reduce full day kindergarten to part time in order to reduce the budget. He noted that the ratables have decreased and the State slashed aid to the Board of Education. He felt people will lose their jobs and he asked the Council to use a scalpel and not a cleaver to make cuts.

Councilmember Perilstein said this is the second defeat of a school budget for herself and Councilmember Mascola. She feels the process is not an optimum one in order to get the best budget. The Council is thrown in the middle when the voters express their displeasure. She asked the percentage of personnel costs in the budget.

Mr. Michaud displayed a pie chart. He said 93% of the budget is the tax rate. He noted the expenditures are 79.66% salaries and benefits. Supplies and other expenses total 3.56%. He spoke about the teachers salary guide. He explained the steps in the teacher's salaries along with longevity.

Councilmember Perilstein felt the issue of budgets is a highly charged issue. She asked the impact of the cuts.

Mr. DiMuzzio felt the need to hire the very best because they are a service organization. He said people move to Edison because of its good educational system. He said \$12 million was already cut out of the budget and he implored the Council to be as prudent as they can as any further cuts would hurt this budget.

Councilmember Perilstein asked the costs for sharing health care.

Mr. Michaud spoke about the rates. He was concerned with a big increase this year. The Board agreed to pay the first 10% increase and the Association shared the second 10% of the increase. This saves \$180,000 a month for the district.

Councilmember Perilstein asked if he was at liberty to discuss the offer to the teachers union by the Board of Education.

Mr. Michaud said this was a freeze of the 2% increase for this year. The return would be a change in contribution costs for health benefits. He said this would save money for the first year but the Board would not have a benefit thereafter.

Councilmember Perilstein asked about the \$2 million and Mr. Michaud explained that they had to put a number into unemployment. He said the teachers can collect for twelve months.

Councilmember Perilstein spoke about health benefits and asked how he determined this number and Mr. Michaud explained.

Councilmember Perilstein said the Council determines a number and the line items for recommendation. The Board is not bound by these recommendations.

Councilmember Lankey echoed Councilmember Perilstein's comments regarding the process. He asked how the adequacy level is determined.

Mr. Michaud said the State came up with a new funding formula a few years ago. The State came up with the per pupil allocation.

Councilmember Lankey asked if geography is considered and Mr. DiMuzzio explained State aid funding.

Councilmember Lankey asked about the 10% over adequacy number and Mr. Michaud said this is because the State aid was cut and the number is over.

Councilmember Lankey asked the adequacy number compared to other municipalities on the expense side of the budget.

Councilmember Lankey asked about fair share and Mr. Michaud explained this is calculated on the entire State.

Councilmember Lankey asked if there is any desire to go back to the table for contract negotiations. He questioned how the new members feel about the adequacy of the budget.

Ms. Bonderowitz said she has some thoughts but is trying to understand the budget.

Ms. Iyer said this is a learning process. There are areas that need to be addressed.

Councilmember Lankey asked about the "no" vote on the budget from the School Board.

Mr. Maeroff said he cast the "no" vote and felt the process of framing the budget could have been better.

In response to Councilmember Lankey's questions, Mr. Michaud said half of the budget will flow into the 2011 budget.

In response to Councilmember Karabinchak's questions, Mr. Michaud explained how the State comes up with the adequacy level.

Councilmember Karabinchak asked if the Board has ever met with the other municipalities that are underfunded and decided to sue the State.

Mr. DiMuzzio said he had a meeting with other Superintendents. They discussed how they would fair if they sued for this money and were told the chances of receiving any money are slim.

Councilmember Karabinchak spoke about a letter received from the State. He asked, if the State is asking for a decision but is offering an opportunity to get more funding, why is the Township looking at this.

Mr. DiMuzzo said the Governor's budget has not been approved yet.

Councilmember Karabinchak felt, if the Council makes a decision based on the voters, but yet the State can then fund, that it is unorthodox and plays on everybody's emotions.

Councilmember Mascola asked for a breakdown of the ninety two teachers that have been reduced. He asked if there is a reduction of \$4 million in teacher's salaries, and questioned why they still have an increase in the line item.

Mr. Michaud talked about the salary increment and also cuts in federal grant account for some of this.

Councilmember Mascola spoke about the miscellaneous revenue difference.

Mr. Michaud said they had to reduce the interest and consolidate rates for busing.

Councilmember Mascola spoke about an increase in salaries for home instruction.

Mr. Michaud explained this may be cheaper than sending out for instruction.

Councilmember Mascola asked about the salary for the superintendent.

Mr. Maeroff said the contract will expire on June 30th and set increases are in there.

Mr. Maeroff said \$194,000 is for the former Superintendent.

Councilmember Perilstein asked if the other unions have taken salary freezes.

Mr. Maeroff said there was a freeze for exempt personnel and the custodians also took a freeze.

Councilmember Mascola opened the meeting for public comments. He said there was a sign up sheet and he will go through the list. At the end of the meeting if someone was late and not able to sign in, he will try to fit them in. There is a six minute time limit.

Bill Brunner, 215 Loring Avenue, said the Township is in a crisis. He asked the teachers union to agree to a wage freeze with no strings attached. He felt the Town needs to think about the students and the taxpayers. He said 68% of the teachers make in excess of \$80,000 while in the private sector people are loosing their jobs and seeing benefits reduced. He felt full day kindergarten could be saved if there is a freeze and the Council can cut areas that do not affect the classroom. He said the Board has ten Assistant Principals and eighteen Supervisors and cutting in this area would not directly affect the children.

Jim Kelly, Route 27, asked the salary of the Personnel Director.

Mr. Maeroff said currently the Board does not have one but the salary would be \$100,000.

Mr. Kelly said Mr DiMuzzio agreed to continue with this position at no additional cost. He said the Board is cutting two librarians in the middle school and he was concerned with the closing of the Clara Barton Library. He felt the Township and the School Board can find a way to fund this.

Dina O'Brien, 43 Morgan Drive, was disappointed about the tabling of full time kindergarten. She asked the Council not to cut any more from the budget. By not laying off the twenty five teachers it saves half a million dollars. She said the Edison education system is why people move in and remain in Edison.

Jaswinder Saini, 169 Prestwick Way, said he has been spending long hours on the budget to try to figure out the cuts. He spoke about the kindergarten issue and felt his two year old child will be affected by this change. He explained the differences between full day and part time kindergarten. He felt what is cut today will cost more in the long term. He commented that Edison is one of the best education systems in the State.

Lou Klementis, 232 Suttons Lane, congratulated the newly elected Board members. He said everyone wants a good education, but having half day kindergarten does not make a difference after third grade. He asked how this came up to be cut. He felt the teachers should take a freeze or cut in salary.

Shay Pagare, 202 Prestwick Way, said her child will attend kindergarten in the fall. She hoped the Council and the Board of Education will have the foresight to save full day kindergarten. She spoke about State official's comments that full day kindergarten is not mandated but felt that this prepares children for good learning skills. She said some children may have a learning disability and may need this time to keep up. She asked that the Council have the foresight to keep full day kindergarten.

Emil Ferlicchi, 2 Ethel Road, spoke about Councilmember Perilstein's comments regarding the union contract. He applauded Councilmember Karabinchak's comments and felt the taxpayers should be angry at Trenton because they cut the State aid out of the budget. He said the Council needs to start organizing themselves to ask about funding. He said Edison is in the bottom quarter of what is spent per pupil in Middlesex County. He spoke about the career guide and noted that they start low. He said a good education is not cheap. The ratables of the Township should be looked at because he felt they are not paying their fair share and a commitment to education should be brought back.

Lois Wolke, 10 Peake Road, agreed with Mr. Ferlicchi that Superintendents and Principals should be going to Trenton. She spoke about the forty nine proposed budget cuts. All items on that list are not mandated. She said five hundred spaces will open up if they go to half day kindergarten. The budget that the voters voted on already included half day kindergarten. She explained the cuts she felt could be made. She spoke about the Superintendent's salary and the India trip. She also mentioned the problems with drug abuse. She spoke about the new employees who were hired over the last year.

Evelyn Lynch, 70 Redwood Avenue, said she has no children in the school system and she would like to remain in Edison. If she moves, a family with two or three children will move in. She said a budget is not personal, it's a business decision and change is necessary for survival. She spoke about sick time in the private sector. She felt the Board of Education did not have a vision to prepare for things when times went bad.

Irene Wall, 205 Fleet Avenue, asked if the Board members have relatives working in the school system.

Mr. Maeroff asked what this had to do with the budget. He said he did not have any relatives.

Mr. Van Pelt said he is the only one. He was elected in 2004. In 1966 his wife applied for a position and received it. Both his sons were employed prior to 2000 before he was on the board.

Ms. Wall asked the disposition of school personnel.

Mr. Maeroff said the Board Attorney said this is not relevant.

Ms. Wall asked who pays for the attorney fees.

Councilmember Mascola felt she should be addressing the budget issues.

Mr. DiMuzzio said there were four individuals convicted and they are no longer being paid.

Ms. Wall asked if the Board would pay for the defense.

The Board of Education Attorney said each of the matters is handled on a case by case basis. She is talking about speculative matters.

Ms. Wall said 60% of her tax bill goes to the school system and she would like to know how many unfilled positions are being carried in this budget.

Mr. Michaud said currently they have four vacancies in custodial.

Ms. Wall asked who pays for continuing education and Mr. Maeroff said the district pays for a part of this after tenure.

Jane Tousman, 14 Butler Road, asked how many children are in the school system and Mr. Maeroff said 14,400.

Ms. Tousman asked the growth and Mr. DiMuzzio said it has increased about two hundred a year for the last ten years.

Ms. Tousman asked the Council to stick to the master plan to ensure there is no new housing. She spoke about breakage between starting salary and final salary.

Mr. Michaud said \$800,000 is the breakage number.

Ms. Tousman said her daughter is a teacher and she has to cope with unpaid leave in another State. She questioned if they are looking at refinancing the bonding.

Elizabeth Conway, 20 Netherwood Circle, felt every decision will affect many people in the district. She comes as a voter and attends the Board of Education meetings. She also comes as a parent, because she had three children go through the district and has seen changes take place. There are many things to be proud of but she is worried for the children of the future because the Board of Education has to keep reining their budget in. She is also a teacher in the district and works twelve hour days and is dedicated to the citizens.

Carol Bodofsky, 39 Jonathan Drive, spoke about the current State of the economy. She said the Governor's cut in State Aid and the growing population put Edison's budget between a rock and a hard place. She felt current graduates have a tough future and she was concerned with more cuts. She said some parents were told to vote "no" in order to add important things back into the budget. She felt some residents were unclear what their votes meant.

Nicole Cerello, Principal of Woodbrook School, hoped no funding would be cut from the budget. She spoke about the value of full day kindergarten and explained what the children are taught in kindergarten. She explained the difference in essay writing for part time and full time kindergarten children. She asked that the Council not cut the budget.

Andrew Wu, 101 Sherman Boulevard, felt the Township should not spend what they don't have. He said he cannot do many things because he has to watch his budget. He spoke about the budget being defeated two to one.

Robert Palladino, 143 Fifth Street, spoke as a parent. He asked to help refocus on academic problems such as maintaining a full day kindergarten program. He spoke of the impact on the parents with kindergarten students. He said it would cost \$7,000 per child to have his children attend private school. He hoped they will restore full day kindergarten.

Jayaderon Atta, 133 Prestwick Way, wanted to keep full day kindergarten because it sets the foundation for children. She said the Board has identified money to put this program back. She felt the vote against the budget was not against the schools.

Lihui Dai, 45 Foley Avenue, spoke about the programs in the school. She felt this is important but people are losing their jobs. She said people should find their own way to get what is important to them and asked the Council to respect the voters who voted the budget down. She refuses to pay more taxes.

Margaret Lee, 15 Independence Drive, said as a mother of two kids, she is disappointed that the Board of Education wants more. She said no one wants to sacrifice in this tough economic condition and felt the raise in taxes should be reasonable. She spoke about the foreclosed homes and the loss of jobs.

Lawson Thouchwatea, 82 Woodbury Road, felt a need to build a foundation for the children.

Shukada Despondi, 36 Aspen Circle, said these are difficult times for many citizens and the Town should remember they are dealing with students and not a business. She felt the Town should think about cuts that will inconvenience versus cuts that will remain. She said not all children are equal.

Barbara Ann Ratel, 8 Roosevelt Terrace, said she attended all the Board of Education meetings and said there was no discussion prior to the last meeting about full day kindergarten. She said kindergarten is not a state mandated program. She spoke about the differences between the two high schools. She spoke about an increase to the Superintendent's salary and asked why so many supervisors are needed. She talked about special education teachers and discussed sports programs. She asked everyone to be responsible and mindful. She also questioned the free balance.

Matt Hrevnak, 2 Ethel Road, said he has been a teacher at JP Stevens for twenty one years and is Second Vice President of the teachers union. He spoke about how the union came up with money saving items and he felt the teachers are giving back. He said the teachers were willing to give 25% of the give backs. He spoke about the teachers contributing towards the health benefit increase. He felt Edison is good because of its dedicated teachers and students. He said teachers transform people's lives.

Councilmember Mascola said from listening to some of the remarks, people have to understand that the Council does not have the power to decide where the cuts are. The Board of Education is the sole responsible party.

Ralph Bucci, Central Avenue, felt there are no cuts in this budget. He said only 4.5% had to be made up in the budget. He did not begrudge people raises but there were comments made that the State turned this into a \$17 million problem. He felt the Council needs to cut the budget.

Amar Tron, a Junior at Edison High School, was present as a concerned student. She felt her teachers inspired her. She said students are the leaders of tomorrow and you cannot cheat education.

Rebeca Guchen, 700 Amboy Avenue, felt if they cut the budget it will not bring back full day kindergarten. She said the public is talking about the future of education in the State. The Town should show values by educating the children the right way.

Tony English, Elder Drive, appreciated the Board attending to advocate their budget. He said he has faith in the Council because the public elected them. He said a lot of people voted the budget down because of a lack of information. He said everyone pays taxes to service and help each other.

Louis Cheng, said every year the budget is raised by 4% or more. He said many people are working and they do not get a raise at all and the tax burden is all over New Jersey. He said the Board did not show credibility over the last few years.

Shevi Prasad, 9 Allison Court, felt other people have paid to keep their children in school and she asked that they not turn their backs on them now. She thought there should be a combined effort to contact the State to get the funds reinstated. She said kindergarten is a very important program.

Betty Ferry, said she is a lifelong Edison resident and her children went through the school system. She is a guidance counselor and is present to advocate for the guidance counselors. She feels they are a vital need and direct link to the children and explained why guidance counselors are needed. She explained the assembly programs they are responsible for.

A resident said he has four children in the school system. He was present because of the kindergarten program. He felt the Town should never cut safety or education. He said the Board made it clear that they will not vote on kindergarten until the Council has made their cuts.

Joe Cerelli, 21 Dale Drive, felt the vote on the budget was a referendum but not against teachers and education. People are tired of paying more and getting less. He was satisfied with the education of his children. He felt any cuts considered should look at the long term and not the short term and asked that a decision be made quickly.

A resident from 8 Heritage Drive, first grade special education teacher, spoke about the University of Delaware and a classmate asking for her opinion about jobs.

Noel Halushka, said all of the programs put together in the school sytem are based on a core decision. She felt the cuts by the Governor are going to impact the children in the schools. She is experiencing cuts in staff and programs in the neighboring municipality where she works.

Dee Schneider, 2 Ethel Road, spoke about the reasons why Governor Christie was elected. She talked about the cuts for libraries and senior citizens. She is asking the Council not to cut the budget. She suggested contacting Legislators and holding a rally in Trenton to urge for a just budget.

Mary Lou Resner said people move into Edison for the education system and she asked the Council not to increase taxes any more than they have to.

A resident said he understood that the Town Council will not decide where the cuts are. He felt a decision should not be made based on the fact that they don't have children in the school system.

Councilmember Mascola said the proposed budget increase is four cents.

The resident felt there are ways to keep the programs in place and agreed that the residents have to work on the Governor.

Denise Weibold, 20 Oak Hills Road, said she is a teacher and a taxpayer. She urged the Council not to make any additional cuts. She said the Town needs the support of the community and she urged everyone to go to the State level to see why the budget is not being supported.

Maryann Hennessey, 20 Carmello Drive, said she did not envy what the Council has to do. She said people are losing jobs and homes. She said she paid for her children to attend school before kindergarten.

Fred Wolke, 10 Peake Road, felt the teachers were not forthcoming in this round with the school board. He spoke about the money found in order to put back full day kindergarten.

Susan Campion, 8 Tripper Court, said she has three children in the school system and she and her husband work for the Board of Education. She felt people vote "no" for the budget because they are angry about a single decision that was made. She said teachers do more than teach academics and felt it will hurt the kids if the budget is cut.

A motion to close the public hearing was made by Councilmember Lankey, seconded by Councilmember Perilstein, with all in favor.

The Board of Education adjourned their meeting.

Councilmember Mascola thanked everyone who came out tonight. He said this was very enlightening and he was very impressed with the different points of view. He thanked everyone for being respectful of each other. He said the Council has a tough job. He thought the Board of Education did not present a proper budget to the taxpayers and the union is not working with the Board of Education or the taxpayers and the State is not helping the situation. He suggested that three Councilmembers meet with the Board and the Union to help iron things out. He hoped to come to some kind of agreement that everyone is happy with. He can understand both sides of the issues.

Councilmember Perilstein said the President of the ETEA said she had an agenda because she asked for the compensation and salaries. They need to strike a balance somewhere because she wanted to explain about salary and felt people need to get the facts. There is no need to take on an adversarial tone. She said the Town is facing difficult economics on the municipal side as well.

Councilmember Mascola announced a water main break in south Edison.

Councilmember Lankey thanked everyone for coming out. He assured everyone that he listened to all that was said and he thanked the Board for putting up with his questions.

Councilmember Karabinchak also thanked everyone for coming out and he asked for a list of the other municipalities that are underfunded.

On a motion made by Councilmember Lankey, seconded by Councilmember Perilstein, the meeting was adjourned at 9:44 p.m.

Wayne Mascola
Acting Council President

Reina A. Murphy, RMC
Municipal Clerk