

**MINUTES**  
**BOROUGH OF NEW MILFORD**  
**7:00 PM SPECIAL MEETING**  
**Monday, April 29, 2010**



Mayor DeBari led the flag salute

Councilman Arthur Zeilner	Absent
Councilman Keith Bachmann	Present
Councilwoman Randi Duffie	Absent
Councilman Howard Berner	Present
Councilwoman Ann Subrizi	Present
Council President Michael Putrino	Present
Mayor Frank DeBari	Present

Also present: Christine Demiris, Administrator/Clerk; Colleen Naumov, Deputy Clerk

Mr. David Foo	Present
Mr. Joseph Steele	Present
Mrs. Judith Rabinowitz-McSweeney	Present
Mr. Dan Conner	Present
Mr. Darren Drake	Present
Ms. Peggy Saslow	Present
Ms. Geraldine Mechler	Present
Ms. Lori Barton	Absent
Ms. Theresa Lacey	Absent

Also Present: Michael Sawicz, Business Administrator; Michael Polizzi, Superintendent; Donna Heinzmann, Assistant Business Administrator

Mr. Sawicz made an opening statement. He stated that the Board of Education lost 62% of its state aid, approximately 1.5 million dollars, and that the budget was cut 5.8% just to cover the loss in state aid. He stated that the defeat of the budget by 27 votes is not a clear mandate and asked the Council to consider no further cuts and possibly financial aid to the district.

Mr. Polizzi made an opening statement. He stated the decision before the Council is about one thing and one thing only – the right to public education. He asked the Council to approve the lean budget to provide the best education under the worst circumstances. He stated that further cuts would cause an impact for years to come and that the state created the crisis and is now shifting the burden to the local budgets.

Councilman Berner stated the Council review will provide a “second set of eyes.”

Council President Putrino acknowledged the budget already contained significant cuts.

Mayor DeBari said that no one on the Council wanted the budget to fail but that now it is the Council’s duty to review the budget and make a recommendation. He said that he had been

informed by the Superintendent of meetings being held earlier in the week and asked if there had been any developments. Mr. Polizzi stated that there had been two retirements that the BOE had not been previously aware of.

The Council raised the following questions:

1. Is the information provided by the BOE complete or is there any additional data? No additional data.
2. Have there been any changes since April 22<sup>nd</sup>? No changes.
3. Does the BOE have a schedule of stipends for coaches? It will be provided.
4. It was noted that the BOE pays for half of the salary and benefits for the Middle School Resource Officer but he is not listed in the employee roster. The position has not been included in the 2010-2011 budget.
5. Does the BOE have an idea if there was any specific item in the budget that caused it to fail or if it was in response to the economy? Mr. Polizzi stated the main concerns he had been made aware of had to do with whether or not there had been any agreement with the staff on concessions.
6. The position of Curriculum Director was questioned; it was noted that some members of the Council had been questioned on the necessity of this position. Mr. Polizzi stated he had been asked about the position but that the BOE was staffing for current and future needs; he stated that no frivolous decisions had been made and that this position is very much needed. It was asked if the responsibilities could not be accomplished by other members of the BOE. Mr. Polizzi responded that they are exploring all possibilities.
7. With regard to the question of the Borough offering support in terms of the Middle School Resource Officer; it was noted that it really comes out of the same pocket.

Council President Putrino asked who was included in the 4.75% collective bargaining agreement. He was advised that four unions are included: teachers, custodians, secretaries, administrators but that the percentage is not the same for all of the people associated with each of those unions. Council President Putrino asked if they have been asked to consider a pay freeze. He was advised that there have been many meetings with the bargaining units and it is hoped that they will bring it back to the general membership for consideration.

Council President asked about capital improvements. He was advised that the Middle School and Elementary Schools are in good shape but that the High School needs some work. They are looking to finish paving the Middle School lot and replace lockers over several years but that they would not be expending any money on those projects this year.

Councilwoman Subrizi noted the salaries for 2010-2011 are listed at \$15,979,255 and noted this is an increase of approximately \$900,000. She was advised that not all of the salaries go up equally at 4.75%. She was advised the Business Administrators contract is reviewed annually and the Superintendent has a three year contract.

Councilman Bachmann stated that the previous year's salaries totaled \$15,059,000 and that a 5% increase would be approximately \$750,000. He noted the salaries are up in excess of 5%. Ms. Heinzmann stated that she would need to review it but that there was an explanation of why there is a greater difference between the two years. She will provide an explanation to the Council as to what other factors contributed to the difference.

Mayor DeBari asked if the BOE had met and discussed any possible further reductions since the defeat of the budget. Mr. Polizzi stated they have already reduced supply numbers, postponed textbook orders and are looking at ways to reduce resource costs with digital or dvd supplies. He stated they are analyzing everything and hoping to consolidate some services.

The Mayor stated he has gotten the impression the BOE is going to take the savings from retirements and reduce the number or layoffs, rather than attempting to cut the budget. Mr. Conner stated the BOE does not want to look at additional cuts; they want to keep the district moving forward and do not want to lose more positions.

Councilwoman Subrizi referenced the tuitions for out of district special education. She asked if the BOE is starting its own Pre K through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade autism program if they would be discontinuing the association with the Tri-Valley program. Mr. Polizzi stated that students above grade 2 would continue with the program, possibly expanding the program down the road to bring these students into New Milford which would be a cost savings.

Councilman Berner noted it is common for the private sector to see a salary freeze and asked if there had been any discussion on implementing a salary freeze top to bottom. He was advised that it had been discussed and that if the unions were to agree to a salary freeze the BOE could possibly save all of the fourteen positions slated to be cut if taken into consideration with the two previously mentioned retirements.

Mr. Dave Wilson, spokesperson for the bargaining unit, stated he had gotten the information from the BOE the previous Monday; he had discussed it with the Executive Board, and hoped to bring it to the general membership for a vote by next Wednesday. Mr. Wilson stated they are in the middle of a three year contract and that he has received no guarantee that the money saved from a salary freeze would go back to those fourteen positions. He noted that twelve members of his association had received pink slips that very day. He added that an additional 30-40 people receiving stipends will already see a pay reduction prior to any further concessions.

Councilman Berner asked if the coaches at the High School will continue to receive stipends. He was advised that they will but that there will be a reduction in the assistant coaching staff.

Mr. Polizzi stated that the loss of a stipend is not a concession because it is not guaranteed.

Councilman Berner stated he had heard that there will be a participation fee for children wishing to participate in sports. Mr. Polizzi state that the BOE is looking at \$50 per student per season for participation.

Councilman Bachmann commented that it is a tremendous sacrifice to ask union members to agree to a salary freeze without knowing if it will result in saving their colleagues jobs. He suggested the two sides should be able to discuss this prior to a vote.

Councilwoman Subrizi asked if eighteen positions were eliminated why only twelve pink slips were distributed. She was advised that not all of the positions were teaching positions and some people may be receiving slips tomorrow.

The BOE was asked if they would be willing to put in writing that if a pay freeze is accepted all jobs would be saved. Mr. Polizzi stated that he is confident that if a wage freeze is accepted across the board all positions would be reinstated but that he could not commit to it in writing. He said they would be able to save a majority if not all.

Councilwoman Subrizi asked if he would be willing to put in writing that all money saved through a wage freeze would be put to salaries. Mr. Polizzi stated he would absolutely be willing to put that in writing.

The meeting was adjourned for a five minute recess.

When the meeting reconvened, Ms. Heinzmann explained that the difference between the salaries from 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 in excess of the contractual increase could be explained by the addition of staff for the autism program. She explained that this will be offset by a decrease in the amount of tuition that will need to be paid for children going outside the district. Councilwoman Subrizi asked how many children will be brought back in district as a result of this program. Mr. Polizzi said approximately twelve students will be brought back in district.

A handout, with information about the stipends, was distributed to the Council.

#### **COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

Councilman Bachmann made a motion to open the meeting to the public. The motion was seconded by Councilman Berner. All present in favor, none opposed.

Mr. Nick D'Amelio, 349 Trench Drive, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Mr. D'Amelio commented if the concessions were discussed prior to the election there may have been a different outcome. He stated the public was not aware of the discussions and if it had been explained that if the budget were to pass it would result in the loss of eighteen positions and that further cuts could result in the loss of additional jobs, it may have changed the results.

Mr. Conner stated that they did not want to pit the BOE against the Teacher's Association.

Mr. D'Amelio said the BOE needs to do a better job at getting the information out to more people that are not directly involved in the school system.

Ms. Joanne Prisendorf, 317 River Road, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. Prisendorf said that even if the employees agree to salary freeze the budget is still short \$1.5 million in state aid. She asked if the Mayor and Council would consider no further cuts. She was advised that it would definitely be considered.

Mayor DeBari announced that the previously scheduled meeting on May 3<sup>rd</sup> would be eliminated but the May 5<sup>th</sup> meeting would remain and the Council would ask to be advised of the outcome of the association meeting at that time.

Ms. Ida Piasevilli, 328 Jordan Road, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. Piasevilli asked if everyone was to agree to a salary freeze would there be a hiring freeze as well.

She said she was not surprised the budget did not pass because there is a feeling that not everyone was sharing in the sacrifice. She said that it is disrespectful to hire people while asking people to take a pay freeze. She said she did not want to hear of someone being hired for \$120,000. She asked who decided on the cuts and whether or not anyone has more than one secretary. Mr. Saewitz stated four of the proposed cuts were secretarial.

Ms. Paige Ryan, 226 West Street, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. Ryan asked if there is a process in place to audit benefits to be sure the BOE is not paying for coverage they do not need. She was advised that the State Health Benefits plan audits the program. She was also advised that the Aides will lose benefits next year because all of the positions would be converted to part time. He stated that the BOE will also offer an opportunity for members to opt out and it was anticipated that a certain percentage will elect to opt out. Ms. Heinzmann added that when the BOE changed from a private insurer to the State Health Benefits Plan she personally reenrolled everyone and each enrollment was reviewed individually.

Ms. Ryan asked if the entire district agrees to a pay freeze will the BOE take the Mayor and Council's recommendation on where cuts should be made if they opt to cut the budget further. Mr. Saewitz responded the Mayor and Council will not find anything to cut that the BOE has not already looked at.

The Mayor asked to confirm, if the membership accepts the salary freeze will the BOE start reinstating the positions listed on the "stormy weather" page of the presentation. He was advised that they would.

Ms. Diane Nativo, 295 Greve Drive, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. Nativo commented that it will require a lot of aides to run an autism program and asked how it will run with only part-time aides. Mr. Polizzi responded the aides for that program would be one-on-one; the aides would not be cut for special programs. Ms. Nativo questioned taking children from a school where they are comfortable and placing them in a new program. She was advised that it would be at the parent's option. She asked where the savings would be if parents do not opt to participate. She was advised the program will not be run unless it would be viable with participants.

As there were no further comments from the public, the meeting was closed on a motion from Councilman Berner. The motion was seconded by Councilwoman Subrizi. All present in favor, none opposed.

Councilman Berner asked for an estimate to run the eighth grade sports program. He was advised it cost approximately \$19,000.

Respectfully submitted,



Christine Demiris  
Borough Clerk