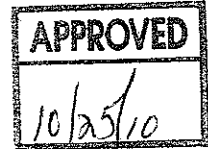


MINUTES
BOROUGH OF NEW MILFORD
7:00 PM SPECIAL MEETING
Thursday, May 13, 2010



Mayor DeBari led the flag salute

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

Also present: Christine Demiris, Administrator/Clerk

Mr. David Foo	Present
Mr. Joseph Steele	Present
Mrs. Judith Rabinowitz-McSweeney	Present
Mr. Dan Conner	Present
Mr. Darren Drake	Absent
Ms. Peggy Saslow	Absent
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. Polizzi made an opening statement. He said the situation the Board of Education finds itself in is through no fault of the town, the BOE, or anyone in the room; no one in the room created this situation, but rather it came about as a result of changes made by the State. He stated the BOE has practiced fiscal austerity for years, noting that New Milford falls below adequacy levels in spending. He also commented on the very short window of time with which the district had to respond to the loss of state aid. He offered his views on the position of the Director of Curriculum.

The Mayor stated that the Council gave the issues at hand much consideration and came to a unanimous decision with the exception of one abstention. He said the Borough will be helping the BOE by collecting their recycling for a savings to the BOE of approximately \$7,000. The Mayor asked Mr. Conner if the BOE and the teacher's union have met since the Council's last meeting with the BOE to discuss freezing salaries. Mr. Conner responded they have not met; he stated the last meeting was last Wednesday and that he had reached out to the union President on Thursday to avail himself to meet but that a meeting has not happened. The Mayor stated he was told that the union representatives had tried to schedule a meeting but the BOE was not available.

The Mayor stated the Council considered a resolution to reduce the budget by \$196,500, which equates to one tax point or approximately \$41.42 per household for the Borough average of \$414,000. He stated it was broken down as follows: each of the individually contracted positions (of which there are three) will forego their 2010-2011 raise for a total of approximately \$16,605; the forty athletic stipends totaling \$280,945 the Council suggests should be cut in half for a savings of approximately \$140,500; and last the Council suggests taking the balance of \$39,395 from the DOC position or even to consider not filling the position for the 2010-2011 school year, freeing up an additional \$100,000. The Mayor also stated the Council has considered the BOE request to cover the BOE share of the SRO position, noting they have not determined whether or not the Borough will be in a position to pick up the cost, but that they will continue to discuss the matter and will advise the BOE. The Mayor then read the resolution into the record.

Councilman Berner asked for clarification on the final number of positions that the BOE believes must be eliminated. Mr. Polizzi said it would include seven support services/instructional staff, one custodial, and four secretarial positions. He noted this would not include the SROs. Councilman Berner asked if the reductions recommended by the Council would be considered as a source to save any of those positions. Mr. Polizzi stated there is a consensus among the administrative team to make further concessions in the area of wages.

Council President Putrino stated there were three retirements as of the last meeting and asked if there have been any others since the last meeting. Mr. Polizzi responded there has not.

Councilman Berner commented on the impasse between the BOE and the union and reflected on how the union's experience compares to what is taking place in private industry. He noted the need for everyone to participate.

Council President Putrino stated that everything he has heard both in and out of the meeting room leads him to believe that everyone shares the same care and concern for the district; they just want it to be delivered at a slightly lower cost. He stated the reductions proposed by the Mayor and Council will help to offset a little of the tax increase while maintaining the quality of the education.

Mr. Foo read the welcome message from the Borough website. He stated the need to approve the budget intact to maintain the community. He said the budget presented was prudent, efficient and fiscally sound. He noted the operating budget was actually \$460,000 (or 2%) less than last year's budget. He stated that NMHS has been ranked in the top 100 high schools in New Jersey since 2004.

Councilwoman Subrizi said she applauds the efforts of the BOE and the Administration and would have liked to have recommended that no cuts be made, but that the Council must recommend cuts if they can find areas that will not affect education. She said there were two schools of thought on the reduction and that she did not ascribe to the one in the resolution; she felt one tax point was an artificial number. She said she felt the cut should have been \$140,000, which could have been achieved by eliminating the DOC position, cuts in the athletic stipends, or a salary freeze for the administration, but she based her number of \$140,000 on the DOC position because Mr. Polizzi said that a mature district might be able get away without of DOC for a year.

Councilwoman Duffie asked that everyone keep in mind that the budget did fail. She said that she knows of three lifelong New Milford residents who moved from town because they just can't afford to live here anymore. She said she understands the concerns; she was a member of the Board of Education, but the Mayor and Council are bound to represent all the residents and asked that people consider the older residents as well.

The Mayor said the Council considered a number of different scenarios including \$0; \$140,000; \$277,000; and they compromised on \$196,500.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

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

Ms. Kathleen McCann came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. McCann read a prepared statement and said that it is a sad day that we find ourselves in this predicament. She asked why the State is taking away 67% of New Milford's state aid, noting that some districts lost 20%, some lost 100% and she asked why it was not equitable. She suggested the Council and BOE unite on focusing the attention on the state. She reminded everyone that the budget was defeated by just 27 votes. She asked the Council to consider their town, their property value, and their reputation as a community in making their decision.

Mr. Rolando Monserrat, 338 Luhmann Drive, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Mr. Monserrat stated he feels that there is a very shallow perspective on the work of the administrators and school teachers. Mr. Monserrat identified himself as a former architect and a current teacher. He stated that few people in the room have the skill to teach a child to read. He said that he was certain that the BOE will keep this experience close at hand in future negotiations but that he believes they should respect the agreements that are currently in place. He said he was hopeful that the Council would not make further cuts.

Mr. Eric Sheninger came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Mr. Sheninger identified himself as the Principal of New Milford High School and the President of the Administrator's union. He said that he has heard a lot about salaries and negotiations, but that he is here to advocate for the students. He said that no cuts would be acceptable in his opinion. He said a number of programs that teachers and administrators have fought for will disappear and that these programs are the things to help students stay engaged.

Ms. Joanne Prisendorf, 317 River Road, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. Prisendorf said that she sells real estate, not just in New Milford but in many towns, and every time she sells a house, no matter what town she is in, one of the first questions she is asked is what the school system is like. She said *that* is what sells a town; if you don't have a good school system it affects the values of the homes.

Ms. Paige Ryan, 226 West Street, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. Ryan read a letter that she had sent to the Mayor and Council into the record. She asked the Council not to cut the budget any further. She stated even if the budget is left as is there will still be cuts to staff. She

expressed her concern that class sizes will grow and that additional cuts will only result in more damage. She stated her feeling that the budget vote was hardly a mandate.

Mr. Brian McCann, 217 McKinley Avenue, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Mr. McCann stated that \$196,500 is not just \$196,500; it is \$196,500 forever because it establishes a base for all years to come, which equates to a multi-million dollar decision for years to come. He stated the kids are pawns in the Governor's chess game; the teacher's have a contract and he threw it away.

Mr. Conner reiterated the point that the \$196,500 reduction will impact future budgets because it will lower the base for next year, noting it will compound to millions of dollars. He stated he is imploring the Council to vote no on that resolution. Mr. Conner thanked the attending public for their support.

Councilwoman Subrizi urged the Mayor and Council to revise the proposed reduction from the \$196,500 to \$140,000. She stated that she does not see how the removal of one duplicate salary, one assistant in the autism program, some money in administrative raises, hiring a DOC at a lesser salary and reducing the stipends by 25% would impact any student programs. She acknowledged that it would affect the CAP in years to come, but stated if the Council had found no areas where reductions could be made they would have said that they had found nothing. She said she thinks the reduction could be made without hurting the kids and that this is a viable compromise.

Mayor DeBari reviewed the list, provided by the BOE, of the things that would be eliminated *prior* to the budget vote: the elimination of eighth grade sports; elimination of high school department chairs; reduction in stipend positions, supplies, and services; postponement of ongoing maintenance/capital projects; implementing a new student activity fee at the high school; elimination of health benefits for aides; and a reduction in staff that includes two vice principals, three high school teachers, two elementary school teachers, two guidance counselors, a middle school teacher, two media specialists, the high school athletic trainer, four secretaries, two aides, and the middle school resource officer. He stated regardless of the numbers the Council looked at things that were NOT going to affect the children. He stated nobody on the Council wanted the budget to fail. The Council did not want the job of reviewing the budget but they were given the job and they have done it and they will vote on the resolution before them tonight.

Ms. Mechler stated while it may not impact the students this year, it will impact them for years to come because of the 2.5% cap.

Ms. Annette Bigger, 325 William Street, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. Bigger expressed disbelief that the proposed cuts will not affect the children. She said she was curious about the issue of stipends and asked how cutting the stipends in half will not affect children. She said by doing so, children may not have the same athletic opportunities, which for some is a vital part of their school experience. She stated that her daughter's passion is sports but she knows if she does not do well in school she will not be able to play. She asked if a savings of \$46 would make a real difference and questioned if people had truly understood what their "no" vote had meant if they may have voted differently. She asked that the Council please reconsider the overwhelming amount of money they have proposed to cut.

Council President Putrino responded the Council is proposing to cut the stipend in half not the number of positions.

Ms. Bigger questioned whether or not the stipends were contractual, noting that they are in the district she works. Mr. Sawicz said they have already cut coaches for every team and with the Council's cuts they now would be cutting teams. He suggested the Council should also provide information on which teams they feel should be cut.

Ms. Bigger said it may not be prudent for someone to take a coaching position if the pay is cut in half.

Ms. Hedy Grant, 175 Boulevard, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. Grant expressed concern over what she characterized as anti union comments made by Councilman Berner. She stated it is unfair to compare the public sector to the private sector, noting that when the public sector was doing well none of these concerns were presented. She further stated that throwing money at problems does not always solve the problems. She noted the town did vote against the budget and she stated that it is not an ethical issue but rather a financial issue. She said that she attended the meeting at which the Council discussed the budget and she thinks they are taking a responsible course of action; attempting to do it in a way that will be least harmful to the town, the school system, and the children.

Mayor DeBari asked to address Mr. Sawicz's comment that the Council cuts will result in the cut of programs. He said he does not see how this will happen as we have people stepping up in all of our town and school sports to coach. He said they are not asking to reduce the number of people coaching but rather asking for part-time salaries for coaching to be cut by 50%. He stated he does not believe coaches will leave because the salaries have been cut and if they do, they were not doing for the kids to begin with. He said the Council is not trying to be adversarial, but they have a job to do and they are just trying to that job.

Mr. Sawicz said the stipends are part of the collective bargaining agreement. The salaries are contractual, they do not have to fill the positions, but if they fill the position the stipend is a contractual amount. He said the association would have to agree to cut all of the stipends in half.

Council President Putrino commented that was not what was said at the first meeting between the Council and the BOE. He said he believed that Mr. Conner had said they could be taken away at any time.

Mr. Conner confirmed stipends are contractual. Once a position is filled, the amount is contractual. Stipends can only be cut by eliminating the position and the BOE has already eliminated some positions. Further cuts in positions would result in program cuts.

The Mayor concurred with Council President Putrino; that was not how it was presented to the Council at the first meeting.

Ms. Joan McCann, 217 McKinley Avenue, came forward to address the Council and the BOE. Ms. McCann said she is imploring the Mayor and Council not to cut the budget. She stated kids will be hurt. She asked them to please reconsider their decision. She stated they have settled on

an arbitrary number and anything less would be better than what is being proposed. She said there was a miscommunication between the Council and the BOE and asked that the Council please review their numbers.

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

The Mayor asked for a five minute recess.

The meeting was reopened at 9:06 PM.

The Mayor explained the Council requested the recess in light of the new information they received about the stipends being part of the collective bargaining agreement.

The Mayor stated the original tax levy on the ballot for the base budget was \$27,038,223. The reduction is now \$126,000 – making the amount of tax levy being certified for the base budget \$26,912,223. The Mayor explained the reductions as follows: reduce new hires for the autism program by two in the amount of \$32,292; eliminate 2010-2011 salary increases for the Technology Coordinator, the Superintendent, and the Business Administrator in the amount of \$16,605; eliminate the duplicate position of one of the teacher's aides in the amount of \$17,103; and reduce the proposed salary for the DOC by \$60,000.

Councilman Bachmann explained that one of the figures is not actually a reduction to the budget but rather a correction, whereby one of the teacher's aides was listed twice in the salary guide.

Mr. Conner stated he was pleased that the Council reconsidered the number but that the BOE was still hoping they would have agreed not to reduce the budget at all; he is hoping that they will still vote no on the adoption of this resolution.

Mr. Polizzi stated he appreciated the reduction and that he is sensitive to the Council's concerns but he still encourages them to vote no.

Mr. Steele said he was commenting as a teacher, parent, BOE member, and a taxpayer. He said when money is cut it affects quality, in effect you are watering down the soup. He said he works ten months a year but works twelve or fourteen hour days and weekends to ensure the quality education of the students he has been charged with teaching. He is asking the Council when they vote to vote for their children.

Councilwoman Subrizi made a motion to approve resolution 2010:125. She noted the cut is for \$126,000 as outlined: eliminating two new hires, one duplicate salary, a reduction in salary for the DOC position, and a salary freeze for three administrators. She noted the BOE is not bound by the account numbers as outlined by the Council, only the dollar amount, but that she was hopeful they would honor the recommendation. She said she wanted to commend the people who came out and the people of New Milford. She noted the budget has passed for the previous ten years and suggested that the attention that was paid to the budget this year will encourage turnout next year.

Councilwoman Duffie seconded the motion. The motion passed on a roll call vote as follows:

For the motion: Subrizi, Putrino, Duffie, Berner

Against the motion: None

Abstain: Bachmann

The Mayor thanked everyone for their time and interest and asked the BOE to honor the suggestions of the Council.

As there was no further business before the Council, Councilwoman Subrizi made a motion to adjourn. Councilman Bachmann seconded the motion. All present in favor, none opposed. Time 9:18 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Christine Demiris".

Christine Demiris
Borough Clerk