

The special meeting of the Board of Education of the City of Vineland was held Monday, February 29, 2016 at 7:02 p.m. at the Wallace Middle School, 688 N. Mill Road, Vineland, New Jersey, pursuant to notice with Mr. English presiding and the following members present: Mr. Bordley, Ms. Codispoti, Mr. DeWinne, Mr. Jennings, Mr. Pagano, Ms. Rios and Mr. Sbrana Absent: Ms. Acosta arrived at 7:06 p.m.

Also present: Dr. Gruccio, Superintendent, Mr. Frey and Mr. Frangipani, Assistant Superintendents, Mrs. Haley, Board Secretary and Mr. DeSanto, Board Solicitor. Absent: Dr. Rossi, Executive Director of Personnel.

Mr. English announced that in compliance with the New Jersey meeting law commonly referred to as "The Sunshine Law," the Vineland Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting to be sent to the following, announcing time and place thereof, agenda, etc.: The Daily Journal, the Atlantic City Press, Clerk - City of Vineland, and Administrative Office Public Bulletin Board.

Flag Salute:

Mr. DeSanto presented a brief synopsis on the purpose of tonight's meeting. He said this is a special meeting of the Board of Education and under the bylaws of the Board at special meetings, as with all meetings, public comment is welcome with respect to items on the agenda. Mr. DeSanto said there will be no formal action taken tonight. He said tonight is a presentation to the Board as a committee of the whole. Mr. DeSanto said it is his recommendation that the Board pass a motion to suspend the bylaws and permit the presentation to go first. He said then have the public comments so the public is provided with the information before they address the Board. Mr. DeSanto said this is not the public hearing on the budget. He said public comments are recommendations and comments from the public for the Board's consideration. Mr. DeSanto asked for a motion to be entertained to suspend the bylaws and permit the presentation to go first with public comments to occur after the presentation.

Motion:

A motion was made by Ms. Codispoti, seconded by Mr. Bordley, to suspend the bylaws and permit the presentation first with public comments to occur after the presentation. All Members voted "yes."

Mr. DeSanto said since the Board is not taking any formal action tonight he suggested that any comments or statements be deferred until next Wednesday after they have had an opportunity to consider the public comments from tonight.

Special

Presentations:

Mrs. Haley presented the 2016-2017 school district budget. She explained the budget process and meetings held to date on the budget. Mrs. Haley reviewed all the upcoming dates in the budget process. She said the revenue side of the budget is comprised of state aid, local tax levy, local non-tax revenue- tuition, fees, miscellaneous, interest etc., other-extraordinary aid & special education medicaid initiative (SEMI), use of fund balance and use of capital reserve/maintenance reserve. She said there was an increase in state aid revenue this year of \$112,730. Mrs. Haley said last year our tax levy was \$22,166,068 and this year we are proposing a 4.00% increase to that amount, which would increase the revenue side of the budget by \$886,643 with a tax levy of \$23,052,711. Mrs. Haley said the state does a fair share calculation and their fair share calculation for Vineland is \$56,597,154. She said 80.7% of the revenue relates to state aid and 13.6% relates to the local tax levy. Mrs. Haley said the other side of the equation is the appropriations side of the budget, which is the expenditure side. She said appropriations exceeded revenue due to increases in salaries, health benefits, charter school tuition and technical school tuition. Mrs. Haley said the entire budget is \$195,158,901., which is a decrease of \$1,666,185 from last year. She said the largest portion of our appropriations relates to regular instruction. Mrs. Haley said when we started the budget process in October we anticipated a shortfall of \$8 million. She said our goal was to balance the Programmatic Side with the Financial Side. Mrs. Haley said the budget approach consisted of the following:

- An \$8 million shortfall was addressed
- Salaries and benefits are the largest expenditure. We sought to meet these challenging budget goals with the least impact on student learning.
 - 52 Positions were reduced through vacancies, consolidation, and enrollment-based equalization through use of a staffing template.
- Principals & Special Education were asked to cut 20% non-salary costs.
- Maintenance reduced by contributing to a reserve and reducing staff.
- Transportation contributed significant savings through reductions, lease-purchase arrangements, bringing routes back to the district that were historically outsourced and centralizing bus stops.

Mrs. Haley reviewed each of the 52 position reductions through attrition and consolidation. She said we have 14 new positions and most are special education related.

Mrs. Haley said the following non-salary reductions are:

- Created a Maintenance Reserve
- Transportation – expense reduction
- Transportation – bus lease purchase
- Schools non-salary expenses
- Special Ed non-salary expenses
- Special Ed two students return
- Textbook purchases
- Transfer to cover deficit in Food Service
- Overtime (0.57% of salaries)
- Postage – Reduction/mailings

Mrs. Haley said other fees on the revenue side are the local tax levy increase, budgeted revenue increase, capital reserve contribution and money applied from fiscal year 2016. She said the programs and goals included in the budget are the following:

- Implement the expansion of the Camelot Alternative Program with two teachers and a transition counselor
- Expand the Applied Math & Science Academy to include 9th grade
- Expand the Positive Behavior Intervention Supports to the high school
- Expand mobile technology district-wide
- Expand the professional development calendar
- Expand Z-Pass for student safety
- Obtain buses through a five-year lease purchase agreement
- Incorporate capital additions of \$1,861,000

Mrs. Haley reviewed each of the capital projects in maintenance, technology and transportation and what they will include. She said the following buses are to be financed over 5 years:

- Ten 54-passenger buses
- Two 34-passenger wheel chair special education buses
- Two 24-passenger wheel chair special education buses
- Two 7-passenger vans

Mrs. Haley said by financing over 5 years we will receive a better interest rate. She said the tax levy in our budget has increased by \$886,643, which would be the amount of revenue being brought into our 195 million dollar budget to help offset the expenses. Mrs. Haley said it is an increase of 2.6 cents in the tax rate. She said the average home is assessed at \$159,276 and that would be a \$42.31 increase on the average household. Mrs. Haley said she is not sure if the senior citizens are aware of the Property Tax Reimbursement (Senior Freeze) Program. She said this program reimburses eligible senior citizens for property tax or mobile home park site fee increases on their principal residence.

Mrs. Haley said to qualify you must meet all the eligibility requirements that are listed on the website <http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/ptr/>. She thanked everyone for listening to her presentation and said it will also be posted on the Vineland Board of Education website.

Mr. English thanked Mrs. Haley, her staff and all who were involved with the budget process.

Public Comments
on Presentation:

Robyn Montagna

Ms. Montagna spoke in support of school librarians. She expressed her concern that staff are asked to do more and more with less.

Danielle Weir

Ms. Weir commended the Administration and Board for the quality of education Vineland offers. She spoke in support of the budget and feels a small tax increase is well worth it to help our community move forward and our students to succeed.

Jackie Huster

Ms. Huster spoke in support of middle school librarians and urged the Board to reconsider their decision, which is not educationally sound.

Dayna Quiles

Ms. Quiles urged the Board to utilize the tax revenue that is available and to raise her taxes.

Lori Russo

Ms. Russo expressed her concern in regards to the possibility of losing nurses in the schools.

Pamela English

Ms. English spoke about all the cuts through the years. She said with times getting worse we have less and less resources to help our children succeed. Ms. English expressed her concern in regards to technology purchases that are not needed.

Thomas McCann

Dr. McCann thanked the Board for giving the public the opportunity to present their views on the budget.

Dr. McCann said he believes Vineland High School has made their contribution to this budget deficit. He said last year 13 employee positions were eliminated and this year depending how everything goes VHS will lose 9 to 11 employees. Dr. McCann said next year the school will be provided with better support through the Positive Behavior Support in Schools (PBSIS) Program, which we are looking forward to. He said next year VHS is going to lose a guidance counselor, which is a very essential position. Dr. McCann said the assistant principals are the work horses of the building. He said last year he tried to propose getting a nurse practitioner for additional help to prescribe medication to students and that did not work out for a lot of different reasons. Dr. McCann said in his opinion the most essential person in a school is the school nurse and he would do without a teacher before a nurse.

Michelle Ogren

Ms. Ogren expressed her concern in regards to a nurse being cut at Vineland High School. She urged the Board to raise her taxes. Ms. Ogren discussed the various health issues that are dealt with on a daily basis at the high school.

Mr. English said with respect to the nursing position at the high school to his knowledge this position will not be cut. He said we do know what the nurses in this school district do.

Ms. Ogren said that she feels the taxes should be raised more than 4%. She expressed her concern as to what will happen if a nurse retires.

Gina Russo

Ms. Russo said she is deeply concerned about the continued cuts to our educational system. She urged the Board to raise our taxes to ensure that the children of Vineland receive a quality education.

William Hartman

Mr. Hartman said poverty is the cause for a lot of the problems that we struggle with year after year. He said 70% of our children are at or below poverty level and receive free or reduced lunch on a daily basis. Mr. Hartman said we have around 400 families in our community who are considered homeless. He said we have spent a lot of money over the last two years for technology because of testing. Mr. Hartman suggested writing a formal letter to the Governor requesting additional support.

Harry Meyers

Mr. Meyers expressed his concern on the decisions proposed tonight with the eliminating of essential positions in our district such as guidance counselors and librarians. He agrees that raising taxes will offset some of the \$8 million shortfall and feels we should be raising the taxes more than 4%. Mr. Meyers believes that investing in the state health benefit plans can save the district considerable money. He said raising significant taxes is the answer to our problems.

Lou Russo

Mr. Russo thanked Mr. English for making this forum public and for the transparent budget process. He thanked administration for putting forth a budget that recommends a 4% increase in taxes, which is .81 cents per week. Mr. Russo said we have been paying around \$23 million dollars in local taxes during the twenty years he has been working in the district. He said he began working in Philadelphia and Camden. Mr. Russo said he has seen what happens in communities that no longer protect the quality of education and stop investing in it. He said his fear is that we are sliding towards that end. Mr. Russo said we have taken less than a state average raise every year for the last three contracts. He spoke in support of the librarians. Mr. Russo said in regards to the statement that was in the presentation that “no one will lose a job” that is not true. He said there are people in long-term substitute positions that will be unemployed when people who were cut are transferred into them. He said we need to do everything we can to investigate healthcare savings. Mr. Russo said as far as cuts how can we expand new programs when we are not maintaining what we already have. He said we can do a little more with the tax rate to save positions for student safety.

Joanne Downey

Ms. Downey said she has watched the chipping away of services that we are providing to the students. She believes that Inspira Hospital Healthcare System should be doing more for the children of this community. Ms. Downey expressed her concern that there is no drug treatment facility in the city of Vineland. She said psychologists will not come down this far to service our students because of the rate that Cumberland County pays. Ms. Downey said someone needs to look at the poverty in our city because that is the real issue.

Rebecca Tasso

Ms. Tasso said that she does not agree with cutting positions and feels the employees should be contributing half to their healthcare costs. She said that she would support a small tax increase.

Lee Burke

Mr. Burke said that New Jersey is one of the highest states in debt and at the county/local level we get hit hard. He said when 80% of our money comes from the state you can say we are a ward of the state. Mr. Burke said some ideas that he has are: reasonable contract steps, give up one week of paid vacation, cap on fringe benefits, close Landis Middle School/Cunningham Alternative School and have later school times. He said what it comes down to is who the employee is most loyal to the taxpayers or the union.

Tanya Kidd

Ms. Kidd commented on her contribution to health insurance as an employee in the district.

Mr. English said tonight we are trying to discuss this budget and find the best suggestions possible to move this district forward.

Vicky Miller

Ms. Miller said during the past 20 years we have only raised taxes 2% and raising taxes 4% is probably not enough. She said that she is 70 years old and is not going to complain about the raising of taxes.

Ryan Suppi

Mr. Suppi said he wanted to discuss a few ideas on what we can implement instead of cut. He suggested paying to play sports (pay to play). Mr. Suppi said maybe the district can take over all the recreation sports. He said the Board should meet with the Strategic Planning Committee to discuss ideas that would help the district. Mr. Suppi suggested having businesses advertise at the various school events and sponsor them. He said a parent committee could be formulated to meet and find ways to raise money for the district. Mr. Suppi said he supports a tax increase.

Xavier Cardona

Mr. Cardona thanked the Board and Central Administration for all their hard work and everything they are doing for this school district.

Mr. English said the next two weeks are crucial in our district because Wednesday is the work session where we will have thorough discussion amongst ourselves on how this budget will be laid out. He said we will vote on the budget March 9th. Mr. English said the budget is a fluid document and can be changed. He thanked everyone who took the time to come out this evening. Mr. English said Vineland is a team concept and he believes in getting Vineland where it was.

Mr. English said Board members do not get paid to sit up here and we treat what we do like we are the highest paid officials in the district. He said there are so many tough decisions we are trying to grasp and we are all smart enough to know what needs to be done. Mr. English said he wanted people to come to the podium with their ideas. He said this Board wants to save everything but knows the last thing the Board wanted people to say is that they do not want their taxes raised. Mr. English said we took the plunge last year and it was not a popular decision. He said it was a small amount of money that was used very quickly. Mr. English said some of the decisions that get made are not going to be the popular ones and do not think they are personal. He said we try to do what is best for the students and taxpayers that have put us in these seats. Mr. English said he thought the room would have been packed with taxpayers but unfortunately he does not see it. He encouraged people to come to the podium and bring their honesty. Mr. English thanked everyone for coming out.

A motion was made by Ms. Codispoti, seconded by Ms. Rios, to adjourn the meeting at 9:09 p.m. All Members voted “yes.”

Respectfully submitted,

Helen G. Haley
Board Secretary

HGH:dt

