

The special meeting for the Public Hearing on the 2017-2018 School Budget of the Board of Education of the City of Vineland was held Monday, May 1, 2017 at 6:05 p.m. in the Reber Administration Building, Board Room, 625 Plum Street, Vineland, New Jersey, pursuant to notice with Mr. Jennings presiding and the following members present: Ms. Acosta, Ms. Codispoti, Mr. Fiocchi, Mr. Holmes, Mr. Medio and Mr. Sbrana. Absent: Mr. Bordley, and Ms. Rios, both for personal reasons.

Also present: Dr. Gruccio, Superintendent, Mr. Frey and Mr. Frangipani, Assistant Superintendents, Mrs. Haley, Board Secretary and Mr. DeSanto, Board Solicitor. Absent: None.

Mr. Jennings 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:

Dr. Gruccio, introduced, Mrs. Helen Haley, Business Administrator, to present the 2017-2018 School District Budget.

Mrs. Haley presented background on the budget process to date. She said several meetings were held with the finance committee to discuss the details of the 2017-2018 budget. Mrs. Haley said on January 31, 2017 a balanced budget was presented to the finance committee and the budget presentation was held on March 8, 2017. She said tonight's budget presentation is very similar to the one that was given on March 8th except the March 8th presentation called for a 4% tax increase and this budget represents a 2% tax increase. Mrs. Haley said the budget was submitted to the county on March 20, 2017 and they had until April 24th to review it. She said we received approval from the county on April 12th. Mrs. Haley said on May 3, 2017 a special meeting will be held to adopt the final 2017-2018 budget prior to the scheduled work session at 6:00 p.m. She said in preparing the budget the revenue minus appropriations equals a balanced budget. Mrs. Haley said the revenue side is comprised of state aid, local tax levy, local non-tax revenue, other extraordinary and special education Medicaid initiative (SEMI), and use of fund balance and use of capital reserve/maintenance reserve. She said for years all the districts in the state received relatively flat funding. Mrs. Haley said a change in the funding formula is currently being discussed.

Mrs. Haley said the general fund tax levy that we are proposing is an increase from last of year of \$452,188, which represents a 2% tax increase. She said 79.7% of the revenue is state aid and 13.4% is from the local tax levy. Mrs. Haley discussed the state aid formula concerns. She said the appropriations is the expenditure side of the budget. Appropriations have exceeded revenue due to increases in salaries, health benefits, charter schools and technical school tuition. She said the estimated shortfall in the beginning was \$5 million, which has been taken down to zero. Mrs. Haley said included in the budget approach was finalizing the plan for the re-purposing of Landis Middle School, meeting with principals and supervisors to maintain a flat non-salary budget, analyzed class size and staffing, reduced positions through attrition, consolidation and enrollment-based staffing equalization, expanded the Cunningham Academy to include middle school, considered hiring armed guards and sale of vacant lots/older buildings. She said 25.5 positions were reduced through attrition and consolidation, which all relate to the re-purposing of Landis School. Mrs. Haley said the total staff reductions through attrition and consolidation is 30, which equals \$2.2 million in salaries and benefits. She said the new positions are 2.5 special education aides, 1 special education teacher and 6 custodian positions. Mrs. Haley reviewed the non-salary increases/reductions and the capital outlay projects. She said lease purchasing of buses is also included in this budget. She said over the last two years we have financed buses over 5 years at approximately 2.35% with an annual payment of \$226,777. Mrs. Haley said the general fund tax levy increase is \$452,188 which equates to 1.8 cents on the tax rate. The average home is assessed at \$159,372 which calculates out to \$29.20 per year for the typical household. She said there is a senior tax freeze application for senior citizens who qualify. Mrs. Haley said this budget presentation will be on the district website. She thanked Scott Musterel, David Hart, Finance Staff, Dr. Gruccio, Central Administration, and the Board Finance Committee, who have spent many hours on this budget along with the district-wide feedback and community comments.

Public Comments

On Agenda Item:

Robert Novicke, Jr.

Mr. Novicke said he conducted a poll with the students in regards to the armed guards and 81% of the students felt that they did not have a strong relationship with the police in the community. He feels before the armed guards are put in the schools the relationship between the students and the police needs to be built up.

Vickie Miller

Ms. Miller expressed her concern as to why we have to pay for children to attend Charter Schools when we offer the same services in the public schools.

Dr. Gruccio said the Charter Schools are overseen by the state and the state requires funding for the child attending the Charter School to go to the Charter School.

John Provenzano

Mr. Provenzano spoke against having armed guards in the schools.

Quan Johnson

Mr. Johnson spoke in support of putting artificial turf on the football field.

Nick Basili

Mr. Basili expressed his concern that the football field is not safe or in good condition and feels synthetic turf would be appropriate at this time.

Lee Burke

Mr. Burke expressed his concern that this budget does not reflect the \$5 million shortfall. He agrees that Landis School must be closed but should not be used as administration offices. Mr. Burke feels the Landis roof needs to be fixed but we should not be spending \$450,000 on renovations. He does not think that armed guards are necessary in the schools and maybe money could be spent on a security plan with the existing security staff. Mr. Burke expressed his concern that we should not be spending \$450,000 to refurbish Landis School without a city commitment for the Reber building and parking lot. He thinks there is money to be saved in the transportation department. Mr. Burke said the Board should consider later starting times in the schools. He said that he supports a 3% increase in taxes but the reality is that parents are making other choices for their children. Mr. Burke urged the Board to use the \$450,000 that was to be used for Landis renovations to offset the shortfall.

Board Member
Comments:

Mr. Medio thanked everyone for coming out and expressing interest in the budget. He said at Wednesday's special board meeting all of the concerns will be addressed.

Mr. Sbrana echoed the comments made by Mr. Medio and thanked everyone for coming to the meeting to express their views. He said that he has stated his views in the past and his position has not changed in regards to the closing of Landis, armed guards and several other things.

Ms. Acosta thanked Mrs. Haley and her staff for the great job they did in putting the budget together. She also thanked everyone who came out tonight and expressed their views.

Ms. Codispoti echoed the comments made by Ms. Acosta and thanked Mrs. Haley and her staff. She said that people do not realize how much work is involved in preparing this budget. Ms. Codispoti thanked everyone who came out and spoke tonight. She addressed the comment made by Mr. Novicke in regards to the police and students. Ms. Codispoti said it is very sad to hear that students are uncomfortable with the police department. She said there are police officer liaisons in the schools that are developing a rapport with our students. Ms. Codispoti said she is hopeful that if someone is uncomfortable that they would reach out. She would still like to know if we move forward with the Landis project has the city committed anything to us as far as purchasing the property. Ms. Codispoti said there are a few things that she is still a little uncomfortable with but is hopeful it will end well.

Dr. Guccio thanked everyone who took the time to come out and we will consider all the comments we heard this evening. She said the final vote on the budget will take place Wednesday.


Board President
Remarks:

Mr. Jennings said Ms. Rios and Mr. Bordley contacted him prior to tonight's meeting to let him know they had personal issues and could not attend the meeting. He said he appreciates everyone who came out tonight. Mr. Jennings said everyone is working hard and have their opinions but it is a process that we will keep working at it. He said hopefully in the end everything gets done for the betterment of the students, city and taxpayers.

Motion:

A motion was made by Mr. Medio, seconded by Ms. Codispoti, to adjourn the meeting at 6:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,


Helen G. Haley
Board Secretary

HGH:dt