

**MINUTES****JANUARY 30, 2010**

The Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Warren met in Budget Session in its offices in the Wayne Dumont, Jr. Administration Building, Belvidere, New Jersey on January 30, 2010 at 9:08 a.m.

The meeting was called to order by Director Gardner and upon roll call, the following members were present: Freeholder Richard Gardner, Freeholder Everett Chamberlain and Freeholder Angelo Accettura. Also attending were CFO Charles Houck, Fiscal Analyst Dan Olshefski and County Administrator Steve Marvin.

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Director Gardner.

Director Gardner read the following statement: **"ADEQUATE NOTICE OF THIS MEETING OF JANUARY 30, 2010 WAS GIVEN IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT BY FORWARDING A SCHEDULE OF REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS TO THE WARREN COUNTY CLERK, THE STAR-LEDGER, AND DAILY RECORD AND BY POSTING A COPY THEREOF ON THE BULLETIN BOARD IN THE OFFICE OF THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS. FORMAL ACTION MAY BE TAKEN BY THE BOARD OF CHOSEN FREEHOLDERS AT THIS MEETING. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS ENCOURAGED. IN ORDER TO ASSURE FULL PUBLIC PARTICIPATION, THOSE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES WHO WISH TO ATTEND THE MEETING SHOULD SUBMIT ANY REQUESTS FOR SPECIAL ACCOMMODATION ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE."**

In attendance to discuss the status of the Warren County Special Services School District were Kevin Brennan, County Executive Superintendent of Schools; Al Purdy, Interim Superintendent of the District and School Board Members Bill Spencer and Bob Hopek. Mr. Purdy said he has spent his whole educational career in Warren County and appreciated the opportunity to discuss the viability of the District.

Mr. Chamberlain said last year at budget time, Regina Swierc, the District Superintendent at the time, had projected an enrollment of 57 students for the coming year, yet it is down to 38. How will the program be moving forward in the future? Ms. Swierc's departure indicated to Mr. Chamberlain that she didn't have a lot of faith in the program. She had thought other superintendents were not supportive of Warren County Special Services School District. Mr. Chamberlain asked, "What is the long-term strategy?"

Mr. Purdy said the District is in its 20<sup>th</sup> year of operation. Twenty years ago, the State's initiative was to integrate special needs students. WCSSSD is currently running six programs; two in Franklin, one in Pohatcong, one in Great Meadows Middle School, one is scheduled in Warren Hills High School and one in an alcohol and drug center in Hackettstown. Since joining the District in October, Mr. Purdy said he has met with all the superintendents in the County. He found it interesting to learn how much transportation coordination is facilitated. The District transports 252 students to 39 locations in and out of the county, utilizing wheelchair vans and other custom equipment between five or six different contractors.

We have commitments for 48 students next year, said Mr. Purdy and our tuition has gone down considerably. More child study teams are looking at us again. Most of the students are Warren County residents; only two or three come from outside.

**MINUTES****JANUARY 30, 2010**

Addressing Mr. Brennan, Mr. Chamberlain wanted to know what other alternatives were available should enrollment in WCSSSD continue to decline. Mr. Brennan said there are private schools located all over the state, but our somewhat remote location makes transportation expensive. A year ago, I also questioned the viability of WCSSSD, said Mr. Brennan. Outreach was insufficient. There were not enough face-to-face meetings with local districts to determine their needs. We needed to bring it back to where the services were meeting the needs in a cost-efficient manner. The District is now operating with a part-time superintendent, a part-time business administrator and three clericals. Action was taken to reduce tuition fees for the 2009-10 school year and even further reductions will take effect in 2010-11.

Mr. Chamberlain repeated his concern that a huge amount is being paid for administration of a program when its enrollment keeps going down and down. Mr. Brennan said candidates for our services are a small portion of the special needs population. Because the numbers are so small, only two or three kids in the average district, it's hard to implement cost-efficiently. Hunterdon County's Educational Services Commission functions like WCSSSD. If WCSSSD were to cease to be, special services would probably operate as a "cluster system" out of the high schools.

Mr. Gardner asked about the drug and alcohol operation. Mr. Purdy said education has to continue when students are suspended. At this center, education continues in addition to testing, counseling and rehab. However, Mr. Purdy said he was examining the cost-effectiveness of this program to determine whether it will continue. Currently, teachers are transporting students themselves.

As for the long-range plan, Mr. Purdy said he is working only three days per week and WCSSSD's educational costs are now lower than those of Hunterdon County and Stepping Stone. A County Child Study Team Supervisor is charged with finding an appropriate program for each classified child; WCSSSD being one of the options. She makes sure all options are explored. Transitions is a very popular program that continues to provide recreation, education and therapy.

Mr. Chamberlain asked if the District had to employ someone with the title of Superintendent. Mr. Brennan said the only alternate title would be Chief School Administrator. We have to have one or the other. Mr. Brennan acknowledged that the administrative costs had been out of line with the size of this district, but that issue has been and continues to be, addressed. Further, Mr. Brennan said he believes that a regional system such as WCSSSD is important to a rural county such as Warren. We restructured ourselves.

Mr. Gardner asked what percentage of the budget was devoted to transportation costs. Mr. Purdy did not have the documentation on hand to answer that question, but did know that the District actually makes money on its transportation services.

Mr. Accetturo asked if each of the County's school districts uses services of WCSSSD. Mr. Purdy said probably not. He did not know exactly how many of the 22 districts currently were participating.

**MINUTES****JANUARY 30, 2010**

While it's true that at one time, the District had close to 100 students, Mr. Brennan said attitudes have evolved over the years and the special needs population is very dynamic. He did not think enrollment would grow to reach that level again, but as the districts start to trust us again, enrollment should increase.

"That phrase bothers me," said Mr. Chamberlain, referring to the implied lack of trust. How did we go so far astray? What was the board doing? Mr. Brennan theorized it was an erosion of leadership. Since last year, however, there has been a concerted effort to turn things around.

Mr. Marvin asked, since Mr. Brennan is required to file a comprehensive report on regionalization, aggregation, special education, etc., will he compel districts to use WCSSSD? Mr. Brennan said, I think you're giving me more power than I have. These decisions are made on the local level. Nothing happens without local votes, but this year, I think we have a greater understanding and connection to needs throughout the county compared to last year.

Regarding budget appropriation, Mr. Marvin advised WCSSSD not to expect any increase over last year. Mr. Purdy thought that was "more than fair" given what has been going on around the state.

This portion of the meeting concluded at 10:07 a.m.

There was some further discussion with Mr. Brennan alone regarding Warren County Technical School. Mr. Chamberlain remembered the Tech School budget having appeared on the general ballot for public vote a number of years ago. He wanted to know what steps had to be taken to get back to a public vote. Mr. Brennan said he would have to investigate and get back to him.

Mr. Brennan was also asked about the minimum contribution set by the State for the Tech School's budget. Mr. Brennan said he had an upcoming meeting with Tech School administrators and would talk to County School Business Administrator Bill Poch about it as well. He said he would get back to Mr. Marvin with the numbers.

At 10:22 a.m., the meeting reconvened. Mr. Houck said he would like to report that he had received all the information needed to finish the budget, but that is not the case. Only fourteen towns have reported and revenue from new construction is still missing so the Tax Board estimates are not ready.

Mr. Olshefski reviewed the Library Budget with the Board, having made adjustments discussed during the last Budget Session.

The Open Space Budget was then discussed. Should the Freeholders decide to decrease the County's rate by a penny, Mr. Chamberlain was concerned that the municipalities would then use that to balance their budgets with no savings being passed on to the taxpayer. Mr. Accetturo thought that was a reasonable assumption. Officials in a town such as Oxford that puts in more than \$600,000 wonders what they are getting back for their own town.

**MINUTES****JANUARY 30, 2010**

The idea was to consider reducing it for one year only then reverting to the prior rate. Mr. Chamberlain predicted that no one would notice the reduction, but then accuse the Freeholders of raising taxes the following year. The only municipalities requesting the reduction were Lopatcong and Oxford. The Board delayed a decision for two weeks to see if more requests would be forthcoming.

Mr. Olshefski noted that the Soil Conservation District had requested a slight increase in County funding as alternate funding is being lost. Mr. Chamberlain thought there was a movement underway to consolidate between counties. Mr. Gardner said by statute, each county is supposed to have their own. Mr. Chamberlain agreed each county has to have its own district, but operations can be handled out of a regional office.

Budget Introduction is still planned for February 24, 2010. No more Budget Sessions will be scheduled for this year.

Mr. Gardner lamented that by going through a reduction process, we will be negatively affected by next year's CAP calculation.

It just recently came to Mr. Marvin's attention that a Six County Coalition Meeting is being hosted by Somerset County on Wednesday, February 3 at Willie's Tavern in Bedminster. The topic was to be transportation. Mr. Gardner said he would attend. Mr. Accetturo had to check his schedule.

Regarding the Chapter 12 proposal by the Community College, Mr. Marvin said they expect some formal action to take place at the February 10<sup>th</sup> Board of School Estimate Meeting. The same issues expressed in the January 23<sup>rd</sup> Budget Session were still of concern to the Board. Mr. Gardner said no matter how we do it, our heads will be on the chopping block. Mr. Chamberlain said we wanted a contract and we still haven't received it. There is still a lot to be ironed out. Mr. Marvin said a more comprehensive draft agreement should be received by the end of this week and included in the Freeholders' packets. Should the County be co-holder of the deed? Mr. Chamberlain reiterated his assertion that market value is different than appraised value. In today's economy, appraised value could be 40-45% higher than the actual selling price.

On motion by Mr. Chamberlain, seconded by Mr. Accetturo, and there being no further business to come before the Board at this time, the meeting was adjourned at 11:04 a.m.

Recorded Vote: Mr. Accetturo yes, Mr. Chamberlain yes, Mr. Gardner yes

**ATTESTED TO:**

**Steve Marvin, Clerk of the Board**