

BLOOMSBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION
Joint Meeting with the Greenwich Township Board of Education
March 23, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.
Approved April 11, 2017

I. INTRODUCTORY ITEMS

CALL TO ORDER:

President, Kevin Kerfoot called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and asked everyone to please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT:

Kevin Kerfoot read the following statement:

The New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act was enacted to insure the right of the public to have advance notice of and to attend the meetings of public bodies at which any business affecting their interests is either discussed or acted upon. The Board has fully complied with the notice requirements by advertising in The Express Times & The Star-Ledger posting publicly and by notifying the Municipal Clerk of the date, time and place of the meeting.

ROLL CALL – BLOOMSBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Present

President, Kevin Kerfoot
Daniela Albright
Kristin Santoro
Peggy Shelton

Absent

Vice-President, Craig Levesque

ROLL CALL – GREENWICH TOWNSHIP BOARD OF EDUCATION

Present

President, Denise Valle
Michelle Faychak

Absent

Vice-President, Beth Rooney
Kevin Bayne arrived at 7:10 pm
Susan Harwell
Victoria Little
Jill McCormick
Scott Nodes arrived at 7:10 pm
Christy Tighe

Others Present

Maria Eppolite, Superintendent
Tim Mantz, Business Administrator/Board Secretary
Renea Pesaresi, Greenwich Township Board Secretary

Flag Salute

II. FEASIBILITY STUDY PRESENTATION – John Comegno, Esq.

BLOOMSBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION
Joint Meeting with the Greenwich Township Board of Education
March 23, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.
Approved April 11, 2017

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

John Tersigni: Mr. Tersingi stated that an increase in the number of Bloomsbury households from 340 to 370 was impossible. What is feasibility study in the Board opinion? Study provides one option not multiple. What impact to the taxpayers on going forward? Take time to consider before putting this on the ballot- don't rush.

Mr. Comengo's response: The study is not an advocacy document as that is not its purpose. Feasibility is a study of analyzing regionalization not merging or consolidation. All the tax information will be on the ballot for both communities.

Karyn Frey: Ms. Frey said that merging, consolidation and regionalization represent different meanings and asked for clarification of what was being studied. She also felt that the study contained multiple errors and omissions. Ms. Frey said that she does not like the concept of a regionalized Board as representation based on population would result in an 8 to 1 board member ratio of Greenwich residents to Bloomsbury residents. Need to look at the impact of taxes and property values. She felt that \$30,000 for attorney fees for the feasibility study is too much money.

Mr. Comengo's response: Feasibility study collects data for regionalization. Merger and consolidation are terms used to describe regionalization. Again all tax impact will be discussed and placed on the ballot if both boards agree to continue.

Ann Ferrera: Ms. Ferrera feels the public would be better served at this evening's meeting by having a back/forth dialogue rather than holding all answers to the end. Ms. Ferrera has multiple concerns with the impact of the merger highlighted by the ultimate use of the Bloomsbury school, if any, and how the town's property values would be affected. Regionalizing would forever lock Bloomsbury into Warren County and Phillipsburg High School. Kevin Kerfoot's letter to the editor stated that "other" options were not considered due to possible lawsuits. Why is this the case and from whom might these lawsuits come? Why not study to find out cost savings to attract other schools?

Mr. Comengo's response: No decision has been paid regarding the Bloomsbury School.

Laura Shultz: Ms. Shultz asked what impact does the merger have on choice students? Ms. Schultz stated that she loves the small class sizes and asked if the merger would have any negative affect on the current choice students.

Mr. Comengo's response: Choice program would continue under the new Board. Superintendent Eppolite stated current choice students would remain. Mr. Juan Torres, the Hunterdon Executive County Superintendent, stated choice is paid by the state and is capped however current students and siblings are allowed to attend.

Bert Furnari: Mr. Furnari asked how does one arrive at the cost per pupil totals stated in the feasibility study? I used the 2014/15 numbers listed in the study and when I did for

BLOOMSBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION
Joint Meeting with the Greenwich Township Board of Education
March 23, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.
Approved April 11, 2017

Bloomsbury, dividing \$3,100,000 by 171 students I got \$18,128 which is almost exactly what is says in the study. But when I divided the number of Greenwich students \$13,622 and study shows \$10,187 please explain. Explain why the study was so late when it was to be done by August? Was there an approval process? Was more information added during the process? It seems this discussion has been going on for months, possible executive session meetings. Please give more background information on the conversations aspects on the financials.

Mr. Comengo's response: It took several months to collect data and some meetings were executive session only due to contacts and personnel can't disclose the minutes.

Karen Murray: Ms. Murray asked to clarify whether merging, consolidating or regionalizing is being studied. Who owns the Bloomsbury building if the districts did merge? She asked what the timeline would be moving forward and pointed out that Bloomsbury has a longer school day then Greenwich.

Mr. Comengo's response: To clarify regionalization is what the feasibility study is based upon. The new board would own the building if you regionalize.

Mike Galuppo: Mr. Galuppo asked why mention the budget at the beginning of the meeting? What would happen to the building if the districts regionalized? Has anyone on the Board been in contact with the Town Planning Board?

Mr. Comengo's response: Budgets are very important to the study. The building would be owned by the new board.

Brandi Booth: Ms. Booth asked if the merger goes through what would happen to the Bloomsbury staff?

Mr. Comengo's response: The new board along with the Superintendent and Business Administrator would discuss with the respective Education Associations regarding staff placements.

Tracy Roth: Ms. Roth asked what affect does regionalization have from a business aspect? I have child who is a choice student and I want my younger child to come here. Would they be able to come once the merger occurs?

Mr. Comengo's response: Choice students who are currently here will continue and yes the sibling would be able to come. Not sure how the regionalization affects the business aspect. If you mean the tax burden that would all be on the ballot.

John Tersigni: Mr. Tersigni stated that he would like to bring the study to Lehigh University to see if they would comment on the usefulness.

BLOOMSBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION
Joint Meeting with the Greenwich Township Board of Education
March 23, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.
Approved April 11, 2017

Karyn Frey: Ms. Frey said that she didn't see anything regarding academics in the study. Ms. Frey requested the study in a searchable PDF format and provided the opinion that for \$30,000 this should not be hard to do. She thought that the study was slanted to help Greenwich.

Brian LeMasters: Mr. LeMasters said that the time period in which the birth rate was analyzed was too small a sample. He believes that this process has been too impulsive and should have been better publicized. He asked how much debt each schools had. Mr. LeMasters asked why Bloomsbury pay \$65,000 for their shared BA while Greenwich only pays \$62,500. Believes the cost should be the same.

Mr. Mantz reponse: Greenwich debt is 1,526,395. Bloomsbury has no debt.

John Tersigni: Mr. Tersigni said he felt that the attorney should have a not to exceed figure.

Bloomsbury Board Member Daniela Albright: Mr. Kerfoot's letter to the editor said topic discussed in open session and it didn't happen. Said budget for school year 2018 proposed cuts while the Board does not know if it was prepared correctly? Why would the Board allocate \$15,000 of taxpayer's money for a study without consulting the town?

Bloomsbury Board Member Kevin Kerfoot: The 2018 school year budget consists of collapsing the 4th & 5th grades into one section while doing the same with the 6th & 7th grades as well as eliminating the PreK program. Moving forward, the Bloomsbury Board will carry debt to Phillipsburg in excess of \$100,000 due to the FY16 tuition adjustment. The budget was already approved by the Board and submitted to the county.

John Tersigni: Mr. Tersigni believes that the sending districts to Phillipsburg High School have been feeling pressure to continue making tuition payments while the Phillipsburg District's school budget has jumped significantly over the past couple of years. If Bloomsbury and Greenwich were to regionalize, this pressure would still exist while Bloomsbury would have a very limited say as to how to handle the situation due to small representation on the Board.

Lisa Hutchinson: Mrs. Hutchinson asked when will the grades be consolidated? Who determines the new regional Board? She does not think Bloomsbury would have enough representation with only one or two members on the Board.

Mr. Comengo's response: The county Superintendents reviews the applications and appoints the new regional board.

Bloomsbury Board Member Daniela Albright: Mrs. Albright stated her opinion that shared services does not provide efficiencies.

BLOOMSBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION
Joint Meeting with the Greenwich Township Board of Education
March 23, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.
Approved April 11, 2017

Greenwich Board Member Kevin Bayne: Mr. Bayne said that Greenwich previously had a full time Business Administrator that did not work out. The cost for a full time Business Administrator would be in the neighborhood of \$75,000 for salary plus the additional cost of benefits. This compensation package would reflect a person with limited to no prior experience in the job. Greenwich hired Pohatcong's Business Administrator through a shared agreement and it is working very well. As a result, he believes the district is better off.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 pm on a motion by Kevin Kerfoot, seconded by Peggy Shelton.

Motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

Respectfully submitted,

Tim Mantz
Board Secretary/B.A.

Respectfully submitted,

Board Member