

Lehigh Area School District

Lehigh, Pennsylvania

Special Board Meeting
Wednesday, January 20, 2016

6:00 PM

Administration Board Room

Minutes

Pledge of Allegiance

Call to Order - A special board meeting of the Lehigh Area School Board was held in the Administration Building, Conference Room A, on the above date and called to order at 6:00 p.m.

Roll Call

	Present	Absent
Mr. Byron Arner, Member	X	☐
Mr. Richard R. Beltz, Vice-President	X	☐
Mrs. Gloria Bowman, Member	X	☐
Mrs. Marianne Dwyer, Member	X	☐
Vacant	☐	☐
Mr. Stephen L. Holland, Member	X	☐
Mr. Wayne Wentz, Member	X	☐
Mr. Andrew Yenser, Treasurer	X	☐
Mr. Hal Resh, President	X	☐
Mr. Brian Feick, Business Manager	☐	X
Mr. Jonathan Cleaver, Superintendent	X	☐
Attorney William Schwab, Solicitor	X	☐
Mrs. Melissa Wagner, Recording Secretary	X	☐

Mr. Resh – We are conducting interviews for the open seat on the school board. Each board member should ask the same question to all the candidates. Each candidate will be afforded 10 minutes. Candidates may sit in the board room during interviews. The motion for appointment is on the agenda for Monday, January 25, 2016.

Atty. Schwab – The board can decide in any way it wishes on Monday night. On the agenda it is left blank. Members of the board can talk amongst themselves but not as a majority (5) of the board. No formal procedure, do what you think is best for the best candidate. There were people sent letters who were not given a formal interview because they were not a registered voter but they were told they may come tonight if we were wrong and be interviewed.

Interviews for Board Vacancy

Interview for the board vacancy were held beginning at 6:10 p.m. The following candidates were interviewed:

Questions asked of each candidate (Byron Arner declined to ask a question):

- 1) Wayne Wentz – Are you ready to move the district forward?
- 2) Richard Beltz – What are your thoughts on building the elementary center compared to renovating the existing buildings?
- 3) Stephen Holland – You’ve seen presentation at board meetings. Do you not believe what is being presented to you?
- 4) Andrew Yenser – How will you, as a contributing member, make a difference in the lives of our students?
- 5) Marianne Dwyer – Why do you feel you are qualified for the school board?
- 6) Gloria Bowman – How much reliable research have you done regarding the vision of the district, it’s building projects and financial impact on the taxpayers, and educational opportunities that will enhance and enrich our students’ lives?
- 7) Hal Resh – Do you have any questions for the board?

Frank Tamburri

- 1) Absolutely.
- 2) Concerned about erroneous numbers from architects. It’s never been about the schools. I haven’t had one board member sit down with me regarding questions. I did sit with Gloria Bowman. Not about the schools, about the money. If it can be proven that taxpayers can afford this but it doesn’t make sense. I don’t personally feel that the town can afford the elementary center along with Obamacare, the taxes and possible recession.
- 3) I think they are tilted somewhat. 5% increase for bond to save \$10 million? What are the tax increases? Where is money coming from? I’m not against an elementary center.
- 4) Looking at the needs in the school. Families can’t afford to keep kids in the school.
- 5) Construction background with list of references.
- 6) I’ve done a lot. I’ve read the PlanCon book. I’ve read the 1st bond 3 times. Haven’t read the new bond. I’ve done my research. There needs to be a balance.
- 7) No questions. Handed out an election summary report from the fall election. Mr. Tamburri had 1779 votes.

David Krause

- 1) Absolutely. Critical portion is making decisions and the financial impact of those decisions. We can do the right thing, the wrong thing or do nothing. Worst thing is to do nothing.
- 2) Based on information provided, the efficiencies of a new building vs. renovating the old ones, there will be tremendous savings and benefits to the kids with a new building.
- 3) No issue with the numbers. Some are estimates and the district has always taking the conservative side. Hopefully numbers will be lower.
- 4) Sincerely believe in education. Served on the board for 8 years. We made significant improvements. We are here to educate – safe buildings, functional buildings.
- 5) I’ve been very active. With my experience – can hit the ground running. Team player – serve on LCCC board. I can bring valuable experience.

- 6) Projects were started some time ago. Familiar with PlanCon process. Project will have minimal impact on the tax base. Talked with other board members from other districts who have gone through projects.
- 7) When will you make the decision? Hal Resh – Monday night.

Larry Stern (phone interview)

- 1) Try to provide the best learning environment for our students. I'm in favor of moving forward.
- 2) We have to keep in mind equality, access and support for each student. The way buildings are configured at this time it is not an equitable distribution. Keep things moving forward with an elementary center.
- 3) From financial perspective, I don't have questions. I know the background on this. Moving and changing plans will be a financial burden on the district. The cost of renovating could be a 4.4 mil swing. Sacrifice ACE grant, PDE funding, and the cost would cause the district to eliminate programs.
- 4) Students are what we are here for. Students are the product of our manufacturing process as a school district. We need to provide a sound educational plan for them. The most stability students have is at school from our staff.
- 5) I have a business background, college educated, product of our environment, my children, myself, wife and parents have all gone through the district and this is my opportunity to give back to my community.
- 6) The last 2 and ½ years on the board.
- 7) No. A tough decision and thank you to the board for providing the phone interview.

Duane Eidem

- 1) Yes, need to bring up to code for safety.
- 2) The whole process started a few years back. I was for renovating, but as time went on I saw the advantages of building a new school. I'm currently for building the school.
- 3) The no tax increase is best. Renovate will increase taxes. Building now would be best with the current rates and no tax increase.
- 4) Make good decisions for students. The district has good teachers.
- 5) Prior board experience for 8 years. Board president for a year and half. Sat in on negotiations, through hiring processes.
- 6) I keep updated on everything that is put out there. I like to read before making a decision. Stick with the facts.
- 7) No. Just hope you get someone good in here.

David Bradley, Sr.

- 1) My 1st grader will be taking the debt for decades to come. You owe it to the children to have a fiscally responsible budget.
- 2) The district is tax happy and skips maintenance on assets and used cash to buy a playhouse. To not look at the numbers and make repairs and say you are doing it for the children is "whack". \$55 million in debt to burden our next generations. Need to keep our district debt free. Look at the numbers.
- 3) Gave a handout to board members regarding fund balance and assessed businesses. Look at the bottom numbers. You have to have facts to borrow money. 2008 taxes at 42 mils by 2015 estimated at 47.88 mils. 12% increase in taxes and didn't fix schools. The board chose to take 1.8 million dollars from taxpayers for surplus. You didn't need it to operate. 2011 – 3.7 million surplus and chose to raise taxes. I believe you should put Frank on the board. He has the time, motivation, understanding, and construction experience. He's the one they voted for.
- 4) I'm blunt. Most say I'm a dictator, some say without the tator. How does the board look at their neighbors? Reduce assessed value of businesses. I lean towards the children. I went to a PTO

meeting. Embarrassed that there is more parents than teachers. The door at Franklin was opened in the middle of winter but locked and propped open. There were children in the building. You are reducing the number of teachers and increase the number of students. George's can run the math for you on bus runs. You've lost focus on the students.

- 5) I'm 18 years old, live in the district, good moral quality. Same as you guys but I can read. I document everything.
- 6) Comparison to whom? Thousands of hours.
- 7) Yes. Why won't you pick Frank Tamburri who had the most votes? Byron Arner – we haven't picked anybody. Gloria Bowman – This is the process we chose. Hal Resh – This is the flaw in the system. Stephen Holland – This is the process we chose. Richard Beltz – This can result in a change in policy. Wayne Wentz – Following procedure.

Stacey Duerst

- 1) Yes. Would hope the elementary center gets built.
- 2) Renovating 60 year old buildings you have no idea what could happen. You can allocate 12 million and may need 20 million. Do you cut corners or increase the cost at which point we could have had a new school.
- 3) I think the numbers are quite clear. I would hope my taxes don't go up. Debt service taxes would go down. Tax increase will exist with health care and pension costs.
- 4) Served on PTO for last 4 years – very successful. Be an intermediary between families and school.
- 5) I'm task-oriented, detail-oriented. I bring these qualities to the board.
- 6) Benefit of building versus renovations. We can increase programs and services for students. Unstable housing situations for students and students get transferred many times in a school year.
- 7) No.

Gary Eckley

- 1) Yes, would like to see things move ahead and look at data. See what is the best possible thing to do. Weigh all the decisions. Best bang for our buck. More feasible to fix up – we should fix up. Will we have energy savings with new?
- 2) Would like to see which is more economic. Step-by-step where savings will be. As a board member you are representing the voter – steward to their monies.
- 3) If the project goes through, what I see is when you get up to 20-21 your expenditures are more than your income. This is what I'm questioning. How will they pay for this? Where will the money come from?
- 4) Try to lookout for the children. What is best – technology, good teachers, keeping up with everything. Make it better for our children, better education.
- 5) Been in maintenance for 45 years, can help assess and look out for the people. Make sure money is being spent wisely. Make sure the children have a good place to learn.
- 6) I've done research on the computer. Studies that small schools are the best thing – more one-on-one for kids. I've worked in other schools that are similar to what you want to build and some of the teachers miss the small schools. Want to be a steward for the people.
- 7) School boards are here to represent the folks – listening to the people. I feel that a man that has 45 years as production manager and planner and has 1778 votes in the election. That tells a lot that the voters wanted that man. I would gladly do this but I would relinquish this job to Mr. Frank Tamburri.

Terry Long

- 1) Definitely, you want the district to move forward and more modern. How we do that is still up in the air.
- 2) A lot of it is cost, but what is best for the kids. We are all supposed to be here for the kids. Building the elementary center may be cheaper. Renovating may be costly. That is to be determined.

- 3) *Has not seen presentations.*
- 4) *School board as a whole effects everything with the district.*
- 5) *I was born and raised in Lehighton and employed with Lehighton for 32 years. A lot of insights that would be helpful.*
- 6) *I have not done any research.*
- 7) *No.*

Richard D. Beltz

- 1) *Current buildings, yes.*
- 2) *Would like to see the current buildings maintained.*
- 3) *We have a tax base that is not expanding. Barely any new construction. Will depend on the taxpayers for costs.*
- 4) *Not directly responsible for students.*
- 5) *Responsible for a \$30 million dollar operation at work. Understand costs and expenses.*
- 6) *I've been listening to my neighbors. Need to keep costs down. Good teachers will still be able to do their jobs.*
- 7) *Not really, just watching and listening and get to see both sides. I've seen the progression of things. I don't think we have the money to do the big expansions. Do we need an elementary building or just want?*

Laura Moyer

- 1) *The board has made a lot of progress in recent months. Safety of kids and education. A lot of controversy of costs, but need to move forward.*
- 2) *Pros and cons both ways. Excited about elementary center because of programs for kids, special needs, gifted, etc. I also think about safety in our buildings. Need to keep the kids in this district. Public school system needs to be strong.*
- 3) *I read the minutes on the website. The tax increase will affect everyone. Taxes did not increase in 2015. I've seen different numbers.*
- 4) *I have a strong STEM program and currently work at Lehigh University. Would like to get involved with the academic side. Vested interest with my own children.*
- 5) *I've been on boards. Current academic chair at work. Very thorough person. I know it is a big commitment.*
- 6) *I've read through meeting minutes, plans in place, reports. As much as is online, I've gone through.*
- 7) *No.*

Courtesy of the floor / Public Comment

1) Michael Lusch - Presentations

Is the ad hoc committee ready to present at the January 25th meeting?

Richard Beltz – *I'll have a short presentation. We've toured the schools. Still waiting on some information.*

Numbers and millage questions were brought up. As an educator, someone mentioned about schools being too big. Our high school has about 800 kids and I can name almost every student. Lehighton will not be damaged by an elementary center. One building does not matter, what matters is the relationship you have with the children.

You said the process was flawed. The process was up to the board. I did not hear about the flaws then. I stand up and ask questions because I have a kindergarten student and another child who

will be four. This directly impacts my children. If my child needs special services they would be shipped to another building. My taxes may be affected in a negative way – negative millage increase.

Gloria Bowman – *I don't think the system is flawed. This is what we chose to do and I think it was fair.*

Hal Resh – *We researched what other school boards have done. There is no set format. There should be a guideline when something like this occurs. School code needs to be updated.*

2) David Bradley - Debt

Obviously the board is troubled. As a board these burdens should be tossed back to the people. Usually goes back to a referendum. You've borrowed \$55 million dollars with \$30 million in interest without asking the people. Act 34 talks about 3.3 mils increase for elementary center. Debt service passed onto children. Tax burden has been reduced because people are leaving area—overtaxed. Reduced Walmart by 8%, Pencor by 17% and Northside Heights by 41% but you keep adding on to the district. Need to make good, sound financial decisions. You do not recognize the burden on the people. The last board ran as much of this debt "freight train" through the district. Start making decision for the children. Doesn't make sense at all.

Adjournment

Next scheduled meeting is the regular meeting on Monday, January 25, 2016, at 7:00 p.m.

MOTION by Mr. Wentz, SECONDED by Mrs. Dwyer to adjourn the meeting at 7:52 p.m.

VOTE: YES - 8 NO - ABSENT - ABSTENTIONS -

Respectfully submitted



**Brian Feick
Board Secretary**

(Minutes of January 20, 2016 include Pages 1 through 6.)