

PARK RIDGE BOARD OF EDUCATION

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

Date: May 6, 2024
Public Started: 7:00 P.M.
Public Ended: 7:39 P.M.

High School Little Theater

I. Roll Call

R. Fisher J. Pierotti D. Bradler J. Bucco R. Browne N. Agoos A. Wagner
X X X X X A X

Also Present:
R. Gamper R. Wright A. Zartarian

II. Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board President, Amara Wagner.

III. Open Public Meetings Statement was read by Board President, Amara Wagner.

This is to advise the general public and to instruct that it be recorded in the minutes that in compliance with Chapter 231 of the Public Laws of 1975, entitled the "Open Public Meetings Act," the Park Ridge Board of Education on April 29, 2024, caused to be posted at the Office of the Board of Education located at 85 Pascack Road, Park Ridge, New Jersey and on April 29, 2024, sent to The Record, 1 Garret Mountain Plaza, P.O. Box 471, Woodland Park, NJ 07424-0471 and The Ridgewood News, 41 Oak Street, Ridgewood, NJ 07450-3805 and on April 29, 2024,, delivered to the Office of the Municipal Clerk of Park Ridge and the Park Ridge Public Library a meeting notice setting forth the time, date and location of this meeting.

IV. 2024/2025 Budget Hearing

Dr. Gamper and Mr. Wright gave a PowerPoint presentation on the 2024/25 Budget.

Dr. Gamper began by stating that the budget was well balanced. There were no cuts to programs, and a few were added. He mentioned that budgets are becoming harder to put together with the CAP restrictions.

Dr. Gamper reviewed the district mission statements and then moved on to the enrollment history saying that elementary enrollment remained about the same. In discussing the budget, Dr. Gamper reviewed the steps involved in preparing it. Dr. Gamper then gave examples of some budget highlights for 2024-25 reiterating that it maintains all present programs and services for

students. He spoke about full day Kindergarten noting that it was in its 12th year and spoke about the fact that the program has a major influence on the budget and classroom availability. He then mentioned the curriculum and how it is updated to be in accordance with NJDOE guidelines. Dr. Gamper also discussed the use of Technology in the district including the 1:1 laptop program and the current fiber optic cabling project. Dr. Gamper then spoke about the High School Internship program with PVRHS and mentioned how popular it was. He then spoke about the Owl House program and the projections for 2024/2025. Dr. Gamper then reviewed various programs and projects which the 2024/25 Budget will support. He also reviewed past projects which have been completed. Dr. Gamper concluded by thanking the PTO's for the contributions they make throughout the years to financially supplement and support the schools.

Mr. Wright then gave a financial review of the Budget. He spoke about the use of funds being similar to prior years with Capital taking up a smaller percentage of the 2024/25 budget as compared to the previous year. This was due to the Locker room project being funded in the prior year. Mr. Wright then reviewed the main areas where the budget has increased/decreased over the prior year. The first area discussed was Capital Projects. Mr. Wright explained that since the projects are funded by Capital Reserve, they do not impact taxes. The next largest area of change was with salaries which increased \$612K. Salaries were up due to a new elementary Guidance Counselor and contractual pay increases. The benefits increase of \$345K was then discussed. Mr. Wright indicated that there were several reasons for the increase which included increased pension costs, rising premium costs and less contributions being received from staff due to new program offerings. Mr. Wright then addressed the increases in Special Education and why it was up \$353K. He pointed to a rise in the out of district placements. He also indicated that the increase would have been much higher but the district had used all its available grant funding as an offset to that cost. Another major reason for the increase was transportation costs, which were up over \$100K. Mr. Wright stated that this was a result of changes in the market and that even though the district participates in a variety of a jointures, prices were still going up. He commented that the post COVID era has seen a rise in related services for students. He concluded by saying that the district was trying to control these costs by offering an in-house Therapeutic program. Operations for the district, which represent the maintenance of the buildings and grounds, remained flat. Mr. Wright explained that there were no large-scale in-house projects in the works. Finally, Mr. Wright explained that both administration and school supplies remained relatively flat for 2024/25.

Mr. Wright then discussed the tax levy and the CAP. He explained that there were certain waivers which would allow the Board to increase the budget past 2% and still be considered under CAP. He then pointed out that the district had chosen to take the Health Benefits waiver. He explained that the need to do this was being driven largely by inflation and a 7% hike in benefit costs. Doing this resulted in a tax levy increase of 2.67% . Mr. Wright also pointed out that the Board would be using additional surplus this year to further offset anticipated increases. Mr. Wright then recapped the budget explaining that it would result in an increase of \$305/year to the average homeowner of a house assessed at \$475,000. He qualified this by saying that the amount is somewhat inflated due to a sharp drop in Assessed Valuations in town of \$24 million.

Public comment - None

V. FINANCE RESOLUTIONS

SM 050624

Be it resolved, upon the recommendation of the Superintendent of Schools in conjunction with the Business Administrator/Board Secretary that the following actions be taken:

- F1. The Park Ridge Board of Education approves the following budget:

RESOLUTION TO APPROVE THE 2024/25 SCHOOL YEAR BUDGET

BE IT RESOLVED that the Park Ridge Board of Education, County of Bergen, approves the 2024/25 school year budget as follows:

Current General Expense (Funds 11)	\$36,865,801
Capital Outlay (Fund 12)	\$ 1,018,901
TOTAL GENERAL FUND	\$37,884,702
Special Revenue (Fund 20)	\$ 489,452
Debt Service (Fund 40)	\$ 778,883
TOTAL EXPENDITURES/APPROPRIATIONS	\$ 39,153,037
and	

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the GENERAL FUND tax levy \$33,891,861 is approved to support Current General Expense and \$514,061 to support Debt Service, for the 2024/25 school year budget; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the 2024/25 budget includes automatic adjustments in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-39€, in the amount of \$221,479 as an adjustment for health care costs.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the 2024-25 budget includes a Capital Reserve Withdrawal of \$1,000,000 for various capital projects included in the district's Long Range Facility Plan.

Mr. Fisher stated that he opposed the 2024/25 Budget. He began by reading a clarification statement on his previously reported cost per pupil analysis. In his statement Mr. Fisher said he used the total Appropriations found in the User-Friendly Budget (UFB) and divided that figure by the enrollment found in district enrollment reports. The reason there was a difference in the cost per pupil between UFB and his calculations was because the UFB does not include several expenditure lines. He feels that the UFB should include these numbers. He then pointed out that the Park Ridge Tax burden is high. Park Ridge was in the top 20% of Bergen County towns, the top 10% of northern Bergen County towns and the 2nd highest in the Pascack Valley. He did retract his previous statement where he stated that Park Ridge was the 2nd highest in Northern Bergen County saying that he properly confused it with Park Ridge having the 2nd worst schools. He continued by saying that the taxes are a burden on the citizens. He commented that it was costing more to send students to elementary school than it costs to go to Rutgers. He then pointed out that no teacher had a PHD and that none of the staff could take a job at Rutgers. He repeated his statement about the district's high cost per pupil and how families will bear the burden of this. He stated that the

staff has inflated salaries, and many should have been terminated years ago. Employment is not based on competence. Education jobs should not be a safety net. He also commented that standards in the schools continue to drop. He mentioned his conversation with Mr. Wright about public debt. He noted that Emerson chose to bond for their capital project. Although they share an identical tax base, Emerson is much more taxpayer friendly. He felt that the district should work on lowering taxes before engaging in construction. He also felt that the Board is closed to public participation. He stated that the Union was able to achieve increases above CAP and that one of the current Board members who was part of that process, is part of the same State Union. He went on to add that there is no public viewership of the tax and spending agenda. He felt that the public needs to be more aware. He also did not feel the Board is making wise or prudent financial decisions and pointed to the use of surplus to abate tax increases. He felt the Board needs to find a way to control spending.

He concluded by thanking Mr. Wright and Dr. Gamper saying he was grateful for the work they put into the budget. He felt it was time to stop over taxing citizens and moved to table the budget vote. There was no second.

M: JB S: JP
RF JP DB JB RB NA AW
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VII. Adjournment – 7:39 pm

M: DB S: JP
RF JP DB JB RB NA AW
Y Y Y Y Y A Y

Robert Wright
Business Administrator/Board Secretary