

# **Milford Board of Education Committee of the Whole Meeting May 24, 2010**

## **Board members present:**

David Amendola  
Tracy Casey  
Suzanne DiBiase  
Josip Jukic  
Diane Kruger-Carroll  
Jack O'Connell  
Greg Oliver  
Jay Tranquilli  
Mark Stapleton  
Robert White

## **Administration present:**

Michael Cummings  
Philip Russell  
Susan Kelleher  
Wendy Kopazna

## **I. CALL TO ORDER**

The Milford Board of Education held a Committee of the Whole meeting on Monday, May 24, 2010, at Milford City Hall. Chairman Stapleton called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. with the reciting of the Pledge of Allegiance immediately following.

## **II. PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Chairman Stapleton read the public comment statement.

Robbie Silver – Plan 4 provides the educational element Milford needs. He encouraged the board and the community to come together. She is very supportive of the plan.

Lori Blair – 80 Hickory Avenue – She is part of the Save Our Schools group. She hoped to show the board a PowerPoint. However, the board declined. She further said the reconfiguration is not the best way to save 2.2M.

Name Unknown – Mr. Cummings came up with a fantastic program. He believes it is good for the future. He then quoted test scores which were close to Greenwich's.

Nathan Blair – He is a member of Save Our Schools (SOS). SOS is asking the board not to vote. He asked that the board take the time to review the proposal from the committee. He told the board the difference between Plan 3 and Plan 4 allows the administration to cut nine more teachers. Is that worth closing a school? He asked the board to look more closely at redistricting and find more costs savings.

Jen O'Connell – 283 First Avenue – She is a parent and an educator. She quoted "Kathy Craig" who states the best grade configuration is small schools. She asked the board to look at New Milford Public Schools data. They reconfigured to PK-3/4-6 and their CMT scores plummeted.

Jeff Kobson -140 Platt Lane – He urged the board not to adopt Plan 4. He would rather the board consider redistricting the town. He asked what would happen if the board needed to close another school. There are many reasons it is not a good idea. Class lists are supposed to be considered by teachers. Collaborative time will not be easy for teachers. He does not agree with busing children all over town. There will be lost time on the bus. This plan is being recommended by an administrator coming off of two failed superintendents. He can not support the plan.

Andrea Dostal – 16 Devonshire Road – She said there are 500 houses on the market in Milford. It will cost the town money if those houses go into foreclosure. Please reconsider and not vote on Plan 4.

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Chris Saley – He thanked Mr. Cummings for his responsiveness to all of his questions. He then distributed a document to the board that contained a line item budget of what he believed could save 1.6M. He then explained the document. He asked the board to review it.

Unknown – She is a member of SOS. She told the board the group has met and came up with ways to save money. Some included fundraising \$15,000 per school, pay to play, recycling, energy savings, turning off computers and more. She asked the board to not vote.

Lisa Biagioni – 73 Sentinel Hill Road – She is supportive of the plan. She encouraged the board to vote for the plan and move forward. RTI is in process.

Jim Santa Barbara – 31 Hitching Post – He believes the board should take a harder look at the dollars to save Simon Lake School. He gave some ways to regain the 2.2M dollar cut. Some were: realign the administrators, put teachers in the classrooms, streamline department heads and coordinators, and eliminate non-mandated testing, curriculum work savings and more. He urges the board not to vote.

Jennifer Frederico – 14 Breakneck Lane – She is confused why the board would entertain Public Comment time. She does not believe the board is going to listen to the public. She asked the board to refrain from voting on this plan for a year.

Tom Bierne – 35 Bayshore Drive – He listed ideas to fill the 2.2M gap in the budget. Some were: putting the group medical insurance out to bid. He asked the board to be creative and not close Simon Lake School.

Joseph Dellamonica Jr. – 83 Lindy Street – He urged the board to think about Plan 3. Plan 4 will create a transportation nightmare. He also mentioned to the board the election time is right around the corner.

Jason Schuld – Burnt Plains Road – He said the Mayor supported the plan. He told the board he will hold all members responsible if his children's grades go down. He urged the board to hire CAFE for an annual cost of \$22,000. This should not be done by one person.

Abbie Wiederhold – 58 McDermott Street – She asked the board to hold off on voting for the plan. There has not been enough time to think through everything. A board member even quoted at a previous meeting, "policy changes should be on hold until a new superintendent is hired". Well, this is change. Why not wait until a superintendent is hired. What if he or she does not like the plan?

Barbara Genovese – Ms. Genovese is a former alderwoman and a board of education member. She said it is not in the best interest of the children to spend \$750,000 on Spanish to be taught at the middle school level.

Joanne Poffenberger – 50 Green Street – She has three children that attend Meadowside. She has a great deal of respect for Mr. Cummings. He is trying to do the best for the kids while being the least disruptive. Research can be found to support either side of the scenario. The conclusion is neither grade span is perfect. She further said she supports Plan 4.

Pat Mulhall – 49 Crescent Street – She is a parent and an educator. She is in favor of Plan 4. She is glad to know that her son will be traveling with his classmates. She also feels that the new configuration will increase the CMT scores.

Charles Parker – 75 Bryan Hill Road - Mr. Parker feels that the board should wait until a new superintendent is hired. He asked the board to have consideration for the families. There has not been enough time to consider a drastic change to the school system. He encouraged the board to wait.

Tim Chaucer – 105 Hawley Avenue – Mr. Chaucer is the co-founder of Schools Against Mega Schools. He does not think it's about the money. He told the board they could find the money. Neighborhood schools are being closed. The plan to go to one high school is next. The people of the town pay enough taxes. The kids should be able to attend the neighborhood school.

Clarissa Bellamy – Sunnyside Court – Her daughter is at Orange Avenue. She fears parent involvement may decrease. Research has shown that failure to deal with transition can cause long term effects.

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Bob Nunno – 9 Elm Street – He said that elementary and middle schools are already overcrowded. He does not think this is the right thing to do. He asked the board if they have examined “art on a cart.” He then asked the board to listen to the constituents.

Tom Acri – 88 Lenox Avenue – He has a child in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade at Simon Lake. His daughter will be beginning kindergarten. He would like the board to rethink option 3 and redistrict the entire city. He also thinks the decision is being made too quickly.

Tracy Berry – 300 Meadowside Road – She moved out of the Simon Lake district and chose to keep her son there. He has done wonderfully there. He will have a hard time transitioning to the new school. Please rethink the decision to close Simon Lake.

Kathy Gage – Read a prepared statement (on file). In the statement, she asked the board to do what the parents are asking of them. Take time to know all of the facts. Home sales will plummet, especially in Devon. Do the research. Don’t use children as guinea pigs.

Mike Rodriguez – Cynthia Drive – He said the reconfiguration will not maintain lower class sizes. He does not understand how this plan will benefit anyone. K2/35 affects neighborhood property values. It increases the buses needed to transport children to and from school. The added buses create more exhaust to environment.

Jaimie McCarvill – Birch Place – Ms. McCarvill urged the board to listen to the expert. She said that Mr. Cummings grew up in Milford. He has worked in the school system for 24 years. He is an educator. She is comfortable with his decision.

Barbara Lambert – 8 Breakneck Lane – She began by thanking Mr. Cummings and the board. She asked why such a big decision would be voted on so quickly. When the board chose to redistrict the Mathewson kindergarteners, it took them a year to make the decision. Only 100 kids were being moved. There is no bonding, no ownership. She asked the board to table the decision until they can sit with parents. She asked the board to wait until the new superintendent was hired. Let her/him make the decision. This is being done too fast.

Sharon Hamilton – 198 Forest Road – Ms. Hamilton feels the plan would put extreme stress on children and parents. She is very concerned about the rush. She also said that Mr. Cummings has done a great job as a civic servant. She wants her daughter to thrive, not dive.

Cecil Massey – Morris Lane – She told the board that she sat with Mr. Cummings for two hours discussing this topic. While she feels he has given this a tremendous effort, there has not been enough time. She does not feel the YMCA has a clue as to what they will do next year. She asked the board to wait until the new superintendent is hired.

Name Unknown – Governor’s Way – He too thinks Mr. Cummings has done a lot of work. However, the plan is very disruptive to families with more than one child. More time is needed to implement something of this nature.

Mike Taylor – 340 Wolf Harbor Road – He has tried to keep an open mind. The more he hears, he is not sure. The board needs to look at taking into consideration, the entire district. He has heard ideas. He asked the board to slow down.

Chairman Stapleton asked for a recess at 8:50 p.m.

The chairman called the meeting back into order at 9:10 p.m.

Chairman Stapleton read the attached prepared statement.

He then asked for a motion to approve the budget.

Mr. White made a motion to approve the 2010-11 Board of Education Operations Budget in the amount of \$83,229,005.00, which reflects the closing of Simon Lake Elementary School and sub sequential reconfiguration of eight elementary schools in to a K2/35 format. Mr. Amendola seconded the motion.

Mrs. Casey wanted the public to know the comment made by the chair was not made on behalf of the board. She further stated she has requested that the Board of Aldermen meet with the Board of Education to discuss the budget shortfall. That meeting did not take place. However, the last she heard, the Chairman of the Board of Aldermen was looking into restoring \$400,000 to the budget. She also requested to have a Special Meeting to give the board the opportunity to discuss with administration what the options were. She

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knows that there were many other options. The public has the right to know those options. She then said the board needs more time. The board has not done their due diligence. That being said, she can not vote for the plan at this time.

Mrs. Kruger-Carroll said that she is not ready to support Plan 4 at this time. She still has questions. She is not comfortable with making such a big decision without looking at the whole K-12 system. She is confident the work that Mr. Cummings has put into this plan is worthy of some real consideration. However, the board has not done their due diligence. She further said that she is elementary schools is not where the problem lies. The elementary students are leaving 5<sup>th</sup> grade with a tool belt and some those tools are never being used again. Is there a way to save some money and improve the schools from a different view point? Work on a plan that focuses on the weakest point and gain both sound financial goals and financial success. We hear from the middle school parents about their concerns and then possibly lose those children to private schools at the high school level. She then told the board that she cannot support this plan this time. She asked the board to table the vote.

Mr. O'Connell began by saying the Barbara Lambert could give the board a tutorial on political action committees. He said you need to question politicians. Milford is not doing well enough for the kids in Milford. He encouraged the public to go to legislature and fight for the money to improve our schools. He then told the public that the board attempted to meet with the teachers union to discuss the budget shortfall. The union members will receive a 5% raise next year. If the teachers gave up some of their increase, Simon Lake could stay open. Mr. Saley gave suggestions as to saving money. All recommendations should be looked at. He concluded by recommending that a legal costs be researched. He believes there is "wiggle" room in the budget.

Mr. O'Connell made a motion to table the original motion. Mrs. Tracy seconded. After a 6-4 vote, the motion failed.  
No votes = Amendola, DiBiase, Jukic, Oliver, Stapleton, White

Mr. White said he would like to continue the discussion now. Time is of the essence. The board is together, in public, so he encouraged the discussion.

Mr. O'Connell proposed going back to the union and asking them to forgo some of their raises. He recommended that a certified letter be sent and release the names to the press. The problem can be equitably solved if they would just enter into a discussion.

Mrs. Casey does not feel like the board has had the opportunity to go line by line in the budget books to make further cuts. She is open to a long term plan with the Board of Aldermen involved. She is not supportive of a quick plan to get the board where they need to be for one year. She recanted the process that took place when the Mathewson kindergarten transition occurred. She does not feel to do this in just two months time without committees in place is too hasty. She then asked Mr. Cummings if he was prepared to discuss the details tonight.

Mr. Cummings said yes. He then said that a survey will be sent to the parent community regarding transportation and start times.

Mrs. Casey asked about start times and was told that the buses have been contracted. The start times would be determined after a parent survey was conducted.

Mr. Oliver then stated that the kindergarten was a recommendation made by administration because of an overcrowding situation. The budget did not drive that plan.

Mrs. Casey said that she agreed. However, no company would implement a plan with such change without fully looking into everything.

Mrs. Kruger-Carroll then said that what she is seeing is other districts restructuring to help improve the middle stages. She again, said that the problem lies in the middle schools. West Haven may defer to K-4/5-6 to improve that. Therefore, she would not support the plan.

Mr. Cummings said that much more time would be needed to look at that reconfiguration.

Mr. Amendola asked Mr. Cummings what would happen if the board did not vote.

Mr. Cummings told the board that according to the teacher's contract, staffing assignments are to be done by June 1, 2010. Plan 2 would need to be implemented which would raise classes to the maximum.

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Mrs. Casey requested that the board to hold a meeting to discuss a long term plan.

Mr. Amendola asked Mr. Cummings what would happen if the board were to be in violation of the teacher's union contract. He was told they would have to look into something like that.

Mr. O'Connell said that contractual class sizes could fix the 2.2M shortfall.

Mr. Oliver said that he does not think that maximum class sizes would benefit the educational needs of the students. He further said that he supports the plan and trusts Mr. Cummings.

By a roll call vote of 6-4, the motion passed.

No votes = Casey, Kruger-Carroll, O'Connell, Tranquilli

### III. BOARD COMMENT:

None.

### IV. ADJOURNMENT

Chairman Stapleton asked for a motion to adjourn.

Mr. White made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Amendola seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

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Robert White  
Corresponding Secretary

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Pam Griffin  
Recording Secretary