

May 9, 2022 Special Mtg.

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MAYOR AND COUNCIL
HELD AT THE
MUNICIPAL COURT /COUNCIL CHAMBERS
10 LAWLOR DRIVE, OAKLAND, NEW JERSEY
MONDAY MAY 9, 2022

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER: By Mayor Schwager at 6:30 pm.

ROLL CALL: Mayor Schwager called the meeting to order and the Clerk called the roll. Present: Mayor Schwager, Councilmembers Kulmala, Pignatelli, Saliani, Slasinski. Absent: Councilman Talamini. Also Present: Lisa M. Duncan, Borough Clerk; Richard Kunze, Borough Administrator; David Young, CFO.

SALUTE TO THE FLAG:

MOMENT OF SILENCE:

MEETING ANNOUNCEMENT: Mayor Schwager announced that this meeting is being held in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Law, duly announced, advertised and posted in the Municipal Building. The meeting will adjourn at 10:00 pm unless a majority of the Councilmembers that are present vote to extend the time.

EXCUSE ABSENCE:

On motion of Councilman Kulmala, seconded by Councilman Saliani, the absence of Councilman Talamini be excused.

ROLL CALL: All yeas, Councilmembers Kulmala, Pignatelli, Saliani, Slasinski.

Mayor Schwager advised that Councilman Talamini must recuse himself because his wife works for the Board of Education.

Mayor Schwager advised that tonight's meeting is a special meeting to talk about the school budget that was defeated.

OPENED FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:

On motion of Councilman Saliani, seconded by Councilman Kulmala, this portion of the meeting be opened for public comment.

ROLL CALL: All yeas, Councilmembers Kulmala, Pignatelli, Saliani, Slasinski.

Deb Mutterer, 101 Walnut Street, voted no on the budget because of the reassessment and the fact that the high school budget increased by 3.6%. She stated residents are getting hammered and don't need any more increases. She stated the school board has enough money.

Michael Ellston, 78 Manito Ave, asked the Mayor and Council to consider what the town voted for.

Kris Pawelko, 73 Manito Ave, stated that the constituents voted no on the budget and the school has money.

CLOSED FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:

On motion of Councilman Kulmala, seconded by Councilman Saliani, this portion of the meeting be closed to public comment.

ROLL CALL: All yeas, Councilmembers Kulmala, Pignatelli, Saliani, Slasinski.

Mayor Schwager advised that when a school budget is defeated, it goes to the Mayor and Council to review. She advised that on May 2nd, she attended a meeting with the School Business Administrator, Superintendent and one Board member. Also in attendance for the Borough was Councilman Pignatelli, Councilman Saliani and Borough Administrator Richard Kunze. Mayor Schwager instructed that the Mayor and Council have to listen to the voters. The School Board advised there are contractual expenses that must be met. Councilman Saliani explained that there are programs that are mandated. He had questioned the student/teacher ratio as well as the administrative/teacher ratio. He stated that the School Board went through the problems they are facing. Mayor Schwager stated there was discussion about class size and how they are top heavy in administration. The School Board asked the Mayor and Council not to cut services. Mayor Schwager explained that there was money in the budget for a full-time media specialist at Valley. Currently that position is part-time.

Councilman Saliani explained that the original budget was a 1.23% increase from the previous year. Mr. Kunze explained that the School Board talks about the increase over their year which runs July to June. The Borough talks about a calendar year so the numbers are not the same. This calendar year increase would be 1.72%. Mr. Kunze stated that no one wanted to see the school programs hurt so the focus was on the two positions that are currently part-time. The Board of Education put money in the budget to make those positions full-time. They advised they could continue them part-time for another year. Mr. Kunze explained that the cost to make the two positions full-time is \$ 116,916. The thought was that removing that amount from the budget was a good solution to provide tax relief and not affect what the schools are doing. The result for the 2022 calendar year is an overall reduction of \$ 66 on the average assessed home.

Councilman Pignatelli stated the School Board brought up areas they are going to try to save money. He stated they went out to bid for transportation to try to save money. They are looking at keeping special needs in-house because the cost of transferring special needs out of district is \$ 20,000 per student. Councilman Kulmala met with the Superintendent and Business Administrator last Friday. It was an eye opening discussion. Councilman Kulmala stated that the schools are a main reason why people want to move to Oakland. The schools could function by keeping those two positions part-time. Mayor Schwager stated if they keep those positions part-time, they don't have to pay the benefits. Mayor Schwager stated that the budget has to be cut because the residents voted it down. She stated she wishes more cuts could be made because there are a lot of supervisors. Councilman Pignatelli stated that the Council did take this seriously. He was surprised at the State mandated programs and the cost of those programs. Councilman Saliani had asked about grants and was told that the Board of Education has already filed for grants and is using State aid.

A member of the audience stated they don't want to take money away from special needs but asked about raises for teachers. Mayor Schwager responded they have contractual obligations. The

member of the audience stated that they should just not pay the teachers any raises. Mayor Schwager responded that would be considered a breach of contract and there could be a lawsuit. She did state there are a lot of supervisory positions. Councilman Saliani thinks this sends a message to the Board of Education that they need to justify their costs. Mayor Schwager

reiterated that the cut of almost \$ 117,000 will not affect the students. Councilman Pignatelli advised this cut brings the increase from 1.23% to less than 1%. He stated if the teachers are not paid their raises as per their contract, there could be a lawsuit and the attorney fees could cost more than the the cost of the raises. Mayor Schwager told the Board of Education to look at future contracts to try to save costs. Councilman Kulmala stated there is some breakage due to retirements. Mayor Schwager stated they did put extra money in for the rising cost of gasoline and transportation. Councilman Kulmala stated that Oakland is one of only a few towns that still votes for the school budget.

A member of the audience asked why the Council doesn't review the school budget every year. Deb Mutterer stated this cut that is being made is disappointing. Mayor Schwager stated that even if the Council decided to cut more money from the budget, the Board of Education can appeal the decision to the State and the amount could be reinstated.

MOTION:

On motion of Councilman Saliani, seconded by Councilman Pignatelli, the amount of \$ 116,916 be cut from the school budget.

ROLL CALL: All yeas, Councilmembers Kulmala, Pignatelli, Saliani, Slasinski.

Councilman Slasinski advised he talked to Dr. Coffaro. He thanked everyone involved in this decision. He is happy that no essential services are being cut. Councilman Saliani advised that the Board of Education was open and transparent and a very collaborative discussion was held. Councilman Kulmala stated that Oakland was one of the bottom five in Bergen County for school tax increase so the Board of Education is being fiscally conservative. Councilman Saliani asked residents to please keep voting. Mayor Schwager stated that the reduction will save an additional \$ 21.52 on the average assessed home.

Kris Pawelko stated that the Mayor and Council are going against the voters. Deb Mutterer spoke of the cost of teachers. Kris Pawelko questioned if the Mayor and Council asked the Board of Ed to look at the supervisors. Mayor Schwager responded she told the Board of Ed they are extremely top heavy. She was told they have to have supervisors for specialized items. Councilman Pignatelli responded that it costs a lot of money for State mandates. The State ties the Borough's hands as well as the Board of Education's with these mandates. Councilman Kulmala explained that sometimes the State pulls back on State Aid and doesn't give it to the schools.

MEETING ADJOURNED:

On motion of Councilman Kulmala, seconded by Councilman Pignatelli, the meeting be adjourned at 7:08 pm.

ROLL CALL: All yeas, Councilmembers Kulmala, Pignatelli, Saliani, Slasinski, Talamini, Van Eck.

Lisa M. Duncan

Linda H. Schwager

Lisa M. Duncan, Borough Clerk
May 25, 2022

Mayor Linda H. Schwager

Date Approved

May 9, 2022 Special Mtg.