

**EAST STROUDSBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

SPECIAL SCHOOLBOARD MEETING

February 13, 2012

J. T Lambert Intermediate – Auditorium

7:00 p.m.

Minutes

- I. President, William Searfoss called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. and led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance. Secretary, Patricia Rosado called the roll.
- II. **Members present were:** Ronald Bradley, Robert Cooke, Eileen Featherman, Douglas Freeman, Robert Gress, Roy Horton, Marjorie James, Michael Meachem and William Searfoss.
- III. **School personnel present:** Diana Allison, Richard Allison, A. Andrews, Susan Andrews, Eleni Angelopoulos, Michelle Arnold, Pat Bader, David A. Baker, Anne Banks, Maria Bartolotta, Hillam Beal, Ann Marie Berardi, Mary Bianchi, Camille Bigio, Jaclyn Bigio, Elizabeth Blundetto, Meghan Borer, Karleigh Bowen, Michael Brenner, Deborah Burns, Holly Burns, John Burrus, Rebecca Butler, Anthony Calderone, Rick Carty, Maria Casciotta, Lois Casella, Ann Catrillo, Mike Catrillo, Patricia Chestnut, Dawn Chighizola, Roseria Cirnigliaro, Stephanie Clark, Daniel Cloward, Lucianna Coke, Mary Conklin, Jyl Connor, Iveliz Cruz, Sue Czahor, Robin Daning, Theresa DeHart, Casandra S. Dietz, Debra A. DiGennaro, Patti Jo Dolph, Amanda Doran, Irene Duggins, Heather Dunn, Larry Dymond, Elizabeth English, Dave Evans, Hollie Falzone, Karen Fattorusso, Matthew Flicker, Pete Fodness, Laura Follis, Charlene Fonash, Nicole Freed, Kellie Fuehrer, Cathy Gallagher, Geoffrey Gambill, Lori Giaquinto, Jill Greenwood, Joyce Gregor, Heather Gress, Marjory Gullstrand, Erin Gurry, Kevin Hatcher, Susan Hegarty, Vicki Heitzman, Gina Hennings, Karin Hogan, Kim Holcomb, Douglas Houser, JoAnn Johnson, Gwen Jones, Sally Jones, Jeremy Judd, Ashley Kean, Alisa Keiper, Amanda Kerdzaliev, William Kesselring, Arlene Kirkwood, Ann Marie Kizer, Francesca Koch-Rutkowski, Michael Korb, Barry Krammes, Nicole Kresge, James Krumanocker, David Krupski, Robert LaBar, Sharon Laverdure, Philip Lazowski, Jason Leap, Donna Lehmann-Deming, Donna Leight, Jacilyn Leonard, Joyce Leonard, Olivia Lesoine, Tina Libby, Dave Libecap, Lorrie Litts, Irene C. Livingston, Elhannan Lloyd Keller, Craig Long, Kristin Lord, Melinda Luhrs, Tina Lupinacci, Ann Marie Lynn, David Majeski, Jennifer Marmo, Stephanie Marshall, Zachary Martin, Carol Masi, Martina Matheis, Theresa McGovern, Bonnie McHugh, Stephanie McIlvaine, Loriann Meyers, Patricia Milenkowic, Barbara Miller, Karen C. Miller, Lorette Miller Scott Moskowitz, Kathleen Muniz, Paul Naser, Anna Nicoletta, Kathy Nigro, Letitia O'Malley, Carrie Panepinto, Jo Parkes, Deanne Patrick, Lauren Pellington, Brenda Perini, Rose Perkins, Bernice Pettinato, Krystal Pino, Amy Polmounter, Mary Predmore, Annelle Prefontaine, Julia Prusik, Steven Randall, Amanda Reiche, Devon Remsnyder, Barbara Rescigno, John Rosado, Patricia Rosado, Dawn Roses, Jessica Ruhl, Jamie Ryno, Jasmine Sandy, Sharon Sanita, Vicki Sayer, Paul H. Schmid, Diane M. Schmidt, Dawn Schnatter, Janice Schneider, Catherine Schoeherr, Angelic Segond, Caren Senior, Jim Shearouse, Amanda Signorello Michelle Siptroth, Rose Skidmore, Julie Slack, Tom Smith, Jaymie Sorrentino, Fabiola Souffrant, Jennifer Spece, Susan Steakin, Gloria Stinger, Susan Streisel, Christine Suarez, Matthew Suarez, Deanna Sutton, Snoann Tobin, Billie Trauschke, Oliver Trojak, Tracy Tumminello, Catherine Tynemouth, Christina Ullo, Susan VanWhy, Catherine VanWinkle, Jacqueline Visser, Maggie Vitale, Timothy Wagner, Robin Walker, Jessica Waller-Wade, Jessica Walters, Laura Weeks, Corinne Weseloh, Matthew Whitney, Thomas J. Williams, Susan Wilson, Robert Wilson, Linda Wisneiski, Laura Witcraft, Susan Wolff, Nadia Worobij, Sally Yorke-Viney, Lisa Zabriskie, Mary Zajac, Steve Zall, Louise Zavertnik and Jan Zelinski. Also present was: Thomas Dirvonas, Solicitor.
- IV. **Community members present:** Brian Ace, Jennifer Amori, Scott Amori, George Andrews, George Angelopoulos, Casey Anne Athey, Annette Atkinson, James Baird, Joan Barnes, Kerry Barnes, Kirk Barnes, Bridget F. Basso, Phil Basso, Eileen Bauthill, Emma Bedref Matthews, Sean Berger, Samir Bhagwat, Alisa T. Bloom, Darlene Booth, Eric W. Booth, Danica Boyd, Chris Brooks, Elenore Brooks, Alath Brown, Beverly Brown, Karla Brown, Lloyd Brown, James Brunkard, B. Byl, Tara Caplette, Rob Casella, Javier Castelanos, Kevin Christman, Tory Colando, Betty Cook, Bob Corbett, Gail Corey, Sharon E. Maly Cramer, Karen Cruz, Alexis Curtis, Caitlyn Curtis, John A. Curtis, Jr., Kerrie Curtis, David Czahor, Sonya Datesman, Jonathan Davis, Devin Day, Katerina Deena, Rosemary Deene, Alycen DeGresenzi, David DeGresenzi, Suzanne Dello Russo, Thomas Dello Russo, Sarah DePaolo, Thomas DePaolo, Frances DeSantis, Donna M.

Dinkle, Ralph E. Dinkle, Robert Dochterman, Gene Driscoll, Joyce Ellis, Neville Ellis, Tamara Ellis, Terri Evans, Robin Farris, Ginger Farro, Robert T. Fenlon, Donald Ferr, Milagros Figueroa, David Flint, Devan Forell, Jeanine Fuller, Jave Gagliardo, Carol Geight, Lucy Giarrizzo, Vinny Giarrizzo, Kier Gibson, Toni-Ann Gilmore, Gloria L. Giraldo, Guillermo Giraldo, Emebert Gire Jr., Sharone Glasco, Astrid Goicoechea, Tianna Green, Patricia J. Griffin, Hal Harrison, Al Hatami, Renee Hatami, Lawrence Henry, Michael Hess, Nicholas Hess, Tammy Hess, John Hollister, Lauren Holmwood, Joany C. Inofuala, Janet James, Reginald James, Jason Jensen, Lauren Jones-Rabbitt, Melissa Jorgenson, Kyle Jorstad, Susan Jorstad, Adam Junus, Keith Karkut, Kate Keglovits, Farong Khawan, Anna Khawayu, Ricardo Kims, Kate Kirkwood, Liz Kirkwood Crystal Klinger, Tanya Klu, Kenneth Koberlein, Diane Krupski, Andrea Lee, Shyannah Lee, Michael Leonard Sr., Ashley Leskowsky, Katherine Lichtenstein, Kenisha Linton, Tracy Littlewood, Enrique Loedez, Noreen Lowris, Ernest J. Mahar, Louis Mancuso, Mitchell K. Marcus, Maudrid Martin, Samantha Mauro, Michael McGovern, Jennifer McMahon, Annie Miller, Cynthia Miller, Luke Morgenroth, Robert Morgenroth, Yelary Moronta, Don Motts, Asa Moyer, Daniel Mullyor, Anthony N. Nase, David Nicoletta, Charles O'Malley, Francisca Omala, Pauola Omala, Danielle Onrtz, Stephen Ortiz, Fikriye Ozgun, Serkan Ozgun, Ruth P., Iona Parker, Prapti Patel, Al Penson, Michael Perez, Michal Peterson, T'Andra Pilier, Ann Marie Pohlman, Bob Pohlman, Jeff Poloway, Angie Ramos, Orlando Ramos, Kao Rily, Theresa Rooth, William Rooth, Paolo Roppe, Denance Roublin, Gerard Rozea, Nancy Rubilotta, John Rutkowsky Jr., Denise Santiago, Sapphire Serrano, Paul Shemansky, Gabrielle Shimp, Mike Silvoy, Jenny Sing, Dan Siptroth, Robert Smith, Alexandra Soto, Edward Soto, Natalie Soto, Deborah Stann, Jennifer Stillmayer, Karen Strobel, Kyle Strobel, Krystal Suhok, Gregory Suhok, Gary Summers, Judy Summers, William Suriano, Margie Taipe, Wayne Thomas, Jason Trump, Jenn Trump, Giovanni Vacanti, John Vacanti, Marc Vazquez, Oliver Vivey, Yvonne Volcy, Mike Warrington, Kelly Weaver, Jack Weaver Heagele, Jayden Weaver Heagele, Robert Weseloh, Joel Williams, Oscar Woerlein, Linda Yeager, Judith Young and Denise Zall.

Media Present: Christina Tatu – Pocono Record
Fane Shupp – TV 13

- V. Mr. Searfoss stated that there is a very full auditorium. He stated that he would like to ask everybody to make sure they sign in as a guest this evening so we have a record of their presence and attendance. Mr. Searfoss stated that when the public members go to the microphone, for the record, if they would speak, to make sure that they state their name clearly and where they are from during public participation, it would be appreciated by our secretary.

VI. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

ACTION BY THE BOARD:

Motion was made by Robert Cooke to approve this agenda for February 13, 2012 (pages 1-2), (with addition of Superintendent's Report). Motion was seconded by Douglas Freeman and passed 8-1. Michael Meachem voted no.

Mr. Searfoss stated that the agenda needs to be amended to add a Superintendent's Report related to the possible closing of schools which was accidentally omitted due to a clerical error. He stated that the report will be between the announcements and Public Participation. Mr. Meachem stated that he has a question. He stated that the first thing that he wants to bring up concerning this agenda is the fact that school closings are included in it. Mr. Meachem stated that as he understood, first and foremost, as it relates to our budgetary constraints and as it relates to the Board policies, then in order for us to be in compliance with the mandates set out by PDE if we consider and for this evening. He stated that he is talking about that he takes offense to the words "school closings" because that evokes a visceral response associated with that is considered job closings and loss of education. Mr. Meachem stated that he, as one of three of the Board members, according to our school policy asked that this meeting be called so that we could consider the consolidation of the underutilized facilities. He stated that at no time did he ever suggest that we should absolutely eliminate any positions and in the past five days, he has read all sorts of things in the press that have suggested that at least, he, as a part of this Board at any point in time suggested that any person lose their job. Mr. Meachem stated that he asked and was supported by three of the members of the calling of this special meeting so that we could consider whether or not this district would evaluate underutilized facilities for the purposes of consolidating them. He stated that he would like to know for one, in fact, he was one of the people who wrote a letter asking for this meeting to be called, why in fact was he not involved in the construction of this agenda. Mr. Meachem stated for all intensive purposes, the surprises on this agenda are never ending. He stated that now he finds out that from it we are actually adding a Superintendent's Report today when in fact, first and foremost, this meeting, when he made the first inquiry, was actually scheduled for the 27th where we would never have been able to fulfill the PDE requirement. Mr. Meachem stated that second, he finds out that it was scheduled for the 20th and when he asked why it was being held on the 20th and who had made that decision, he never got a clear answer. Mr. Meachem stated let's go back to the fact that he wants the public to know considerations that were supposed to him and he, as a School Board member, is standing on the outside looking in just like everybody else. He stated that at this point, the construction of this entire agenda, he takes exception to and he would like to know who put it together. Mr.

Meachem stated that he thinks the public should know that as well. Mr. Searfoss asked if there were any other comments on the agenda.

VII. ANNOUNCEMENT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION -- An executive session was held this evening at 6:30 p.m. before this meeting for the purpose of discussing litigation.

VIII. ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE BOARD

A. Mr. Meachem stated as follows and submitted his statement for inclusion as part of the official record:

Meachem February 13, 2012 Opening Statement

Presented by: Michael Meachem, School Board Director for inclusion as a part of the official record.

First we need to adjust the paradigm for the purposes of this evenings meeting, this Special Meeting that was called at the request of three Board Members. Mrs. Marjorie James, Mr. Ronald Bradley and myself. Mrs. James and Mr. Bradley are present therefore I would never think of offering announcements on their behalf, so I will restrict my remarks to my sentiments.

First the term "Closing Schools" evokes a visceral response:

- LOSS OF JOBS
- REDUCTION OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY

CONSOLIDATION OF UNDER UTILIZED FACILITIES — in my proposal

- This can happen Without The One Loss Of Any Job At Any Level
- It can in some instances improve educational quality

WHAT IS REQUIRED?

- Different type of thinking
- Willingness to embrace changes in
 - Our thinking
 - The way we do business
 - The way we operate our buildings

What if we are unable to reach compromise?

- Self-survival realizations can be implemented that will affect
 - Education
 - Valuation
 - Homes
 - The Community
 - Our educational standards
 - Jobs
 - Today we consider seeking savings by reducing under-utilized buildings
 - Without the plan we can look at the loss of hundreds of jobs
 - The least Senior workers
 - The unnecessary Administrators

Today as one of the people who called for this Special Meeting to consider the proposal to consolidate our buildings. I say to this can be done without the loss of one single job. I have never asked to consider the loss of any jobs in any form for any reason. **PDE states that in order to consider reduction in building usage there is a strict timeline and the need for Public Hearings.** If that is not a considered today I see our community becoming further divided and that will not be good for education or our educational employees.

B. Mrs. James stated as follows:

I do solemnly swear that I will support, obey and defend the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of this Commonwealth and that I will discharge the duties of my office with fidelity. This is the oath of office that we took before we assumed the office of School Director for the East Stroudsburg School District. We promise to discharge our duties with fidelity. What does that mean? It means that is our duty as a Director to act with loyalty, faithfulness and trustworthiness in the best interest of our constituents. When comparing our school district to Pleasant Valley, Pocono Mountain and Stroudsburg School Districts, our District had the second

largest tax increase from the year 2001 to 2010. Last year Monroe County averaged over 100 foreclosures a month. People are walking away from their homes and many are turning to the city to live. People just can't continue to live under the burden of having their taxes raised every year. I heard the condition of our nation's economy referred to as the great recession. People at the national level, State level and county level are looking at ways to tighten their belt and we as a school district, must do the same. I taught at J.M. Hill and Smithfield Elementary for many years and I cherish the friendships of teachers, administrators and parents that I formed along the way. I was proud to work with them side by side. I was proud to work in this district but as a loyal, faithful and trustworthy School Director, I find that operating the school at half the enrollment capacity to be financially irresponsible. It's time to stop kicking the can down the road. We have a \$10 million dollar deficit. I challenge each and every one of you here tonight to study the budget of our district and then come up with suggestions as to how we can cut back our expenditures without raising the taxes and it goes without saying that we don't want to take away the quality of education of our children. The closing of a school that is filled to half enrollment capacity is one way to save our district money and reduce our deficit but we must find more ways. We, as elected School Board officials who took our oath, our promise to the people of the East Stroudsburg Area School District seriously, must do everything within our power to avoid burdening the citizens of this school district with higher taxes during these difficult economic times. Thank you.

C. Mr. Bradley stated as follows:

I, too, was recently elected to the School Board and as follow up to what was stated by Mrs. James and Mr. Meachem and I take my responsibility very seriously. I was elected by the people and as far as conserving money, I represent the people as well as the teachers and more importantly, our students and the quality of education in our schools. Under those terms, I feel it is my duty along with the rest of us sitting on the Board, to minimize and maximize the quality of education, at the same time retaining our teachers and our staff which is what I feel we can do and since we brought this information to the forefront, myself, Mrs. James and Mr. Meachem as well as others have been looking into saving every position and improving the quality of our children's education while closing one, possibly two of the schools and making us more efficient, more qualified and more credible in terms of students and their education. Thank you.

IX. SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

- A. Mrs. Laverdure stated, "Why are we here tonight?" She stated that they are all probably saying that's pretty obvious. Mrs. Laverdure stated that Administration was given the charge to look at everything and one of the things we had to look at, obviously, was declining enrollment and how that declining enrollment can narrow the deficit in the budget. She stated that we started looking at that just to give you some figures, it seems that the summer of 2009-2010 is really when we started to see the rapid decline. Mrs. Laverdure stated that there may have been some leading up to that time but it's when we see the rapid decline where we lost approximately 454 students. She stated that then it continued and in 2010-2011, we lost another 170 students, now mind you, those of us who have been in the district a long time remember we used to gain 500 students in the summer and we have new teacher groups of 50-60 sitting at orientation time, so this was quite a shock at that particular point, for us to start feeling that and seeing that. Mrs. Laverdure stated that from 2011-2012 to date, we are looking at our Average Daily Membership or attendance (ADM). She stated that right now we have a total of 7,534 students in a district, if you go back to the last building that we built which was Middle Smithfield, and you go back to the PlanCon documents. Mrs. Laverdure stated that those are the documents that we turned into the State to get permission to build. She stated that we were slated to be about 10,000 students this year, so it kind of gives you some historical background as to how we've gotten to where we are right now. Mrs. Laverdure stated that you have to know that in the State of Pennsylvania, there are checks and balances that are put in place and that's the whole planning process to build a school and that is the PlanCon that some folks may talk about or speak to along the line. She stated that is PDE's way of protecting the taxpayer, where district don't build extravagant schools, or don't build schools bigger than what projected growth is going to be and that is what gets us here tonight. She stated that we are bigger than what we need to be right now and we have empty elementary classrooms. Mrs. Laverdure stated that it is affecting our elementary schools more so than if it is affecting our middle schools and high schools because we see the elementary where individuals we are losing, where people aren't coming the way they did. She stated that we are losing some at the middle schools and high schools and we are down but not like we are at the elementary level because we are not growing the way we were projected to grow. Mrs. Laverdure stated that the Board's direction was to look at school closing/consolidation of one or two schools and see how we can do that. She stated that if we look at enrollment capacity, we have projected enrollment and she thinks you can see it at Bushkill, ESE, J. M. Hill, Middle Smithfield, Resica and Smithfield. She stated that what we need to remember is when we started the building process, every one of our elementary buildings actually, through PDE, we originally had half day kindergarten; we now have full-day kindergarten, so that has impacted the capacity to some extent. She stated so you might have thought, in your building you may need to fill this many seats or that many seats, well that is part of it as well as special education classrooms that are located at many of the elementary

buildings as well as middle and high school. Mrs. Laverdure stated from administrations' point of view, the conclusion of our initial analysis, because tonight is the decision as to whether to move forward with a hearing or not, not necessarily the decision of what's going to happen but whether to move forward on the hearing. She stated that a lot of information was given to the Board members but not as specific as it would have to be once we jump into or make that decision one way or the other. Mrs. Laverdure stated that the conclusion of initial analysis is it would be extremely difficult to close two buildings. She stated that the elementary buildings would be maxed out and the way that the territorial lines/boundary lines would be very difficult to do that with. Mrs. Laverdure stated that two scenarios have been developed tonight to look at and if you choose to do both, then you could use both scenarios as your final outcome as well, the closing of Smithfield or the closing of J.M. Hill Elementary. She stated that we are not recommending, at any time, to liquidate these buildings. Mrs. Laverdure stated that she thinks the community is not stable enough right now and she does not think we know what direction our community is going to go in. She stated that there are a lot of homes here to be sold and there are a lot of areas to live so she thinks it would be irresponsible if we would look into liquidation and administration is not recommending that. Mrs. Laverdure asked Mrs. Bader to go into Scenario 1.

- B. Mrs. Bader stated when administration decided to see how we were going to proceed with this process, we started with transportation. She stated that we said if we are going to do this, let's see if we can do it the most efficient and cost effective way. Mrs. Bader stated that we will begin looking at the natural splitting of neighborhoods based on current bus runs so that we didn't have to make the children sit on longer than normal buses or have some sort of crazy ride. She stated that yielded both Scenario 1 and Scenario 2. Mrs. Bader stated that of the 337 children that are currently located at Smithfield, the natural division of those children would be to send 57 to J.M. Hill Elementary, 40 of them to East Stroudsburg Elementary and 240 to Middle Smithfield Elementary. She stated that the personnel savings that the division would yield because Middle Smithfield is at such a low capacity and is projected to go lower next year, there would be personnel savings of \$1.572 million. Mrs. Bader stated that we would move 10 teachers to Middle Smithfield and there would also be an additional 1.5 of professional staff that would move to some place in the district. She stated that we could split some specialists up. Mrs. Bader stated that the transfer of students to J.M. Hill and ESE would not cause us to have any need for additional headcounts in those buildings because of the fifth grade being larger than some of the lower grades are and they'd moving on to the intermediate schools. She stated that we would not need any additional enrollment at the J.M. Hill or East Stroudsburg Elementary. Mrs. Bader stated that means that 14 professional staff and 13.5 support staff would be furloughed. She stated that as far as operating savings reduction, we have an approximate amount of \$50,000 because if you think about custodial and maintenance services, if you want to think about it as supplies directly associated with children and adults or maintenance of the building, so extermination services vs. floor cleaner. Mrs. Bader stated that since administration is not convinced that this low enrollment is not a permanent phenomenon, the homes could be filled again. She stated that we want to maintain those building and therefore, expenses like extermination services or other services would be maintained. She stated that perhaps at a lower level if this process moves forward, we would have to do a more in depth analysis of exactly all of those services but we do believe that the supplies part of custodial and maintenance could be reflected in the \$50,600. Mrs. Bader stated that in Scenario 2 the natural progression based on transportation is to move 131 children to East Stroudsburg Elementary and 257 to Smithfield. She stated that both of those buildings will be at their maximum student capacity. Mrs. Bader stated that we would move 4 professionals to East Stroudsburg Elementary, 10 professionals to Smithfield and specialists would be needed in other areas. She stated that means 20 professionals would move and we would eliminate 6 professionals and 13.5 support. Mrs. Bader stated that those personnel savings would be approximately \$1.012 million and again, for the same reasons as in Scenario 1, the operating savings would be estimated at \$50,000. She stated that on slide 7 there are some additional considerations; again, operating expense reductions need further analysis if we move forward in this process. Mrs. Bader stated that we would also have to determine if we are moving our professionals, we would have to do an estimate on what the costs would be as well as if we had to secure the unoccupied building and move some of the assets, the kitchen supplies, desks and chairs, unless we were to leave them behind. She stated that she can assure you that we have made some initial inquiries to other facilities like the colleges. Mrs. Bader stated that no one, at this point, is interested in leasing the buildings but if they were, the expenses would probably remain the same but what we would add to the budget would be a revenue item, a lease amount, which would narrow the gap or operating deficit. She stated that the debt service payments would remain the same on all of our buildings even if the buildings were unoccupied and there is a point on number five of this slide. Mrs. Bader stated that there is a component called "rental subsidy" which is somewhat of a misnomer, but basically it is a State subsidy that gives us back some of our debt service payments. She stated that we currently have a \$1.6 million "rental" State subsidy for all of the building debt. Mrs. Bader stated that when buildings become unoccupied for educational purposes, you do lose a portion of that. She stated that at this point, we have not been able to ascertain that amount from PDE. Mrs. Bader stated that as you can see, the difference between our debt service of \$18 million per year and the rental subsidy of \$1.6 million, the amount, it most likely would be some insignificant amount. Mrs. Bader stated that for J.M. Hill, the last time it had any new debt besides the projects that are scheduled for next summer, was in 1994. She stated that Smithfield has

more recent debt which was concluded in 2006. Mrs. Bader stated that in addition, another item we would have to consider for future analysis is how administration is handled at those buildings. She stated that if we could further split, as we're doing now, we split principals and vice principals between Smithfield and JTL, if we could do something like that as we staff these buildings. Mrs. Bader stated that we will have to do an analysis of that.

- C. Mrs. Laverdure stated that in the presentation, the timeline was up first. She stated that we felt that with the timeline, we are in compliance with the State.
- D. Mr. Searfoss stated at this time, we are going to go to public participation.
- E. Mr. Meachem stated if he may, because there were a number of things that were said. He stated that he thinks he would like to respond to some of these because he thinks that the public is at a disadvantage because they're being asked to speak before they know what is going on. Mr. Meachem stated that the first thing he wants to point out is that on February 1st when he contacted the Superintendent, he asked her, after having read in the paper about the considered closings of the schools, where are we in relation to that timeline and what happened is the Superintendent shared with him a lot of verbiage but he did not hear anything concrete. He stated that later on that day, he got a timeline that week in his Board Briefs, a document that is dated 2/3/12, where he got an in depth explanation on PlanCon and he can tell you that right now he is absolutely stupefied because looking at the presentation that the Superintendent just offered, he would like to go back to slide 3 please. Mr. Meachem stated that on the enrollment capacity that was listed on the PlanCon document that he received for, let's just take Bushkill because it's at the top of the list, under PlanCon under the full time equivalency of what he was led to understand was the capacity of that building, that number is 675, here we are two weeks later, it shrunk to 594 and this is a surprise to him. Mr. Meachem stated that at this point, he can't understand and he has asked this simple question. He asked what are the maximum capacities on each of our buildings because that is where we can begin to determine where we stand relative to our usage. Mr. Meachem stated that it seems as though the maximum capacity seems to depend on who you are speaking to on any given day and to him that's a problem. Mrs. Laverdure stated or the number of special education classrooms you may share within a building. Mr. Meachem stated, again, he wants you to understand something. He stated that a child with a special need is still a child. Mrs. Laverdure stated, "Correct." Mr. Meachem stated you can only have a certain number of children within a building. He stated that he is asking you whether they are regular education or special education, what is the maximum number of people on there. Mr. Meachem stated on the 3rd slide, Bushkill Elementary was 675 but for the purpose of this evening's presentation it was 594. He stated that he does not know about you, but he is confused.
- F. Mr. Gress stated the only thing he wants to comment on is that after going through six elementaries in the past week, is what you do with each classroom. He stated that the basement usage at J.M. Hill, the basement usage of Smithfield, the train behind Middle Smithfield, the 5th grade that was put up here from J.M. Hill and band on carts and reading, special education in the hallways in closets and yes, everyone forgets that PlanCon is a formula based on the funding formula to get reimbursement from the State, on what you can throw in classrooms. If you look at some of the classrooms that we get reimbursements, eight or ten cents on the dollar, that reimbursement revenue and those classrooms cannot hold full classrooms. Mr. Gress stated that if you try to put 22 kids in those classrooms which are a classroom, you cannot do it. He stated that if you put 6 special education children and so on it would depend on what you are doing. Mr. Gress stated that the numbers here then if you went around to some of the schools and saw what they are being used for such as there are music rooms, there are special education rooms, there are a host of rooms used for reading specialists and so on that are in the classrooms, so the rooms in the schools are operating efficiently. Mr. Gress stated that if you pack the schools back to the way it was 10 years ago, where everyone was tripping over, education was going down, if you look at the progress of school improvements of our elementary schools and possibly looking at closing two of the better performing schools in the district which is kind of funny. He stated that going back to the classroom usage, it is one or the other, the other thing that is not mentioned, if we do close a school, the ripple effect that will cause other schools to have problems. Mr. Gress stated that if we do move kids or teachers to other schools and we do combine some classes where there might be only 16 or 18 kids in a class and bump them up and if staff is lost, the least senior teacher will be let go, or support staff or custodians, so it is a ripple effect throughout the entire school district. Mr. Gress stated that it is not just J.M. Hill, Smithfield or whoever but it is a big picture. He stated that it's something that needs to be looked at. Mr. Gress stated that he is concerned about the timeline that we have and he is going to bring that up later. He stated that he does not think we have the timeline in here with our budget as far as being able to do it properly. Mr. Gress stated that he is going to bring that up at another time. He stated that as far as us adopting the budget, he sees it there and as he mentioned to them earlier this week or last week, one of the problems is having a hearing in June on closing the school. Mr. Gress stated that the final determination or when we are presenting the preliminary final budget for approval will be sometime in the end of May, so here in our budget we are going to have that we need to close the schools. He stated that we need to make a

determination on closing a school or not so he thinks the timetable is wrong. Mr. Gress stated that we need to look at some consolidation but definitely not closing the schools.

- G. Mr. Meachem stated if he may just have a moment and asked Oliver Trojak to launch the document that he gave him earlier. He stated for the purposes of discussion this evening, he put together a number of things and asked Oliver, if he could just display it for the moment. Mr. Searfoss stated, excuse me Mr. Meachem, we are not going to do that. Mr. Meachem stated, "Oh really". Mr. Searfoss stated that it is time for the public to participate. He stated if he wanted to be on the agenda, he should have contacted him or the Superintendent. Mr. Meachem stated that he contacted the Superintendent and he told her. Mr. Searfoss stated if the rest of the Board would like to see the PowerPoint, they can do that, but now we are going into public participation. Mr. Bradley stated he would like to see it. He stated, in the interim he could make a statement. Mr. Searfoss stated we have a PowerPoint and a presentation by our Superintendent. He stated that she has worked on this, she has worked on the timeline with our Solicitor and worked on it with her staff and before we start muddying the waters and going to anyone else's PowerPoint. Mr. Meachem stated he is not anyone else. He stated that he is an elected School Board Member. Mr. Searfoss stated, he has the floor and he is out of order. Mr. Searfoss stated that he thinks we need to deal with Mrs. Laverdure's presentation. He stated that he would like to go to public participation and he would like the public to comment on this and where the public is commenting, they are going to be coming up and giving us ideas, they are going to be asking very good questions, if we have too many things going on at one time, everything will get confusing, everything will get muddy and nothing will get accomplished. Mr. Searfoss stated that we pay Mrs. Laverdure to check numbers and he is going with her numbers. He stated that it is time to start public participation and he will just remind everyone that there is a time limit. Mr. Searfoss stated that if there is a group, that wants to make a point, please try and consolidate themselves in the same group because there are many people here tonight.

X. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- A. Mr. Gary Summers stated that he thought we were here tonight to vote on whether or not to have a public hearing. He stated that what he just heard is a presentation that tries to lay out why we should or should not close a school. Mr. Summers stated that therefore, he would suggest to us that if the Board approves that the presentation and the material that they would be totally irresponsible with what they've done tonight, because that is what we've done. Mr. Summers stated that we set the motion in place and we have precluded opportunities for the public. He stated, "You as Board Members have a responsibility to make a decision to explore options". Mr. Summers stated that is what the Board was voted to do. He stated that if we vote tonight not to explore options and not have a public hearing, we have abdicated our responsibilities and he contends that we ought to resign immediately from our positions because that is what they have elected us to do. Mr. Summers stated that the Administration, with somebody's permission, has submitted materials tonight that basically stacked the deck and forces a decision tonight on whether or not you want to close a school. He stated that is not the purpose of tonight's meeting. Mr. Summers stated "If you Board members, that we elected, vote no to a public hearing, you should resign immediately and abdicated your responsibilities". Mr. Summers stated, "You are a disgrace to your position. You've got a \$10 million dollar problem to solve and you need to explore all the options". He stated that we are to continue to set all the options on the table. Mr. Summers stated that if the Board continues to sit here tonight and not explore the options, they have abdicated their responsibility. He stated that we are a disgrace to the community, we are a disgrace to the taxpayers and how are we going to solve a \$10 million problem if we don't explore the options. Mr. Summers stated that the consequences are going to be severe and he feels sorry for all of us.
- B. Ms. Michael Peterson stated that she is very concerned about the fact, as she sees on this motion that we are going to limit ourselves to do research on which school or schools we are going to close. She stated that the purpose of tonight's meeting, according to PDE guidelines, should only be to vote on whether you want to have a public hearing, period. Ms. Peterson stated that the material that is being presented tonight should be presented at the public hearing, after 15 days' notice to the public. Ms. Peterson stated that we have not given proper notice to the public that we are going to be presenting this material tonight. She stated that the PDE guidelines are very clear and first we vote to have a public hearing. Ms. Peterson stated that it does not say vote to have a public hearing and choose what schools. She stated that we have to vote to have a public hearing and we have to give proper notice to the public so that they can come and hear the material and this meeting would not give proper notice to the public. Ms. Peterson stated so we need to seriously consider this motion and the wording because it is not following PDE guidelines.
- C. Ms. Tami Hess stated that she is the mother of a first grader at J.M. Hill and a taxpayer in the East Stroudsburg School District. She stated that what she wants to speak about is advocacy for small school model and why she

feels it is important. Ms. Hess stated that in a small school, our students feel a sense of belonging; the teachers and administrators know their students. She stated that violent outbursts are less likely because caring adults have a personal relationship with students. Ms. Hess stated that school violence will not be solved with metal detectors, security systems, but solved with positive caring one on one relationship with administrators, peers and parents. She stated that too many children in one small space make a big, big problem. Ms. Hess stated that small schools can create programs which adults have more meaningful contact with youth. She stated that most importantly, for females and disadvantage students. Ms. Hess stated that proper bridges are built between school and home when faculty know their children on a one on one basis which helps the parents who are the students first teachers to transfer skills, meet their children's need and in turn build a stronger community. Ms. Hess stated that our children are important and should not slip through the cracks by becoming just a number in the eyes of our district. She stated that she, for one, is not ready for bar coding of her child or any other child and send them off to a place where they are a number without a face or a name. Ms. Hess stated may we all survive and remember to put the kids first.

- D. Mr. Bob Pohlman stated that he would like to know who is really running our district. He stated that he thinks the way it works is that they are the taxpayers and they voted in the Board of Education and the Superintendent, the staff and administration works for the Board of Education. He stated that tonight, something was askew and what he means by that, an agenda that was thrown in and what it does is put the citizens of the East Stroudsburg School District at odds with each other. Mr. Pohlman stated that those that have children in the school district or the schools that the Superintendent mentioned tonight or like him, who is going to have a grandson in one of the schools in a year and a half, and we are putting them at odds already about the question as somebody said. He stated that we are not answering the question or focusing on the question. Mr. Pohlman stated that the question really is should we have a hearing and he believes that the first gentleman tried to raise that point with us. He stated that us guys and ladies voted two meetings ago, something about a vote for the preliminary budget and he heard from several of us saying that we had to do it now even though the budget was \$10 million out of skew and we were going to bring in caps or whatever we call this stuff, we had to do it. Mr. Pohlman stated yet, we don't need a budget until June, so all we're doing right here tonight should be giving us guys and ladies a vote for a hearing. He stated that he is saying just like the second lady got up and said what this is about. Mr. Pohlman stated that he thinks we should vote for a hearing just like we voted for a preliminary budget because we need that time to develop this stuff. He stated so vote for a hearing, get all the information, no matter how many meetings you need for this hearing from, use your research, from the Superintendent's information and think about it. Mr. Pohlman stated that it should not be a school closing issue right now. He stated that the issue is we are paying too many taxes. Mr. Pohlman stated that he sent a letter to the Board and gave them four or five or six steps based on my prior teaching position in different districts, what they did. He stated now there are so many things you can do. Mr. Pohlman stated that maybe we don't have to close a school but that looks like a good thing right now but we're not talking about that. He stated that we are talking about a hearing for that discussion, formally, over the next several months and then make a decision at that particular time.
- E. Ms. Kerrie Curtis stated that her daughter goes to J.M. Hill Elementary and is in kindergarten. She stated that our thing tonight has been that education will not suffer. Ms. Curtis stated how can education not suffer when she gets a phone call from her daughter's teacher just to tell her that she is doing well and that she is progressing. She stated that she is not going to get that if there are 40 kids in her class. Ms. Curtis stated that her daughter looks forward to learning to read because they get to go to Mrs. Arnold's office and read her a story when they do well. She stated that is not going to happen when there are 1,000 kids in a school. Ms. Curtis stated that we said we explored all options. She asked how much does the school district pay in field trips every year. Ms. Curtis asked how much does the school district pay towards sporting events. She asked does the football field need to be reseeded yearly, "no". Ms. Curtis asked do they need new uniforms every year, "no". She stated that we have not explored every option. Ms. Curtis stated please keep our small schools open. She stated that kids do better, there is less violence and they love learning.
- F. Ms. Karen Cruz stated that we come from a small school and she knows there are better options. She stated that she has been through budget cuts and she knows there are better ways of doing this besides cutting out schools. Ms. Cruz stated to look at all the options and we cannot cut out schools. She stated that our children depend on going to this school. Ms. Cruz stated that her daughter looks forward to receiving that phone call and going to the class together every day. She stated that this school means the world to them and the small classrooms. Ms. Cruz stated that she just can't stand the thought of this school closing. She stated that smaller schools are what really mean the world to them because it is our community. Ms. Cruz stated please do not do this to them. She stated look at this outcry. She stated this is East Stroudsburg. Ms. Cruz stated that this is how many people want the school district to remain what it is, how many people want these schools to remain the smaller schools, they're willing to help, every one, to come up with options to bring ideas to the table for you to help in any way and if he

has whatever PowerPoint it is, let him help also. Ms. Cruz stated, "Please just bring any more ideas that are out there and please just don't close our schools".

- G. Mrs. Lauren Jones-Rabbitt stated that she has to actually disagree a little bit with what this woman just said. She stated that we are voting tonight about a public hearing and the fact is that this isn't East Stroudsburg talking because you haven't given us enough time to organize and there will be even more people who come and say we do not want these schools to close. Ms. Jones-Rabbitt stated that fiscal foresight is really, really important. She stated that she lives on Analomink Street and has a beautiful Victorian that she is actually trying to sell and guess what, that parking lot that was put right in my backyard, you acquired a piece of property and then we demolished a house and then we paved it. Ms. Jones-Rabbitt stated that she wonders how much that cost. She stated that maybe it would be \$50,000 plus more that we spent on the extra stuff there. Ms. Jones-Rabbitt stated that when we take out local schools, we are taking out a value system and a value system that this country is losing and a lot of people are going to come out and fight for if we let them. She stated that is what they elected the Board to do; to hear them and to give them time. Ms. Jones-Rabbitt stated that they are important, their children are important and he is a home schooler and she wants this school there. She stated that she is a home schooler who has friends that teach in the school and she is friends with people who proudly send their children to this school. Ms. Jones-Rabbitt stated that J.M. Hill Elementary is a wonderful school as she is sure Smithfield Elementary is. She stated talk about trickle down, it's going to pull down and we're all going to feel it. Ms. Jones-Rabbitt asked what are we going to put in these buildings. She stated that they are not just going to sit there and not reopen when we get 20 more kids enrolled. Ms. Jones-Rabbitt stated that fiscal foresight is the problem here. She stated that building and not having fiscal foresight and she will come to more meetings. Ms. Jones-Rabbitt stated that is her vow. Mr. Meachem stated, if I may, I'd just like to share with you that you said in that parking lot expansion, you threw out a figure of \$50,000. Mrs. Jones-Rabbitt stated, I'm just guessing. Mr. Meachem stated, "No I'm going to tell you it was \$500,000". Mrs. Jones-Rabbitt said, exactly and thank you. She said I should have asked.
- H. Mr. Keith Karkut stated let's be real. He stated this is Friday's paper with 4 ½ pages of foreclosures. Mr. Karkut stated it is not stopping and our numbers are skewed. He stated that the key words here and, he said it two meetings ago, they are projected and calculated but not actual. Mr. Karkut stated that we are using projected and calculated numbers and not actual numbers. He stated that when he was a Board member, the Board approved for Middle Smithfield Elementary to be built for 1,000 student not 902 students, not special education or regular but for 1,000 students. Mr. Karkut stated that they also built East Stroudsburg Elementary for 1,000 not 858 students. He stated that we are here for the Board to approve a public hearing. Mr. Karkut stated approve the public hearing so you can hear the public and so you can look at the numbers more logically. He stated that we cannot look at all these numbers overnight and this is what we are asking the public to do on a rather hard to read slide. Mr. Karkut stated that he was sitting way in the back and he could not read it. He stated that he did not know the numbers were like that until he got closer. Mr. Karkut stated that the scariest is, again, that we keep blaming our financial problems on lack of state funding. He stated that is our excuse that we are not getting the proper funding from the State. He stated ladies and gentlemen, you and I know that the State is broke and Harrisburg is bankrupt. Mr. Karkut stated that we are not going to get money from Harrisburg, so now we have to look at options on what we can do to save money. He stated that he presented to the Board a couple of weeks ago a plan to not close schools but to merge schools and make it an alternative school. Mr. Karkut stated that there are so many here who want to keep the schools. He stated honestly if it is for the best of the students and everyone keeps saying small classes. Mr. Karkut stated that he does not want his child going to a larger school where there are larger sizes. He stated that the classes will not get any larger because the students are still there. Mr. Karkut stated that the schools were built for a 1,000 students for a school within a school. He stated that if you know those buildings they are different levels in different wings. Mr. Karkut stated that it is not a big school in a sense, so look beyond. He stated that this is what we would be able to learn as a public if we had a hearing to look at. Mr. Karkut stated please vote tonight to have a hearing because like Mr. Summers said if you don't you are irresponsible and you should resign.
- I. Ms. Arlene Kirkwood stated that the first thing she would like to do is thank us all for the job that we do because it is not easy and we are in trouble and there are problems. She stated that said, we have been open since 1760 and we have stood proud as a community. Ms. Kirkwood stated that we have gone through a civil war and two world wars. She stated that it was our parents and our community and our small schools that stood together and fought for the poor, fought for our students to have hot lunches, fought for our students to have vaccines and this did not come from large schools but came from small schools. Ms. Kirkwood stated that J. M. Hill Elementary and Smithfield Elementary stand proud in their accomplishment and want to be recognized. She stated know that they are not just dollars and bricks but they are a community with heart that stands proud and they do the best they can for our kids.

- J. Mr. Robert Smith stated that it seems to him that we did not explore all the options. He stated that he used to make \$3,000 a week working in construction before 911 hit. Mr. Smith stated that he became a disabled person because of it. He stated that he went from \$3,000 a week to \$1,500 a month. Mr. Smith stated that he had to cut his budget and he had to cut everything. Mr. Smith stated that the first thing he did not cut was his home. He stated that it seems that we are cutting their home. Mr. Smith stated that he does not think it is right. He stated it is a million dollars and we cannot find a million dollars in our budget to cut anywhere to save two very good schools that have the highest grades in the district. Mr. Smith stated that it does not make sense to him and he is a college grad/ex construction worker. He stated that it seems to him if he could find the budget cuts, we can find the budget cuts. Mr. Smith stated that one question he has and it seems to him that we already made our decision by the point we put on the slide and would have loved to have heard some options. Mr. Smith stated that the point is, if we do close a school and go to the lease option and then East Stroudsburg University (ESU) comes in and says they will lease the building, are we ever going to open the building again. He stated that ESU is not signing a year lease but they are signing a 10, 15 or 20 year lease. Mr. Smith asked is the school opening up again; maybe for his grandchildren if we are lucky and he doubts it. He stated that we are going on projections and we projected more students and got less. Mr. Smith asked what if this turns around next year. He stated that we are closing a school and bouncing students back and forth and then say we can afford to open it and then close it again. Mr. Smith said, "Admit there was a mistake, cut your budget, do something on your end, don't take it from us and our kids". He stated that they did not make the mistake but whoever made the projections made the mistake and he would love to hear that point and some options.
- K. Mr. Hal Harrison stated that he would like to bring it to us from a different prospective. He stated that if one of these school closes it will have a far reaching impact not only on the elementary level but follow through to middle school and then to the high school. Mr. Harrison stated that you have jewels in the community and he thinks we are hearing it from the community, from the people that put their stock and faith in electing us. He stated that we have a hard decision no doubt. Mr. Harrison stated that it is a hard decision to make and we are facing budget cuts in a time when we are in a recession despite what all the people in Washington want to make us believe that there is a turn around. He stated that at the local level we know there is no turn around. Mr. Harrison stated that people are being foreclosed on left and right. He stated if we close a school the value of the property in this community, "Guess what", it drops even more. Mr. Harrison stated that what happens as a result we will be looking to raise the millage rate event higher because as more people move out we will have to raise it in order to cover that ever widening budget gap. He stated there are alternatives and he wants to give us a synopsis from New York City. Mr. Harrison stated that they went through the same cycle and they shut down so many schools and when the economy came back it cost them ten times as much to build the classes that they sold to colleges for pennies. He stated that they kept taking over more and more space at a discounted rate. Mr. Harrison stated that the only thing he sees with the motion is that it is too limited. He stated expand it pass B and C and bring D and E once you hear from the people. Mr. Harrison stated there are a lot of smart people in this community that put their faith and their vote behind you to put you on the Board. He stated why don't we hear from them as a mass and come up with other alternatives besides closing the schools. Mr. Harrison said to talk with our teachers and parents and see who is willing to contribute into giving before we take the drastic measure of closing a school because like the gentlemen said once it is done, it is done. He stated that it is not going to come back. Mr. Harrison stated that our predecessor or successor will come to the community to say we need to raise 20 or 30 or 40 million dollars to build a new school because our predecessors made a mistake. He stated don't make that mistake and open your minds and hearts to the community and let us work out some other alternatives. Mr. Harrison stated it is not a lot of money in the total scheme of things especially when people keep getting their real estate property taxes raised and their primary services cut back on. He stated that he is asking us to vote to expand the motion to maybe into taking in two other options. Mr. Harrison stated that he does not know what they would be but he thinks if we listen to the people here, we will come up with two additional options besides closing one of the schools.
- L. Ms. Rosemary Deene stated that years ago, she moved up here from a very crowded school district. She stated that when she came, it was to Smithfield Elementary School. Ms. Deene stated that when her daughter came here into 4th grade, she had the math capacity of a 2nd grader. She stated that Smithfield Elementary brought her up to a 4th grade level within a matter of months. Ms. Deene asked what will happen to the kids if they fall behind if they go into a bigger school with crowded classrooms. She stated that her daughter is in J. M. Hill Elementary and has been identified by the State as gifted. Ms. Deene stated that if you put her at a crowded school and she does not get that attention, what chances will she have to be able to progress and fulfill her potential. She stated that her daughter has a lot of potential because the State said it. Ms. Deene stated that the State also said that the district gets money for every gifted student so where is that money going to.

M. Ms. Toni-Ann Gilmore stated that she came from the Bronx schools that were okay. She stated that she was in a resource room her entire life. Ms. Gilmore stated that she did not want that for her children so she took them out of New York and bought them to a beautiful community. She stated that they are here now and they had trouble in reading and are now at a 3rd grade reading level and a 2nd grade reading level with extra help. Ms. Gilmore stated that if they go into a bigger school she fears for them because they will be eaten up and spit out in a matter of days. She stated that her little one came home and said "Mommy I'm going on strike if they close the Smithfield School. I am not going to school anymore." Ms. Gilmore stated that this is from a 2nd grader, so hear from the children not just from the parents. She stated that our children do not want these schools closed and they do not want to go into schools that are big. Ms. Gilmore stated that her son said, "Mommy they are going to beat me up in the hallways" because this is what a friend that goes to East Stroudsburg Elementary told them so now they are afraid to go to a big school. She stated that we said that J. M. Hill and Smithfield have the top scores so why would we close our schools that have the top scores. Ms. Gilmore stated, "You keep them open and don't close them. She stated that this morning there was a lady whose car broke down and if she was in New York she would not have stopped. Ms. Gilmore stated that she saw the parent walking with her daughter to school and she turned around and picked them up and brought them to school, then she took her back to her home for her to call AAA. Ms. Gilmore asked if we think a big community school would have taken the time out of their busy schedule to do that for somebody. She stated not ever in a million years would they do that. Ms. Gilmore asked for the Board members names. Mr. Meachem gave her his name. Ms. Gilmore stated that she wants to hear what he has to say. Mr. Meachem stated that they made their decision. Ms. Gilmore stated that this is supposed to be an open hearing to discuss if we are going to close the schools. She asked why are you not voting on that tonight to have an open hearing because we were informed that we were not supposed to speak tonight. Mr. Meachem stated that he does not know who told her that but what is happening is that there are many things that are being discussed this evening. He stated that what is happening and in understanding the concept of the budget which is a large reaching concept. Mr. Meachem stated that at this point this Board has been given the budget in chunks. He stated that this evening the purpose of calling this meeting was to determine whether or not we were going to have hearings on closing the schools because if we don't have those hearings at this time, that is closed forever. Mr. Meachem stated that is not to be considered. He stated that what is happening here is that it is a concept that should be offered to everybody. Mr. Meachem stated that what he is saying to her, as a Board member, he posed the question because while he understands that there are very strong passions about the small schools in both Smithfield and J. M. Hill, he wants her to understand that there are other parts of our district that have equal concerns because the taxation rate is there. He stated that there are people that are looking to reassess their homes. Mr. Meachem stated that if in fact that happens in the areas where people are paying higher taxes what will happen is the discussion about those hearings will not happen at all next year and there won't be any money and the eventuality will be there. He stated that what he is saying is this evening, as a Board member, he should have been offered all of the options and what happened is he has learned things this evening just like she did and that is not something that should happen. Ms. Gilmore stated that as a taxpayer, she would like more information not just drips and drabs from the newspaper. Mr. Meachem stated that first of all he wants her to understand something, there were remarks that were made in the newspaper that no one consulted him as a Board member. Ms. Gilmore stated that as a taxpayer and parent she was never asked. She stated that as a taxpayer and a parent they were not supposed to be speaking tonight and she would have had her facts. Ms. Gilmore stated that this was supposed to be just to vote if we were going to have a public hearing tonight as stated in the newspaper. She stated that as a taxpayer and a parent this is not acceptable. Ms. Gilmore stated that she came out with all these numbers and if you are educated.... Mr. Meachem asked if her time could be extended. Mr. Searfoss said no because we have other people and we got to keep it moving. Mr. Searfoss stated that he would like to call everyone's attention to item XI which is to vote on having a public hearing. He stated that this is the actual motion being read this evening. Mr. Bradley said "The bottom line is. Can I say something"? Mr. Gress stated don't believe what you read in the paper because they can't get stuff straight if they try. He stated that the paper is wrong. Mr. Gress stated that he was passing by J.M. Hill and the newspaper reporter asked him if he wants to say something. He said no because they want a sound bite to get the reason for the meeting. Mr. Gress said the reason for the meeting is to determine if we should have a hearing within the next two months to discuss the closing of these two schools and that is the vote for tonight. He stated that if it is voted down then there is no hearing and there will be no discussion on closing these two buildings. Mr. Gress stated that at the last Board meeting and like he has told parents for the six years that he has been a Board member that they should come to every Board meeting and see who says what at what Board meeting because when the public shows up, there is a spin-on on what people say and how people say it. Mr. Gress stated that when he ran for School Board member he never said he was cutting taxes. He stated that he said he would look at things and some people say he is abdicating his responsibilities. Mr. Gress stated that he is doing what he was elected to do which is to provide the best education while looking for cuts and making sure all our children and schools are safe. He stated that they said some schools are not safe but all schools are safe and the staff is wonderful. Mr. Gress stated that tonight is to see if we should have a hearing. He stated that he says no because there are other places to cut and we will

look at that. Mr. Gress stated that there are other places, yes. He stated that what Mr. Meachem wanted tonight was out of nowhere to have a PowerPoint presentation which could happen at a budget meeting or some other place down the road. Mr. Gress stated not tonight because tonight's meeting strictly is on these two things that the Board voted on like should we look at having a hearing. He stated that actually three Board members called this meeting to say we want to have a special meeting to discuss this. Mr. Bradley stated and that is why we three Board members should be talking right now. He stated, "Excuse me Mr. Gress, I have heard enough". Mr. Gress stated to Mr. Searfoss that he has the floor. Mr. Bradley said he is going to speak because Mr. Gress spoke over him twice already. He stated that the bottom line is do the public want the public hearing on closing the schools. Mr. Searfoss said "Mr. Bradley". Mr. Bradley said "We represent you. You elected us here. Do you as the public want us to hold a public meeting on whether or not we want to close the schools or find other alternative means". Mr. Gress said he has the floor and to shut Mr. Bradley's microphone. Mr. Searfoss asked for Mr. Bradley's microphone to be shut off. Mr. Bradley said "Stand up and let your voices be heard". Mr. Gress stated going back to public comment, at no time anywhere was the public not going to be allowed to speak tonight. He stated that he does not know who told them that. Mr. Gress stated that we will be here until whenever, to listen to people speak. He stated that there is a three minute ruling and it is been in effect for years so if everyone wants to get up to talk for three minutes, he has no problem with it. Mr. Gress stated for people to say that they will not be able to get up and say something at this meeting that is wrong but there is a three minute rule and that is what it has been for years and it is a Board policy. He stated that if we give two minutes to one and then another, next thing you know it is a lot more.

- N. Mr. Anthony Nase stated that he is coming at this from a different prospective. He stated that he has known Mrs. Laverdure for a long time and some others, too. Mr. Nase stated that he has no children and he went to Smithfield. He stated that back in 2006, he drove by and to this day he is still trying to figure out what the hell we did to his school. Mr. Nase stated that we poured all this money into this school in projections; he gets it. He stated that we are talking about \$1,000,000 band-aid for a \$10,000,000 problem. Mr. Nase stated that he is not understanding this. He stated that we are sitting up there fighting like the kids do in elementary school and he is kind of embarrassed right now. Mr. Nase stated that he came here expecting, not this. He stated that he would be the first to admit that this is the first meeting he has been to in a long time and closing a school gets the passion going. Mr. Nase stated that he does not envy us not one iota. He stated that every year when he gets his tax bill, he shudders because he knows it is going up. Mr. Nase stated that he does not understand about mills but he lives in a little place on a dead-end road so his property cannot get much lower than it is. He stated that what we are doing here for lack of a better word, is damn pathetic. Mr. Nase stated that there is one feller hollering. He stated, "Mr. Meachem I respect you but there are rules that you got to follow". Mr. Nase stated that we want the best education for our kids. He stated that everybody wants that for their children. Mr. Nase stated that he has a niece at Temple University who went to Smithfield and he is proud of her. He stated that it breaks his heart to think that we would take Smithfield away from more kids. Mr. Nase stated two of our best schools in our district and that is where we want to cut and he doesn't understand it. He stated that we say bigger schools will get the same education but that is "hogwash". Mr. Nase stated that it has been proven for years that smaller classes equal smarter kids and that is just a simple fact. He stated that he does not know if an alternative is pay to play. Mr. Nase stated that he played for Ed Christian and he could not afford it but the district bought his stuff. He stated that he knows there will be parents that cannot afford to put their kids in uniforms or to buy pads if we go pay to play but these are alternatives that we need to look at. Mr. Nase stated that closing schools will save a couple of pennies now but it will hurt in the long run. He stated that we say we don't want to liquidate the buildings so we will sit on an empty building.
- O. Mr. John Vacanti stated, "You two in the middle are living in a bubble because you have no idea what we are going through to pay our bills every month". He stated you want to talk about taxes well the guy next door to him could pay his mortgage but could not pay his taxes. Mr. Vacanti stated that his neighbor picked up and left and just left his house. He stated that the projected enrollment should be even lower because people are leaving their house and just renting. Mr. Vacanti stated that he will just go rent so why should he have to pay taxes because his kids will go to the same school. He stated that 4 ½ years ago, he paid \$250,000 for his house. Mr. Vacanti stated that the house next door to him sold for \$125,000 so why have the taxes not gone down. He stated that we are forcing them to assess our houses and once that happens, where are we going to look for money now. Mr. Vacanti stated that we are killing them, that they are going to run out of here so fast that we are going to see their dust. He stated that this is ridiculous and we sit here shaking our heads but there are other ways to cut. Mr. Vacanti stated that he cut cable from his house because he cannot afford to pay it. He stated that we keep raising his taxes every year so what is he supposed to do. Mr. Vacanti stated if you want to talk about crime, you are forcing people to rob and do things just to pay for their taxes. He stated that we have to take things into consideration and we want to talk about 1.5 million dollars but we have a 10 million dollar problem. Mr. Vacanti stated that what, we are going to close a school and then what keep raising taxes. He stated that everyday his

children come home with solicitation for donation for this or that and he is tired of it. Mr. Vacanti stated get your act together because he pays the bills in his house. He stated that we have to fix our budget and do something because it is getting ridiculous.

- P. Mr. Scott Amori stated that he and his wife have two wonderful kids at Smithfield Elementary Schools. He stated that he knows many of the Board members and many of them know his parents. Mr. Amori stated that many of them on this Board know that, believe it or not, he was a product of Smithfield Elementary School. He stated that what is unusual he thinks in this day and age is that he sits back here and looks and sees many people who actually went to Smithfield and East Stroudsburg and came all the way through and stayed in this area. Mr. Amori stated that he is going to give us a pass on things that happened ten years ago. He stated that in his practice, most of his week anymore is spent on doing bankruptcy work because he is an attorney. Mr. Amori stated that ten years ago it was not that way. He stated that ten years ago, he did real estate closings and business incorporations. Mr. Amori stated that he did a lot of things that he would call fun law. He stated "Guess what, that has changed". Mr. Amori stated that he would go under the assumption of the district and for today the economist assumption is, how does an economist open a can a soup but first we assume we have a can opener. He stated that he would go on that assumption that these numbers are correct and they are projections of income and enrollment; however, the enrollment is not coming back. Mr. Amori stated that the buildings were built by prior Boards and we are stuck with them and stuck with debt on things that we probably don't need any longer. He stated, however, the bulk of your budget is not fiscally planned. Mr. Amori said, "Close the two schools". He stated that we only have attributed for 20% of our budget problems on our numbers. Mr. Amori stated now what do you do and it has been said eloquently a few other times. He stated frankly what do we do. Mr. Amori stated we will have empty buildings and they still have to have heat and lights. He stated we just want to rent them out but what do we want to rent them out to. Mr. Amori stated we have J. M. Hill that is plopped in the middle of a medium residential zone and Smithfield is plopped in the middle of what he believes is an R1 zone. He asked, "Do you think that the Township or the Borough is going to allow a different use in those buildings, frankly, No. Mr. Amori stated that he would be extraordinarily surprised especially when we have the Township and Borough residents that are going to be furious that we closed their schools. He stated so we will have empty white elephants. Mr. Amori stated that we better go back and think about additional options in dealing with budget problems. He stated that he knows we didn't create it but this is not going to get it done by closing down some bricks and mortars.
- Q. Mr. Chris Brooks stated that first, he just wants to say thank you for your service. He stated that he admires you but he sure does not envy you. Mr. Brooks stated that he wants to point out two things and a lot of things have already been said and he does not want to repeat them. Mr. Brooks stated that property value and crime as a collateral damage to a schools closing. He stated that if we are going to crunch numbers, he would appreciate as a taxpayer to see what kind of impact the move of closing one or the other school may have when you factor in those numbers. Mr. Brooks stated let's call it like it is. He stated close down J. M. Hill Elementary hypothetically. Mr. Brooks stated that two or three blocks away, we know for a fact, the elephant in the room there have been shootings and drug sold and all kinds of crime on Lackawanna Avenue. He stated that does not mean everyone there is bad because that is not true. Mr. Brooks stated that he lived there as a student and he did not sell drugs. He stated that is what happens with the white elephant like Mr. Amori pointed out. He asked if we considered the issue of law enforcement because quite frankly we are looking at some substantial increase in taxes to cover that.
- R. Mr. Robert Wilson stated that he has been teaching for 38 years at Smithfield. He said, "I just want to get this perfectly clear". Mr. Wilson said if we vote no tonight on a hearing there will be no school closing. Mr. Gress said, "Correct". Mr. Wilson stated that this is very simple because if you vote no to a public hearing the schools will stay open. He stated that these guys keep saying public hearing. Mr. Wilson stated that they want you to vote yes so they have the option of closing them. He stated that if we say no to a public hearing, done. Mr. Meachem stated if you say no to a public hearing and again he can appreciate this evening that we have heard consistently from many of the people from the smaller schools and he understands that this is an unpopular concept. He stated that what has happened here is that we are not hearing from the people from other parts of the district who are talking about reassessing their homes and for the very first time in the history of East Stroudsburg School District assessed property values in Middle Smithfield have dropped and as it was reported to them during the budget discussion, has attributed a great percentage of the plight that we face now. Mr. Meachem stated that what he does not hear and why they are being bashful this evening he does not know but there are residents from other parts of the district who are currently aligning, meeting and planning to reassess their homes. He stated that the discussions that we are having this evening just about having a public hearing because he wants you to understand that yes if in fact the public hearings are not supported this evening that discussion would not go away but the concept of saving money on our underutilized facilities also goes away. Mr. Meachem stated that he

is responding to what he was saying. He stated that he appreciates exactly what he is saying. Mr. Wilson stated that he is trying to convince us to vote yes. Mr. Meachem stated that he is not trying to convince him but what is happening is that he has spoken and there are people who have spoken to him about the fact that their taxes are absolutely out of control. Mr. Wilson stated that if you vote no, you can't close the schools.

- S. Mr. James Brunkard stated that for the past four years until a couple of months ago he served on this board. He stated that at the time he came on the Board only two of the members who are on the Board now are still on it. Mr. Brunkard stated that if he says things that not anybody may remember it is just one of those things that always during this period of expansion during the period of revitalizing and rebuilding schools and going through immense construction problems and all the difficulties added on along with everything else that is involved in a school where we employ 1,400 people and we have 8,000 students even if we now have 7,500 students and where budgets go up from \$125,000,000 to \$150,000,000 over the course of a number of years and taxes go up and everything. Mr. Brunkard stated that during that time we make consequential decisions and you move forward and you have an idea. He stated that this is not the first time that people have talked about closing these or other schools or consolidating. Mr. Brunkard stated that these are always things that are in the thought or in the process. He stated that they are always as sure to be in the hopper. Mr. Brunkard stated that the fact that they are forward at this time probably has to do with the increasing funding difficulty of finding areas of where one can cut of a number of things just going wrong and the depth of the recession and the difficulties of each and every issue and how some things just haven't panned out as well as one might have expected. He stated that to reflect back on where people were saying what was the cost of the Van Ness property that we acquired as part of the J. M. Hill Elementary School and taking it down and moving it forward, it took years to do that sort of thing. Mr. Brunkard stated that the revitalizing and renewals of schools and when we remodeled schools like Middle Smithfield Elementary and Smithfield Elementary, we turned them into something. He stated that we really are thinking forward on those sorts of projects and it is not something that should ever be undertaken lightly. That with a flip of a switch we go through things like that because we spend a lot of time moving forward to make these schools what they are. Mr. Brunkard stated that while compelling arguments could be made for the esthetic and historic values and the quality of J. M. Hill Elementary or Smithfield Elementary, similar arguments can be made for any school in the school district. He stated that as Board members they have to look at the monies and where there may be possible savings. Mr. Brunkard stated that he believes the savings if you look into it will be scamp savings and they are not forward thinking. He stated that you won't find it and he has pretty good ideas of what is happening within these schools. Mr. Brunkard stated how difficult it is to make the commitment to remodel Smithfield Elementary or to make the commitment to secure reasonable grounds that you need for the better use of J. M. Hill Elementary.
- T. Mr. William Suriano stated that he has two quick things. He thanked the Board for this time in allowing him to speak. Mr. Suriano stated that he has two quick things. He said, one he would encourage the Board to vote for a public hearing. Mr. Suriano stated you probably have heard of that old cliché, "If you fail to plan then plan to fail". He stated that he sees it as part of doing your due diligence. Mr. Suriano said, secondly, he recommends that we establish a citizens advisory committee to assist us in whatever plan for the future regarding the enrollment decline has to offer. He stated that this citizens' committee can be quickly charged with advising you and coming up with recommendations as well as holding community hearings around the school district. Mr. Suriano stated that he would encourage this committee to be composed of teacher representatives, parent representatives, and citizen representatives as well as administrative and Board representatives. He stated that he wishes us the best of luck and would encourage us to do those two things. Mr. Suriano stated that he thinks it will make everything a lot better and we will be able to convince them that there is compelling reasons to do what we plan to do.
- U. Ms. Sapphire Serrano stated that she is the First Vice President of the PTO at J. M. Hill Elementary. She stated that her heart sunk when the news broke about the shortsighted school closings. Ms. Serrano stated that J. M. Hill prides itself on its neighborhood field, its sense of community and its nurturing environment and yet the Board feels otherwise because we are ready to shut them down. She stated that our class sizes are ideal however, all of that will change by eliminating both, J. M. Hill Elementary and Smithfield Elementary. Ms. Serrano stated instead our children will be ushered into classroom sizes of upwards of 35 and this does not bode well with her and other parents. She stated that plenty of research has been conducted which found that students in smaller classes especially in earlier grades do better in every way. Ms. Serrano stated that they score higher on tests receive better grades and exhibit higher attendance rates. She stated that our children at J. M. Hill are top performance within this district so why would you close us down and Smithfield for that matter as well. Ms. Serrano stated that the quality of education will decline with the closure of J. M. Hill and Smithfield Elementary. She stated that she certainly believes that and our community will support her in saying that our children deserve better than that. Ms. Serrano stated that closing these schools may force families to leave this district including

hers. She stated that she left New York to come to something better, to something smaller and to a community feel. Ms. Serrano stated that she is sorry to say that she can just go right back home and put her son into a 35-40 child classroom and she does not want to do that. She stated that she has been here for 2 ½ years and she has to say she loves her community because there is a sense of community here and J. M. Hill is part of that. Ms. Serrano stated that it is very easy to close a school and that does not take real leadership, does it. She said, "Board members, you come from all walks of life. You were once children with vivid imaginations. It is time to tap into that creativity and come up with other solutions than to close these two schools". Ms. Serrano asked if they have considered other options and what are they. She stated that she is asking what are they. Mr. Meachem stated that he stated before that the purpose of this evening's meeting is to consider public hearings and public hearings only. Ms. Serrano stated that she realizes that but he has provided them data. Mr. Meachem stated that he has not provided data. He said she has provided that data. Ms. Serrano stated that she realizes that it was not him but as a Board there has been data brought forward. She stated that she would assume that other options have been looked into. Ms. Serrano asked have there been any and what are they. Mr. Gress stated that the issue is that the budget has a hole of about \$10,000,000, so as a result one of the options is how do we come up with money if we close some schools. He stated that at the budget meeting which will be coming up, we will have additional costs savings. Mr. Gress stated that whether it is special education reduction, busing consolidating, after school programs, field trips or reduction of activities, there are other things to be discussed to come up with this budget hole. He stated that as he said earlier and other people said it also, if a hearing is held then this is on the table to close that gap but if it is not then we have to come up with other options to save money. Ms. Serrano stated fair enough so why weren't those things at least presented at this point. Mr. Gress stated because this meeting is not for that. Ms. Serrano stated but you have provided us data. Mrs. Laverdure stated she would be the one because they had talking points and part of the reason for the talking points was as a result of many times the administrators are accused of not being transparent. She stated that with that in mind, she thought it would be good and important and she ran this by the solicitor and the Board President in order to have some talking points so that they knew where we were coming from in order to get to where we needed to be. Mrs. Laverdure stated that the Board will decide whether or not to have a public hearing and then at that point a lot more information is discussed and given out. She stated that along the way there are budget meetings that are set up that are open to the public, where other options are discussed so that process is in place. Mrs. Laverdure stated that she also wants to tell her and she doesn't know who alluded to her that class sizes will be up to 35 students because that is not correct information. She stated that is not what the Board directed them to do. Mrs. Laverdure stated unless they direct them to do that but she does not see that happening. Mr. Meachem stated that what he proposed if we were to examine not losing those positions, he is saying the students and all of their educational support system should go with them. He stated right now he is just saying that we should look at the opportunity because if we don't do it now that is forever gone. Mr. Meachem stated that what happened here is that the information he was offered was not the information that was presented this evening. He stated if she would like what he is going to do because the only way it is going to happen is he is going to have to present his ideas on his website for her to see because right now he does not know where he is at. Mr. Meachem stated that he does not know whether he can trust the information that he saw and the only thing that he can say to her this evening is that if this discussion does not happen here at this time, it can't.

- V. Mr. Robert Dochterman asked does the new mall with the super Giant store coming up where the flea market is has any of that future income been figured into with these figures. Mr. Gress said no because the assesment on that won't be until the actual construction. Mr. Dochterman said if these are projected numbers then why have they not been projected also. Mr. Gress stated because of the assesment.
- W. Ms. Ginger Farro stated that she would like to echo what this woman said about J. M. Hill and the other small school. She stated that her children would be zoned for East Stroudsburg Elementary and they did not have the luxury of going to a small community type classroom. Ms. Farro stated closing these schools will make her children's classrooms even more crowded, it sounds though. She stated that she does not think anybody has taken that into account. Ms. Farro asked so what other school are they going to go to. She stated that her children would probably have their classroom even bigger. Ms. Farro stated that she does not know if that is true but where will they go. She asked will it be East Stroudsburg Elementary; therefore, it will affect the size of my children's classroom, too. She stated that an already big enough school will get even bigger. Ms. Farro said she does not know but she is just saying.
- X. Mr. George Andrews stated that it has been a very interesting night for him and he has never been to one of these before. He stated that he sees that there is a lot of emotion here. Mr. Andrews stated that he gets the feeling that we are missing the point. He stated that his feeling is that the meeting tonight was, should we look into the possibility of closing the schools. Mr. Andrews stated that not that we will not or that anything will change but just the possibility of change and we need to do that now and not later due to time frames. Mr. Andrews stated

that his three children went through the school system here and many people here know his kids. He stated that it is a great school system. Mr. Andrews stated that his taxes have gone up fifteen hundred percent in the 26 years that he has been here. He stated that there are a lot of things in motion here. Mr. Andrews stated that his whole feeling in coming here tonight was to see what it was. He stated that he thinks everyone is missing the point. Mr. Andrews stated that the point is nothing is going to be decided except that we want to have another meeting to vote on the possibility. He stated nothing is going to happen here so tonight. He thinks everyone should say yes. He stated let us have another meeting and let us vote to have it so we can find out what the possibilities are. Mr. Andrews stated that we may not have to change anything in the school system. He stated we may find other cuts or we may find other ways to do things but we need to do this today so we can take the next step forward.

- Y. Mr. John Curtis Jr. stated that he is a 22 year veteran of the East Stroudsburg Fire Department. He stated that he was born in East Stroudsburg and raised in East Stroudsburg. Mr. Curtis, Jr. stated that he went to J. M. Hill Elementary and that lady up there helped teach him. He stated that some of you know him and some of you know his father. Mr. Curtis, Jr. stated that a business, a good business, and this is what the school district is a business, depends on repeat customers. He stated you do not take your best stallions and your best schools and close them. Mr. Curtis, Jr. stated how many people out here in this audience right now came from large schools because they wanted a better education and now they are threatening to leave. He stated how many countless from the city came here and have left. Mr. Curtis, Jr. stated closing J. M Hill Elementary, even entertaining the idea, is wrong. He stated that he gathers if we vote no, it is dead. He stated that he recommends that we vote no. Mr. Curtis, Jr. stated that we said it ourselves, do you want people like Mr. Curtis right here that has brought his two children and has never left the borough and decided to stay as a Cavalier. He stated, "That is it. It is right there. I stayed". Mr. Curtis, Jr. asked do you want these people to stay or do you want them to go. He stated if we want them to go, vote yes. Mr. Curtis, Jr. said, "If you want them to stay, VOTE NO!"
- Z. Ms. Alisa Bloom stated that all of her children are 25 years or older. She stated that her grandchild goes to Middle Smithfield Elementary. Ms. Bloom stated you might say that classrooms won't get crowded but her kids are 25 and older and they started out in Barrett which is in Cresco. She stated that she lives in Tobyhanna and her grandchildren live in Twin Lakes. Ms. Bloom stated that when her kids were young, they started out in Barrett with about 15-18 children in a classroom. She stated that in small nice schools everyone knew each other but then they changed the zoning. Ms. Bloom stated but now they went from a small school that was doing fantastic to a very large school where realistically it was so large, yet they did not have classroom sizes to fit the new students that were coming in. She stated that instead of having 16-18 kids in a classroom they went up to the high 20's and low 30's. Ms. Bloom stated sorry to say the education changes and she is not saying they get lost completely but it is not that one on one education. She stated that her teacher now has to teach double the amount of children. Ms. Bloom stated ask any teacher, and her sister is one, would they rather be with 16 children giving that quality education or trying to get 30-35 kids to pass that exam and move them along. She stated that she begs to differ. Ms. Bloom stated that she would love to see what this man has and why we don't want to show it already says something. She stated that it is not fair and not fair whatsoever. Ms. Bloom stated that, realistically, the ones who suffer are the kids and the homes that they live in. She stated that it happened with her kids. Ms. Bloom stated thank God they are all 25 and out of the house doing well. Ms. Bloom stated that realistically that transition was difficult for them. She stated that they get lost in the crowd and like the one lady said they become a bar code number. Ms. Bloom stated that it is bad enough that it happens in high school and college because when you look on the board for your exam grade, you have to know your social security number and not your name.
- AA. Ms. Emma Bedref Matthews stated that when her son came to her and said you have to go this meeting on Monday because she has to save J. M. Hill because they are closing it, she said what, why would they close one of their best schools that they have. She stated that she could not understand why a good school would close and get merged with perhaps a school that is not doing so well. Ms. Bedref Matthews stated that when you put a rotten apple in a basket of good apples those apples will rot, too. She stated that she is very concerned and came here to get more clarity of what was happening but she ended up more confused. Ms. Bedref Matthews stated that if you vote no, no school will close and I like that. She stated if you vote yes what is the option. Ms. Bedref Matthews stated that the option we presented them is just the option of closing two schools or the option of closing one school. She stated that we did not present or explain to them what happens if those two schools are not closed. Ms. Bedref Matthews asked what are other places that we can take a cut so that our budget can balance. She stated that we did not give her an option but choosing no so none of the schools can close. Ms. Bedref Matthews stated that her understanding is if she votes no, no schools will be closed. She stated that we presented to them very poorly and left them more confused.

BB. Mr. Javier Castelanos stated that early this afternoon he received an email that was kind of false telling us to go to this meeting because we will save money on taxes if they close these schools or something to that effect. Mr. Castelanos stated that as he sits here and is listening to these people, he has a daughter in high school and also has a 19 month old granddaughter who hopefully will be going to school here. He stated that this chart that is up here does not show any viable options for anyone in this community to look at to understand that the education of their children will not be compromised by these decisions that we are making. Mr. Castelanos stated that we have not shown anything and this chart might as well be turned upside down. He stated that the bottom line is that there is no amount of taxpayer money that is going to convince this community that these kids' education is not at risk. Mr. Castelanos stated that he is the first one to tell you that he wants to save money on his taxes. He stated that if we cut his taxes cut them right now because he is paying a whole hell of a lot of taxes. Mr. Castelanos stated that he works two jobs and his wife works full time and they are barely making it. He stated that we can't sit here and tell him that this option, even if you tell people it will save them \$5 a year in taxes some people might buy that but that is not worth it to him and he does not think it is right. Mr. Castelanos stated that at first, he thought he was coming down to talk about saving a couple hundred dollars because that is exactly what the email said if they consolidate these schools, you may save a couple of hundred dollars in your taxes. He said, "Guess what, at what expense." Mr. Castelanos stated that these kids are our future and according to the United States census, these children make up 20% of the world's population but you look at them because these kids are going to represent 100% of the world's future and by us doing this, we are going to hurt these kids.

CC. Ms. Carrie Panepinto stated that she wants to bring up one thing. She stated that no one has talked about the transportation of the J. M. Hill Elementary students. Ms. Panepinto stated that she believes that a number was thrown out at a budget meeting and 1/3 of the students are walkers so where is that money going to come in to transport. She stated that we only have 5 buses for 400 kids so where is the money going to go to now transport them further. Ms. Panepinto stated that her children are on the bus for maybe 5 to 10 minutes, so now they will have to travel sometimes twice as long. She asked how does the transportation cost go into play when deciding to close a school.

DD. Mr. (did not state his name) asked if the three minutes cover the different things on the agenda. He asked if he can be given 30 seconds more to talk about another item. Mr. Searfoss said no because he had his chance. Mr. Gress stated that it is about a different issue; the Pocmont issue. Mr. Searfoss said okay he can speak. Mr. ___ stated that it appears that the School Board is in a heck of a quandary because we are being asked to vote on a settlement stipulation on Pocmont Resort who bought a six plus million dollars for less than 2.5 million dollars is asking for a break on their taxes or downward assessment. He stated that this money comes out of the very money that we need to keep these two schools open. He stated that the details of the settlement you are asked to vote on is not being provided to anybody. He asked if this is another deal like Wal-Mart who got a 1/2 million dollars back of the taxpayer's money. He asked why are we asking to give a commercial entity money on their property taxes and we are being asked to close the schools.

Mrs. Featherman stated that Pocmont is totally gutted. She stated that there is no income coming into Pocmont. Mrs. Featherman stated that when it gets back on the rolls then it will be reassessed and taxes will be increased but right now it is not functioning as a resort and that is why those taxes have been reduced. She stated that it is totally gutted.

Mr. Meachem stated that one of the things that he wants to bring to their attention as one of the people that called this meeting is when the request was made for the special meeting it was to deal with one single issue. He stated that what happens is that and again we have asked the question, but between the Superintendent, Board President and Solicitor, they decided to muddy the waters by putting these two other issues here to create just that type of confusion. Mr. Meachem stated that when this meeting was called it was with the intent of keeping things clear and they are anything but clear now.

Mr. Dirvonas stated that the tax reduction figure on that is approximately \$140,000 per year. Mr. Brown stated that \$121,000 of that is for school taxes. Mr. Dirvonas stated that the Pike County Chief Assessor has looked at this situation and he very vigorously recommends that the Board approve this.

XI. POCMONT TAX APPEAL SETTLEMENT

ACTION BY THE BOARD:

Motion was made by Douglas Freeman to approve the proposed Settlement Stipulation with regard to the tax assessment appeal filed by Pocmont Properties, LLC in the Court of Common Pleas of Pike County to No.2652-CV-2010, and to authorize the Solicitor to execute the same, in substantially the form as presented at this meeting. Motion was seconded by Eileen Featherman and passed 8-0-1. Michael Meachem abstained.

(See pages 3-7)

XII. PSBA CONTRACT FOR BOARD SERVICES

ACTION BY THE BOARD:

Motion was made by Eileen Featherman to approve the contract with the Pennsylvania School Boards Association to provide a Board workshop entitled "Roles and Responsibilities of the School Board" at a cost of \$850.00 plus travel expenses as presented at this meeting. Motion was seconded by Robert Cooke and passed 8-0-1. Michael Meachem abstained.

(See pages 8-12)

XIII. SCHOOL CLOSING

ACTION BY THE BOARD:

Motion was made by Michael Meachem to be ammend the agenda to consider a public hearing only. Mr. Dirvonas stated that the action to be taken and the notice that has to be given for the public hearing has to specifically mention the school or schools which are going to be considered to be closed. With the motion that has been made the effect of that motion would be to schedule a public hearing at least with a 15 day notice. At which point testimony and information would be received with regard to both schools with the understanding that if a decision to close is made, it would only be made with regards to one of those schools and that decision cannot by law be made until three months after the hearing is concluded. Motion was seconded by Ronald Bradley. A roll call vote was taken and failed 2-7. Ronald Bradley and Michael Meachem voted yes. Robert Cooke, Eileen Featherman, Douglas Freeman, Robert Gress, Roy Horton, Marjorie James and William Searfoss voted no.

ACTION BY THE BOARD:

Motion was made by Douglas Freeman to schedule a Public Hearing, subject to the provisions and requirements of Section 7-780 of the School Code and applicable rules and regulations, and subject to compliance with applicable advertising requirements, on a date and at a time to be determined by the President of the Board, but no later than March 1, 2012, for the purpose of determining whether to do the following [**Option C** as selected/voted upon by the Board shall be the only option considered at the scheduled hearing]:

A: Consider closing the JM Hill Elementary School for the 2012 –2013 school year and/or subsequent years.

B: Consider closing the Smithfield Elementary School for the 2012 –2013 school year and/or subsequent years.

C: Consider closing either the JM Hill Elementary School or the Smithfield Elementary School for the 2012 –2013 school year and/or subsequent years.

Motion was seconded by Marjorie James. A roll call vote was taken and passed 7-2. Ronald Bradley, Robert Cooke, Douglas Freeman, Roy Horton, Marjorie James, Michael Meachem and William Searfoss voted yes. Eileen Featherman and Robert Gress voted no.

XIV. ANNOUNCEMENTS/INFORMATION

- A. Mr. Robert Cooke stated that he is probably the only one old enough to have had Mrs. Schaffer as a fifth grade teacher. He stated that for those of you who did, she said to be him, you have two ears and one mouth. Mrs. Schaffer asked him, "What do you think you should use more? Mr. Cooke stated that he figured out he should use his ears most. Mr. Cooke stated that he came here tonight to listen to ideas to what needs to happen. He stated that he did not come with a decision. Mr. Cooke stated that he still does not know whether closing either school is a

good idea; however, he did come to listen and gather ideas from the public. He stated that he did not come to be called a name and if that makes him a disgrace then he is a disgrace. Mr. Cooke stated that he did not come to be mocked because he sat here and he shook his head in agreement with someone. He stated that he needs more information on whether or not the best interest of the East Stroudsburg Area School District is served by closing either one of these schools. He stated that he has not yet made his decision on whether or not it is. Mr. Cooke stated that he is about the 4th person who is totally against reduction of staff if it is not necessary. He stated that last year, he slept through a motion which was reconsidered about staff count and we know what his vote was on that. Mr. Cooke stated that at this point, he needs more information as he said to make sure if closing a school or not closing a school is in the best interest of the East Stroudsburg Area School District. He stated that he has elderly friends who call him to see if they are going to eat tonight or buy their medicine; however, he listened to a lot of discussion tonight and he has not made up his mind whether or not closing a school is the best idea. Mr. Cooke stated that he believes a hearing with more data is appropriate; therefore, he votes for a hearing.

- B. Mr. Gress stated that he is voting no mainly because we did not look at other schools like Resica Elementary or something else. He stated that he thinks small schools are the key to this district and have been the key to this district. Mr. Gress stated that there will be staff laid off if there is consolidation; otherwise, there will be no reason to close these schools because the savings will not be there.
- C. Mr. Bradley stated that certain people are working in those schools. Mr. Searfoss stated that we are in the middle of the vote. Mr. Bradley stated that he wants the public to be aware of what is going on because there is not a lot of truth being told. Mr. Searfoss said we are in the middle of a vote.
- D. Mr. Meachem stated that he wants the people to understand this evening that this is an issue that needs to be looked at and we need to hear from a lot of people and we need to look at it now and we need to have accurate information so that the Board can make a decision. He stated that this is not to suggest that we need to close them but we need to look at it; therefore he votes, yes.
- E. Mr. Searfoss stated yes and he believes that in looking for 10 million dollars as much as people have expressed find it in different places, we have been finding other places and we have been cutting. He stated someone said stop blaming Harrisburg, well it is really nice when you find money to cut in your budget every year and you find out that Harrisburg also lowers that amount and you are at zip for doing it. Mr. Searfoss stated that people talk about cutting from the top down. He stated we have cut from the top down because we have rerouted buses, we have done many things and we are now getting to the “nitty gritty”. Mr. Searfoss stated that we are running out of things to look for. He stated like the gentlemen said, he cut his cable and others may not buy a second car or are selling a car, we are now at a point to look at downsizing. Mr. Searfoss stated that this does not mean the vote when it will happen will do this but we have seen preliminary numbers and 1.6 million dollars for one school and 1 million dollars for the other school is something that he thinks deserves a look at.

XV. ADJOURNMENT: 9:14 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia L. Rosado,
Board Secretary