

EAST STROUDSBURG AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- - -

In Re: Section 7-780 Public Hearing

- - -

Transcript of proceedings held in the
above-captioned matter before the East Stroudsburg School
District Board of Directors, East Stroudsburg High School
South, 50 Vine Street, East Stroudsburg, PA on Friday,
March 2, 2012, commencing at or about 7:08 o'clock p.m.

- - -

WILLIAM SEARFOSS, President
ROBERT COOKE, Vice President
RONALD D. BRADLEY, Director
EILEEN FEATHERMAN, Director
ROBERT GRESS, Director
ROY HORTON, Director
MARJORIE JAMES, Director
MICHAEL MEACHEM, Director

SHARON LAVERDURE, Superintendent
PATRICIA BADER, Business Manager
THOMAS F. DIRVONAS, ESQ., Solicitor

- - -

DONNA G. KENDERDINE, R.P.R.
P.O. BOX 509
STROUDSBURG, PA 18360
(570) 992-7766

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

INDEX OF WITNESSES

- - -

Speaker's Name	Page No.
<u>District:</u>	
1. Thomas F. Dirvonas, Esq.	4
2. Sharon Laverdure	8
3. Patricia Bader	9
<u>Public:</u>	
1. Michael Perez	12
2. Tomora Ellis	14
3. Anne McHale-Power	16
4. Christine Griffin	19
5. Rose Ann Whitesell	21
6. Ernest J. Mahar	23
7. Scott Amori	25
8. Sean Boyer	27
9. Christopher Brooks	29
10. Elizabeth Kirkwood	32
11. Geoff Gamble	34
12. Peter Kirkwood	37
13. Richard Berkowitz	39
14. Robert Wilson	41
15. Susan Jorstad	43
16. Wendy Sheeran	45
17. Steven Zimmerman	47
18. Kathy Parrish	49
19. Sapphire Serrano	52
20. Kerrie Curtis	53
21. Carrie Panepinto	55
22. Cathy Gallagher	58
23. Gerard Rozea	59
24. Catharine Berkowitz	61
25. Sharon Maly-Cramer	63
26. Lynn Ames	65
27. Richard Moran	68
28. Jennifer Marmo	70
29. Oscar Woerlein	71
30. Amanda Jackson	73

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

INDEX OF EXHIBITS

- - -

Exhibit No. & Description	Page No.
Board A - Notice of Public Hearing	5
Board B - Three Letters dated 2-23-12	5
Board C - Agenda and Rules of Order	7

P R O C E E D I N G S

Monday, February 13, 2012

- - -

MR. SEARFOSS: I'd like to call to order this public hearing of the East Stroudsburg Board of Education for the purpose of receiving public comment for the closure of either J.M. Hill Elementary or Smithfield Elementary.

Madam Superintendent, all board members are present.

Stand for the pledge of allegiance.

- - -

MR. SEARFOSS: Mr. Dirvonas?

MR. DIRVONAS: Thank you, Mr. Searfoss. At this time I'd like to go into a few details with regard to the purpose of tonight's hearing.

The hearing is being held in compliance with Section 7-780 of the Pennsylvania Public School Code, as amended, for the purpose of holding a public hearing on the possible closing of one of two public school buildings, those being either the J.M. Hill Elementary School or the Smithfield Elementary School. The school code provides, in part, that the Board of Education cannot close a school building without holding a public hearing not less than three months prior to the decision of the board concerning the closing.

1 At a previous special public meeting held on
2 February 13, 2012, the Board of Education, by majority vote
3 of its members, authorized tonight's public hearing.

4 On February 15th, 2012, notice of this public
5 hearing was published in the Pocono Record and posted at the
6 administrative offices and the schools of the district and
7 on the district's website. A copy of that notice has been
8 given to the stenographer to be included as Board Exhibit A
9 to the transcript of this hearing.

10 On February 23rd, 2012, the district complied
11 with the requirements of Section 10304 of the Municipalities
12 Planning Code by forwarding written notices of this hearing
13 and the possible closure of one of the school buildings to
14 the planning commissions of Smithfield Township, the Borough
15 of East Stroudsburg, and Monroe County soliciting their
16 comments and recommendations concerning the hearing. Copies
17 of those notices have also been given to the stenographer to
18 be included collectively at Board Exhibit B to the
19 transcript of this hearing.

20 The purpose of this hearing is to give the
21 administration the opportunity to present facts and
22 statistics with respect to the educational, physical,
23 administrative, budgetary, and fiscal matters related to the
24 possible closing of one of the schools in question. It
25 gives the board the opportunity to receive public comment

1 concerning any possible [sic] closing. As previously
2 stated, that actual decision cannot be made for a period of
3 three months from the conclusion of this hearing.

4 A stenographic record of this hearing is being
5 made so that a transcript of the hearing can be submitted to
6 the Department of Education, if necessary, and made
7 available to board members for their review. In this
8 regard, it is requested that the public avoid expressing
9 your approval or disapproval of comments made by particular
10 speakers so that the stenographer is able to hear and
11 transcribe the comments of all speakers.

12 It should also be noted that residents and
13 taxpayers may submit written comments to the secretary of
14 the Board of Education for consideration by the board prior
15 to the expiration of the three month period. We would
16 suggest that written comments be submitted sooner rather
17 than later to give the board the opportunity to review those
18 comments. Any written comments submitted prior to this
19 hearing will not be read at the hearing, but will be made
20 available to the board and will be made part of the record.
21 Residents and taxpayers submitting written comments should
22 indicate their name, address, and telephone number and
23 should sign their comments that they are submitting.

24 Persons who are present at the hearing but who
25 are not speakers are requested to list their names on the

1 sign-in sheet so that we have accurate information regarding
2 those in attendance.

3 The agenda for this hearing and rules of order
4 for this hearing have been made available on the district's
5 website and at the registration and sign-in table prior to
6 the meeting. They've also be been presented to the
7 stenographer to be included collectively as Board Exhibit C
8 to the transcript of this hearing.

9 It is important for you to keep in mind the
10 rules of order. We are here to receive public comments
11 regarding the possible closure of a school building. This
12 is not a question and answer or debate session. We expect
13 that your issues of concern will be addressed to the board
14 in a respectful manner and that the board will, in turn,
15 consider your concerns when discussing and making a decision
16 on any school closing.

17 Because of the three month waiting period, we
18 expect that a special board meeting will be scheduled and
19 held in early June to discuss and vote on any school
20 closure.

21 Because of the anticipated number of speakers,
22 we have assigned speaker numbers and will request that
23 groups of 14 or 15 be seated in the front row of the center
24 section of the auditorium when requested so that we may have
25 an orderly progression of speakers. We will have a brief

1 break or recess between the seating of subsequent groups for
2 the benefit of the stenographer and all in attendance.

3 Please keep in mind that the three minute time
4 limit for each speaker will be strictly adhered to.

5 I would also like to mention if there's anyone
6 who has pre-registered to speak and if they have not signed
7 the form available at the sign-in stable, if they could
8 please do that now before the numbers are called.

9 At this time I'd like to turn the hearing over
10 to Mrs. Laverdure, the district superintendent.

11 MS. LAVERDURE: Thank you, Mr. Dirvonas, and
12 I'd like to thank you all of you for coming this evening.

13 We in the administration and I don't want to
14 speak for the board, but we, as administration, appreciate
15 your concern and understand how much this impacts our
16 community. It's a very serious matter we're here to discuss
17 tonight and, so, let's move on to the topic at hand.

18 We will be showing the slides above us and
19 there they are. There's a timeline which we will be
20 following and I would like to also say that this will be
21 posted on our website tomorrow morning and for those who do
22 not have access to a computer will have hard copies
23 available at the administration center on Monday.

24 The timeline is there. It kind of recaps what
25 Mr. Dirvonas just said. I guess the next most important

1 date of note would be Monday, March 12th, where we have a
2 special board meeting planned.

3 So, why are we here this evening? Well,
4 we're here to discuss, try to find some different ways to
5 narrow the deficit in our budget. We do have a declining
6 enrollment in our school district, we do have empty
7 elementary classrooms in our district, and our school board
8 members gave us, the administrators, direction to look at
9 closing the smallest elementary schools. They said look at,
10 gather the information. The smallest elementary schools we
11 have in the district are J.M. Hill Elementary and Smithfield
12 Elementary.

13 The next slide shows you the capacities for our
14 elementary schools district wide. Let's go down to J.M.
15 Hill. Projected enrollment for J.M. Hill next year will be
16 400 with a capacity of 484 and Smithfield's projected
17 enrollment is 339 with a capacity of 638 students.

18 So, looking at that information, it is the
19 administration's recommendation to consider only one
20 building closure and the two scenarios that we have put
21 together are closing Smithfield Elementary or closing J.M.
22 Hill Elementary and I'd like to turn the rest of the
23 presentation over to Mrs. Bader, our business manager.

24 MS. BADER: Thank you, Mrs. Laverdure. In
25 Scenario No. 1, closing Smithfield, we would consider moving

1 the 337 students that we currently have located at
2 Smithfield in the following way. We would move 57 students
3 to J.M. Hill Elementary where the average class size will
4 become 22 students. We would move 40 students to East
5 Stroudsburg Elementary where the average class size will
6 become 23 students. We will move 240 students to Middle
7 Smithfield Elementary where the average class size will be
8 24.

9 We would be able to reduce personnel because of
10 duplication of services to approximately 1.57 million
11 dollars. We would have a furloughing of 14 professional
12 staff and 13.5 support staff.

13 The operating saving reduction is approximately
14 \$50,600.00. Additional savings could be realized if the
15 building is mothballed and by that I mean there would be a
16 reduction in operating costs like electricity. If the
17 building were leased the operating expenses would remain the
18 same, but a monthly lease income item would be reported in
19 our revenues.

20 On the next slide is Scenario No. 2 which is
21 closing the J.M. Hill School where we have considered moving
22 388 students. 131 of those students would move to East
23 Stroudsburg Elementary where the average class size would
24 become 23, 257 students to Smithfield Elementary where the
25 average class size would be 22. However, I need to make

1 note that this would push both of those buildings to their
2 maximum student capacity.

3 The personnel savings would be approximately
4 \$1,012,800.00 and we would be furloughing six professionals
5 and 13.5 support staff.

6 There would be an operating savings of
7 \$50,000.00. However, the same condition would apply. If we
8 were to mothball the building there would be savings like in
9 natural gas and electricity and if we lease the building we
10 would have a revenue item for the monthly lease income.

11 The next slide is additional considerations.
12 Operating expenditures would need further analysis because
13 reductions could be realized.

14 We would need to budget an additional cost for
15 moving the staff, their supplies, and also assets like
16 things in the kitchen as well as securing the unoccupied
17 buildings.

18 Then, if leased, the revenue item would be
19 added to narrow the operating deficit.

20 Debt service payments would remain the same for
21 all buildings regardless of occupancy. We currently have an
22 18 million dollar debt service per year.

23 There will be a reduction in rental state
24 subsidy when a building is closed. We're still waiting for
25 that information from PDE, the Pennsylvania Department of

1 Ed. However, we currently have 1.6 million in rental state
2 subsidy for all building debt.

3 And, that concludes the presentation.

4 MR. SEARFOSS: Mr. Dirvonas?

5 MR. DIRVONAS: Thank you, Mrs. Laverdure and
6 Mrs. Bader.

7 At this time I would like to remind those who
8 are going to speak that when it's your turn at the
9 microphone to approach the podium, state your name, address,
10 and your status within the school district; that is, are you
11 a resident, are you a taxpayer, are you both, and once we
12 have that information then the three minute time limit will
13 start.

14 At this time I would like to ask Speakers 1
15 through 15 if you would proceed to the first row here and
16 we'll start with No. 1 and then fill in the row, please.
17 It looks as though there is no No. 2, so if we can go from
18 1 to 3 everybody should fit.

19 Okay. If we can start with Speaker No. 1 and
20 if you would please come to the podium, state your name,
21 address, and status.

22 MR. PEREZ: Thank you. My name is Michael
23 Perez. I'm a taxpayer and a resident. I live at 107 Lilac
24 Drive in East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania.

25 I would like my comments to be made public

1 about the possible closing of Smithfield Elementary School.
2 Smithfield Elementary School was renovated less than five
3 years ago at the tune -- I could not find the exact amount
4 when I tried to do my research in the last couple of weeks
5 calling different offices within the district, but I know it
6 was to the tune of millions of dollars and now just a few
7 short years later we're discussing the possible closing of
8 the school that we in this auditorium and taxpayers on the
9 board have spent millions of dollars on renovations.

10 Smithfield Elementary has a full, functional
11 kitchen which J.M. Hill does not. Smithfield Elementary has
12 a fully functional gymnasium with a stage.

13 As reported in the Pocono Record as of last
14 week, this board has decided to possibly borrow millions of
15 dollars on upgrades and renovations to J.M. Hill Elementary
16 School and, as a taxpayer, I do not understand that. I do
17 not understand how we are borrowing money when we are --
18 have a deficit of over 10 million dollars, money that we
19 will have to pay later on on a building that we're talking
20 about possibly closing, for renovation and upgrades. I find
21 that to be irresponsible by this board, to approve such as
22 action, to borrow money when we don't have any money.

23 What is our long-range plan for our financial
24 difficulties within this district? Do we all -- are we all
25 naive to think that this ends this year? Are we naive to

1 think that there will not be another budget deficit next
2 year? What are our long-term plans because, clearly, the
3 trend in this county -- using Pocono Mountain as an example,
4 they had a large budget deficit last year. They have an
5 even larger budget deficit this year. So, where is this
6 board -- where do these individuals stand on our long-range
7 plan because if we don't have a long-range plan all of us
8 will be standing right here one year from today to discuss
9 possibly more closures, to discuss even higher tax
10 increases. Our taxes increase every single year. That is a
11 guarantee within this district. And, this year we are
12 facing an even higher tax increase.

13 Please look at the long-range plans. Please
14 consider all options because closing one building is not
15 going to fix our problems. It is putting a Band-Aid on a
16 wound that requires larger than a Band-Aid.

17 Thank you for your time.

18 MS. ELLIS: Good evening. I am Tomora Ellis,
19 236 Manor Drive. I'm a resident and a taxpayer of East
20 Stroudsburg.

21 This meeting tonight proves for some of the
22 parents a bad dream come true, your precious school closing,
23 and my heart goes out to you. My feelings would be the same
24 if my school were closing and since the inevitable seems to
25 be coming true, my message is not to you, the school board,

1 but my message is to the parents.

2 I attended the public hearing last month and
3 needed to process why some of the negative things were being
4 said regarding the larger schools. I now understand the
5 logic behind the comments. You are trying to save your
6 school. However, the comments were not and are not true.

7 I am the proud parent of three years of one of
8 the largest schools, ESE. ESE was recommended to me by
9 another parent who -- my husband and I were considering
10 private school for our first child. This parent had sent
11 her child to a private school and ESE and declared ESE
12 superior and now I concur.

13 ESE has a safe, clean, nurturing environment.
14 ESE teachers are always available and they respond to
15 questions or concerns immediately. Weekly reports of the
16 progress of the children, weekly agendas for the upcoming
17 topics of studies, and two or three good phone calls home to
18 the parents each and every month from every teacher are some
19 of the things that you'll find at ESE. Monthly meetings
20 with coffee with the principal, monthly grade level
21 assemblies and almost weekly PTO meetings and activities and
22 functions to help defray the cost of educational activities
23 for the children are also thriving and found at ESE.
24 Reenforcing the values I teach my children at home with a
25 positive program, positive behavior program of being a

1 bucket filler school is found at ESE.

2 Respectful, responsible, and ready to learn
3 children, parents, staff, teachers, and my principal, Miss
4 Livingston are all found at ESE. Fights, metal detectors,
5 and uncared for children are not found at ESE.

6 I leave you with this, parents. Experience is
7 not what happens to you, it is what you do with what happens
8 to you, and, so, when the best things are not possible the
9 best can be made out of those things that are available to
10 you.

11 And to you, the school board, remember, a
12 diamond is merely a lump of coal that did well under
13 pressure. Please, just be our diamond. Thank you.

14 MR. DIRVONAS: No. 4, Anne McHale Power.

15 MS. POWER: My name is Anne McHale Power.

16 I live at 301 Remington Road. I'm a resident, a taxpayer,
17 and a mother of two children in the district.

18 I'm here tonight to represent the interests of
19 the parents, students, and faculty of Smithfield Elementary
20 School. Just like all the other schools in the district,
21 some of our families have been here for generations while
22 others have been here less than a year.

23 Why did we stay here instead of moving away?
24 Why did we come here instead of settling elsewhere? Family.
25 These are tough times for the American dream. As the safe

1 routines of our lives have come undone so has our
2 characteristic optimism; not only our beliefs that the
3 future is full of limitless possibility, but our faith that
4 things will eventually return to normal, whatever normal was
5 before the recession hit. There's even worry that the dream
6 may be over. We currently living Americans are the
7 unfortunate ones who shall bear witness to that deflated
8 moment in history when the promise of this country began to
9 whither.

10 As taxpayers we recognize that we're facing a
11 10 million dollar deficit. We also recognize that closing
12 one of these schools will not rectify that situation even
13 when coupled with the proposed 5.8 percent tax increase.
14 Besides tearing apart the fabric of our community what will
15 we gain? Next year we'll find ourselves in the same
16 situation, this time looking to close the other school and
17 raise taxes another 5.8 percent. At that rate even families
18 who have been here for generations will be looking to move
19 away.

20 George Bernard Shaw once said, "A government
21 that robs Peter to pay Paul can always depend on the support
22 of Paul." I assure you that undoubtedly as J.M. Hill nor
23 Smithfield's parents, students, and faculty want to be cast
24 in the role of Peter, neither do we want to be cast in the
25 role of Paul.

1 The ends do not justify the means. We can
2 argue ad nauseam about which school has more history, but no
3 one can place a value on what each and every school in our
4 district provides our children: A quality education. We
5 urge the board to fully consider the impact of disrupting
6 the entire school community. All our children require and
7 deserve stability, continuity, especially in these times.

8 Mrs. Laverdure stated that the district would
9 not be divided as long as she is superintendent. We
10 respectfully ask the board to follow that lead and find
11 other means of bridging the budget gap besides deciding
12 between one of the two schools.

13 Transparency is a way of protecting fairness
14 and ensuring the common good. We implore the board to add
15 additional dates for public hearings to the calendar within
16 the 90-day consideration period, but understand that 90 days
17 is not a lot of time to make this decision.

18 Things for you to consider: Next year's
19 proposed budget includes 8.3 million dollars for supplies.
20 A 20 percent reduction would save 1.6 million dollars.
21 Last year's finances reflect a general fund balance of
22 8.8 million dollars. Assigning 20 percent of that for next
23 year's budget appropriation would provide 1.7 million
24 dollars.

25 Smithfield's renovation finances indicated they

1 were paid for with a bond issue of 30 million dollars, but
2 in the end cost only 16 million. Is the unspent 14 million
3 dollars also part of the debt we still carry in the
4 district?

5 VOICE: Three minutes.

6 MS. POWER: Thank you.

7 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 5, Chris Griffin.

8 MS. GRIFFIN: Hi. I come tonight as a
9 resident, a taxpayer, and a proud parent of a former
10 student. It's good to hear from the parents' comments that
11 East Stroudsburg continues its tradition of excellence in
12 education, of responsible relationships with their teachers
13 and parents at home and the excellent programs in sports,
14 extracurriculars, arts and music. So, thank you all for
15 your commitment to the community and doing a really great
16 job. I know you're doing it and I'm really, really happy
17 and proud to be a part of the district.

18 As a taxpayer who has no children in the
19 system it's difficult to be facing the challenges that we
20 are. I'm aware of the fact, though, that the bridge in
21 funding is necessary because the State has cut 550 million
22 dollars to the county, if I'm not incorrect, and that is
23 why, despite the fact that we have been promised real estate
24 tax relief, we are facing this increase in taxes. So, I do
25 not blame the district. I realize the problem comes from

1 Harrisburg.

2 If there's one place to cut I would suggest
3 the newsletter. It's got to be a really big expense to put
4 that all together and as much as I appreciate it as a
5 resident, seeing what's happening in the schools, as
6 important as this information is, I really would ask the
7 press under the circumstances to try to pick up the slack.
8 Dave Pierce probably wouldn't mind writing a few more
9 excellent stories and with what the municipalities and the
10 districts are paying in just the public notice fees I think
11 we could get much better coverage. It would be healthy and
12 positive to read that in the Pocono Record instead of the
13 crime sheet.

14 Moving on to the closure of schools, I'd just
15 like to say that although everybody likes a walkable
16 community and everyone's afraid of urban blight I feel
17 really, really confident based on the projects that we're
18 seeing before Smithfield, and I am a township supervisor,
19 that there are many, many, many business opportunities for
20 adaptive reuse of the J.M. Hill school. I have no prejudice
21 between Smithfield and J.M. Hill. I know they're both
22 excellent schools. However, with the 3 million dollars in
23 grant funding that it is my understanding that the district
24 has obtained, those funds could perhaps be used towards
25 adaptive reuse and sale of the J.M. Hill school to many,

1 many entities who are anxious for mixed use residential and
2 retail, for old folks homes. There are many facilities
3 right there at J.M. Hill that would create an ideal
4 situation for a developer versus the expense of bringing a
5 plan and stormwater and engineering to a township like
6 Smithfield. There are a lot of advantages to strategic
7 adaptive reuse of the existing structure and I'd really like
8 us to look at the sale of that building and what that could
9 do to our overall debt because we could pay down capital and
10 maybe look at debt restructuring. That would be an
11 excellent scenario in my mind.

12 For the parents who are concerned about urban
13 blight, we all know that East Stroudsburg is a really great
14 place for lots of people to live and work. What the
15 existing structure offers is tremendous existing
16 infrastructure, walkability, public transportation, a
17 recreational spot, and many other advantages which I would
18 be happy to speak to the board about separately or write you
19 a letter.

20 Thank you so much for your consideration. I
21 know you're all doing a great job.

22 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 6, Rose Ann
23 Whitesell.

24 MS. WHITESELL: Resident, taxpayer, Smithfield
25 Township, Shawnee Village, and a former teacher. Tonight I

1 am here to ask the school board to please keep our schools
2 open. Closing a school is devastating to a community.
3 Children are uprooted from their friends and their teachers.
4 Jobs are lost and property values go down. These changes
5 will force some citizens to leave our area and lessen the
6 amount of taxpayers.

7 Closing a school does not lower taxes. It can
8 actually lead to an increase.

9 Many people have moved to our area because of
10 our small community schools. J.M. Hill and Smithfield are
11 two excellent schools with a history of top test scores.
12 Closing either of these schools will impact all of the
13 students in this district. Class size will increase and
14 special programs such as speech, gifted, and reading support
15 will be pushed out into the hallways. Our district had to
16 instruct students in the hallways and in portable classrooms
17 for too long. It took years to give our children the
18 classrooms they deserved. Taxpayers do not want to see this
19 happen again. If this board does close a school I hope that
20 you will consider the fact that taxpayers have already spent
21 millions of dollars renovating Smithfield. If you keep
22 Smithfield open you will save more jobs from being lost.
23 Unfortunately, J.M. Hill still needs millions of dollars in
24 renovations and it does not make sense to put the money into
25 it even at a good interest rate if you are going to close

1 the school.

2 I hope that you will keep both schools open and
3 look at other options to close the budget gap. Closing a
4 school is not worth the high price our children and
5 community will have to pay. Thank you.

6 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 7, Mr. Mahar.

7 MR. MAHAR: Yes. Ernest Mahar. I'm a resident
8 and taxpayer residing at 12 Lions Street in East
9 Stroudsburg.

10 I've been a resident of this area for over 10
11 years and currently have a daughter attending second grade
12 at J.M. Hill Elementary. I very much appreciate the
13 opportunity to address you tonight.

14 I want to state that I was born in Pontiac,
15 Michigan, and I spent the first 40-something years of my
16 life in metropolitan Detroit, so I think I have a little bit
17 of firsthand knowledge about the subject of declining
18 neighbors. The point I would like to make regarding the
19 potential closing of the J.M. Hill Elementary property
20 specifically is one that goes outside of the justifiably
21 emotional issues of small class size, the quality of
22 education for children or the advantages of a small school
23 versus the alternative, all of which are of vital importance
24 and I'm sure will be well addressed this evening.

25 I would like to address the subject of

1 community and neighborhood preservation. The area
2 immediately surrounding J.M. Hill is defined almost
3 exclusively by the presence of it, as the only
4 distinguishing institution in the neighborhood. As it is
5 the single defining presence, the school represents not only
6 the identifying characteristic of the neighborhood, but the
7 social and cultural hub as well.

8 By shuttering this facility, the board would
9 put the entire neighborhood into a path escalating decline
10 not only due to its loss of identity, but also by virtue of
11 the landscape becoming dominated by a vacant and most
12 assuredly declining physical edifice.

13 The irreplaceable loss of tax revenues due to
14 inevitably declining property values, the potential for
15 vandalism on the property, the subsequent overall decline of
16 the neighborhood and the inescapable loss of residents due
17 to these factors will be, in my estimation, much more
18 detrimental to the future of the borough, the district, and
19 the area than the temporary easing of roughly 10 percent of
20 the school board's current budget deficit.

21 I urge the board to look beyond the short term,
22 stop gap budget Band-Aid of the potential closure of the
23 district's highest performing institution and to keep J.M.
24 Hill Elementary and its adjoining neighborhood viable and a
25 contributing influence in the best interests of all East

1 Stroudsburg Area School District residents.

2 Again, thank you for your time and God help you
3 with this difficult issue.

4 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 8, Scott Amori.

5 MR. AMORI: Good evening. My name is Scott
6 Amori. I am a resident, a taxpayer, and parent in the East
7 Stroudsburg School District. My children attend Smithfield
8 Elementary.

9 East Stroudsburg Area School District now
10 stands facing the fiscal tidal wave that has been building
11 for 20 years. I, along with the subsequent speakers, formed
12 a joint effort we call Save Our East Stroudsburg Schools and
13 commenced a review of the district's structure, the 126
14 million dollar budget from last year, the professional
15 contract, and the school code.

16 This district faces a 10 million dollar massive
17 shortfall for 2012-2013. The proposed preliminary budget
18 includes yet one more tax increase, this time 5.8 percent
19 which simply cannot be sustained.

20 We selected one school not subject to this
21 hearing to review your enrollment numbers. We found that
22 the enrollment figures failed to match across the different
23 district computer systems -- 697 students versus 730
24 students. Absent a proper census of students, the
25 district's starting point, frankly, is fatally flawed.

1 We examined the alleged savings by closing
2 these two buildings. Buried in the District's numbers is
3 the startling fact that the estimated yearly expense to
4 operate each building was only \$50,000.00, less than one
5 half of one percent of the proposed budget deficit.

6 We looked at the district's estimated staff
7 savings that you presented here tonight and we chose three
8 single instructor positions that would have to be eliminated
9 contractually and so forth under the collective bargaining
10 agreement. Frankly, the district's numbers overstate the
11 savings by \$26,000.00 for those three positions alone.

12 Assessment for this -- challenges in Pike
13 County and Monroe County because of our declining real
14 estate valuations continue. This board approved a
15 settlement with Pocmont recently which carved 1.45 million
16 dollars from the tax assessable base from this school
17 district. Fernwood is in litigation. Can't be far behind.

18 Additionally, this district's debt service
19 which you listed tonight at 18 million dollars, on last
20 year's budget was 19 million dollars, this is an albatross
21 around this district and this taxpayer's neck. It doesn't
22 disappear. The debt service doesn't disappear if you close
23 one school, both schools or, frankly, all of the schools.
24 It makes no difference. We are stuck with it as taxpayers.

25 The proposal also really makes no mention of

1 the impact of closing the school recently renovated by state
2 aid.

3 Absent in this discussion? The 43 million
4 dollar non-instructional staff budget and any cuts there.
5 Additionally, personnel. These personnel costs alone
6 comprise 62 percent of your operating budget of the non-
7 instructional budget line items.

8 For the sake of the students, for the sake of
9 the taxpayers and residents, this board should, frankly,
10 undertake a comprehensive budget review by a qualified
11 professional rather than rushing through this fatally flawed
12 school closure plan. If you want volunteers, we'll help.
13 Thank you.

14 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 9, Sean Boyer.

15 MR. BOYER: Good evening. I reside at 152
16 Gabriel Estates in East Stroudsburg and I'm a resident and
17 taxpayer. Thank you for your time. I applaud the efforts
18 in finding creative ways in your February 27th budget
19 meeting to save 6.5 million dollars. I don't understand why
20 you didn't go over that tonight at all, but thank you.

21 Creative methods may help to find the rest of
22 the needed funds such as the following: One, having
23 administrative staff pay half their health insurance like a
24 lot of us already do. Cut the Driver's Education program.
25 Rent out school rooms to adult night classes. Having

1 parents buy school books. Having businesses advertise on
2 school buses. As you heard at the February 13th meeting,
3 we all have to make sacrifices.

4 The approach that was taken by the board in
5 communicating the school closings was not in the best
6 interests of the community as it did not provide enough time
7 for us to organize and research. If some of the budget cuts
8 listed in the February 27th budget meeting were determined
9 and decided upon within the past two weeks, just think what
10 could have been done if this had been formally brought to
11 the public a year ago.

12 Pew Charitable Trust is a company that analyzes
13 public and civil problems. They did a study last year
14 concluding that informing the public early on in the process
15 of closing schools will result in a much fairer process for
16 everyone involved, school closing or not. The district's
17 site had given one year advance notice to the public [sic].

18 In the past two weeks several groups have
19 organized in our district participating in solving the
20 problem as a community. We, as a community, have found
21 discrepancies as Mr. Amori pointed out, found solutions, and
22 have educated our ourselves as to the nature of our problem.
23 Let me underscore our problem as this affects the entire
24 district.

25 On Monday I sent direct questions to the

1 district Right To Know officer trying to find numerical
2 trends over the past five years trying to figure out what
3 went wrong, where we are headed, and what could be done.
4 I received a bunch of links yesterday afternoon which might
5 provide me some of the data, but I have to sift and compile
6 it myself which I had no time for last night. Again, we
7 should have been given more time to educate ourselves and
8 determine solutions.

9 Lastly, while there was just cause to build a
10 new elementary school based upon the influx of new students,
11 the decision to build a 40 million dollar school instead of
12 a typical 10 to 20 million dollar school has proven to be
13 severely underestimated, compounding that with the
14 redistricting of hundreds of students and transferring them
15 from the very two schools we are now discussing to be
16 closed. There's no doubt that poor decisions have been made
17 in the past. Let's not make another poor decision when
18 we're dealing with the welfare of our kids, our educators
19 and our communities. With such a devastating impact to our
20 community, this is not the time or circumstance to rush to
21 judgment of closing a school. Thank you.

22 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 10, Christopher
23 Brooks.

24 DR. BROOKS: Good evening. My name is
25 Dr. Christopher Brooks. Taxpayer, resident. Kiwanis

1 Street, East Stroudsburg.

2 My colleague, Dr. Eileen (inaudible), and I
3 represent differing ethnic groups, political affiliations,
4 and schools within the district, but in the spirit of
5 bipartisanship and the spirit of (inaudible), which has been
6 severely harmed both locally and nationally, we wish to
7 share with you why we both find that East Stroudsburg Area
8 School District's proposal to close either J.M. Hill or
9 Smithfield Elementary troubling given recent research
10 demonstrating a lack of financial benefits from school
11 closures.

12 A recent Pew study indicates significant
13 savings from school closures occurs only if accompanied by
14 faculty layoffs. As many of the teachers who work here live
15 here, too, laying them off could force them to leave the
16 county. This, in turn, decreases tax base, a vicious cycle
17 of declining population and tax revenues.

18 This problem is exacerbated by the closure of
19 neighborhood schools which serve to increase property
20 values. A recent Urban Economic Journal study found that
21 the school closures in Shaker Heights, Ohio, for example,
22 led to a 9.9 percent decrease in home values.

23 Further, one of the advertised benefits of
24 school closures is that buildings can be sold to private
25 investors in order to yield income to municipalities. Many

1 studies indicate this alternative reuse is very rare.
2 Selling or leasing closed schools is, quote, extremely
3 difficult and that unused schools, quote, attract vandalism
4 and other illicit activity, unquote.

5 Community shuttered schools, therefore, incur
6 more costs such as lost tax revenue, reduced property
7 values, property damage, and the need for increased police
8 patrols, an issue which I raised in the 13 February hearing.

9 Some community members argue that the teachers
10 are overpaid and their contracts should be open to
11 renegotiation. East Stroudsburg teacher salaries are not
12 outrageously high. Look at the collective bargaining
13 agreement. No one is earning close to the \$90,000.00 salary
14 that some people are claiming. One avenue of savings might
15 be their health care contributions, but even that has been
16 subject to regular annual increases in the current CBA.

17 Discussion of administrators who have already
18 taken a voluntary pay crease [sic] and making contributions
19 was also discussed.

20 Closing schools may address the symptom of our
21 economic malaise, but it would not end -- but it would end
22 up worsening the high unemployment and a depressed housing
23 market as well as reducing the quality of our children's
24 education.

25 We urge this board to fulfill its 2006 adopted

1 Code of Conduct responsibility; engaging all community
2 stakeholders, taxpayers, by addressing shortfalls through
3 transparent dialogue with the community, one which is well
4 aware of the need for long-term fiscal responsibility.

5 We, the taxpayers, are here to work with you,
6 just ask. Respectfully submitted. Thank you.

7 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 11, Elizabeth
8 Kirkwood.

9 MS. KIRKWOOD: Hi. Elizabeth Kirkwood.
10 Taxpayer, resident and parent. 120 Worthington Avenue,
11 Shawnee, Pennsylvania.

12 Schools closures abound nationwide becoming
13 almost epidemic. Our public educational problems are here
14 to stay in this economy. In response we must be unified and
15 strong and devise long-term creative solutions as a
16 district, as a community, to protect our schools from
17 closing year after year.

18 Why is this important? For one, the impacts of
19 closing schools are very grave affecting everything from the
20 real estate property values to the social fabric of a
21 community.

22 And, secondly, because if we don't develop
23 long-term strategies we'll see a domino effect whereby this
24 school board will have to decide to close more schools every
25 fiscal year and while it may seem like a wise decision to

1 close a school in the immediate short-term, make no mistake,
2 the board will have to move mountains before it can reopen
3 and close Smithfield or J.M. Hill in our district.

4 So, what can we do? First I want to commend
5 you all as a district and a board on demonstrating the kind
6 of critical creative thinking reducing the 10 million dollar
7 deficit in the recent budget this past week. Line by line
8 the district has identified ways to cut over 6 million
9 dollars in its budget. Thank you.

10 To then jump to the conclusion that we should
11 simply close Smithfield or J.M. Hill, it's an either/or
12 story, pitting the schools against one another, to make up
13 the remaining deficit gap, however, is both shortsighted and
14 very destructive to our community. We simply have not had
15 sufficient time to make such as drastic and Draconian
16 decision. Rather, such a decision must be based on hard,
17 empirical evidence that leads to a broadly supported,
18 incontrovertible conclusion.

19 As a taxpayer and parent, I contend that we've
20 not met this burden. Instead, I urge you, respectfully, as
21 a board to implement the following measures designed to
22 ensure sound reasoning, fairness, and transparency.

23 No. 1: Establish a Blue Ribbon, countywide
24 advisory committee comprised of a balanced cross-section of
25 the community.

1 No. 2: Continue to explore and alternative
2 revenue streams in debt such as the state fund reserves.

3 And, No. 3, garner political support from
4 state representatives.

5 A countywide advisory committee will provide
6 the long-term guidance we need to address the systemic
7 educational problems in our region. Moreover, this
8 committee will serve to examine countywide strategies for
9 fully understanding these numbers. They're just not clear.
10 Reducing the deficit, establishing a realistic timeline,
11 avoiding school closures, if possible, and proposing
12 creative, long-term solutions to declining student
13 populations and respective tax bases.

14 Volunteers to join this committee surround you
15 here tonight. Let our voices be heard and let us together
16 think creatively and explore options. Thank you very much.

17 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 12, Geoff Gamble.

18 MR. GAMBLE: Thank you. My name is Geoff
19 Gamble. I am a taxpayer and resident of East Stroudsburg,
20 92 Fawn Road.

21 I'd like to ask, if I could, if everybody in
22 the auditorium, if you're comfortable, could please stand as
23 part of my presentation.

24 Ladies and Gentlemen, we've heard a lot about
25 numbers tonight and rightfully so. The budget is vitally

1 important. The shortfalls are daunting. We've seen the
2 numbers. These are the people. These people standing
3 represent the students who will be most affected by your
4 decision. Based on the numbers that I saw for attendance
5 tonight this -- these people standing would represent one of
6 the possible two schools. These are the people that will
7 try to find a way to fit into their new school communities.
8 They will be welcomed with open arms, there's no doubt, but
9 it will be very different from what they have always known.
10 These are the people who will have to adjust to the changes.

11 We've all seen what it's like for a new student
12 to move into a school and we all know the challenges that
13 they face and how intimidating it all can be. So, multiple
14 that by 337 or 388.

15 These children will be anxious. They will be
16 nervous. It may be very hard for them to focus on their
17 studies as they work to adjust, I know. My daughter told me
18 when she was moved from J.M. Hill to ESE. She still
19 remembers Mrs. DeHart; she remembers and she misses. She
20 loves ESE now, she's connected to it, but those connections,
21 like all good things, took time to grow and wrap themselves
22 around her. ESE is her school and she's produced to call it
23 her home now. She knew what teacher she was hoping to get
24 in the fifth grade when she was in the third grade. She
25 knew. The children and parents of J.M. Hill and Smithfield

1 can tell you as well: They know their schools, teachers,
2 and staff. Generations of the same family have been taught
3 by the same teacher. They know. That's what makes the
4 school a home.

5 Each school in our district is their
6 neighborhood's small school. Each has forged these
7 connections with their communities and, make no mistake
8 about it, ladies and gentlemen, each of them will be
9 affected by these proposals. Some will change by welcoming
10 new students, but the changes won't stop there. Teacher and
11 support staff cuts and furloughs will most certainly cause
12 changes in the staff and classrooms of all school
13 communities across the district, not just at Smithfield or
14 J.M. Hill. Long-standing members of school communities at
15 Bushkill, Resica, Middle Smithfield, and ESE may well move
16 to a new school. Some, sadly, we may lose. We can hope
17 that their talents and care for the children will still be
18 there when we're ready to call them back, but like anyone
19 who has lost their job, sometimes they cannot ride out the
20 storm and must seek new harbors.

21 Change will come to all school communities if
22 these options are executed by the board. We know that
23 closing one or both of these schools will not lower anyone's
24 taxes nor will it provide the long-term solutions to our
25 financial problems.

1 VOICE: Time. Thank you.

2 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 13, Peter Kirkwood.

3 MR. KIRKWOOD: Ladies and Gentlemen of the
4 board, friends and neighbors, hello. I am Pete Kirkwood.
5 I'm a taxpayer. I live in the Village of Shawnee. I went
6 to Smithfield. All four of my siblings did, too. My
7 daughter's there now in kindergarten and so is my nephew.
8 I won't belabor this point because I know that others have
9 and will make it forcefully. Suffice to say that my family
10 and I hold a deep affection for our alma mater and a strong
11 feeling that it's central to our community.

12 I want to use an analogy to make my point, so
13 please bear with me if it takes a moment for my meaning to
14 become clear. Many of you are familiar with the ravages of
15 diabetes and how, under certain circumstances, foot lesions
16 sometimes necessitate an amputation. Many of you are also
17 aware that successful control of diabetes requires a
18 combination of expensive drug therapies and serious
19 lifestyle modifications.

20 Now let's imagine our school district is the
21 diabetes patient. The patient's definitely sick. Now let's
22 imagine you, our school board, as the good doctor trying to
23 develop a successful treatment. Let's imagine Smithfield
24 school as the left foot and let's imagine J.M. Hill as the
25 right foot. So far the feet themselves are healthy and no

1 one would advocate preemptively amputating a health limb to
2 avoid complications from diabetes. Amputation doesn't cure
3 the disease anyway, it just diminishes the patient.

4 If we are here to decide which of these schools
5 to close, however, we are, in effect, deciding which healthy
6 foot to chop off. This, of course, is missing the point.
7 The underlying disease is that our school system costs more
8 to run than we can raise to run it. Under that commitment
9 to systemwide reform, closing one of these schools does
10 nothing but retard our community's inevitable slide into
11 convalescence. Pretty soon we'll be on the operating table
12 again with another limb under the knife.

13 We shouldn't be debating which foot to sever,
14 we should be attempting to articulate a vision for a real,
15 sustainable vitality for the entire system.

16 Unfortunately, the treatment is complicated.
17 It's a commitment. It requires some pain all around and a
18 real change of lifestyle and it can't be articulated in a
19 three minute sound bite. One thing is clear, however. It
20 needs to address the entire patient, not just one foot or
21 the other.

22 Therefore, I support the formation of a Blue
23 Ribbon committee to examine this problem at the county
24 level, to consider the entire patient, and to proscribe a
25 holistic plan for the long-term health of our school system

1 and I call upon you, the school board, to request that the
2 county commissioners form such a committee and that you
3 postpone any decision on the closing of any school until
4 this committee has met, done its research, and made its
5 prescription. Thank you very much.

6 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 14, Richard
7 Berkowitz.

8 MR. BERKOWITZ: Richard Berkowitz. I'm a
9 resident and taxpayer in the East Stroudsburg School
10 District. I thought about writing a long speech and I know
11 there are so many stories to be told. My kids no longer go
12 to Smithfield, they go to East Stroudsburg Elementary. They
13 were moved from that school a while back and I think there's
14 great things to be said about all the schools.

15 I think it's an excellent thing that folks are
16 now talking about creating committees and working with the
17 school board. For the last three years I was at almost all
18 school board meetings except for this year. I've been --
19 your meetings are the same night that I have another
20 meeting, so I have missed probably the last eight meetings,
21 regularly scheduled school board meetings, but I don't see
22 too many people here that have been at those meetings. Some
23 have become board members now that were at the meetings all
24 the time and I think it's a great idea that we all kind of
25 pitch in and rededicate ourselves to coming to those

1 meetings because it's a really difficulty job. I don't know
2 how you even figure out the budget. At times I wonder do we
3 even do that because it's so difficult to -- I mean, the
4 reams of paper that I saw you guys working through tell me
5 that it's almost -- it's a daunting task.

6 Whether or not we should keep a school or close
7 a school I have no idea. I don't believe we have as a
8 community, or maybe even as a board, enough information to
9 really make that determination and my encouragement as well
10 is that we, as a community, that the three hundred and some
11 odd people that came out make a regular effort to meet with
12 the board to get real information that we can use to help
13 make decisions.

14 The taxes have gone up every year. I've lived
15 here for 12 years, 10 years my current home. My taxes are
16 double. There has been no change in the yearly having to
17 double the taxes. I really do believe that -- and I don't
18 know if it's county level or state level, but we need to
19 consider action for the state for the proper funding of our
20 school districts and that is a countywide decision, but,
21 really, we have to focus on East Stroudsburg and we have to
22 focus on what are our opportunities to correct that
23 injustice.

24 I also do think that, again, there hasn't been
25 enough information. I'd like to know more about what money

1 are we going to lose from the state by closing this school,
2 what is the real rental income, and there's a million other
3 questions.

4 So, I'm hoping that you guys have gotten those
5 answers and I would also encourage that you get those pieces
6 of information out to the public. Obviously, there must
7 have been a fire or something else more important because
8 the news packed up their bags and left and that's
9 unfortunate because there's many people that can't come to
10 these meetings for real reasons and so they won't have the
11 information.

12 I hope that we as a community that's out here
13 today will make -- I'll do it myself as well, make a
14 continued effort to get to more board meetings to be an aid
15 to you in solving this solution long-term, not short-term.
16 Thank you.

17 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 15, Robert Wilson.

18 MR. WILSON: Hello. Bob Wilson, 128
19 Schoolhouse Road, East Stroudsburg. Resident, taxpayer,
20 teacher. First of all, I'd like to apologize to some of the
21 bigger elementary schools. I know how good those schools
22 are. You have to understand that some people are very, very
23 passionate and if you were in this position, if you were
24 from ESE, if you were from Bushkill you'd be fighting as
25 hard as you could and sometimes people say things that they

1 really don't mean and all of our schools are great and I'd
2 like to say I'm sorry if anybody took anything anyone said
3 wrong.

4 The other thing is that this timeline is so
5 short. You've got to understand: If they go by this
6 timeline your children will not know where they're going to
7 go school when school ends. The teachers will not know
8 where they're going to teach when the last day of school is.
9 You're not going to know your bus runs. They're not going
10 to know who they'll be with. This is not going to be made
11 until the middle of summer. When your kids leave they might
12 be saying good-bye to their friends for the last time. They
13 might not even be in that same school. They might be saying
14 good-bye to their teachers, their special teachers. This
15 will affect every school. The highest paid teachers are not
16 going to be let go. It's going to be the lowest on the
17 totem pole. When they furlough, because of our contract the
18 highest paid teachers with the most tenure are going to stay
19 and the new teachers making bear minimum are the ones that
20 are going to go. You have to understand that also.

21 It's just such a crunch in time. If we could
22 just have more time to think this over and all this input
23 from all these people. It just seems like we're rushing
24 into it. And, at the last meeting we had one of the board
25 members told me that we were in a minority. Well, we've had

1 like 14 people here. Where are the people that want these
2 buildings closed? Are they going to speak next? Please
3 come up if you want to speak. I'm sure you're registered.
4 Correct? So, if they're going to speak I'm going to stick
5 around and listen to the people that want the buildings
6 closed. Thank you.

7 MR. DIRVONAS: At this time we're going to take
8 a five minute break. When we come back we'd like speakers
9 16 through 30, if we could.

10 (Recess from 8:09 p.m. to 8:17 p.m.)

11 MR. DIRVONAS: We only have 16 or 17 remaining,
12 so if we could have the rest of the speakers come up front
13 and maybe sit in the second row what we'll try to do is try
14 to get this finished up rather than have an additional
15 recess. Thank you.

16 If we can have Speaker No. 16, Susan Jorstad.

17 MS. JORSTAD: As a parent -- I'm sorry.
18 Susan Jorstad, 3194 Dogwood Terrace, East Stroudsburg.
19 Resident, taxpayer, and mother of four children in the
20 district.

21 As a parent I am concerned about the quality
22 of education for my children. We have good teachers, good
23 families, had the opportunity for a good education at every
24 one of our schools. So, this is not a matter of my child's
25 school is better than any other school.

1 As a taxpayer, I am concerned that the decision
2 to close the school is being made hastily based
3 on miscalculations and without regard for the whole picture.
4 In reviewing the budget proposals and proposed spending cuts
5 a number of areas still need to be addressed.

6 One: Why does the cost savings analysis for
7 closing Smithfield include furloughing 10 professionals
8 while closing J.M. Hill, which is a larger school in terms
9 of enrollment, would result in furloughing only six
10 professionals? The difference in savings between the two
11 options appears to be entirely the difference in the number
12 of teachers you would chose to furlough under either option,
13 so why would 10 be furloughed under either option?

14 No. 2: Smithfield houses Early Intervention
15 and Autistic Support students through the IU as well as Life
16 Skill students, but I don't see these numbers included in
17 the table that compares enrollment in each of our elementary
18 schools. If Smithfield were to close where would the
19 students go?

20 No. 3: Cost savings of closing Smithfield
21 versus J.M. Hill is unfair and incomplete. Smithfield is
22 fully up to date having just four years ago undergone a
23 multi-million dollar renovation. The renovations in excess
24 of 2.5 million being planned for J.M. Hill are not
25 necessarily included in that cost comparison and I'm

1 wondering why not. Perhaps your answer would be that the
2 J.M. Hill renovation must be done even if that school should
3 remain vacant, but why renovate a vacant building that the
4 board admits has a low likelihood of being rented? Why not
5 do minimal repairs to keep the building standing in case of
6 a future need or sell or demolish the building? Why aren't
7 these alternatives being discussed?

8 No. 4. If Smithfield is to be closed will we
9 be required to repay state subsidies received for the recent
10 construction and renovation at a higher interest rate since
11 the building's no longer being used for educational
12 purposes? This also needs to be part of the comparison if
13 you're considering closing one of the schools.

14 No. 5. Based on the board's budget, six
15 million of the 10 million dollar shortfall for 2012-13 is
16 due to an increase in salaries and benefits. This 6 million
17 dollar increase over the prior year includes two and a half
18 million dollars, additional taxpayer dollars, for teacher
19 pensions and an additional 1.8 million for medical
20 insurance. One of my questions is why the administrators
21 are not contributing to their health care premiums. This
22 would be one place to start in terms of balancing that
23 overall budget. Thank you.

24 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 17, Wendy Sheeran.

25 MS. SHEERAN: Wendy Sheeran, 116 West Broad

1 Street, East Stroudsburg. Taxpayer and resident. Make no
2 mistake, your taxes are going to increase whether we close
3 both of the schools or not. Just as important is what will
4 happen to our community with empty schools. What will
5 happen to our kids as they try to adjust and more buildings
6 close with our growing deficit.

7 As a 7th grader, my district consolidated
8 schools and sent the 7th and 8th grades from my town to the
9 neighboring junior high within the district. Children are
10 innocent and I, like my friends, would have gone innocently
11 with an open mind to Ford City Junior High. However,
12 because of parents, taxpayers who sat in meetings like these
13 for months and bashed Ford City, talked about the bad apples
14 there, screamed at board members and picketed in front of
15 their homes for weeks I went to junior high inherently
16 afraid of the bad apples and overtly sad that the school my
17 family so much loved didn't matter enough to nine people
18 with power. It came down to my mind that it should have
19 been more than that. I felt that I had failed somehow and I
20 see that happening here. At J.M. Hill I am, unfortunately,
21 seeing the same behavior starting to emerge; angry parents
22 yelling, holding signs, and promoting conspiracy theories
23 that affect our kids in both schools. Like in my hometown,
24 divisiveness will end up equaling failure here, too. And it
25 didn't save money. The schools separated again and have

1 stayed that way, but the raw emotion, the senseless furry
2 that ran rampant in the hearings and news articles that came
3 out in school changed our community forever.

4 My message to parents, taxpayers, and the board
5 is this: If we unite in our purpose, we will stand. If we
6 divide, we will fall one after the other. Let's go to our
7 representatives and ask them in unison to fight for us
8 instead of fighting amongst ourselves. Let's work together
9 in a Blue Ribbon commission to help these elect officials do
10 what we want them to do and do what needs to be done: Save
11 money and keep smaller class size in community schools.

12 As the Reverend Martin Niemoller once said,
13 "When the Nazis first they came for the communists I
14 remained silent. I was not a communist. When they locked
15 up the social democrats I remained silent. I was not a
16 social democrat. When they came for the trade unionist I
17 did not speak out. I was not a trade unionist. When they
18 came for the Jews I remained silent. I was not a Jew.
19 When they came for me there was no one left to speak out.
20 Who will speak for the other schools in our district if we
21 refuse to solve this together? Thank you.

22 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 19, Steven
23 Zimmerman.

24 MR. ZIMMERMAN: My name is Steve Zimmerman.
25 I'm a 30 year resident of East Stroudsburg. I first want to

1 say thank you for your services. You're put in an extreme
2 situation.

3 This is only the second time I've spoke or had
4 the opportunity to speak to the board. I wish to say I
5 represent the people who aren't as affluent as others.
6 Taxes are at an all-time high and they're not really going
7 to go away for the next four or five years. When we look at
8 Pennsylvania revenue, it's posted on the website, and the
9 corporation tax, year to date, was 1.2 billion. It sounds
10 like a lot, but, truthfully, the Commonwealth is in much of
11 a problem as we are considering they had a 260 million
12 dollar short fall or 17 percent, 18 percent. So, they're in
13 the same boat we are. You only get so much money with so
14 much to do with it.

15 I don't think the governor's going to help you.
16 I really don't think your representatives are going to help
17 you. Some have come up with a great idea, the great idea
18 being that they have this HR1776 Property Tax Independence
19 Act which was submitted. I only have six copies. I
20 apologize. As I said, I'm not a well off person. But,
21 it's something to consider for future. I'm sure now you
22 have timelines, but basically what it says is to increase
23 the state tax to 7 percent and tax some other things and
24 reduce property taxes.

25 There are people who are stressed. There are

1 people who give people food. When we look at our high
2 school, 60 percent are in the free lunch program or free
3 breakfast program. Kudos to all of you for allowing it to
4 stay open during the summer.

5 Rentals aren't going down. Taxes aren't going
6 down. Like ourselves, we, too, as a family, we've had to
7 cut. Maybe our cable, maybe take back a car, do other
8 things. It's hard.

9 To pick a school is hard. J.M. Hill has been
10 friends for my family for many years with all the teachers.
11 Nine children. I say again, nine. Okay? And, every one of
12 them is trying to be something in society that's gone beyond
13 my house.

14 Maybe if you do have to close, maybe, and not
15 to pick, but maybe Smithfield might be the one since you
16 already bus. If you move J.M. Hill you have to rebus all
17 these kids. Maybe Beacon School, Shawnee Academy and other
18 students that you farm out to Lehigh Valley to teach, to
19 train, and that cost, we maybe can do an alliance with
20 Pleasant Valley, Stroudsburg, and others and maybe one of
21 our schools could be that house and that alliance. It's
22 certainly something worth looking into and that's really all
23 that I have to say. Thank you again.

24 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 20, Kathy Parrish.

25 MS. PARRISH: Hi. My name is Kathy Parrish.

1 227 Estate Drive, East Stroudsburg. I'm a taxpayer and a
2 resident of East Stroudsburg. I'm also a parent of two sons
3 who both attended J.M. Hill Elementary from kindergarten
4 through fifth grade, so I do have a sentimental attachment
5 to that school. I'm also aware, though, of the financial
6 difficulties which we are facing as a district. We spent
7 millions of dollars in recent years renovating, expanding,
8 and upgrading Middle Smithfield and Smithfield elementary
9 schools as well as building East Stroudsburg Elementary.

10 The projected enrollment for the 2012-13 school
11 year for Middle Smithfield is 498 students in a building
12 which has a capacity of 909 [sic]. Projected enrollment for
13 Smithfield is 339 with a capacity of 638. Projected
14 enrollment at ESE is 707 and has a capacity of 858. There's
15 the potential for an additional 411 students at Middle
16 Smithfield, 299 at Smithfield, and 151 at ESE. The
17 projected enrollment for J.M. Hill is for only 393 students
18 who could all be easily accommodated at the other three
19 schools. There's also sufficient room to absorb any new
20 students coming into the district.

21 It's fiscally irresponsible for this board to
22 make plans for a 3 million dollar renovation to upgrade
23 J.M. Hill when there's a 10 million dollar budget deficit.
24 I understand that the district has secured a 2.5 million
25 dollar bond, but I cannot believe that there's not a

1 contingency plan to return money that's not needed. The
2 district but on its website what the savings would be if
3 either J.M. Hill or Smithfield Elementary would be closed,
4 but the website did not incorporate the savings if the
5 renovation is not done. If J.M. Hill is closed the money
6 saved from salaries, benefits, operating cost, and
7 renovation will result in a savings of over 4 million
8 dollars.

9 J.M. Hill is a beautiful, historic building,
10 but just as there were significant issues with the Bunnell
11 building, the same holds true for the J.M. Hill building.

12 Although it would be an initial adjustment for
13 the staff as well as the students and the families directly
14 involved, the financial gain would have an affect on the
15 educational system as a whole for the entire East
16 Stroudsburg Area School District. With a 10 million dollar
17 budget shortage, there's no reasonable rationalization for
18 starting another costly renovation and take on more debt.
19 History has proven that unexpected renovation costs tend to
20 expand once a project has started resulting in higher than
21 anticipated expenses. We have three newly built and
22 renovated alternate sites where we can provide the J.M. Hill
23 students with a modern technology, inclusive learning
24 environment. The board will be short-sighted to reduce the
25 emotional -- I'm sorry, the educational opportunities for

1 all the other students in this district, all the other eight
2 schools, because of the sentiment offered for the 339
3 students at J.M. Hill. Considering the financial issues
4 which the district is currently facing and will continue to
5 face in the future it's time to make hard choices. It makes
6 sense to close a school which requires significant and
7 costly improvement: J.M. Hill. Smithfield Elementary has
8 already had extensive improvements completed. The district
9 should not put any financial burden on the taxpayers by
10 taking on additional debt and we should close J.M. Hill
11 school.

12 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 21. Sapphire
13 Serrano.

14 MS. SERRANO: Sapphire Serrano. 16 Oak Lane,
15 East Stroudsburg, PA. Resident and taxpayer. Here's a fun
16 fact. Today would have been Dr. Seuss's 103rd birthday, a
17 quirky author who saw the value in developing the minds of
18 our youth. Schools throughout the United States celebrated
19 in his honor -- J.M. Hill was no different -- by wearing
20 pajamas and engaging in Dr. Seuss's books. This morning as
21 I dropped off my son and saw the number of students wearing
22 PJs walking to school with such excitement written on their
23 faces my heart smiled. There was a certain goodness
24 emanating from our streets this morning, a goodness that
25 would disappear with the closure of J.M. Hill and Smithfield

1 by potentially lowering property taxes, by negatively
2 impacting our education with the increase of class sizes and
3 the furloughing of teachers.

4 School board members, I urge you to research
5 and any all avenues that would allow both J.M. Hill and
6 Smithfield Elementary to stay open. I urge you to consider
7 options such as pay-to-play sports, energy conservation,
8 allow us parents to purchase school supplies, rent out
9 school classrooms to other institutes, and, lastly, have
10 administrators and teachers pay towards their health
11 insurance.

12 Additionally, I would like to piggyback on the
13 Save Our East Stroudsburg group about forming a Blue Ribbon
14 committee.

15 I leave you with this. Think left and think
16 right, think low and think high, all the things you can
17 think up if you only you try. Thank you for your time.

18 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 22, Kerrie Curtis.

19 MS. CURTIS: Hello. Kerrie Curtis. 516 Oak
20 Street, East Stroudsburg Borough. Resident, taxpayer,
21 mother of two children.

22 Let me just start out by saying I do not envy
23 any of you guys your position tonight. This is such a
24 difficult decision laid upon you guys and I would not want
25 to be in your position right now.

1 My children do not attend the East Stroudsburg
2 Area School District because it is our local public school,
3 they attend East Stroudsburg because it is the best schools
4 in the area. I checked the AYP reports, I checked class
5 sizes, I actually wanted to send my kids to private school.
6 Talked to parents in the district. I was told how great
7 J.M. Hill teachers are, how great Smithfield's teachers are,
8 how active the principals are. Turns out it's actually
9 better than private schools; they're getting a better
10 education. It's a smaller class size than the private
11 schools.

12 This is a small, tightknit community. We have
13 six small, tightknit community elementary schools. They
14 gives the kids a sense of pride in their community. It
15 gives the kids a sense of belonging to their community.
16 They go to school where their neighbors went to school.
17 They go to school where their relatives went to school.
18 It gives them pride. These are the children that are going
19 to be leading us in the future. We want them to have pride
20 in our community. We want them to lead us into the next
21 decade, century, what have you with that strong community
22 feeling to prevent problems like this happening in the
23 future.

24 The staff at these small schools from the
25 principal down to the support staff know the children by

1 name. They call them by name in the hallways. That gives
2 the children such a sense of pride and accomplishment. They
3 look forward to going to school every day because everybody
4 knows their name.

5 It was mentioned before that the class sizes
6 would be 22 to 23 children if J.M. Hill were to close.
7 Right now my daughter is in a class with 24 children so how
8 will class sizes actually decrease by adding 100, 200
9 students to another school?

10 Finally, I know that the board will make the
11 proper decision. We're doing our best to help find the cuts
12 and I'm sure the board can look a little bit deeper, find
13 places to cut. Allow us to purchase the supplies for our
14 children for school. Take it off the board's hands. Let us
15 pay to play. Let us help you save our schools. Thank you.

16 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 23, Carrie
17 Panepinto.

18 MS. PANEPINTO: Hello. Carrie Panepinto.
19 244 Braeside Avenue. I'm a taxpayer and resident. I've
20 lived here for nine years. I have three children attending
21 J.M. Hill. I have two more still to come, so that would be
22 five children. I have three that are in kindergarten,
23 first, and second grade. I will be a part of J.M. Hill for
24 13 years when all is done. I thought about moving, but I
25 don't want my children to lose out on the J.M. Hill

1 experience.

2 My kids were actually very upset that school
3 closed on Wednesday because, as the last few speakers said,
4 we had Dr. Seuss week and Wednesday was Whacky Wednesday.
5 So, they kept asking when they were going to dress up for
6 Whacky Wednesday. They were upset about not going to
7 school. That just blew my mind. I'm also a teacher at
8 High School North, so I enjoyed my snow day.

9 My kids also have prizes that they can get
10 because we have a Pride program at our school and my
11 students, my kids, choose to spend time with the principal
12 as opposed to getting a little prize, a little toy. They
13 want to spend time with the principal and see what she does
14 or spend time with the computer coach so that they can play
15 on the computers and learn more and they're very excited to
16 come home and talk about it with me and with my younger
17 kids. My two year old is so excited to go on the school bus
18 and go to J.M. Hill. Of course, he has three years until
19 then, but he can't wait to go.

20 J.M. Hill is a community and I stress
21 community. It's a family. My kids love going there as I
22 have said many times. It's also a successful school.
23 95 percent meet AYP. That's huge. 95 percent are
24 proficient.

25 It's a growing school. Since my daughter

1 started in kindergarten to now there's 50 additional
2 students in the school and I'm also a PTO president, so I'm
3 very involved in raising funds for the school and I have an
4 active PTO involved in our family game nights and our
5 fundraisers we do and all the activities we do. Our school
6 is so close we know everyone, we talk to everyone. As I
7 said, the support staff knows their names. My kid is so
8 excited when they come home and someone said their name.
9 Everyone knows my children and they're only in kindergarten,
10 first, and second grade. And they're good kids. That's one
11 of the reasons; they're good kids.

12 But, there's a lot of factors to be considered
13 when thinking about the budget. Right now we're trying to
14 do the budget and we're trying to think about closing
15 schools. There's too much going on. We need more time to
16 decide on what we need to do for this budget and the
17 schools. It's rushing something that could be detrimental
18 to the future of our district.

19 Remember, it's about the kids, it's about our
20 future. J.M. Hill is a community school. So many kids are
21 saying, "My parents went here. My grandparents went there,"
22 and they stayed here so they could bring their children and
23 their families to J.M. Hill. They didn't want to move.
24 Like, I don't want to move because I want my kids to
25 continue at J.M. Hill. It's a community just like

1 Smithfield is. This is a community that we don't want to
2 break up and cause more problems in the future.

3 So, please remember it's for the children.
4 We are educating our children and our future. Thank you.

5 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker 24, Cathy Gallagher.

6 MS. GALLAGHER: Cathy Gallagher. 186 State
7 Street, East Stroudsburg. I'm a resident, a taxpayer. I
8 was born here, grew up here, live here, and I now work for
9 J.M. Hill. When I started out I worked at a bigger
10 elementary school. It was sometimes so big it was a little
11 chaotic at times. I never once met the principal in the
12 whole four months I worked there. As soon as the opening
13 came up I jumped at the chance to work at J.M. Hill.
14 Everyone there knows everyone and the principal is very
15 visible and knows all of us personally by name. From
16 Mrs. Arnold to all the teachers, support staff, my fellow
17 cafeteria workers, and the custodians, which one happens to
18 be my oldest son, we're all like one big extended family.

19 My youngest son is at JTL this year and thanks
20 to his great teachers there on the Oak team and, more
21 importantly, the teachers at J.M. Hill who gave him the
22 tools needed to move up he is a High Honor student.

23 I could say I really, really need my job, but
24 it's really -- what I'm saying is I love my job. I have
25 been a PTO board member for four years and everyone,

1 students, parents, staff, Mrs. Arnold, everybody worked
2 together at every event would do to make our school a
3 success and I think it's very important.

4 So, please, forget numbers and think bodily.
5 Thank you.

6 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 25, Gerard Rozea.
7 Is that correct?

8 MR. ROZEA: Rozea, yes. Thank you. My name is
9 Gerard Rozea, 309 Reagan Drive, a resident, a taxpayer in
10 Smithfield Township.

11 First I'd like to thank the board for the
12 opportunity to discuss a very serious matter of possible
13 closure of either J.M. Hill or Smithfield Elementary. My
14 daughter is a first grader in Smithfield Elementary school.
15 Our experiences with the school, administration, staff and
16 teachers has been beyond anything I could have hoped for.

17 The student center, the learning environment
18 has allowed my daughter to excel academically, emotionally,
19 and socially. She loves her teachers, classmates, and has
20 found a true enjoyment in her education and in school.

21 Please take the time to consider all options
22 before making this important decision. Not based on short-
23 term budget needs, but consider the potential long-term
24 effects of the education of the students. Please do not
25 close our schools. The school district should consider that

1 the short-term cost savings in closing the schools outweighs
2 the long-term affects on education opportunities and the
3 affect this has on all the schools in the district
4 considering the fact if redistricting occurs and how that
5 impacts all of the schools. It appears enrollment numbers
6 for Smithfield Elementary School and J.M. Hill can be
7 attributed to redistricting when East Stroudsburg Elementary
8 School was open. Taking nothing away from any of the
9 schools, but this must be considered in enrollment totals
10 and impacts on all the schools as we move forward. The
11 deficits next year in the budget are expected to exceed
12 those for this year. Please consider the long-term budget
13 strategy and affect school closures may have on them.
14 Significant increases in taxes are likely to occur with or
15 without the closure of the schools. Therefore, the
16 immediate budget should not outweigh the long-term
17 educational and fiscal effects associated with this
18 decision.

19 I encourage the board to identify creative ways
20 to minimize cuts and to look at areas of potential savings
21 and other revenue resources. The current allocation of
22 funds from the state to the district should be addressed to
23 ensure the proper funding formulas for the county. Address
24 the state funding and work to educate individuals of
25 problems of cutting public education and the need to restore

1 the funding. Look at other revenue sources. Other areas
2 are facing similar problems and we should look to those
3 ideas and creative opportunities that have been created in
4 those areas. Identify ways to decrease expenses and
5 possibly generate revenue. Minimize unneeded expenses,
6 usage and needs. Shift materials from where it's not being
7 used to where it's most needed. Energy saving ideas.
8 Simple things like turning lights out, stop the drips,
9 thermostat regulation, reduction of paper, transition to
10 on-line technological resources. Cooperative ideas.
11 Cooperative purchasing working with multiple districts.
12 Consider strategic partnering. Other places are going
13 through similar problems. Consider other creative options.
14 Utilize --

15 VOICE: Time.

16 MR. ROZEA: Thank you.

17 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 26, Catharine
18 Berkowitz.

19 MS. BERKOWITZ: Hi. Catharine Berkowitz. I
20 live at 6108 Franklin Hill Road in East Stroudsburg. I'm a
21 resident and taxpayer.

22 First I'd like to thank the board and
23 administration for your time and, as far as the board, I
24 would also like to acknowledge the many, many hours you've
25 put in as a board member and volunteering your time.

1 I have a daughter in 7th grade at JTL and a son
2 in fourth grade at ESE. I can empathize with the fears of
3 the Smithfield and J.M. Hill parents. My daughter was at
4 Smithfield through third grade and we loved the small school
5 setting and had some wonderful teachers. I still think very
6 fondly over her years there and the feeling of family they
7 provided.

8 When the redistricting happened I was very
9 unhappy with the thought of my daughter having to switch
10 schools and go to the big school on the hill. That being
11 said, we have been very happy at ESE. Both of my children
12 have flourished there. We've had wonderful teachers and a
13 wonderful, nurturing experience. Also, because it is a
14 bigger school there have been more after-school activities
15 for them to be involved with. Many of the stories the
16 parents are telling you today that they've experiencing at
17 J.M. Hill and at Smithfield I experience now at ESE with my
18 son. The teachers know him. It's just -- it's a great
19 experience that we've been having.

20 So, if the school were to be closed I'd like to
21 just reassure the parents of J.M. Hill or Smithfield
22 students that it is not the absolute end of the world
23 because I was terrified and it has been great.

24 If cuts do have to be made, and these cuts do
25 have to be made, I hope that everyone considers what's next

1 on the list if we do not close either of the schools. I'm
2 not saying that we should or shouldn't close the school,
3 I'm just hoping that the financials are looked at closely
4 and while people may be unhappy with the closing of a
5 school, I believe that many of these people would be equally
6 unhappy if things like after-school programs, AP classes or
7 other programs or staffing that affect our children were
8 cut. Thank you.

9 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 27, Sharon
10 Maly-Cramer.

11 MS. MALY-CRAMER: Thank you. My name is
12 Sharon Maly-Cramer. I'm an East Stroudsburg taxpayer and
13 resident of 3108 Red Oak Lane, East Stroudsburg, PA.

14 I currently have a child attending Smithfield
15 Elementary School and I come here before you, the Board of
16 Directors, to ask that you not include closures in balancing
17 the 2012-13 budget. I realize that our district faces the
18 daunting task of closing a 10.2 million dollar deficit and
19 it's going to require deep cuts, difficult decisions, yet I
20 hope you consider, as our neighboring district did, that
21 this action needs more time and investigation than the
22 calendar will allow.

23 It is my understanding, as you concurred
24 tonight, there are variables and figures that have yet to be
25 finalized. I'm not sure how to address the possible savings

1 because the numbers don't seemed to add up and I question
2 the stated savings comparing the two closures. I feel with
3 further analysis of staff furloughs those numbers will be
4 more comparable.

5 Aside from discussing the savings let us
6 discuss the cost. I urge you to consider these carefully.
7 A school is more than just a building, it is a community,
8 and please don't dismiss student school pride, sense of
9 community, and, most important, continuity. I feel this
10 will compromise the educational standards of the East
11 Stroudsburg Area School District.

12 And as for class size? It will raise my son,
13 in any of the three proposals that were put forth, up to 27
14 students. Must I tell my third grader that he and his
15 school is expendable? I hope not.

16 Let us work together and consider all other
17 cost saving measures. And, there were good ideas brought
18 forth today: Reducing supply costs, and work weeks for
19 utility savings. I agree with the comment that was made at
20 Monday's meeting that said pennies make dollars and I
21 implore the board to scrape those together instead of
22 consolidation, a word which many Americans now recognize as
23 being synonomous with job loss, and in this case many of
24 those jobs lost belong to our fellow community members.

25 It also means facility closure that scars the

1 landscape of the community creating a further decline in
2 property values.

3 Now I feel I need to speak in defense of
4 Smithfield Elementary. Small should not equate to
5 insignificant yet this proposal makes us feel this way.
6 Enrollment capacity numbers don't tell the whole story.
7 There are IU20 classrooms not filled to capacity and it's
8 not empty as some have said. You chose to build a new one.
9 Sad, then, that it's being proposed that we not use it at
10 all. Over 16 million dollars in taxpayer money was used on
11 recent renovations of Smithfield. The district constructed
12 an impressive elementary school filled with upgrades that
13 increase the safety and educational experience of the
14 students. It would be a disservice to taxpayers and to the
15 school community to walk away from this facility.

16 I realize the need for fiscal responsibility,
17 but school closures should be a last resort. I caution the
18 board: The last time big decisions were made tied to
19 projected enrollments in a hurry-now-approach we built the
20 building. Please, don't consider this. Thank you.

21 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 28, Lynn Ames.

22 MS. AMES: My name is Lynn Ames. I'm a
23 resident and taxpayer and I live on Roosevelt Road in East
24 Stroudsburg. Dear School Board Members: Please let it go
25 on record that I strongly oppose the closing of Smithfield

1 Elementary School. I have three children and all three of
2 them have gone through the East Stroudsburg School District
3 and they've all gone through Smithfield Elementary School as
4 well as East Stroudsburg High School South.

5 We just remodeled the Smithfield Elementary
6 School and the taxes were increased to pay for this. A
7 subsidy, a state subsidy, to contribute to the expense was
8 signed and now the East Stroudsburg School District wants to
9 close this newly remodeled school.

10 It is said that enrollment is down. So, I'm a
11 little confused as to why we built the new elementary school
12 and we didn't have a little bit of foresight to see what was
13 happening in the community. I feel as though it's a huge
14 burden and a big mistake building that new elementary school
15 in addition to the fact that the high school renovation was
16 much too costly and many mistakes were made with that
17 project as well. And, I'm not saying that the decisions
18 were solely upon the board members, but I'm saying that,
19 once again, planning was not done.

20 And who pays the price? The taxpayers. All of
21 these decisions have ripple effects. People who look to
22 move into our community will see it's a failing community if
23 we close schools. Taxes are high and schools are closing.
24 People can't sell their homes. Who can't afford to pay the
25 high taxes? Senior citizens who have spent their entire

1 lives paying for their homes are now losing them because of
2 taxes.

3 We should be thinking of creative ideas to
4 bring in revenue, but instead we take, I feel, the lazy way
5 out: We increase taxes.

6 I have a suggestion. Why don't we implement
7 some ways to bring in revenue such as adult education? I
8 heard Mr. Boyer already suggest that. I think it's a great
9 suggestion. We could work with -- we have one of the
10 greatest resources here, ESU. We could work with ESU and
11 some of the newly graduated teachers from ESU, new teachers
12 that can't otherwise find jobs and are anxious to work.
13 Perhaps some interns from ESU would be interested in
14 teaching classes such as exercise, nutrition classes,
15 computer classes, et cetera.

16 We have ways to bring that money back into the
17 school district and to stop increasing taxes. Perhaps some
18 of the sports classes or driver's ed. should have a fee
19 attached to them.

20 I come from the mindset that if you don't have
21 the money to do something you either get something that
22 costs less or you don't do it. It's time that East
23 Stroudsburg Area School District did this.

24 Thank you for listening.

25 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker 29, Richard Moran.

1 MR. MORAN: Good evening. Richard Moran. I
2 live at 42 Skyview Circle in East Stroudsburg. I'm a
3 resident and extreme taxpayer. Being I'm at the tail end of
4 the night, a lot of my comments already were made. It's
5 very clear about the buildings, the taxes. Everyone
6 generally has the same concerns, so I'd like to come at it
7 from a little different approach.

8 My feeling is that a school is the heart of the
9 neighborhood. There's no two ways about it: Closing either
10 of these schools is a loss of history, a sense of community
11 and who we are and who our children are in this community.

12 The way this issue evolved and the way it was
13 presented to the public was disturbing. It's caused a rift
14 in the school district that benefits no one. The release of
15 information and comments from the onset all seem to indicate
16 that Smithfield is closing. Deal done, signed, delivered.
17 If this is not reality, this is what I, as a taxpayer and a
18 resident, got from everything that I saw and that needs to
19 be presented to you so you're aware of what reality is. I
20 believe that may still be the case.

21 I'd like to make a few points and I have a few
22 questions that I feel the residents and taxpayers deserve as
23 well as make you aware of my concerns. The first point
24 which everyone has said and I'm not going to let it go is
25 why is rehab work continuing at J.M. Hill. 3.3 million

1 dollar in debt. The credit card is full. Cut it up.
2 What -- 3.3 is the initial numbers. What will the final
3 numbers be? You open the up the walls of a hundred year old
4 school you'll find surprises and it's not full of money.
5 That's not meant to be funny.

6 The term interest-free grants has been thrown
7 around numerous times. In my economic courses I was always
8 taught about the opportunity cost of borrowed money because
9 it is borrowed money. People get confused that a grant is
10 free money. It's not, it's borrowed money. There's an
11 opportunity cost associated with that money where it could
12 be used to pay off higher interest debt which we have, I
13 think, 110 million dollars worth. It could be used to
14 invest in better programs. There's many, many things that
15 could be done.

16 I almost feel that this closing discussion is a
17 diversion, it's a diversion tactic to get us riled up
18 against each other and then at the end you'll say, "We're
19 not going to close it," and then everyone'll say "Yeah."
20 "Oh, by the way, we just cut 40 teachers." I have that
21 concern and I think it's legitimate.

22 The elephant in the room is why is there so
23 little talk about cutting salaries, pensions, and benefits?
24 The free economy has spoken. That's what happens. Thank
25 you.

1 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 30, Jennifer Marmo.

2 MR. MARMO: My name is Jennifer Marmo and I'm
3 a resident of Pocono Ranchlands in Bushkill. I attended the
4 meeting at JTL where the school board members voted on
5 whether or not to hold this public hearing. That night
6 ended a lot of parents' concerns about their children's
7 schools. I understand that. However, I also heard a lot of
8 ignorance regarding information that was available regarding
9 the consolidation. East Stroudsburg Elementary isn't
10 operating at full capacity. Therefore, if students go there
11 from J.M. Hill or Smithfield there will not be 35 or 40
12 students in a classroom. Teachers will be moving with these
13 students to fill empty classrooms.

14 I also heard a lot of negativity regarding
15 other areas in the district, especially regarding larger
16 schools and how principals or teachers don't know the
17 children. My daughter is in kindergarten at Bushkill
18 Elementary. During Teacher Night at McDonald's many
19 teachers greeted her by name. Anytime I meet her teachers
20 in the community they can always speak with me about her.
21 My daughter is working on first grade sight words and math
22 skills. Again, she's in kindergarten. She's also getting
23 assistance with being left-handed in a right-handed world.
24 So, in other words, she is known. She is getting enrichment
25 and she is getting individualized attention.

1 We have to remember that our district covers
2 two counties. We have to stop dividing ourselves into south
3 and north, the haves and the have nots. We are one district
4 with the same goal, to provide our children with the best
5 possible education in these tough economic times.

6 I urge the board to make the decision that will
7 be the best for the children in the whole district. Thank
8 you.

9 MR. DIRVONAS: Speaker No. 31, Josephine Ferro?
10 Speaker No. 32 has withdrawn his request to
11 speak.

12 Speaker No. 33 is Oscar Woerlein.

13 MR. WOERLEIN: My name is Oscar Woerlein.
14 I'm a homeowner and taxpayer from Winona Lakes. I'm here
15 just to speak off the cuff, I have nothing planned, and I
16 think I represent the senior citizens here who have yet to
17 speak tonight.

18 It's hard to formulate so many things, but I
19 will start with the sitting board. All you individuals
20 worked hard politically to be where you are and you need to
21 make the right fiduciary, responsible decision. It takes
22 time, I know, but whatever you decide the ramifications will
23 go on for many years as we are now paying the cost from the
24 last few years.

25 The situation right now is no matter what

1 occurs money is required. There isn't any. I personally
2 had to eliminate my insurance, my vehicle, and the next
3 thing is move out. It's that simple. Economics. We do
4 what we have to do. We can't carry the weight.

5 The taxpayers of this area, as you can -- well,
6 you should know, the home foreclosures are a mess. Your
7 students aren't filling classrooms. Simple economics. Why
8 carry an empty classroom? We have to consolidate. These
9 are the things that will be before you. How you handle it,
10 God only knows. I don't envy you.

11 Whatever is done, as I said, is coming down to
12 economics. The taxpayers, how much more can you squeeze out
13 of them? And this goes for all, from the state and federal.
14 It isn't there. So, if the economics call for you to close
15 a school, whichever one, it's material, it has to be done.
16 Salaries. The extra teachers. The good days or gone.

17 I can't interject anymore except if you do your
18 job -- and I hear a lot of inaccuracies in the math that
19 comes before us. I would think it'd be prudent for the
20 board to have a forensic audit done and show the taxpayers
21 what's going on. Besides what you're telling us we need
22 reliable information and I believe you do, also. It would
23 be for everyone's benefit.

24 So, consequently, I think I've ran my mouth off
25 long enough. Thank you very much.

1 MR. DIRVONAS: The last registered speaker,
2 No. 34, is Amanda Jackson.

3 MS. JACKSON: Hi. My name is Amanda Jackson.
4 I live at 423 Williams Street and I'm a 7th grade student at
5 JTL Intermediate. I'm here to represent J.M. Hill tonight.
6 I don't think you should close J.M. Hill because my brother
7 goes there and I would hate for him to switch schools.
8 Although I did not go to J.M. Hill, I went to a school in
9 New York that was closed and I had to switch to another
10 school and it was terrible and I would hate for young
11 children to have to switch schools like I did.

12 If J.M. Hill closes, he will lose his first
13 school and his teachers. J.M. Hill is a good school and
14 I -- a good learning environment. Although I'm only 12
15 years old, I know how important education is and how it
16 feels to lose the school -- you lose your school and I don't
17 want to see that happen again.

18 Also, the taxpayers just paid for a new parking
19 lot at J.M. Hill, so it would be wrong to close J.M. Hill
20 after many renovations were made because they would have
21 been for nothing. Thank you.

22 MR. DIRVONAS: At this time I would like to
23 once again mention that the board will be receiving written
24 comments from the public for a period of three months from
25 tonight's hearing and those comments should be submitted to

1 the board through either the superintendent or the board
2 secretary. Anyone wishing to submit those written comments,
3 again, should include their name, address, phone number,
4 and should sign the comments when they are submitted.

5 I would like to thank everybody for their
6 participation tonight. I believe the speakers were all
7 excellent. I believe the public was a receptive audience
8 and I think that the board was a receptive audience, too.

9 We will be not only receiving additional
10 written comments and getting those out to the board, but the
11 board will also be seeking additional information. A lot of
12 that, I'm sure, as a result of the comments that were made
13 tonight. Mr. Searfass?

14 MR. SEARFOSS: I want to thank everyone who
15 come out. We do know that we are taking this decision very
16 seriously. We are not doing it lightly. We are taking it
17 very serious and considering many factors and, yes, money is
18 one of them.

19 Thank you. Meeting is adjourned.

20 - - -

21 (Whereupon, the above concluded at 9:09 p.m. on
22 Friday, March 2, 2012.)

23

24

25

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I, Donna G. Kenderdine, R.P.R., do hereby certify that the foregoing was taken stenographically by me on March 2, 2012, and that this transcript is a true and correct transcript of the same, fully transcribed under my direction, to the best of my ability and skill.

I further certify that I am not a relative or employee of any of the parties in this action; that I am not a relative or employee of any attorney in this action; and that I am not financially interested in the event of this action.

Donna G. Kenderdine, R.P.R.
Notary Public