

SPECIAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
Public Hearing – Proposed School Budget
1670 Flat River Road, Coventry, RI
April 17, 2008 – 6:00 p.m.

Present: Kenneth Cloutier, Anthony Colaluca, Justin Pomfret, Bruce Thompson, Frank Hyde,
Acting Town Manager Paul Sprague

School Committee Members Spear, Patenaude, Hayden; Superintendent Kenneth DiPietro;
Finance Director School Department Tony Ferrucci

- Jennifer Sewchuk, Representing Oak Haven PTA
Hazard Street

Ms. Sewchuk – Would like to have the support of the Town Council in seeing that the Oak Haven School is maintained.

- Cheryl Carberry
Wesleyan Avenue

Ms. Carberry – Concerned that if Oak Haven School is left vacant, there will be safety issues. Also, the value of the homes in the area will be affected. Urged Town Council to do everything they can to leave the community in Oak Haven the way it is now.

- Fred Anderson
69 Laurel Avenue

Mr. Anderson - Would hate to see the school close. Questioned how class size in other schools would be affected if Oak Haven closed.

Superintendent DiPietro – Class size would not change; we would just use more classrooms. It might be tight, but not result in larger class size.

Mr. Spear – We wouldn't be eliminating staff, will not have a negative impact on class size.

Mr. Thibeault – What would happen with the lease for Oak Haven?

Manager Sprague - If not used for school purposes, would revert back to Ferland Corporation

Mr. Thibeault - Can the state legally give you less money?

Mr. DiPietro – There is no law, but don't anticipate that they would go less than last year.

Mr. Thibeault – Where are you saving \$115,500, noted on Page 18 of your proposed budget?

Mr. Ferrucci – Accumulation of anticipated cuts.

- Gary Cote
29 Pettine St

Mr. Cote – This is a community school and I implore the Town Council to fund the school budget.

- Laura Flanagan
Knotty Oak Lane

Ms. Flanagan questioned how redistricting works. Chairman Spear explained the redistricting process to Ms. Flanagan. Mr. DiPietro explained unfunded mandates.

- Anna Bigton
23 Yale Avenue

Am new to Coventry, taxes are high. Interested in ratios of class sizes. Mr. DiPietro explained that elementary is 20-26 per class, middle school 25-29 per class. We are right in the middle of the range.

- Joy Martin
32 Taft St.

Ms. Martin – Questioned pension system.

Mr. DiPietro stated that the law states that teachers have to belong to the state pension system.

Mr. Spear – The problem is that the state is not paying their share.

- Ronald Gizzarelli
50 Harrington Road

Need for ad hoc committees. Not in favor of closing Oak Haven. Need long term solutions. Supports the school budget.

- Holly Menuto
27 Pettine Street

Lives three houses from Oak Haven, doesn't want to see neighborhood school closed.

- Michelle Lambert
65 Yale Drive

Live around the corner from the school. Closing Oak Haven would be a short term fix. They are building more houses over near Tiogue School. Please look at everything else before closing this school.

Mr. Cote – Can't the School Committee and the teacher's union sit down, redefine some contract language, and give back something?

Mr. Spear – That thought has been reviewed. Don't recommend going that route.

Mr. Cote - You should try anyway.

- Joel Johnson
164 Gough Avenue

Mr. Johnson - Should maybe look at regionalization. Has anybody looked at cuts in administration?

Ms. Carberry –Recent bond issue should have been separate items and not all inclusive.

- Robert DiPadua
62 Laurel Avenue

Mr. Di Padua - Should refuse the unfunded mandates.

Mr. Hyde – Tried that before, State said if we did that they wouldn't give us any more money.

Mr. Thompson – The Providence City Council has contacted us regarding bill going before the General Assembly.

Mr. Spear – There have been many good ideas here tonight, but we can't do it alone. All the School Committees in the State need to work together for change.

- Susan Walker
15 Hazard Street

Ms. Walker - Will we have all day kindergarten in 2010?

Mr. DiPietro – It is not a mandate. State has realized that it cannot be funded.

Joel Johnson – Do you know how many students we have going to Coventry schools that live in West Warwick?

Mr. DiPietro – Probably we have 20-30 that get reported to the truant officer each year.

Mr. Colaluca – Don't want to take away from the children, I am against closing Oak Haven. I am in favor of fully funding this budget.

Mr. Hyde – If you don't close Tiogue this year, do you plan to close it next year?

Mr. Spear – We have no plans.

Mr. Hyde – Will music be graded?

Mr. DiPietro – Yes.

President Pomfret reminded public of the Financial Town Meeting on June 10, 2008.

Town Clerk