

Town Council Public Hearing
Board of Education Budget
April 29, 2009, 6:00 PM

Chairperson Buebendorf opened the Public Hearing at 6:00 PM in Council Chambers at the Montville Town Hall.

Chairperson Buebendorf noted fire exits to the public, as per the request of the Fire Marshal.

Board of Education Chairperson, Sandra Berardy, thanked the Council for hosting this public hearing. She then asked that Mr. David Erwin, Superintendent of Schools, speak, and stated that she would address the Council with her closing remarks upon the conclusion of Mr. Erwin's presentation.

Mr. David Erwin, Superintendent of Schools, thanked the Council for giving him the opportunity to discuss the proposed budget. Mr. Erwin stated that the Board of Education members are elected by the taxpayers of Montville, and that the Board is very proud of the school system, the teachers and the students. Mr. Erwin stated that the Board has been awarded the K.A.B.E. Leadership award for their work. In his presentation, Mr. Erwin outlined the many accomplishments of the school system and students, including music and choral programs, sports programs, and student and teacher leadership awards and acknowledgements. He then reviewed the numerous grants that the education staff has worked hard to secure in order to bring extra money into the school system for educational programs. Mr. Erwin stated that the Board of Education is requesting a 3.81% increase, which breaks down to 2.81% negotiated salary increases, .70% insurance premium increases, .78% negotiated, grandfathered retirement benefits, and .5% municipal employee retirement fund. Mr. Erwin closed by stating that a cut in the Board of Education budget, as proposed by the 2009/2010 budget, would be a significant detriment to the students and teachers of the Montville school system.

Ms. Sandra Berardy reiterated Mr. Erwin's statement that a cut in the Board of Education of the magnitude proposed would be devastating and unmanageable. She stated, however, that the Board will cooperate and negotiate in order to reach a manageable budget that will serve the Town and the school system.

Mr. Howard Thomas, 94 Perez Drive, stated that there are many families in the midst of severe financial problems, and many families are losing their homes to foreclosures. He stated that it would be more important to the taxpayers to assist with keeping their homes than giving more money to the Board of Education.

Ms. Jaclyn Brush, 4 Lochdale Drive, stated that she is a junior at Montville High School. She indicated that she has had three different chorus teachers since she has been at the school, and that Mr. Cushing has made an amazing and positive to her studies, as well as the other students in his classes. She asked that the Council take into consideration what a great teacher he is and what a positive impact he has had on his students, and please re-consider and not lay-off Mr. Cushing at the end of this school year.

Ms. Amy Funk, 866 Chesterfield Road, stated that she has two children in the school system and feels that the teachers are doing a great job and are very dedicated to the students and none of them should be laid off.

Ms. Janice Blaisdell, 210 Pruitt Place, stated that she has a child who is a sophomore at Montville High School, and also that she works within the school system. To layoff Mr. Cushing and make cuts to the chorus and music programs is an unjust decision to the students. Ms. Blaisdell read the Montville High School's mission, and stated that it is very important that the students have stability.

Mr. Jake Alexander, 76 Park Avenue, stated that he is a junior at Montville High School and that Mr. Cushing is the best teacher he has ever had and he should not be laid off. The students at the high school need a teacher like Mr. Cushing and need the chorus and music programs as they are today and nothing should change.

Ms. Brenda Alexander, 76 Park Avenue, stated that she was speaking on behalf of two residents that could not be in attendance this evening. Mr. Allan Lyman, Oxoboxo Dam Road, wrote that he has a son at the high school and is against Mr. Cushing being laid off and that the chorus and music programs should not be cut. Mr. Jim Hillby, Beckwith Road, has a daughter at the high school and has been a teacher in musical education for 26 years. Mr. Hillby states in his letter that all of the teachers and programs within the school system need to stay in place and nothing and no one should be cut.

Mr. Andrew Meishitzer, 52 Pheasant Run, stated that he and his wife recently moved into Montville primarily because of the great school system. Mr. Meishitzer has young children that are not yet old enough to attend school, but he stated that he has moved back in anticipation of his children attending the schools here as they are, and he does not want to see any changes or cuts as this would defeat his decision to move back in the first place.

Ms. Rallou Clark, 42 New York Road, stated that she is a parent, a resident and a teacher in Montville. She had moved back into Montville in order to teach here and to send her children to school here. She wants her children to have the same opportunities and programs that she had when she went to school here, and if the budget is cut as proposed, this will not be possible and the Montville school system and students will suffer.

Mr. Rosario Antonello, 12 Laurel Drive, stated that the Town does need to cut out the excess, and he is in favor of the budget as it is being proposed. He is retired and cannot afford for taxes to continue increasing in order to allow the school system to have programs that are not necessary, such as chorus.

Ms. Katie Southard, 89 Wildwood Lane, stated that she is a teacher in a different school district, but that she supports the Montville school system as it exists and does not want to see any cuts or layoffs. She asked the Council

to consider the impact increasing class sizes will have on the students, and the impact that the budget cuts will have on the school system as a whole.

Ms. Cathy Brush, 4 Lochdale Drive, stated that she is a 2nd grade teacher in Montville and that she has two daughters, one that recently graduated and one that is a sophomore. Ms. Brush stated that when her oldest daughter started Kindergarten, there were 26 students in the class. Her daughter was falling behind, but was perceived to be just quiet and shy. In first grade, the class size was reduced to 16, and the teacher was able to give more time to individual time and attention to the students. It was at this time that Ms. Brush's daughter was more closely evaluated and it was determined that she had a mild form of autism. She is now a freshman at Albertus Magnus College on the Dean's List. Ms. Brush stated that if the class size remained at 26 students, the teacher may not have had an opportunity to give the attention that her daughter needed in order to determine and diagnose her disability. Ms. Brush asked that the Council find other ways to cut costs and get funding, but please do not cut the Board of Education budget.

Ms. Diane Monahan, 15 Torrey Drive, stated that grew up in Montville and is now a 5th grade teacher in the school system. She is not in favor of cutting the Board of Education budget and feels as though the cuts will affect the students that need the programs the most. She stated that cutting the budget would also snowball and be harder to bring it up to where it needs to be in future years and that would be a huge detriment to the students and the system.

Ms. Pam Howett, 273 Lynch Hill Road, stated that she was a Montville teacher for 23 years and expressed her experience with having new teachers with young and new ideas enter the system and refresh the students, teachers and programs. Having new teachers enter the environment is crucial to the system growing, and it would be a detriment to the system to lay off these new teachers due to the proposed budget cuts. She stated that cutting teachers and programs in Montville will do nothing but hurt the students and she does not want to see this happen.

Mr. David Erwin, Superintendent of Schools, thanked the Council for listening to everyone's views this evening, and stated that he understands that there are tough decisions to be made regarding the budget. He acknowledged that he understands the Council's and public's position, but that the Board of Education will have some very difficult decisions to make if they have to work with the numbers given to them in this budget. A cut of this magnitude will severely affect the Montville school programs, and the students.

Mr. Joel Ferrier, 33 Corey Lane, East Lyme, addressed the Council and thanked them for allowing him to speak although he is not a resident, but a teacher in the Montville school system. Mr. Ferrier stated that he is the President of the Montville Education Association. He stated that the Council needs to consider that there are many students that do not have parents at home, but are being raised by grandparents or other family members. Mr. Ferrier stated that the teachers in the Montville school system give above and beyond to not only these students, but all students, by staying at school beyond their paid time in order to work with these children that need extra attention and assistance due to home environments are not typical and the guardians are not able to provide the support that is needed to these students. He reminded the Council that education of our students is an investment in Montville's future and that the Board of Education budget should not be cut, but that everyone should work together to find creative ways to offset the funds needed to continue with the current level of support and education.

Mr. Joshua Cushing, 16 Race Rock Road, Waterford, addressed the Council and thanked them for allowing him to speak although he is not a resident, but a teacher in the Montville school system. Mr. Cushing stated that when he was hired into the school system, the students had no passion or confidence in the program as they had been faced with a number of different teachers in a short period of time. It was his challenge to re-engage the students, and he knew that they wanted to be engaged and that they had amazing potential. Looking at the students today, he points out that the school has put on the best performance of Beauty and the Beast that the system has ever seen, and that the students are engaged, happy and productive. He does not want to see them lose another teacher(s) nor have any of their programs cut as they are all succeeding in the scenario as it exists. Mr. Cushing is not in favor of cutting the Board of Education budget, and specifically he is not in favor of the chorus and music budget being cut.

Mr. Dana McFee, Leffingwell Road, addressed the Council and stated that he is in favor of the budget cuts as outlined in the proposed 2009/2010 budget.

Ms. Jessica Chapalo stated that she moved into Montville because she did research and found that the school system was outstanding and she wanted her children to attend school here. She is not in favor of the budget cuts proposed in the 2009/2010 budget.

Ms. Jackie Pastrana, 44 Chapel Hill Road, stated that she is a parent as well as a substitute teacher. She stated that she is very happy with the school system and does not want to see the budget cut and feels as though the programs and teachers should stay in place as they are.

Ms. Kelly Costa, 1332 Route 163, stated that she is a parent and feels as though the Montville school system is great. She hopes that the Council can find creative ways to keep the teachers and programs in place as she does not want to see any teachers or programs cut from the system.

Mr. David Erwin, Superintendent of Schools, addressed the Council and the public and stated that there were hard copies of his presentation available to anyone who wished to take one.

Councilor Jones stated that she is concerned with the financial state of many families in Montville; reporting that many families have lost jobs, are losing their homes, and experiencing other related financial hardships and cannot

afford to have mil rate increased in order to enhance the education budget. She is hoping that some creative ideas can be considered in order to offset the current revenue situation, such as instituting a “pay for play” program, possible Union concessions, or maybe considering regionalization.

Councilor Beetham stated that he had done some research and found that student enrollment is down and questioned the Board’s budget considering there are fewer children entering the system. Councilor Beetham also noted that Montville students’ SAT scores are low compared with other districts, and questioned the job of the system in teaching the children what they need to know.

Mr. David Erwin addressed Councilor Beetham’s concerns and noted that when many students take the SAT test, even if they are not planning to attend college, this is a factor that brings the overall score down. Mr. Erwin stated that colleges are looking less and less at SAT scores when considering students for enrollment.

Councilor Radgowski asked the public in attendance if they would be willing to pay higher taxes in order to keep the current education programs, and most of the public raised their hands and indicated that they would be amiable to higher taxes in order to keep the school system, teachers and programs without cuts.

Councilor Murphy stated that the only issue he has with the proposed budget is the salary increases. He attended Montville schools and currently has grandchildren in the school system and is happy with the programs but realizes hard choices have to be made. Councilor Murphy thanked Mr. Erwin for his hard work over the years.

Councilor Caron stated that the Finance Committee has a tough job ahead of them. He stated that he is proud of the teachers and the Montville school system as a whole, and he assured the public that their concerns and comments are taken very deeply and seriously in this budget process.

Mayor Jaskiewicz stated that he is proud of Montville’s school system, but that he has had to make hard decisions based on the fact that revenue has decreased as much as it has. He realizes that there are many hard decisions to be made, but the public should realize that he was elected to represent and make the best choices for the Town and the taxpayers as a whole. The Mayor thanked the public for attending tonight’s meeting and sharing their views on this matter.

Chairperson Buebendorf thanked Mr. Erwin and everyone who took the time to speak and attend tonight’s public hearing.

Chairperson Buebendorf called the public hearing to an end at 7:47 PM.

Respectfully Submitted by:

Sandra Anderson CPS
Montville Town Council Clerk