Chairman Timothy Walsh called the Special Meeting of the Board of Education to order at 7:40 p.m.

Roll Call: (alpha order)
Paula Ellis (Arrived at 7:46 p.m.)
John Francino-Quinn (Excused)
Kate Kutash
Arlene Liscinsky, Vice Chairman
Thomas Minotti, Secretary (Arrived at 8:00 p.m.)
Win Oppel
Mike Pacowta
Timothy Walsh, Chairman
Kathleen Yolish

Initial quorum of 6 present, 3 absent; final quorum of 8 present, 1 absent.

Board of Education Administration present:
Superintendent of Schools, Freeman Burr
Assistant Superintendent, Lorraine Rossner
Director of Finance, Allan Cameron
Director of Instruction, Patricia Curran
Director of Human Resources, Rita McDougald-Campbell
Operations Manager, William Banfe

(2 tapes on file in City/Town Clerk’s Office)

The Board led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Hearing
No one from the public wished to speak.

Approval of Agenda
Win Oppel and Kathy Yolish moved to approve the agenda; seconded by Arlene Liscinsky; vote 7-0; motion passed.
Final Budget Discussion and Recommendations
Allan Cameron discussed anticipated savings if one large elementary school were to be closed.* Projected savings would total $593,415 less redistricting expenses of $46,080, leaving a total of $547,335. That amount would buy back approximately 7-10 teachers.

(*Paula Ellis arrived at 7:46 p.m.)

Win Oppel said based on the redistricting plan done by Ross Haber, there would be 116 full-size academic classrooms available in the five elementary schools that will remain open. Based on the current proposal, if one of the large elementary schools were to be closed, there would be 13-16 classrooms of students. According to the Ross Haber study, without closing an additional facility, 63 of the classrooms in the five elementary schools would be used. That would leave 53 empty classrooms district wide at the elementary level meaning 48% of available space would not be utilized under the current proposal. If one of the larger buildings were to be closed, the remaining four facilities could absorb the student population. Win went on to suggest that not only could one large school be closed, but also an additional school. He said if those schools were Booth Hill and Sunnyside, 20 classrooms would be closed, still leaving 33 vacant classrooms in the system.* Kathy Yolish asked if two schools were closed, would the approximate $750,000 be used to bring back staff? Win Oppel responded that we could do anything we want if we had an extra $750,000. Chairman Walsh questioned additional transportation costs, and Allan Cameron said we would have to put back two buses at about $96,000.

(*Tom Minotti arrived at 8:00 p.m.)

Paula Ellis stated the neighborhood schools would be lost with longer bus rides. She discussed the reasons for building Perry Hill School which were to have rooms for all-day kindergarten, pre-k, art, and music to advance education in Shelton. Insufficient funding of the budget affects the long-range planning that has gone on for many years. Arlene Liscinsky reflected on a motion passed by the Board a few years ago in concept not to exceed 550 students per elementary school. She then pointed out the effect of larger student population on cafeteria, lunch waves, library, bathroom facilities, and technology. Mrs. Liscinsky noted that while this year is bad, every indication received from Hartford is that next year will be worse in terms of state funding.

Allan Cameron said it had been questioned whether it would be cost effective to not move to Perry Hill and keep Lafayette open. He shared a comparison of estimated costs to run Perry Hill School and five elementaries versus costs to run Lafayette and five elementaries. Calculations show it would cost $471,925 more with 8.7 additional positions required by not opening Perry Hill. Chairman Walsh added that the Board of Aldermen had originally allocated $50,000 for Lafayette’s roof repair and subsequently used that money for a railroad crossing; therefore, additional money would have to be added for roof repair if Lafayette were to remain open. Bill Banfe said under current costs, it would be about $900,000-$950,000 to replace the roof. Chairman Walsh
Final Budget Discussion and Recommendations (continued)
questioned how the State would view the racial imbalance at Lafayette. Superintendent Burr noted we are under a State directive to disperse that population and that’s one of the reasons for opening Perry Hill and redistricting. Mr. Burr said with less money available next year, if we are not prepared to move this year, how are we going to be in a better position to move to Perry Hill a year from now?

Arlene Liscinsky questioned the consequences of leaving a new school unopened. Bill Banfe had asked the State if funding would be in jeopardy if the school did not open and was told it would not, as the project would be considered incomplete if the school were to remain vacant for a year. However, during that year’s time, if the school were to be vandalized, the State would not be responsible. In addition, if the building were to be used for any other purpose than indicated in the grant application, the City would have to reimburse the total amount to the State. Also, an average temperature would have to be maintained year round.

Mike Pacowta asked for clarification of the extra teachers needed in the Lafayette and five elementaries scenario and was told they are positions that would be brought back. Thomas Minotti prompted discussion about the number of teachers that could be brought back. Superintendent Burr said under the best scenario the number could be as many as 25 but more likely around 20 additional.

(Tape 1; Side B – 8:29 p.m.)

Superintendent Burr asked with this devastating budget, is it our responsibility to add anxiety, turmoil and crisis by closing neighborhood schools and disrupting the educational environment our students have become accustomed to, or is it our responsibility to say in spite of a very bleak situation that we will all unite and create some stability and harmony in order to stay as close as possible to replicating the district as it is now? He stated it is a very difficult decision for Board Members, but our core business is the education of our students. To that end we have to create a student environment that most of all enhances our students’ abilities to be educated in the most effective way possible. Classroom space is a premium and allows flexibility. Mr. Burr noted Bev Belden and Beth Smith both have dealt with compromising space. He said you not only have to look at the data but think intuitively about what we are doing with the data and to be able to balance that. He said we are dangerously close to eradicating the concept of the neighborhood school and are already in a transition with redistricting, our budget situation and sending kids to Perry Hill. He noted parents are anxious about sending their kids to a new school. He cautioned the Board Members that the dollars have to be looked at but it’s necessary to balance that with the importance of understanding that the decision will impact kids. Mr. Burr noted that if 12-14 teachers are brought back, those teachers will be dispersed throughout the district and not just at the elementary level. Talks are ongoing with our unions to see if we can get some relief through retirements and other things that could help. Superintendent Burr emphasized that the $63.1 million will not change; if we are able to get additional savings from
Final Budget Discussion and Recommendations (continued)

retirees or relief over next year’s budget, there will be more discretion with money because of the savings in salaries, which then can be translated to teachers returning, and the commitment is to bring back as many teachers as possible. Win Oppel discussed preliminary pay to participate numbers, and Paul Ellis noted the Athletic Committee will meet on June 2 to discuss the topic and look for cost savings and alternate ways to offset fees.

Chairman Walsh discussed the philosophy behind opening Perry Hill and creating space for extra programs for students at the elementary level. He talked about planned curriculum initiatives and the promotion of STEM programs starting with grade 5 and continuing through grade 12. He warned against being short-sighted and giving up buildings to the city.

Further discussion continued concerning pay to participate. Freeman Burr clarified that there are no concessions at this time and retirements have not been finalized. He stated talks with the secretaries union are completed and there is an open agreement with the teachers to add further retirees, but the other labor unions have not given specific feedback to know where we stand. He discussed dedicating discretionary money in accounts to bring back teachers and addressed a suggestion by Mrs. Ellis to possibly use some of that money to offset pay to participate costs. He said before doing that, the Athletic Committee would have to look for ways to find cost savings from within.

There was question about rescinding non-renewal notices and when the deadline was. It was stated that teachers have to be given their assignments five days before the end of school. Mr. Burr said teacher would be hired back in waves as money avails itself.

Given the Perry Hill scenario and closing one or two schools, Arlene Liscinsky asked Freeman Burr for his thoughts, to which he replied at this point in time it just doesn’t feel right. Mrs. Liscinsky went on to point out that the Board’s object is to hire the Superintendent, and we have to have faith that if this is his budget proposal and it doesn’t work, we hold him responsible. She noted that there has been so much crisis over the last several months with mitigation, redistricting, and budget proposals and suggested that we need to let people calm down, move forward, go through the education process in September, and tweak it as we go along. She said the Board can make a commitment as part of a motion to put every single available dollar back into teachers and welcomed anyone to come to the Finance Committee meetings to ensure that is being done.

Kathy Yolish asked if charging for preschool, even on a sliding scale, was considered. Freeman Burr responded that about 40% are PAL students and only attend half day; we need to look at the program cost and compare to private programs to come up with something. Kate Kutash noted a private program would only be three days a week versus five days. Mr. Burr said this is a reasonable suggestion and will be looked at. It
Final Budget Discussion and Recommendations (continued)
was suggested that Pattie Curran could help with researching this, as she has contact
with the preschool community.

Arlene Liscinsky moved to adopt the Superintendent’s May 25, 2010
recommended budget of $63.1 million for the 2010-2011 school year with the
caveat that alternate savings be investigated and any monies that may accrue to
the school system through any means necessary go to restoring previously
eliminated positions. Paula Ellis seconded the motion for discussion. Paula
expressed concern that the burden would fall on Athletics. Win Oppel felt the Board
should wait to for the recommendation of the Athletic Committee, see if the teachers
union will participate in some cost sharing, and then get a new line item budget with
adjustments. There was further discussion about notifying staff as required. Freeman
Burr clarified the decision to restore three administrative positions.* Motion passed
unanimously.

(*Tape 2; Side A – 9:13 p.m.)

Chairman Walsh announced a Special Meeting on June 3 at 7 p.m. in the Board Room
for discussion of redistricting. Staff was asked to give all Board Members and the press
a one sheet summary of the budget, as well as post on web site. Mr. Walsh expressed
appreciation to the Board for their efforts. Mrs. Liscinsky stated that none of the
decisions have been easy and thanked parents and YES for their support.

Adjournment
Paula Ellis made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:22 p.m.; seconded by
Kathy Yolish; vote 8-0; motion passed.

Diane Luther
Diane Luther
Recording Secretary – Board of Education
June 4, 2010