Chairman Mark Holden called the Special Meeting of the Board of Education to order at 6:40 p.m.

Roll Call:
Mark Holden, Chairman
Thomas Minotti, Vice Chairman
Kate Kutash, Secretary
Anne Gaydos
David Gioiello

José Goncalves (absent)
Amanda Kilmartin (excused)
Darlisa Ritter
Kathleen Yolish

Quorum – 7 present; 2 absent

Board of Education Administration present: Christopher Clouet, Superintendent of Schools; Lorraine Rossner, Assistant Superintendent; Rick Belden, Finance Director

Also Present: Rebecca Auger and Meghan McGaffin, Milone & MacBroom Consultants

(1 tape on file in Town Clerk’s Office)

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda
Thomas Minotti moved to approve the agenda; motion seconded by Darlisa Ritter and passed unanimously.

Discussion of Redistricting Plan
Superintendent Clouet acknowledged Board of Aldermen President John Anglace and Alderman Eric McPherson in the audience and thanked them for their support.

Rebecca Auger and Meghan McGaffin of Milone & MacBroom gave a presentation of scenario 5 to members of the public. Ms. Auger stated she contacted Planning and Zoning for updated information on proposed or potential development of Canal Street, Shelter Ridge and Huntington Village, which most likely would affect Long Hill School. She said requested adjustments to scenario 5 to reduce Mohegan’s enrollment mostly would have affected Long Hill at a level that was too high, given all the planned housing development, and decision was to not make any changes. Another factor considered was Mohegan’s PreK program, which could possibly be moved if additional space is needed at Mohegan. Maps were reviewed and are also on the district website. Ms. Auger spoke of the student transportation impact analysis of scenarios 5 and 6 by Transportation Advisory Services, which showed fewer impacts and no additional bus routes needed to accommodate scenario 5. She reviewed route changes and live time of buses for each scenario. Megan McGaffin reviewed on maps the changes made to scenario 5. Ms. Auger stated scenario 5 is preferred. It was noted that scenario 6 would require purchasing two additional buses.

There were numerous questions and comments from the public. The following spoke:
Christine Halkiopoulos, 112 Perry Hill Road, expressed concern for currently enrolled students and whether or not there would be an option for grandfathering.

Stacey Stanchfield, 55 Old Dairy Lane, discussed conditions of overcrowding with five lunch waves at ESS. She felt the reduction of 50 students was not sufficient to make an impact.

Jennifer Tedesco, 27A Perry Ave, said she takes her child to daycare at LHS, she is right on the line and this will add to ESS.

Angelica Barrera, 45 Congress Ave, assumed her daughter would attend LHS but learned it was ESS. She brought her daughter to ESS for kindergarten registration and screening. With the redistricting, she will now attend Mohegan. She wondered why time was wasted to have her child excited about ESS only to find out she would not go there. Are we thinking forward, given all the new development in town?

Milena Vaz, Kings Highway, son is in first grade and is devastated to be moved from ESS. She feels it should only apply to new students and not those who are in the school already.

David Wulinsky, 1 Spice Bush Lane, asked why we are allowing the percentage of free & reduced lunches to shape our decision, when scenario 5 is not the best decision for the district. He said free & reduced lunch has no indication of cultural diversity. He felt a couple of the earlier scenarios seemed to have better long-term solutions for the health and population levels of our schools.

Kristen Medoff, 25 Meadow Lake Drive, agreed with previous comment regarding free & reduced lunch. She said she purchased her home knowing her son would attend ESS. She asked that measures be taken to make the kids feel welcomed and comfortable in their new schools.

Superintendent Clouet commented on a couple topics raised. He stated we will be doing transition for those who will be moving. We want the children to feel comfortable and will make sure a transition plan is in place for the kids to visit before the end of the school year. Dr. Clouet said in reference to free & reduced lunch that it is an issue, but the major issue is overcrowding. We want to make sure that we have a balance in our schools. There was further explanation of the scenarios by Rebecca Auger. Mr. Wulinsky felt scenario 5 may not be the best and there may need to be more discussion and more maps with a deeper look at this. Dr. Clouet stated no plan is absolutely perfect. We have a plan that is good for the great majority of children, reduces overcrowding, and we are committed to making sure there is a transition plan in place for all children who will be moved. We have been working on this for about a year with discussions and updates from Milone & MacBroom at board meetings. We have had input from parents and lots of opportunities for exchange of ideas that has resulted in some changes to the plan. He said the time has come, and he will recommend to the board to make a decision. The parents need to be informed where their children will go next year, and the tight budget is a big factor. We will need to reallocate some teachers and will need to have this plan in place to make sure class sizes are equal throughout the district.

Beverly Belden, ESS Principal, reviewed the many changes she has experienced in her 27 years with the district, including redistricting and restructuring of grade levels at schools. With each change, transitioning students were welcomed into new schools. She stated ESS has been overcrowded in the 14 years she has been there. She talked about space issues and class sizes. She acknowledged redistricting is hard for parents, students, the board and staff. She said whatever the superintendent and the board directs the principals as administrators to do, we will welcome your students into each community. It’s about accepting every single person, every single child and doing what’s right for them.
Ashley Wulinsky, 1 Spice Bush Lane, asked if each school was looked at for number of classes per grade level, number of students per classroom and what redistricting would do for those class sizes. She said BHS is not being touched and they have low class sizes. Moving 50 kids from ESS doesn’t solve the problem and just moves it to Mohegan. We need to redistrict, but let’s have it make sense. If we need to move 150-175 kids versus 109, it’s not that big of a difference if you get better numbers in the long term. She would like to see a breakdown of class sizes in each school and where they would be projected.

Dr. Clouet noted that projections are constantly changing. There was mention of preferred class size of low to mid 20s. Rebecca Auger discussed building usage and standard room deployment. She said that while we are redistricting to alleviate overcrowding at ESS, we are also trying to equalize how programs are delivered amongst all schools. Dr. Clouet stated the reason there is no breakdown of class sizes by classroom is the uncertainty of how many teachers we will have due to a tight budget cycle. Our projections are based on what we have now. He said since he has been here, we have had fewer teachers and administrators every year, and we fully expect to have fewer teachers every year, which will increase class sizes. A question was asked how a decision on redistricting can be made without knowing what the budget is. He said by City Charter the Board of Aldermen make their final vote toward the end of May. That would not allow sufficient time to properly plan for redistricting.

Rick Belden said Milone & MacBroom has given us a plan that will provide space to have classrooms, standard room deployments and come up with a functional capacity. If the teacher count goes down, class size of 22 will go up, depending on what we have for a budget. They have provided a road map for equity throughout the district. They have given us a template. How we fill it will become an issue because of budget.

Ms. Auger explained the target enrollments used in the scenarios is 90% of the functional capacity, because it’s a reasonable assumption on actual use of the building. Some elasticity is needed to accommodate fluctuations in enrollment. The functional capacity enables each of the buildings to have the standard room deployment, which they do not have now. She reviewed the data for Mohegan under scenario 5. Ms. Auger stated their greatest confidence is in the first five years of projection because it is based on known enrollment data and known birth data.

Meghan Hall, 12 Captain’s Watch, wanted to know if we adopted scenario 5, for ESS – what would the classrooms look like and what would the extra classrooms be? Would you have art, music, math in the cafeteria? As the budget stands today, ESS with only losing 56 students, will still maintain that level of equality with the other schools?

There was random group discussion. Ms. Auger said ESS is physically the hardest building and is likely to remain the hardest school. She discussed the physical factors of the building. Beverly Belden referenced the earlier mention of class size. ESS currently has five first and five second and we might lose a section of one of those grade levels, which would allow us to have another classroom. She said the enrollment by grade level can make a difference. There was additional discussion of scenario 2 versus scenario 5. Mr. Holden commented on the equality of education at our elementary schools with four of the five being recognized by the State as Schools of Distinction, and the fifth only missing it by one point.

Dawn Olivera, 61 Ridge Lane, asked is there is a timeline of what’s happening next. Superintendent Clouet said within two weeks we should be able to contact all the parents and children and we would then talk about transition plans. Pushing the decision into May or June will not allow time to plan. He said a decision needs to be made in order to move forward. It has not been done in haste.

(Note: inaudible comments)

Someone asked for an explanation from anyone on the board as to why they feel scenario 5 is the best decision.
Chairman Mark Holden said Milone & MacBroom is the acknowledged expert in this field in this area. This is their best advice. They know more than I. This will cut down on our population issue at ESS... not as much as some of you would like, but it’s a big step in the right direction. And, this program is designed, with our current budget, which we know we won’t have, to try to put 22 kids in a typical classroom and still have separate classrooms for the specials and so forth. It is designed to give the most equitable thing that we can. You talked earlier about socio-economic concerns, something people don’t like to talk about. We did get a letter from the State a few months ago indicating that we had an issue with a couple of our schools being too high in terms of the number of people with free and reduced lunch. If we don’t do something to improve that situation and we do something that makes that situation worse, then the State is going to come in and start to get involved with our redistricting. I don’t want the State telling us how we are going to move kids without any thought of what is actually best. Then we would end up with something that was based entirely on socio-economics. We need to look at balancing as many things as we can. It’s a case of how to balance many things at once to come up with the best possible solution. At this point in time, scenario 5 appears to be that.

Stephen Massad, 20 Sylvester’s Way, asked if there will be a bus route map and where the stops will be. Rick Belden said the City will be taking over the bus service July 1. You can anticipate the same will be done as in the past with the routes and times of pick up and drop off available to the public well in advance of the school year starting. We will get feedback from the schools, and we will continue to adjust if we find there are any issues.

Amy Gibbs, 83 Beacon Hill Terrace, asked with the vote tomorrow, are we confident of the streets as they are? Mark Holden responded there is a possibility a board member may want to move a street.

Adjournment
Chairman Mark Holden adjourned the meeting at 8:05 p.m.