



LIVINGSTON BOARD OF EDUCATION AND LIVINGSTON TOWNSHIP COUNCIL FIVE-ON-FIVE MEETING MINUTES

Wednesday, September 6, 2023

Hybrid Meeting in Heritage Middle School Cafeteria - 7:00 p.m.

A **Five-on-Five Meeting** of the Livingston Board of Education and Livingston Township Council was held on this date in the Heritage Middle School Cafeteria and via Zoom and Facebook Live. The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. by the Board President, Vineeta Khanna, who announced that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by amendment to notice approved at the Board's reorganization meeting on January 3, 2023 and posted at the Board of Education office and communicated to *The Star Ledger*, *West Essex Tribune*, *TAPinto Livingston* and the Livingston Township Clerk.

LBOE Members: Jenissa Arnette, Pamela Chirls, Seth Cohen, Vineeta Khanna and Parul Khemka

Township Council: Mayor Michael Vieira, Deputy Mayor Alfred Anthony, Rosy Bagolie, Shawn Klein and Edward Meinhardt

Also in Attendance:

From the Township: Barry Lewis Jr., Adam Loehner, Russ Jones, Attorney Jarrid Kantor and Carolyn Mazzucco

From LPS: Dr. Matthew Block, Thomas Lambe and Joann Goldberg

There were approximately 40 members of the public and staff in person and approximately 104 members of the public and staff watching remotely through the webinar and via a Facebook Live Stream.

Workshop Items

Mrs. Khanna and Mayor Vieira began the meeting by explaining that although the Five-on-Five meetings do not happen as often as everyone would like, members of the Township and Board, the town manager and superintendent, all meet on a Town Liaison Committee on a regular basis in an effort to keep communication open between all parties so they can work together on topics affecting our community.

1. Shared Services

Mrs. Khanna reviewed some of the areas in which the two governing bodies share responsibility such as snow plowing and salting, usage of the Monmouth Court building, utilization of township and school facilities for various programs, field maintenance and a gasoline cooperative.

Mr. Lewis added they will continue to explore additional opportunities to share facilities and buildings as well as the fiber optic system.

Mr. Cohen asked to see an increase in dialogue about finding a permanent place to park and secure our bus fleet. Mr. Meinhardt responded that there is a possibility land may be made

available once the new DPW is complete. It was agreed to keep this as a discussion item for the Town Liaison Committee.

Mr. Meinhardt announced a new turf field will be installed at the top of the Brendan Tevlin Field and he looks forward to sharing it with the high school, middle school and community. The field will be lined for use with many different sports. The projected completion date is March of 2024. Funding came out of a meeting between Mr. Meinhardt and Mayor Vieira with Governor Codey. A request was made and the State of New Jersey granted the township the money to install the field and it is at no cost to the taxpayers.

Ms. Arnette asked about having discussions about adding pedestrian lights at the crosswalks of Wynnwood and Northfield, Winchester and Northfield and Belmont and Taconic.

Mr. Lewis responded that those intersections currently have crossing guards so an immediate fix could be to expand their hours. Mr. Lewis added he can send her concerns about Northfield to Essex County since that is a county road.

Mrs. Khemka asked if they can look at adding sidewalks to streets around the schools that don't have them so students walking are safely away from traffic. Mr. Lewis explained that the township applies for money to address sidewalks through Safe Ways to Schools and reviewed the areas where new sidewalks will be installed. Mayor Vieira asked Mrs. Khemka to provide him with a list of the streets she would like them to review.

2. Enrollment Update

Dr. Block announced that Livingston High School was recognized as #18 in Best High Schools in New Jersey by U.S. News and World Report and that families continue to move into our town for the schools.

Dr. Block reviewed our enrollment trends, showing how enrollment has increased steadily, with a slight dip during COVID, between 2012 and 2023. Dr. Block also reviewed the number of sections in each elementary school, noting that we are starting the year with only a few sections over guidelines.

Dr. Block explained some of the short term fixes to address our growing Pre-K program and additional elementary enrollment. These include the reconfiguration of interior spaces at Burnet Hill and Hillside to create additional classroom space and moving smaller offices outside to our new annexes.

At the secondary level, we have also reconfigured space inside the building and added the option of open lunch for both juniors and seniors this year.

Mrs. Khanna added that the district has created a Long Range Facilities Planning Committee to look at long term solutions for increasing enrollment and that Mrs. Bagolie will be the town council representative on the committee.

Mr. Cohen asked about other things being done around the buildings to address some of the overcrowding and Dr. Block responded that in addition to allowing juniors and seniors out for lunch this coming school year, they have opened some other interior and exterior spaces for students to eat lunch. Dr. Block added that there are seats for everyone who wants one at lunch; however, some students do choose to picnic on the floor with their friends.

3. Housing Development

Mr. Lewis began by saying that they recognize housing development can directly affect the schools; however, none of the housing projects that have been approved currently have a shovel

in the ground so some of the enrollment pressure everyone is feeling is from people moving to Livingston due to how well our students are performing in the schools.

Mrs. Bagolie added the town is seeing an acceleration in the cyclical rate of home turnover due to Covid when many individuals sold their homes and new families moved in from the city.

Mr. Lewis explained the court ordered mandate that every municipality must follow to provide affordable housing in their communities. Mr. Lewis continued they take the impact on schools very seriously and work with developers to minimize the impact by encouraging them to build over 55 communities, special needs housing and one-to-two bedroom unit complexes.

Upon Ms Khemka's request, Mr. Lewis reviewed the Rutgers data that they utilize to estimate how many children will come out of projects that are approved. Mr Lewis clarified that the actual number appears to be higher for multifamily units when compared to the Rutgers study predictions. This includes a development that hasn't yet been fully sold. For single family units, Mr Lewis clarified that the number of actual students is double that predicted from Rutgers study. Mr. Lewis added that they continue to compare their actual results with this survey data and he will continue to keep Dr. Block informed as much in advance as possible so the district can continue to be proactive with their planning.

When discussing smaller properties that are being torn down and larger ones built in their place, Mr. Lewis mentioned that the Zoning and Adjustment Board Chair, Mrs. Fass is looking into introducing ordinances to limit/restrict subdivisions of larger lots.

4. Space/Land for Possible School Expansion

Mr. Lewis explained they will continue a dialogue with the Board about exploring vacant space in town hall, about possibly relocating some of their programming at the community center to free up additional space in that building and sharing facilities at Monmouth Court. Mr. Lewis continued if the Board has the ability to expand on their own existing property and it takes away current parking, they may have adjacent property that can assist with moving those lots. Mr. Lewis also explained they have recreational space inventory and although that comes with some restrictions attached, we can request a diversion from the State.

Mrs. Chirls reiterated the district's interest in utilizing more of the Monmouth Court building and the council expressed willingness to continue those discussions. After her review of the Township's Fall 2023 Catalog, she noted Monmouth Court is used on a limited basis. However, school buildings are well-used, which can continue given the strong partnership between the District and the Township.

Mr. Klein brought up the Haines Pool complex as a possible option to be made as part of a larger high school complex.

Dr. Block explained as we begin our Long Range Facilities Planning, it would be good to know what options may be on the table and what definitely are not.

Mr. Cohen and Mrs. Chirls explained that the Town Liaison Committee is at the analysis stage, where every piece of data is being shared amongst the group but they do plan to make their conversations and recommendations known to the public, similar to what was recently published in the paper.

Mr. Meinhardt added that the committee started meeting in January, has worked well together and is another way to show the collaboration between both entities.

Public Comment

Justin Alpert, 56 Amherst Place, suggested the 2:2 Meetings be open to the public, that we need to agree on a rate of growth, that healthy community growth includes adding workers from the community and that Livingston should set the standard of excellence.

Jim Burd, Hopewell Township, stated it is essential that both groups get together to discuss how the percentage of monies would be distributed when using a PILOT. Mr. Burd suggested going through the legislators in Trenton to find out who came up with the equation for affordable housing. Mr. Burd offered his assistance by contacting him at jim.burd@gmail.com.

Rosy Bagolie responded that she has been outspoken in her commitment that she would not allow a PILOT to happen without some of the funds going to the Board of Education.

Jean Stoloff, 18 North Drive, suggested the group research the definition of a PILOT because she doesn't see any area in Livingston that falls within that definition. Mrs. Stoloff added that communities reach a plateau with development and most homes in town don't have children. Mrs. Stoloff recalled that when the district put the \$50 million addition on the high school, it only passed by 40 votes.

Libby Barak, 51 Elmwood Drive, expressed that the town camp is not inclusive because it does not have structure for students with disabilities. Mrs. Barak encouraged more cooperation between the two groups to create an inclusive environment that brings people together and raises children who know how to be responsible, respectful and compassionate adults.

Seven Montgomery Road, stated we cannot maintain our standards if class sizes are too high and suggested not going to the top of the guidelines as shown on the slide. Asked the council to put together a document that gives a projection of units that will be occupied year by year over the next five years. The document should be based on how many construction permits were issued, how many applications are currently underway, how many are in the planning stage, how many affordable credits Livingston is obliged to, how many have been fulfilled and how many are left.

Fran Frederick, 7 Emerson Drive, encouraged the Board to take another look at class sizes because studies show the guidelines for grades K-2 should be 18. Ms. Frederick also asked what the determining factors are for having 25 students per class.

Steve Shaiman, 4 Knollwood Drive, asked wouldn't it be prudent to determine where the pool will be before offering the property to the board of education for the high school?

Mayor Vieira responded they are still in the study phase and are having an engineer look at everything and provide them with a recommendation. Mr. Klein added that no one has promised anything and that no decision will be forthcoming until they have reviewed all the data.

Tugce Yalt, 8 Fieldstone Drive, asked if there is any talk with developers to give some of the space to the schools, asked for the facilities committee to be transparent with their discussions and decisions and allow the public to vote on the options. Mrs. Yalt asked if the annexes will be used for classrooms and if so, how will safety and bad weather be handled.

Bernard Searle, 14 Washington Court, had an opportunity to obtain some data from the Township of Millburn and saw they have a number of sites for affordable housing but there is a

tremendous range in the number of units per acre. Dr. Searle asked why a developer has the right to put 25 or 30 units per acre in addition to retail? He said Millburn has a range between 8 and 40 per acre. Dr. Searle asked why developers are able to come in and make a tremendous amount of money but don't have any responsibility for the schools, fire, police, etc. and that they need to take into consideration the density of the town. Dr. Searle asked if there is any data on the number of students generated from the housing units that are knocked down and replaced/rebuilt with units with larger square footage.

Mrs. Khanna responded that the annexes are not intended to be classrooms and that they will hold staff offices.

Dr. Block added there will be some limited cases where staff will meet with students in the annexes but main classes and specials will all be held in the buildings. Dr. Block added staff will bring students back and forth between the building and the annexes, when necessary.

Mr. Lewis responded that currently the law in New Jersey limits their ability to impose impact fees on developers but that there is legislation proposed in Trenton that would expand the ability of a town to impose those fees and this could be something to support.

Mr. Lewis continued they have not yet done an evaluation to identify how many smaller houses were knocked down and rebuilt and how many students may have been generated but it is a good suggestion.

Dr. Block responded that he would like to make class sizes as reasonable as possible, which is their goal with adding sections and working hard to expand the number of teachers and classrooms as enrollment increases. Dr. Block believes this will be addressed during discussions with the Long Range Facilities Planning Committee.

With regard to a public document on pending development projects, Mr. Lewis responded we are in the process of working with Dr. Block to track and monitor when construction permits are being issued, when we anticipate them coming online and how many bedrooms they will include. Mr. Lewis continued he can look at putting together a public facing document with this information for the future.

The meeting adjourned at 9:22 p.m.