



LIVINGSTON BOARD OF EDUCATION PUBLIC LISTENING FORUM MINUTES

Monday, May 24, 2021

Public Session - Virtual Meeting Via Zoom and Facebook Live – 6:00 p.m.

A **Public Listening Forum** of the Livingston Board of Education was held on this date in the large conference room in the Administration Building and via Zoom and Facebook Live. The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m. by the Board President, Samantha Messer, who announced that adequate notice of this meeting has been provided by amendment to notice approved at the Board's reorganization meeting on January 4, 2021 and posted at the Board of Education office and communicated to *The Star Ledger*, *West Essex Tribune*, *TAPinto Livingston* and the Livingston Township Clerk.

Members Present: Pamela Chirls, Seth Cohen, Vineeta Khanna, Ronnie Konner and Samantha Messer

Also in Attendance: Dr. Matthew Block, Steven Robinson and Joann Goldberg

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

Public Listening Forum on Board Size

Ms. Messer began by explaining the reason for this meeting is for the board to hear the public's thoughts on whether or not they should vote to put the question of increasing the board size on the November ballot. If the board decides to put the question on the ballot, the voters then decide whether or not they wish to increase the board size from a five member to a seven or nine member board.

Paul Boxer, 12 Audubon Road, provided an analysis of board seats and student enrollment numbers from Essex and surrounding counties that show the majority of them have nine member boards. Mr. Boxer continued that a question to ask is if there is a relation between the number of seats and student performance.

Mike Ramer, 22 Mohawk Drive, stated he would like to see a more diverse board and believes that based on the number of students in the district, the optimal size is seven members. Mr. Ramer added that a larger board will also allow for more expertise and asked that the citizens be allowed to make the choice.

Cheryl Paredes, 21 Burnet Hill Road, stated quality should come before quantity, adding there are many members of the community who are happy with what has happened in the past and what is happening now with a five member board. Mrs. Paredes stated she is strongly against moving to a nine member board.

James Calderon, 130 Hobart Gap Road, stated he thinks the current board is not large enough to oversee the governance of the district and expressed concern about student proficiency in math and reading that he saw in *US News & World Report's* high school rankings.

Ms. Messer and Dr. Block both responded that we will check to make sure if the information he read is accurate because sometimes the way those articles are written can be misleading.

Maren Harris, 5 Bowling Drive, stated that the Town Council has been approving more development in town which will bring up facilities and class size issues for the school district. Mrs. Harris expressed that a larger board may be better equipped to deal with those decisions.

Jenissa Arnette, 281 West Mount Pleasant Avenue, stated that in order to evolve, we have to make changes. Ms. Arnette continued that although right now a five person board is working, we need to consider Mr. Boxer's research and that the community will be expanding as we evolve.

Alyse Heilpern, 4 Highland Drive, stated she thinks the question should go to the community to decide and that larger boards allow for more people to work together.

Ms. Messer took a moment to explain the process moving forward is for each of them to use a uniform set of questions to speak with a few other boards and superintendents of various sizes, as well as past board members and superintendents, about their experiences. On June 14, they will have a discussion in public to share with the community what they have learned and go through the pros and cons of expanding or keeping the board the same size. On June 21, they will take a vote on whether or not to put the question of expanding the size of the board on the November ballot. Ms. Messer added that we need to get information to the county office by September 3 if we want the question on the November ballot.

Paul Boxer, 12 Audubon Road, asked if at any point, the public will hear the board's own personal viewpoints or opinions.

Sasha Paillet Koff, 13 Rumson Road, stated a board of the whole operates very differently than one with a committee structure and as they gather their information, to do their due diligence as it is important to understand the differences of how they will communicate and how information will be shared.

Adjournment

At 6:38 p.m., Mrs. Konner made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Mr. Cohen seconded the motion.

ROLL CALL VOTE - Ayes - Mrs. Chirls, Mr. Cohen, Mrs. Khanna, Mrs. Konner, Ms. Messer
Nayes - None

Respectfully submitted,

Steven K. Robinson
Board Secretary