



**Highlands Borough Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes  
April 5, 2022– Special Meeting Minutes**

**SPECIAL MEETING: 6:00PM**

The Deputy Borough Clerk read the public meetings statement.

The notice requirements provided for in the Open Public Meetings Act have been satisfied. Notice of this meeting was properly given by transmission to the Asbury Park Press and the Two River Times and by posting at the Borough of Highlands Municipal Building and filing with the Borough Clerk all on March 17, 2022. Items listed on the agenda are subject to change.

**PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

**ROLL CALL**

Councilmember Chelak, Councilmember Melnyk, Councilmember Olszewski, and Mayor Broullon were Present.

Absent: Councilmember Cervantes

Also in attendance were special counsels Vito Gagliardi, Jr., Esq., and Kerri Wright, Esq., Michael Muscillo, Borough Administrator, and Deputy Municipal Clerk Heidi R Brunt.

**DISCUSSION ITEM:** Regionalization of Highlands, Atlantic Highlands, and Sea Bright in a K-12 school district.

Mayor Broullon opened the meeting and updated the public on the Feasibility Study for the K-12 school regionalization with Highlands, Atlantic Highlands and Sea Bright. The Mayor discussed impacts on the school district having to do with COVID and the 2020 US Census outcome. The Mayor provided information on the LEAP Grant also awarded to the School Board for a Feasibility Study for the possible regionalization as well.

Mayor Broullon also spoke about the process for placing a question on the General Election Ballot for Regionalization for November 2022. Also stating there would be a series of meetings like this one to educate the members of the public regarding the process and study. The Mayor introduced Vito Gagliardi, Esq. and Kerri Wright, Esq. of Porzio, Bromberg, & Newman, P.C.

Mr. Gagliardi spoke about his role in the Feasibility Study and the outcome of the study and its recommendation, including the expectation that the issue would be submitted to the voters in November 2022 at the General Election. Mr. Gagliardi continued to discuss the process and timeline for putting the referendum on the ballot in November. However, Mr. Gagliardi stated there would be review of both study's results and recommendations prior to drafting the final question for the ballot. Mr. Gagliardi discussed the fact that Mark Magyar, former policy advisor to Senator Steve Sweeney, and how he would continue to be involved in the process as well.

Ms. Wright spoke in detail regarding the need for a resolution approving the question for the ballot and agreement to move forward with the question, from all three communities involved in the Regionalization effort. The three communities involved (Sea Bright, Highlands, and Atlantic Highlands) would all have to concur. Ms. Wright spoke about working together to create a question for the ballot that would also include the method for allocated the tax levy in the new district (this would need to be finalized in advance of the referendum question being presented to the voters). As stated by Ms. Wright, there will be further public forums to dive into detail about what the Regionalization will look like.

Mayor opened public portion.

**PUBLIC PORTION**

Donald Krueger, Scenic Drive, Highlands and Board of Education Member, commented on the study and the lack of numbers that are addressed at the local taxpayer level. Mr. Krueger requested information on the impact of the Regionalization to the local taxpayer. Mr. Krueger

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expressed his objection to the study.

Mr. Gagliardi stated the communities will prepare detailed numbers further into the process and discussed the possibility of taxpayer savings due to the possible regionalization but also the fact that this regionalization would result in significant educational benefit. Mr. Gagliardi also stated the method for allocation of the tax levy will be determined prior to the question being submitted to the voters.

John Crowley, 2 Keystone Drive in Atlantic Highlands, commented regarding his disappointment that the Highlands Governing Body was meeting on this topic without the Henry Hudson Regional feasibility study results in place. Mr. Crowley stated there is no guarantee there will be savings to the local taxpayers and this should be a Board of Education matter.

Mayor Broullon stated that the meeting was being held at the request of residents in the Highlands.

Mr. Gagliardi commented on the need for the meeting which was to discuss the process to be able to submit a question on the ballot by the August deadline, not the details, at this point of the recommendation or the question itself. Mr. Gagliardi also discussed legislation designed to increase the flexibility available to communities looking to regionalize in order to ensure savings to the taxpayers of each municipality. He also informed the public that the ultimate decision would be left to the voters.

Charlie Rooney, 196 Ocean Blvd in Sea Bright, commented on his long history in the area and requested information on options for education if one municipality does not want to participate.

Mr. Gagliardi stated the parties that wish to move forward with the plan may do so.

Chris Francy, 36 Fifth St., Highlands, noted that Highlands currently does not vote on school budgets and asked if we would start. Mr. Gagliardi answered that it depends on the Board of Education. Mr. Francy asked if all towns would be voting for the same members. Mr. Gagliardi answered that each town will have representative members who will be elected by the voters in their respective town.

Tracey Abby White, Atlantic Highlands, stated she is not opposing or endorsing anything at this time but wanted to address some confusion about the Tri District and Regionalization in addition to faculty salaries.

Mr. Gagliardi discussed the option of a dissolution of the Henry Hudson Regional School District and creation of a new school district. Mr. Gagliardi described the process to create a new school district and that it is not intended to protect or hurt employees, but to maintain their rights as existed prior to any change to the district. He also noted that tenure and seniority rights of employees are protected.

Ms. Wright discussed the example of South Hunterdon Regional School District's collective bargaining agreements and how the largest union's agreement stayed in place until a new agreement was duly negotiated between the board and the union.

Christ Lucas, Atlantic Highlands, requested information on the studies that were done in the past and why there was a need for another study.

Mr. Gagliardi stated that there would be more educational meetings to discuss the studies and their need.

Mr. Lucas also requested additional information of how the funds will be spent.

Mayor Broullon discussed the budgets that govern tax allocation and how municipalities collect the school's taxes and distributes to the school for allocation.

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Muriel Smith, 99 Center Ave. in Atlantic Highlands, requested information on a timeline for this process and the completion of the board of education study as well. Ms. Smith also requested a timeframe on the approval of the question by the other towns.

Mr. Gagliardi discussed the timeline and the actual tax allocation and the question that would go on the ballot. There is a three-month window during which time the towns will negotiate over the tax allocation method to be proposed to the voters and the Commissioner can review the petition and make a determination on authorizing the ballot. The ballot question would need to be submitted to the County Clerk in August. Mr. Gagliardi also discussed that the law permits the municipal governing bodies to petition the Commissioner of Education to place the issue of regionalization on the ballot for voters. Mr. Gagliardi spoke about the last revision to the statute regarding regionalization (passed in 1993) and that the change made by the legislature, purportedly to make it easier to form a regional district, did not result in the creation of more regional school districts. He stated now there is a new law that encourages regionalization and it appears to be more flexible and effective in encouraging regionalization.

Tara Beams, Superintendent of the Tri District, commented on the study from 2019. Dr. Beams spoke about the current Sea Bright relationship with Shore and Oceanport and five-year transition required by the new statute. Dr. Beams also posed the question of how many students would enroll in the new district from Sea Bright.

Mr. Gagliardi stated that the new legislation permits Sea Bright to withdraw from Shore Regional and Oceanport without the need for those two districts to approve Sea Bright's withdrawal. Only the Commissioner of Education and the voters in Sea Bright (and Highlands and Atlantic Highlands) need to approve Sea Bright's withdrawal. Mr. Gagliardi also stated there should be no disruption of the students in Sea Bright, as the law permits them to continue in their current school until they reach the last grade in that school. Sea Bright's withdrawal from Shore and Oceanport would take five years to phase out.

Kerry Callus, of Atlantic Highlands, commented on the prematurity of the comments made by Dr. Beams and that this issue should be on the ballot in November.

Gina Melnyk, of Highlands and member of Highlands Board of Education, commented that she supports the process and wished for more enthusiasm in Atlantic Highlands for regionalization. Ms. Melnyk also thanked the Highlands Council for having this meeting and planning more to come.

Brian Bombs, of Atlantic Highlands, requested information on the process for allowing towns to separate from current agreements for education.

Mr. Gagliardi stated that the new legislation allows for Sea Bright to leave Shore Regional and Oceanport over a certain time frame.

Councilman Melnyk thanked the public for attending.

Mayor Broullon stated that the regionalization will provide better socialization of the children in this area.

**ADJOURN:**

Upon motion by Mayor Broullon, seconded by Council President Olszewski, motion carries to adjourn at 8:15PM.

All in Favor. Motion carried.

Approve: \_\_\_\_\_

Mayor Carolyn Broullon

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_

Nancy Tran, Borough Clerk