

**Highlands Borough Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2022– Special Meeting Minutes**

SPECIAL MEETING: 6:34PM

The 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 September 9, 2022. Items listed on the agenda are subject to change.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

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

Also in attendance were special counsel Vito Gagliardi, Jr., Esq., and Kerri Wright, Esq., and Municipal Clerk Nancy Tran.

Councilmember Melnyk – arrived at 6:45pm

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

Mayor Broullon stated that the regionalization question will not be on the November ballot this year and listed other possible opportunities where it could be put to a vote. The funding formula has been agreed upon by all 6 entities, but the details of cost sharing is holding up the process. She then turned it over to Mr. Gagliardi and Ms. Wright.

Mr. Gagliardi noted the historical significance of six governing entities submitting a petition to the Commissioner of Education to pose a question to the public to form a PK-12 school district. The deadline of September 9th to put a question on the November ballot was not met since the Commissioner did not have enough information to proceed. The six governing entities were still working on the details of a process to share savings resulting from Sea Bright's inclusion in the new PK-12 regional district. He stated that regionalization would offer better education for less money. He explained how the new statute affects the process. Mr. Gagliardi stated his goal is to present something to the public that will be attractive enough for the voters to consider disrupting the status quo.

Ms. Wright had nothing further to add and would be happy to answer the public's questions.

Mayor Broullon asked if Mr. Gagliardi and Ms. Wright could give a brief overview of next steps. She also asked the dais if anyone had questions or comments. Councilmember Chelak asked for Mr. Gagliardi's thoughts on why Atlantic Highlands doesn't want to lessen the tax burden for the public. Mayor Broullon suggested that she could go to the next Atlantic Highlands council meeting and ask them. Councilmember Cervantes added that he doesn't understand Atlantic Highlands's stance on the cost savings agreement. Councilmember Chelak asked why the Board of Education get to make the cost savings decision for the public. Mayor Broullon suggested that she go to the Board of Education meeting to ask that question.

Mayor opened public portion.

PUBLIC PORTION

Muriel Smith, Atlantic Highlands, asked if the attorneys were contacted before Atlantic Highlands made their vote. Mr. Gagliardi answered that they were contacted and were asked if they would be part of the mediation. He stated that it didn't make sense not to try to resolve this. He felt hopeful that an experienced mediator will help both sides see the benefits. Ms. Smith asked if mediator has education background. Mr. Gagliardi answered that cases get mediated all the time. If mediation is unsuccessful, then he would suggest a professional mediator. Ms. Smith asked why

**Highlands Borough Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes
September 14, 2022– Special Meeting Minutes**

not start there to save money. She then noted that Highlands has two schools to maintain and asked about municipal costs vs. school costs. Ms. Wright said that that point could be brought up at mediation. Ms. Smith asked who would be present at mediation and thought that Dr. Beams should not be.

Charlie Rooney, Sea Bright, thanked Council for holding the meeting. He stated that he remembered when Sea Bright closed their schools and the subsequent relationship with Ocean Shore school system. Mr. Rooney noted that forever is not good for all parties and that focus should be on the potential savings. He then asked about the monies from the state to incentivize regionalization and the current district's loss in state aid for declining enrollment. Mr. Gagliardi answered that there is a mechanism to slow the reduction of state aid, if the districts move forward with regionalization. Mr. Rooney noted that there were two feasibility studies and the cost for them and that they both came to the same conclusion. He asked if the Highlands Board of Education supported the studies and why the Highlands Board of Education was pushing for savings for Atlantic Highlands. Mayor Broullon suggested that he go to the Board of Education meeting for them to answer and gave upcoming Board of Education meeting dates. She then summarized the cost per student for each municipality and the potential savings with regionalization. She reported that everyone was on board with the funding formula and that when the savings sharing question was raised at the May 25th meeting, the Board of Education said that they had nothing to do with it.

Mark Fisher, Atlantic Highlands, expressed his confusion as to why the Board of Education is involved in the savings sharing issue when it's between the two towns, Atlantic Highlands and Highlands. Mr. Gagliardi answered that there were six entities involved in the joint petition and stated that the original formula was 88/12 and it's now 85/15. Mr. Fisher asked why the Board of Education special meeting was cancelled at the last minute. Mayor Broullon answered that Highlands didn't want 50/50 cost sharing in perpetuity with no way to get out of it. Mr. Gagliardi agreed that agreement should not be in perpetuity. Mr. Fisher stated that he went to the Atlantic Highlands council meeting and left feeling good but then was surprised when he went to the Highlands council meeting. Mayor Broullon stated that the language was not the same in Sea Bright, only the funding formula was the same. Mr. Fisher stated that it didn't seem right that the Board of Education is involved in the cost sharing discussion.

Ms. Smith asked for the meaning of binding arbitration. Mr. Gagliardi answered and explained that it was not the same as mediation. Ms. Smith asked how long is binding. Mr. Gagliardi answered that one can have binding and agree to sit down to modify. All six entities will be at the mediation. Ms. Smith noted that Atlantic Highlands school has debt while Highlands does not and asked if Highlands would have to pick up Atlantic Highlands' debt. Mayor Broullon stated that the Highlands elementary school does not have debt but the high school does.

With no further comments from the public, the Mayor closed public portion. In closing the meeting, she stated that the discussion should be about the kids' education and tax savings for all. All three towns' assessed values have gone up in recent years. One should talk about the good stuff that's going on.

ADJOURN:

Upon motion by Mayor Broullon, seconded by Councilmember Melnyk, motion carries to adjourn at 7:47PM.

All in Favor.

Approve: _____

Mayor Carolyn Broullon

Attest: _____

Nancy Tran, Borough Clerk