

**Highlands Borough Mayor & Council Meeting Minutes
June 8, 2022– Special Meeting Minutes**

SPECIAL MEETING: 6:00PM

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 May 13, 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., and Acting Municipal Clerk Nancy Tran

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

Mayor Broullon gave a brief summary of regionalization progress and introduced Mr. Gagliardi, Jr. and Ms. Wright. Before turning it over to Mr. Gagliardi, she noted that both Council and Board of Education Regionalization studies were similar.

Mr. Gagliardi gave a brief summary of his presentation. He noted that the Public will be the one who's in charge. The two Regionalization studies (one by the municipalities and the other by the boards) complement one another and that the experts who wrote the study completed by the boards complemented the work and analysis of the experts retained by the municipalities. He further noted that regionalization is a chance to improve education while paying less for it. All parties are working toward a referendum in November, and all 6 parties will have the opportunity to weigh in. He does not have an exact number for the tax levy as that must be negotiated among the three communities. But both studies identified savings for each of the communities upon regionalization. They're hoping to come up with a regionalization plan that's provides a better educational structure that's less expensive.

Ms. Wright gave an overview of how the Henry Hudson Regional School District currently is funded. Currently, the tax levy is allocated between Highlands and Atlantic Highlands based on equalized property valuations; however, the proportional number of students educated in each community K-6 vs 7-12 is a factor in the allocation of the tax levy. Ms. Wright provided an example. The K-12 formula will be different.

Mr. Gagliardi noted that using Ms. Wright's example, if there are no kids going to Henry Hudson from one of the two communities, then that community would pay \$0 towards the operation of Henry Hudson. Taxes will be affected by the number of pupils no matter what formula is chosen by the three communities. Mr. Gagliardi noted that the final decision on the tax levy allocation will need to be one that the majority of voters in each of the three towns would support, or the referendum will not pass.

Councilmember Olszewski remarked that it's important to see the child go through the entire school system, from K-12. Councilmember Melnyk asked who is responsible for coming up with the funding formula, Governing Boards or Board of Education? Mr. Gagliardi answered that legislature empowered Governing Boards and Board of Education to work together. Councilmember Melnyk asked if a unanimous vote is required. Mr. Gagliardi answered no.

Mayor Broullon noted that Atlantic Highlands will be discussing Regionalization at their Council meeting tomorrow night. Mr. Gagliardi noted that there is no disagreement among the attorneys

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who all recommend the same process for moving this matter forward to obtain authorization to place this important question before the voters.

Mayor opened public portion.

PUBLIC PORTION

Chris Francy, 36 Fifth St., 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 that respective town, and who will be responsible to answer to the constituents in their respective town.

Tracy Abbey-White, Atlantic Highlands, asked about the difference between expansion vs. dissolution. Mr. Gagliardi answered that the new law removes some of the practical barriers of regionalizing and now favors expansion.

Muriel Smith, Atlantic Highlands, asked for clarification of regionalization for K-12 or PreK-12. Ms. Wright answered that the new district would be responsible for the education of students entitled to a free and appropriate public education PreK through 12. Ms. Smith asked how does the wording of the referendum question get decided. Mr. Gagliardi answered that he expects the question to be hammered out among the attorneys for the three communities and the boards within the next few weeks. He also noted that 1 town cannot hold up the decision. Ms. Smith asked if it's a majority vote of the voters in all three towns or does each town decide itself? Mr. Gagliardi answered each town. He also noted that if Atlantic Highlands and Highlands vote to proceed while Sea Bright votes no, the regionalization plan can still proceed as to the formation of a K-12 district for Atlantic Highlands and Highlands. Ms. Smith asked if there were any guarantees that current Board of Education members will all stay. Mr. Gagliardi answered no but believes that there will be significant carryover.

Patricia Robertson, 101 Highland Ave., stated that Highlands have tried to do this more than a decade ago and it's never gotten to referendum. She is happy that we've gotten this far. She believes that it's better than letting the state tell us what to do.

??, 48 First in Atlantic Highlands, asked what is the basis for the difference is between the recommended tax allocation formulas in the 2 reports. Mr. Gagliardi answered that he could explain the recommended formula in his report but not in the board of education report. He also noted that the allocation formulas included in the reports were not the only possible formulas available to the communities. However, he also noted that there will be no substantial savings without Sea Bright's inclusion in the new district.

Eileen (?), Atlantic Highlands, asked what is being done already to align education program of the 3 schools/towns. Mr. Gagliardi answered that he does not know what steps have been taken, if any, by the boards of education, but that there will be continuity of instruction and discussions have already been considered.

??, Sea Bright, noted that all should make sure that no child loses. Continuity is important. Tax savings is being discussed but the children and their education must be considered. Mayor Broullon agreed. Mr. Gagliardi noted that there's false narrative that the Board of Educations were not invited to join the early regionalization discussions. Truth is that the Boards of Education were invited but declined. Mayor Broullon noted that all Board of Education meetings are open to the public.

Peter Vito, East Highlands, Atlantic Highlands, asked about the formula. Mr. Gagliardi answered that the savings for each community do not need to be equal but rather the savings must be substantial for each of the three communities or it will not likely receive voter approval. Mayor Broullon stated that Atlantic Highlands has more children than Highlands. Mr. Gagliardi noted that the new legislation offers an enormous amount of flexibility in finding a method for funding the new district in a manner that is equitable for all three communities. Mayor Broullon stated that

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formula uses 2022 equalized property values of all 3 towns and enrollment numbers, which are different in all 3 towns.

Charlie Rooney, Sea Bright, agreed with Ms. Robertson that this discussion has been going on for a long time. Tomorrow night is an important night (referring to the vote anticipated at the Atlantic Highlands municipal council meeting).

With no further comments from the public, Mayor closed public portion.

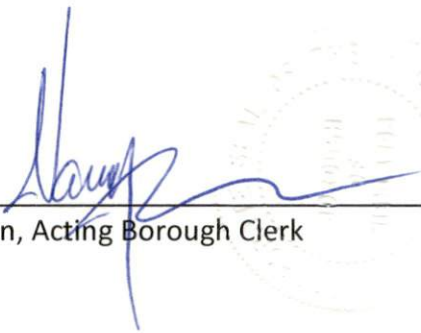
Councilmember Olszewski assumed that there will be a small window after the vote and asked when it would take effect. Mr. Gagliardi answered that he expects the educators to be ready to transition to the new district by July 2023. Councilmember Olszewski asked if new Board of Education members will be elected in November and if some will be chosen. Mr. Gagliardi answered that, historically, the first Board will be appointed where 2/3 will be from the elementary school and 1/3 from the Henry Hudson Regional High School. The seats will be staggered and that there is a process. Mayor Broullon noted that if your seat is up this year, then you still need to run. Mr. Gagliardi believes that the new Board will be named well in advance. Ms. Wright added that there will be a transition board, as there are a number of educational decisions that will need to be made prior to the anticipated July 1, 2023 transition date.

ADJOURN:

Upon motion by Mayor Broullon, seconded by Council President Olszewski, motion carries to adjourn at 7:46PM.

All in Favor.

Approve: 
Mayor Carolyn Broullon

Attest: 
Nancy Tran, Acting Borough Clerk