

The Westfield Leader

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How Westfield Handled Last Defeated School Budget, 1994

By HORACE R. CORBIN

On April 19, 1994, Westfield voters rejected the school budget spending plan of \$46.7 million, that called for a 6.4 percent increase in taxes, by a tally of 1,610 No versus 1,197 Yes. The mayor and town council deliberated on the matter prior to the deadline of Thursday, May 19 - altering the requested tax levy of \$41.3 million to be \$40.5 million, resulting in a tax increase over the previous year of 4.2 percent. The school board and the state department of education accepted the council action.

At that time, Bud Boothe was mayor, Dr. Mark Smith was schools superintendent and Susan Pepper was school board president. The procedure for resolving the matter then is the same as the procedure to be used today in that the voters rejected on April 19, 2005 the proposed 2005-2006 school budget.

The procedure is described in detail at www.state.nj.us/njedd/finance/fp/dwb/defeated/.

The "Defeated Budget Information" transmittal is given by the school board to the town clerk no later than April 27.

The mayor and town council have until May 19 to "determine and certify to the county board of taxation the amount of money necessary for school purposes to be raised by taxes for the ensuing school year."

If either the board of education or municipal governing body, or both, will have a majority present at the meeting, then the meeting must be publicly announced and advertised according to the "Open Public Meetings Act" by the body(ies) with the majority present.

The town council can increase, decrease or maintain the proposed school budget; submitting such to the school board for acceptance; all of which is subject to review by the county superintendent of schools and further subject to review by the state commissioner of education. Should disputes arise, there is a comprehensive dispute resolution procedure.

A snapshot of the deliberations in 1994 follows:

Board of Education President Susan Pepper said of the budget's defeat to the town council, "Clearly, we regret the need to be here. But the voters have spoken. The 1994-1995 school budget now rests with the town council."

Former council finance chairman William Jubb Corbet, Jr. urged the council to "go easy on the board" in reducing the budget.

In a letter to the editor, Dr. Ferdinand Gajewski of Westfield wrote, "Now, not unexpectedly, the school budget has been rejected by the voters, and it must be intelligently reconstituted in a matter of days. An impossible task, particularly inasmuch as the town council is not competent in such matters."

Fourth Ward Councilman James Hely said it is inevitable programs will be cut as a result of a budget reduction. He said his role as a councilman is "to find programs we can possibly live without."

Councilman Anthony LaPorta asked if the district has projected retirements in advance and compared these salaries against those of new hires.

A suggestion was given by First Ward Councilman Norman Greco to consolidate department chairmen and get them back in the classroom full-time. Dr. Smith said the chairmen teach three classes, two less than regular teachers.

He said they must be curriculum experts. They also evaluate and supervise teachers.

Councilman Greco asked school officials if they have considered consolidating the school administration building on Elm Street into the former Lincoln School or perhaps selling the building outright.

Dr. Smith said the administration has wanted to sell the Elm Street building for years.

He noted the school administration would be interested in selling Lincoln School.

In a letter to the editor, former school board president Douglas Campbell wrote:

"It was interesting to hear Dr. Mark C. Smith, the Superintendent of Schools, talk about increased enrollment when, in the not-too-distant past, we had about 7,000 students in the system. And budgets have increased while enrollments went down."

"The problem basically is an institution that is almost wholly unionized with all, but two or three executives, in the same union."

"Dr. Smith mentioned four or five bargaining units, but in fact, principals, supervisors, directors and other upper- and middle- management people are associated with the New Jersey Education Association as are the rank-and-file teachers."

"It is difficult to imagine arms-length negotiations and contract enforcement in this relationship."

"It is therefore, only the board of education itself, which exercises discipline in controlling costs, while maintaining effective educational values. A board of willing, part-time, amateur educational volunteers is so easily manipulated by a full-time professional staff dedicated to increasing its security and image..."

"However, the future of the school budget requires that the Westfield council and the board of education, sans the superintendent, form a joint task force to review a long list of onerous statutes, regulations and decrees from Trenton, fostered by the New Jersey Education Association and their close ties to past legislators, that force the school boards to hire restrictive and costly special talents..."

Michael Seiler, the President of the Westfield Education Association, told the board his association was greatly concerned with the resolution the town council delivered to the board.

"This resolution does not reflect an understanding of what makes a public high school a comprehensive one," Mr. Seiler said.

"The association was pleased to learn the board is not accepting all the recommendations of the town council because you are not willing to compromise the programs at Westfield High School," he continued.

Mr. Seiler added he hoped to continue the partnership of the teachers union and the board, the administration and the parents.

On Tuesday, May 17, 1994, the town council unanimously passed a resolution to cut the board of education's \$41.3 million tax levy request by \$765,900. Of the amount cut, \$565,900 was for specific line items in the budget while the additional \$200,000 was to be appropriated from the school board's fund balance.

The council told school board members they must negotiate more firmly with the teachers union and strongly urged the hiring of a professional negotiator.



Below are four arcane words, each with four definitions - only one is correct. The others are made up. Are you sharp enough to discern this deception of diction?

If you can guess one correctly - good guess. If you get two - well-read individual. If you get three - word expert. If you get all four - You must have a lot of free time!

All words and correct definitions come from the board game Diction Deception.

Answers to last week's arcane words.

1. Parle - To converse
2. Pisk - The common nighthawk of America
3. Fundation - The act of making fruitful or prolific
4. Vaca - A cow in the Southwest

OSSARIUM

1. A vase or pitcher with three handles
2. A receptacle for the bones or ashes of the dead
3. A section of a hospital that specializes in the treatment of bone and spinal cord diseases
4. The skull with crossbones

SOREMA

1. A mass of carpels in a single flower
2. An infection causing pernicious clotting of blood
3. Gout in the hand
4. The passage or velocity of red blood cells

KERATIN

1. An astrigent or repellent
2. An albuminous substance forming the principal matter of hair and nails
3. An orange vegetable pigment
4. The hard outer shell of the thoracic region of an insect, such as with an ant or beetle

ASSOT

1. A war horse
2. Utter dismay; astonishment
3. To infatuate
4. A parasitic worm such as the tape-worm

Letters to the Editor

Fun With Latin, Learning Today From 2,000 Years Ago

Mr. Corbin, regarding your question: "Can your students tell me what this Latin means? *Ad Populos, Non Aditus, Pervenimus*." We have the best classical minds at Pingry working on your query.

It is not a full quote, but apparently a partial quote, which, loosely translated, means "We reach all the people, not just the targeted audience (read: few)."

We think it might be a quote from Cicero. The head of our Latin department is researching it for me this weekend. I should have a more comprehensive answer on Monday.

This is on your masthead. Is this a test or do you really not know what it means? The challenge has been enjoyable!

Hope this means you will print our release on the success of our students on the National Latin Exam!

Jill Alexander
Communications Director
The Pingry School

Editor's Note: *The Westfield Leader* deems it to mean, "We reach people, not driveways." It is the motto of our newspaper. That's the best we could come up with, aided by the Latin department at Westfield High School 10 years ago, as there was no expression for driveway 2,000 years ago. I look forward to hearing of your research.

Town Council Should Respond to People's Will on BOE Budget

I believe that the vote against the school budget was mainly due to homeowners' resistance to higher property taxes. However, there are also concerns with how the budget is being spent. I feel that too much money is allocated to administration rather than in the classrooms.

There is a commitment in Westfield to provide a quality education in our public schools, but the money should be used wisely. It is now the responsibility of the town council to make the appropriate reductions to the school budget.

These decisions by the council should be made in response to the will of the voters, not the board of education.

Thomas Cumiff
Westfield

McCready Thanks Residents for Support During BOE Campaign

I would like to thank all of those who supported me during my campaign for the Westfield Board of Education, including those who hosted coffees, sent e-mails or simply read my flyers. A slim margin of victory does drive home the point that every vote does count, be it for a candidate or the budget.

The board of education will face a challenge to determine what we will need to cut out of a budget that already had several cost reductions built into it. I urge the community to make their opinions known to both the board and town council so we will know more than the simple ballot box numbers.

Gary McCready
Westfield

Special Deadlines Next Week
Due to our townwide mailing of *This Is Westfield* next week, much of the newspaper must be completed a day earlier - by Tuesday afternoon. Please e-mail your submittals and Ads by end of Friday, if at all possible - to ensure your inclusion during this special week. Thank you from *The Leader/Times* staff.

School Board Members Face Many Challenges; Many Interest Groups

Every April, voters go to the polls and select members of their community to serve on their board of education. Last week, Westfield voters elected Ann Ormsby Cary and Gary McCready plus re-elected Alice Hunnicutt out of a field that included incumbent William Ziff and newcomer Steven Dorry.

Scotch Plains voters chose Don Parisi and Warren McFall over incumbent Trip Whitehouse. In Fanwood, Sasha Slocum, who was unopposed, will replace Susan Dyckman, who did not seek reelection. Veteran Scotch Plains incumbent Ed Saridaki, Jr. also did not seek another term.

In Mountainside, residents elected write-in candidate, police sergeant Scot Worswick, and reelected incumbent John Perrin. Unopposed and board President Peter Goggi opted not to seek another term. In Garwood incumbents Gary Maher, Monty Brown and newcomers Debbie Courtney, Tracy Schadewald, and write-in candidate Christine Guerriero were elected to the borough's board of education.

We congratulate the winners and thank all candidates. Serving on a local school board has a great deal of importance. Board members are entrusted with the interests of the public - requiring more than just forming partnerships and strategic plans with parents, superintendents and unions alone. The fo-

cus is on the education of our children, yet it must be balanced with fiscal responsibility and the interests of the community. It's a difficult job, where they must remain independent in deliberations.

They have complex issues to ponder and must support, nurture and evaluate the professional staff. They must deal with curriculum, hiring of staff and administrators and approving capital projects for the district's buildings and athletic fields. School calendars are reviewed and approved.

Board members participate in contract negotiations with unions. While wanting to attract the best teachers, board members must be mindful that unions have the specific interests of the union foremost in mind.

Board members must work as a team and with many parties. They must possess decision-making skill and communicate with staff, colleagues and the public. They work hard studying agendas and readying themselves to articulate opinions and cast votes at meetings.

School board members have their hands full. The "wish list" is always larger than the money pot. May they find wisdom, judgment and patience in representing the interests of the community while doing their volunteer jobs in guiding the direction of our public schools. Thank you all for serving.

Westfield BOE President Anna Riegel Discusses Budget Defeat and Commitment to Resolution With Council

As president of the Westfield Board of Education, I want to thank the residents who voted in last week's school election. I'm extremely proud of our school system and our dedication to meeting the needs of our students.

As you know, the tax levy for next year's school budget was voted down by a small margin of 65 votes (1463 "yes" to 1528 "no" votes). State law now requires that the Westfield Town Council review the proposed school budget and determine a dollar amount to be cut, as well as specific programs and items to eliminate.

The Westfield Board of Education is committed to working amicably with the town council during this process. I'm hopeful that the reductions will be modest, in line with the narrow margin of defeat.

Cognizant of ever-increasing taxes, the budget as presented to the voters on April 19 included significant cost containment

measures and addressed priorities identified by the 2003 community survey and last year's new strategic plan.

The defeat of the school budget came as a surprise; over the months of developing the budget, we heard few opposing views. We discussed the budget at 11 public meetings, which were summarized in Westfield's local newspapers and also televised on Channel 36.

These meetings were publicized in advance in the newspapers, on Channel 36 and on the district website.

The board of education takes the defeat of the school budget very seriously. We want to gain a better understanding of this voting result. Please share your opinions with us in person or by e-mail at boe@westfieldnj.com.

I'd like to congratulate Alice Hunnicutt on her re-election to the board and welcome newly elected board members Ann

Ormsby Cary and Gary McCready. I also thank Steven Dorry for his candidacy and interest in our schools.

Our tremendous thanks goes to nine-year board member and past board president Arlene Gardner and board member Bill Ziff, who served a three-year term. Both of these dedicated volunteers worked hard and made significant contributions to our school district.

Our mission remains unchanged. We are committed to providing an excellent educational system for our children and our community. We will do our best to regularly update the community on the status of the school budget review process by the town council, which is expected to be concluded by May 19.

Anna Riegel
President, Westfield Board of Education

Mainstreaming Special Needs Children Not the Answer to School Budget Woes, Alternate Solutions Are Required

I have been watching the subtleties in which it appears some of us are beginning to equate the needs of our children, to the growing tax burden to Westfielder's.

Unfortunately, it is not the fault of the board of education (BOE), council, teachers or students. Initiatives designed by our national and state leaders have created a widening gap between what each municipality's BOE must offer to students, and what they are being reimbursed to facilitate these new guidelines.

Dr. Foley and the BOE have done a magnificent job so far in controlling these discrepancies.

Unfortunately, the time has come to bite the bullet. No one likes to ask for money.

I would like to offer those that have mumbled privately or publicly to pull non-districted students back into the Westfield schools this:

In classrooms that are currently overcrowded with "average" students, imagine mainstreaming one, two or more of

our special children into that environment, and the possible/probable disruptions to the classroom with those with extra needs, either emotional, educational or physical.

I promise this, those of you on the "bring 'em home" bandwagon would be on the "not in my child's classroom" wagon next.

And no, segregation into another school or classroom is not an option. There are no more classrooms available (we are already losing music rooms, art rooms, gyms etc). And adding another school? With administration, teachers, occupational therapists, maintenance, insurance, electric, heat etc? You don't know budget busting until you begin adding that one up!

And can I be blunt? Let's not forget where we live. I grew up here. I graduated from Westfield High School in 1979 and bought my first home here in 1986. I remember the initial stigma attached to the students in the "Project 79" program. I realize there are many new residents

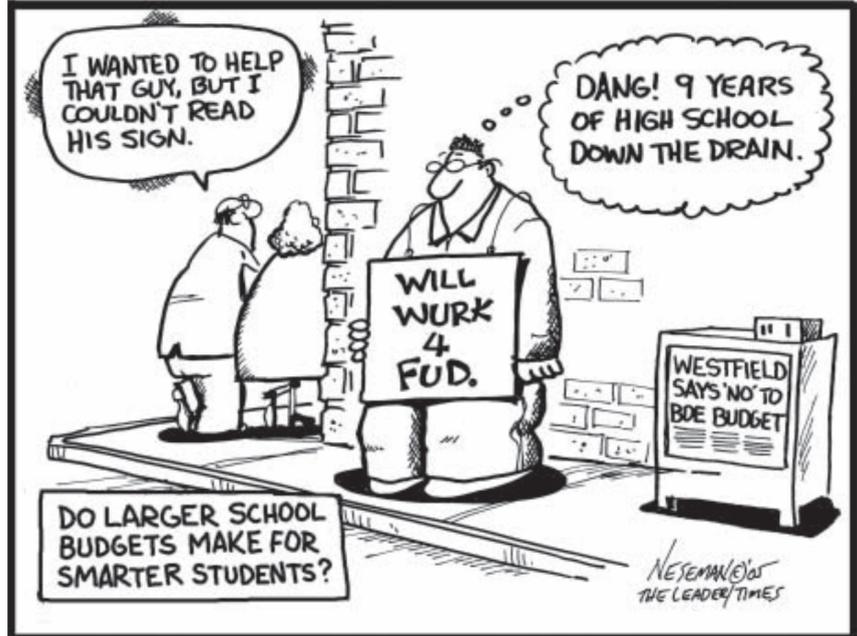
here without the background that I have, so let me offer you the same advice I offer those who want to stop people from playing on parks before a certain time of day, or stopping train whistles on tracks that were there before they moved in, or putting parking decks in the middle of town, and those that do not have or no longer have children in the school system:

Hush! You knew what the situation was when you bought your home here and perhaps even enjoyed the benefits of them: high property values, bustling downtown, high standard of living, safety, ivy league educational standards, and with these come high taxes.

If you don't like it, Plainfield isn't that far away.

I am sure that with the gene pool available here in Westfield, we surely can come up with alternative solutions. I guess my run for mayor is out of the question now, huh?

F. Chris Nelson
Westfield



Letters to the Editor

Westfield Resident Feels Town Website Is Inferior, Outdated, Needs Overhaul

The Town of Westfield website (www.westfieldnj.net) is out-of-date, difficult to navigate and generally inferior to surrounding town websites.

How does Westfield's website compare to other towns? The town code and charter are available online for Summit, Millburn and Springfield. Cranford posts the annual proposed budgets for both the town and the board of education (BOE). New Providence has a provision for the payment of parking tickets online. And many towns post council and BOE meeting minutes.

Our town's website is an embarrassment. The Department of Public Works Maintenance Department page states "Road Maintenance Information and Related Links Coming Soon". This page was last updated February 25, 2002. The Parking Services page still has a link to the parking garage development website. There is no site map to aid navigation. There are typographical errors and outdated email links that do not function. The

Robert Nehring
WECARE
Westfield

School Board Member Bill Ziff Thanks Public and Congratulates Winners

I take this opportunity to thank the public for the privilege of serving on the Westfield Board of Education the past three years and to extend my hardest congratulations to the successful candidates, Alice Hunnicutt, Gary McCready and Ann Ormsby Cary.

I leave the board proud of the many accomplishments of our students and with admiration for the professionalism exhibited by faculty and administrators. The vitality of the programs, which enable our students to reach their highest abilities are the result of the high caliber of our professionals.

I view the public's rejection of the budget, not as a faltering commitment to education, rather, the deep-seated frustration of paying high taxes. The immediate challenge of the Westfield Board of Education and the Westfield Town Council extends beyond arriving at a dollar and cents adjustment.

William Ziff
Westfield