

Special Community Forum on Budget Meeting  
South Orange-Maplewood  
Board of Education  
March 7, 2016

A Special Community Forum to discuss the 2016-17 Budget of the Board of Education of South Orange-Maplewood was held in the District Meeting Room at the Administration Building, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, New Jersey, on March 7, 2016.

President Elizabeth Baker called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m. in the District Meeting Room.

Adequate written notice of this meeting of the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education was sent to the Township and Village Clerks, the Libraries, The Star Ledger, the News Record and all schools.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL: Present: Ms. Baker, Mrs. Daugherty, Ms. Kambili,  
Ms. Maini, Ms. Pai, Mr. Sabin, Ms. Smith

Absent: Ms. Jones, Mrs. Lawson-Muhammad, Mrs. Wright

6 VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT

2016-17 Preliminary Budget - Mrs. Schneider

Mrs. Schneider presented a Powerpoint on the 2016-17 proposed budget including the following highlights:

- Budget Development Process
- Revenue Sources and Tax Levy Caps
- Expenses Proposed for 2016-2017
- Proposed Spending Reductions
- Programming Restructuring
- Personnel Adjustments
- Expiring Banked Cap, Taxing Authority Adjustments

[presentation is on file in Board Secretary's office]

***Mrs. Wright Arrived at 7:20 p.m.***

***7 Voting Members and 1 Student Representative Present***

Mr. Walston spoke about the changes to the high school and middle schools including the library media specialist positions. Mrs. Grierson explained the proposed changes to the reading intervention program.

Dr. Ramos explained that nobody is suggesting that these cuts are desirable, but we need to make sure that all schools have the essentials that they need and have to balance a budget.

The Board will be asked to approve the budget for submission to the county for review on Monday evening, March 21, 2016. The statutory deadline for submitting the budget to the county is March 22, 2016.

Dr. Ramos commented that the a decision regarding the closing of the Columbia High School swimming pool was not part of the budget discussion. The only thing included in the budget is an accommodation to secure other means for providing for the swim team in the event the pool has to close. The Finance, Facilities and Technology committee will discuss the status of the pool and the feasibility of keeping it opened while the Strategic Plan is being developed.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATION

The following students/individuals spoke about the plan to close the Columbia High School Pool: Gabby Hayek, Emma Chung, Raina Hackett, Caroline Cerny, Marie Fagan, Chloe Lawrence, Zubin K???-Guha, Jesse Gonon, Anna Jacques Harberle, Chloe Holt Reiss, Jeremy Dunston, Sarah Ortiz, Rohan K-Guha, Paul Adam. Comments included:

- How is it cost effective to close the pool and add classrooms? Why do you need additional classrooms when we are eliminating teachers? Swimming pool is classroom space.
- Closing the pool will create annual recurring cost to give the swim team access to an offsite pool for practice.
- Having a pool onsite contributes to the success of the undefeated Columbia High School swim team and to the community support received at the school.
- Within the two towns the CHS pool is the only indoor pool.
- Many students' first experience with learning to swim occurs during swimming class at Columbia High School.
- The pool can generate revenue for the district by allowing residents of the town to pay to swim all year and to take swimming lessons.
- Urges the Board to reconsider closing the pool.
- A petition with over 2,000 signatures so far is circulating with support to keep the pool open.

<u>NAME</u>	<u>TOPIC</u>
Roberta Baltin South Orange	School librarian, previously worked at Tuscan. Spoke against the reduction of librarians. Libraries are the integral link for enriching education for our students from selectors of great books to teaching digital thinking.
Frank Rice	Suggested finding room in the budget, such as bringing students back in district, to find a way to support maintaining a swimming pool at Columbia.
Suzanne Ng CHS Librarian	Asked the Board to reconsider the reduction of the middle school librarian position. Reported statistics of functions of the South Orange Middle School library.
Deb Gomer CHS Teacher	Spoke in support of school librarians and relayed her experience at different grade levels in the district and the importance of librarians at each of the levels.

Debra Cohen South Orange	Worked as a librarian at Clinton School and Columbia High School. Librarians teach students critical thinking. Believes it is impossible for one librarian to serve all middle school or high school students. Teachers will lose a valuable resource.
Christine Houseworth Maplewood	Spoke about the possible cut of the reading intervention specialist. Son receives services which has helped with his reading and confidence. If the Board is serious about academic equity than these resources should not be cut.
Crystal Glynn South Orange	Concerned that the Board is cutting positions that will affect services to our students and suggested that it is time to use banked cap.
Steve Latz Maplewood	Recognized the efficiencies utilized in District operations. Glad to hear that if there are additional resources, they would be used at elementary level. Look at core content. Are we spending more at the secondary schools than we need to?
Joseph Sieczkowski South Orange	Encouraged the Board to be creative in budgeting. Use the banked cap, but in creating budgets for business, there is always a way to find efficiencies.
Mike Donahue SEPAC	Thanked the Board for reacting to prior comments. Appreciates efforts to keep resources for special education, but concerned about proposed reduction of academic intervention. Also stressed that the Board of Education Finance, Facilities and Technology Committee has asked for information on Special Education programming before and urges the Board to get that information from Administration.
David Huemer Maplewood	Urges the Board to use the banked cap. Will accept higher taxes. Need funding to begin to make changes being discussed in the Strategic Plan. Why would you consider taxes to be more onerous than the cuts to education?
Ian Grodman Maplewood	Urged the Board to raise taxes and to avoid making cuts to the elementary programing or academic intervention. Recognized support to Seth Boyden Elementary in last year's budget and indicated that with increasing enrollments we cannot afford to take resources away from the elementary schools.

DISCUSSION

Discussion among Board members included the following comments and questions:

- Impact proposed cuts will have on curriculum.
- Concern regarding the reduction of librarians and library services.
- Support for certifying classroom teachers for literacy support in addition to the pull-out intervention.
- Requested information regarding the long term viability of the pool at Columbia High School and review of past Board decision to close the pool.
- Clarification that the pool closure was raised as part of the budget discussion as related to the costs should the swim team need to practice at an alternate location.
- Viability of cuts at elementary levels with the need for a strong elementary foundation in light of the access and equity policy.
- The need to continue to provide support to the Seth Boyden population.
- Urged Administration to find other ways of avoiding cuts without using banked cap.
- Questioned the cutting of content supervisors and how will the curriculum content be supported.
- Consideration of municipal partnerships both with town support of the swimming program and recognition of burden on town libraries when the middle school libraries are closed.
- Timing of the budget considerations in light of March 22 deadline to submit.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

<u>Name</u>	<u>Topic</u>
Lorraine Labonne-Storch Maplewood Historic Preservation Committee	Concerned that the historic value of pool may be lost in the debate. Guastavino ceilings are an integral part of Columbia High School Architecture.
Jason Hackett Maplewood	Spoke about closing the CHS pool. Believes the costs to fix the pool are a lot less than what the Board is presenting.
Ed Cerny Maplewood	Spoke in support of keeping the pool opened. Suggested looking into private-public partnerships. Shouldn't jump to conclusions because of a vote a number of years ago.
Theresa Fagan South Orange	Thanked the Board for listening to everyone who spoke and considering the options regarding the pool.
Devgand Guha South Orange	Questioned who will handle the work of the math supervisor and what the number of cuts at the high school will mean for class size and course offerings.

Gregory Fagan  
South Orange

Spoke in favor of keeping the pool open. Has been involved with the swimming program since 2003. Gives the high school students the opportunity to give back to the community by teaching younger children to swim. People want to see the program and tradition of the CHS pool survive.

Joe Malespina  
South Orange

Spoke on behalf of his wife, Elissa Malespina, former SOMS Librarian. Cutting librarians is counter to discussion on strategic direction. Shifting funds from libraries to classroom libraries will offer less variety and less access. Classroom libraries and school libraries work better when curated by a librarian.

Andrew Lee  
South Orange

Reminded Board that there are people in the towns who cannot afford the increases in taxes. Don't want to see cuts, but think of those who are not able or willing to come forward to say they cannot afford the taxes.

Serena Hack  
South Orange

Spoke about budget cuts and asked the Board to look a little further for ideas of how to be more creative. Small class sizes at the elementary level is a key issue, and secondary schools should maintain choice and options. Asked the Board to consider ideas such as ending courtesy busing for students within legal limits, look at the Marshall-Jefferson pairing, and that full fees are charged for students who attend the Montrose Early Childhood Center to generate funds to save a teacher. Have elementary PTA's pool funds and distribute evenly among schools, and consider giving students credit for athletics.

FUTURE MEETINGS

The Board of Education will meet in Closed Session on Monday, March 21, 2016, at 6:30 pm in the Superintendent's Office to discuss personnel and legal issues, negotiations and other matters to be announced at a later date. Immediately following the Closed Session, the Board of Education will meet in Public Session at 7:30 pm in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ. Action will be taken.

The Board of Education will meet in Closed Session on Monday, April 18, 2016, at 6:30 pm in the Superintendent's Office to discuss personnel and legal issues, negotiations and other matters to be announced at a later date. Immediately following the Closed Session, the Board of Education will meet in Public Session at 7:30 pm in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ. Action will be taken.

MOTION made by Ms. Pai, seconded by Ms. Smith, that the Board of Education adjourn. Motion unanimously approved at 10:10 p.m.

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Cheryl Schneider, Board Secretary