Chairman Mark Holden called the Special Meeting of the Board of Education to order at 5:14 p.m.

Roll Call:
Mark Holden, Chairman  Kate Kutash
Thomas Minotti, Vice Chairman  Win Oppel (Via Skype)
Arlene Liscinsky, Secretary  Darlisa Ritter
David Gioiello  Kathleen Yolish
Faith Hack

Full Quorum

Board of Education Administration present:
Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Christopher Clouet
Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Lorraine Rossner
Finance Director, Dominic Barone
Human Resources Director, Carole Pannozzo

(1 tape on file in City/Town Clerk’s office)

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Agenda
Arlene Liscinsky moved to approve the agenda; seconded by Faith Hack; motion passed unanimously.

Budget Workshop
Dr. Clouet stated we are reconvening discussion of the budget, and this afternoon Dominic Barone sent members an email update, which was a summary of past conversations. In response to concerns expressed at the last meeting about enrollment, class size and use of space, Lorraine Rossner discussed a handout with detailed enrollment data by grade level. She stated while we do not have a hard and fast policy with regard to class size, we prefer to keep 19-21 at the elementary level, especially in grades 1 and 2. In response to a comment by David Gioiello, Dr. Clouet confirmed that part of the Strategic Planning processes will be how we use space, which includes looking at housing trends. Arlene Liscinsky suggested a conversation with Planning and Zoning to learn about future housing developments that may impact enrollment. Dominic Barone discussed K-4 classroom utilization and said all rooms are being utilized, with the exception of one empty classroom at Booth Hill. Arlene Liscinsky said the purpose of opening Perry Hill School was to have dedicated rooms for art and music and pointed out that Sunnyside doesn’t have a music room and there is no art room at Elizabeth Shelton. Dr. Clouet said one problem we are finding is that school enrollments have grown at different rates, some so much that there are no available rooms, or there is
alternate use of space. Superintendent Clouet stated there are legitimate questions about the spaces in the district and legitimate concerns about enrollment trends. Given the fact that the board has tasked him with starting a strategic planning cycle, he proposed that these topics will be a big part of it.

Chairman Holden called for a brief recess at 5:40 p.m. to allow Superintendent Clouet to make an appearance at another meeting in the building. The meeting reconvened at 5:58 p.m.

Dr. Clouet stated the Special Education parents who were at the meeting he just attended shared some interesting insights into the issue of space.

The board held a lengthy discussion of the details of the Modified Mandated scenario ($1,558,730 or 2.24% increase). Areas of discussion included positions of Assistant Principal, School Counselor, Library Media Specialist, and IT personnel. Mr. Oppel asked about possibility of using grants as a way to fund counselors. Superintendent Clouet stated depending on the amount and type of funding we get and the specific uses of those counselors, we could conceivably use some federal funds to help support that. When asked about similar support for IT positions, Dr. Clouet noted that federal funding is very restrictive and is sometimes exclusively used for students with special needs. Mrs. Yolish referred to Newtown’s need for additional social workers for mental health issues and asked if social workers could be included in that grouping. Dr. Clouet said that could be explored and proposed that he meet with a group of principals and our Special Education team to look at how we currently organize use of staff for those kinds of purposes, specifically counselors, psychologists, and social workers, prior to making a recommendation. It was mentioned that the board has been requesting Media Specialists for a number of years and that the requirements of the position have expanded over time. A suggestion was made to include in the budget presentation a brief video explaining what a Library Media Specialist does and to invite the aldermen and mayor to visit the schools for observations.

Dr. Clouet summarized by saying the discussion was exactly what was hoped for prior to making his recommendation, which will be presented to the board on February 3. He stated he is hopeful the Board of Aldermen will take into consideration the recent media reports regarding the increased needs of students who experience mental health crises and the need to have staff who can work with both students and their families.

Chairman Holden adjourned the meeting at 6:36 p.m.