



Concerned Taxpayers of Monroe Woodbury

47 East Crossman Avenue
Monroe, NY 10950

Wednesday, 10 March, 2004

Eleanor Varian
District Clerk
MWCSO Education Center
Route 32
Central Valley, NY 10917

Sent via FAX: 928-9337 and email

Subject: Communication to the Board – NY Open Meetings Law and Video Taping Meetings

Dear Monroe-Woodbury Board of Education:

We believe you regularly violate portions of the NY Open Meetings Law both in substance and intent as follows. We ask that you stop violating this law and make immediate changes to your procedures. We respectfully request that you address the following issues in the “Public Officers Law, Article 7, Open Meeting Law”.

- § 106. Minutes. Sub-Paragraph 2. Minutes of executive sessions do not seem to be taken and available to the public. Please start doing so immediately.
- §106. Minutes. Sub-Paragraph 3. Minutes of your public meetings are not made available to the public within two weeks of the meeting as required by law. Minutes of executive sessions are not made available to the public within one week as required by law. Several of our members have asked for minutes after this two week period and were told they are not available until approved. Minutes may be marked unapproved but must be available.
- § 105. Conduct of executive sessions. According to Mr. Freeman, Executive Director of the Committee on Open Government, “Citing “personnel matters” is not a sufficient ground for going into an executive session. The motion to go into executive session should be more specific. For example, a motion could be made to enter into executive session to discuss “the employment history of a particular person.” The person would not have to be identified.” Please correct that procedure immediately.

In the currently available minutes posted to your website and in the memory of several of our members we know of about a half dozen requests by residents that you video tape your meetings. At every instance you have been responsive with why this just can’t be done. Never has this currently sitting board ever openly discussed and voted on video taping each regular and special meeting. The board president has stated on record that, outside board meetings that board members speak only as private citizens. Hence any discussion about video taping meetings that may have ever taken place by Board members outside of Board meetings were between private citizens. We urge this board to publicly discuss and vote on video taping meetings. The appearance to the public is that one or more individuals have made a decision which is contrary to how this public body should operate.

Our superintendent is on record stating that video taping could not be started this year due to austerity because new projects are not allowed. The board president has stated that “...a study showed that the room makes camera angles very difficult.” Last year Middle School concerts were not video taped but this year they are. Is that a “new project”? Couldn’t that same employee video tape all board meetings? Could Mrs. Perez produce the study that stated the board room was such a poor place to tape? Aren’t these things that this board, collectively

should discuss and ultimately vote on in public? And can this be done prior to May's election so we all know exactly who does or does not want these public proceedings preserved on tape? Although airing the meetings on TV stations would be a nice thing and the board president has always lamented the difficulty of that the requests from citizens has usually been to simply tape the proceedings and make the tape available.

You seem to making this harder than it has to be. The public has a right to know what business is conducted by the Board. You have a responsibility to that public to comply with the law. Non-compliance with the Open Meeting Laws gives the appearance that the Board has something to hide from the public. Full compliance will benefit everyone. Additionally, video taping the meetings is vital to preserving the accuracy of Board meetings. Not having discussed it publicly and collectively voting on this issue is shameful. We respectfully request that you schedule a discussion and vote on video taping Board meetings (apart from broadcasting the meetings) at the earliest opportunity. We also request that you address your compliance with Open Meeting Laws immediately.

Sincerely,



John C. Collins
Concerned Taxpayers of Monroe Woodbury