

Watchung board looks to keep talks open with teachers association

By **ERIC HOSTETTLER**
STAFF WRITER

WATCHUNG – Though it's not quite the time for negotiations between the teachers and the K-8 school district, Board of Education member James Rhyner believes the two sides should sit down in efforts to build a more positive relationship.

Rhyner said during the board's Wednesday, Sept. 13, meeting that the board's negotiation subcommittee should sit down with the Watchung Borough Education Association (WBEA) to

strengthen the relationship between the two parties before the next negotiation period.

"I'd like to suggest that the negotiations committee reach out to the education association to just set up a meeting to have a conversation, because we formed this committee and we really don't have much contact with the association until negotiations where we sit across from each other and try to iron things out," said Rhyner. "I just think it would be better for us in terms of a relationship if we

had communication, whether it be to share information or answer some questions along the way – just to have an ongoing communication with the association."

Contract negotiations were concluded last year and the district agreed to a three-year deal with the teachers association through June 2019. Regardless, Rhyner said he felt it was a good idea to keep an running dialogue between the two parties outside of negotiation periods.

Rhyner asked for the board's authority to have

the negotiations committee reach out to representatives of the association.

The entire board agreed Rhyner's was a "terrific" idea, unanimously passing a motion to have the negotiations committee reach out to the teachers association for a potential meeting.

"The Board and the WBEA leadership do not get much of a chance to communicate aside from during formal negotiations and so it would be great to sit down more informally during the year," said Board President Ellyn Margulies.