

Finance Committee
Minutes
April 28, 2009

Location: Amherst Regional High School Library

Attendance: Marilyn Blaustein, Brian Morton, (Chair), Douglas Slaughter, Andrew Steinberg, Marylou Theilman

Others present: John Musante (Assistant Town Manager and Finance Director), Maria Geryk (Acting Superintendent of Schools), Rob Detweiler (Director of Finance and Operations, Amherst and Amherst/Pelham Regional Schools), Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee, members of the Amherst Select Board and Select Boards and Finance Committees from other towns in the region, members of the public

Agenda:

Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee discussion of 2010 budget

Actions:

None

The meeting convened at 7:50 p.m.

Discussion:

The School Committee adopted a 2010 budget on April 7, 2009 in the amount of \$28,302,372, an increase of 0.5% from 2009. The assessment for Amherst, using the agreed formula, would be \$12,829,201, an increase of 3.5% as specified in the original Finance Committee preliminary guideline of November, 2008. During the public comment period, the chair of the Leverett select board announced that Leverett held its annual town meeting on April 25, approved the regional budget in that amount, and urged other towns to do so.

Geryk and Detweiler explained that this amount is \$1,514,747 less than a level services budget and an amount that Geryk could not recommend that they go beyond. The budget was modified since its approval to institute additional expense cuts at that total to reflect a possible reduction of approximately \$400,000 for regional transportation reimbursement. This would implement a reduction proposed by the House Ways and Means Committee in the budget it submitted for consideration in the House of Representatives. Geryk reviewed the additional cuts that were anticipated.

Amherst Select Board Chair Stephanie O'Keefe stated that Amherst had insufficient funds to support a budget at this amount and was looking for a dialogue with the other towns to identify an appropriate amount to fund essential school needs that could also be supported by the towns. Committee vice-chair Marianne Jorgensen (Shutesbury) said that she anticipated that her town would approve the budget in the amount approved by the School Committee, and that in prior years approved overrides as necessary to raise the funds to pay the assessment from the Region.

There was discussion among members of the School Committee about the budget and their responsibilities to the schools and to the voters in the town that elected them. Musante reported that the House of Representatives, earlier in the day, amended the budget proposed by the Ways and Means Committee to provide more funds to municipalities, paid from an additional sales tax enacted by the House on the previous day. He pointed out that there will be further action in the legislature and other changes affecting the four towns. He also pointed out that the House had eliminated the proposed reduction in regional transportation funding, which could reduce the assessments to the towns if the amended expense budget does not change.

The School Committee took no action regarding the budget and proceeded to discuss other items on its agenda. The Finance Committee continued its discussion briefly with Musante, O'Keefe, and Select Board member Alisa Brewer regarding the regional school budget.

The meeting adjourned at 9:20 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Steinberg, Acting Secretary