

Amherst Finance Committee Minutes

December 12, 2009

CALL TO ORDER

The joint meeting of the school committees, select boards and finance committees of Amherst, Pelham Leverett and Shutesbury was called to order at 9:07 a.m. in the library of the Amherst-Pelham Regional Middle School.

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Marilyn Blaustein, Phil Jackson, Kay Moran (vice-chair), Douglas Slaughter, Andy Steinberg (chair), Marylou Theilman.

STAFF IN ATTENDANCE: Larry Shaffer, Town Manager; John Musante, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director; Alberto Rodriguez, superintendent of schools; Rob Detweiler, schools director of finance and operations

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Amherst Select Board members Stephanie O’Keeffe, Diana Stein, Alisa Brewer; Amherst School Committee members Irv Rhodes, Katherine Sanderson, Andy Churchill; members of the school committees, select boards and finance committees of Pelham, Leverett and Shutesbury; Becky Torres, Shutesbury town administrator; Rick Hood, Nick Grabbe.

DISCUSSION

Detweiler presented a 10-year regional school district revenue history showing a decline in the state share and increase in local assessments, and projections for FY 11 under four scenarios.

- 1) A “level funding” budget with no change in Chap. 70 state aid would require \$1.9 million in cuts to the “level services” budget and assessment increases to Amherst of 0.1% (\$15,934), Pelham of 2.1% and Leverett of 0.6%, and an assessment decrease to Shutesbury of 3.2%..
- 2) A “level services” budget would be \$29,527,247, an increase of \$1,750,895, or 6.3% over the FY 10 budget. He assumes that Chap. 70 state will remain at FY 10’s reduced level and that other outside revenue will decrease by 1.5%, or \$177,143. Amherst’s assessment would increase by 15.8% (nearly \$2 million) Pelham by 18.1%, Leverett by 16.2%, and Shutesbury by 12.0%.
- 3) An “estimated available funds” budget of \$27,165,272 assumes a 10% reduction in Chap. 70 aid and a decrease of 1.5% to other outside revenue, and would require cutting \$2,361,975 from the “level services” budget. Amherst’s assessment would increase by 3.4% (\$431,953), Pelham by 5.5%, Leverett by 3.9%, and Shutesbury by 0.0%.

- 4) A budget decreased by 3% from FY 10 would be \$26,943,061 and would require cuts of \$2,584,186 from “level services.” Amherst’s assessment would increase by 2.1% (\$259,050), Pelham by 4.1% and Leverett by 2.5%, with Shutesbury’s assessment decreasing by 1.3%.

Rodriguez distributed a memo outlining initial budget recommendations for FY 11. Proposed reductions would result in increased class sizes, reduction in the number of electives, reduction and consolidation of health and physical education classes, reorganization of special education, reduction to guidance/support staff and library FTEs; reduction of 0.7-2.3 administrative FTEs and 1 FTE each from clerical and custodial staff; increases in athletic fees and fund-raising by booster club, and elimination of one sport; and consolidation into one of the programs at the South Amherst campus and the East Street School. He presented a draft prioritized list of cuts for the middle school’s FY 11 budget and said a similar list for the high school is in the works. An analysis is underway comparing financial implications of a two-semester vs. a three-semester school year. School Principal Mark Jackson will decline his yearly incremental increase and has asked the teachers’ union to consider contract give-backs. The refined regional school budget in January will include FY 12 projections. John Trickey of the Pelham Finance Committee asked for FY 13 and FY 14 projections as well. Phil Jackson asked that the January budget include what’s been cut in previous years.

Farshid Hajir of Leverett, chair of the Regional School Committee, said it is that committee which will decide the appropriate level of funding for the schools. He said Leverett would be willing and able to handle a larger assessment increase than Amherst, as it has been in the past.

Patrick Callahan of the Shutesbury Finance Committee said his board has asked for town department budgets the same as FY 10 or 0.5% less.

Trickey said Pelham is in dire straits and has already made many cuts to its town and elementary school budgets in previous years.

O’Keeffe and Musante said it’s very helpful to have this much school budget detail so early in the process. Musante predicted Amherst would be able to pay an assessment increase somewhere between scenarios 3 and 4, above.

Rodriguez noted that even with budget constraints, he’s looking at increasing requirements.

The Regional School Committee will hold a forum on the proposed school budget Jan. 21, 2010.

The next four-towns meeting will be Saturday, Jan. 30, 2010.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 11:04 a.m.

Kay Moran, acting clerk