

Amherst Finance Committee Minutes
March 5, 2011

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 9:07 a.m. in the Leverett Town Hall, Leverett, MA.

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Kay Moran (vice-chair), Janice Ratner, Doug Slaughter, Andy Steinberg (chair), Marylou Theilman. Absent: Phil Jackson, Bob Saul

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Maria Geryk, Interim Superintendent of Schools; Rob Detweiler, Director of Finance and Operations; John Musante, Town Manager; Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; Stan Rosenberg Hampshire-Franklin District State Senator; Members of the School Committees of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury; Members of the Finance Committees of Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury; Members of the Select Boards of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham, and Shutesbury

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION:

1. Welcome and Introductions

Senator Rosenberg stated that he believes that FY 12 would be the last of the really bad budget years. He stated that the Governor's budget is reliant on fees and revenues that are not in place, for example expanded gaming revenues, and the Senate will be unlikely to make those changes for FY 12. Rosenberg felt that Chapter 70 funding and regional transportation aid would likely be at the same amounts as in FY11 or perhaps a slight increase but that there would be a smaller cut in unrestricted (lottery) aid than was originally predicted. Rosenberg reported that other revenue related topics that the Senate will consider in the near future are changes the Regional Transportation Authorities funding, changes to the gas tax, and the consideration of a graduated income tax.

2. Fiscal Year 2012 Regional Schools Budget Update

Geryk reported that she is seeking to take a long term view with respect to budget development in order to "do school differently". She stated that while our overall enrollment is down, the composition of the student body is changing, for example, an increase in the number of students who are English language learners. Additionally, our performance on state testing still shows achievement gaps. Geryk stated that these are some of the reasons the schools need to approach their work differently. The budget seeks to keep class sizes reasonable and begin funding the processes to change and improve the work that the schools do while still cutting in some areas. Geryk stated that she is concerned if Chapter 70 funding comes in at FY11 levels (0% increase) due to the resultant increases in the assessments that would occur, but is very worried if there is a

cut to Chapter 70 aid. A 3% cut to Chapter 70 funding would result in \$150,000 in additional cuts which would be very difficult to absorb.

3. Assessment Discussion

Detweiler stated that the Regional School Committee would take its vote on the budget at its meeting on March 8th. He indicated that revised calculations of the member Town's assessments were needed due to errors made in the assignment of some retired staff to Amherst, instead of the Regional Schools, with the state's insurance plan. The correction of these errors changed the Regional School's assessment to the state and subsequently the Town's assessment calculations. The member Town's indicated that the current year assessment amounts, as currently calculated, would be supported.

Detweiler also reported on the development of a capital planning process for the Regional Schools. In order to transition into the new process, the first two years of the capital plan will be paid from reserves. The member Towns will begin paying a capital plan assessment starting in the third year.

4. Regionalization Committee Update by Farshid Hajir

Hajir reported that the Regionalization/Collaboration Commission had begun its work and would produce a report by June 30, 2011. He stated that the Commission has formed four subcommittees in order to address the 16 charges that the commission was tasked with: Capacity and Collaboration, Financial, Academic, and Transition. Hajir also reported that in its work to date the Commission has found that other states which sought consolidation/collaboration through incentives were much more successful than those who mandated the changes. Therefore, he felt that the Commission's report would recommend predominately incentive based options in which school districts could participate.

5. Representation and Observers of Negotiations

Elaine Puleo was selected, by consensus, to be the voting representative from the four Town's Select Boards during labor contract negotiations occurring this spring.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 11:32 a.m.

Douglas Slaughter, acting clerk

DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING

Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Fiscal Year 2012 Four Towns Meeting Budget Packet (dated March 5, 2011)

Current List of Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools Add/Cuts for FY 12

Sensitivity Analysis of Chapter 70 cuts effect on Member Town Assessments

Revised calculations of Assessments based on +3% increase to Amherst's Assessment

Report on the Regionalization/Collaboration Commission