

APPROVED 1/19/12

**Four Town Meeting
Amherst Finance Committee Minutes
Saturday, January 7, 2012
Amherst Regional Middle School Library**

ATTENDANCE:

Andrew Steinberg (Chair), Kay Moran (Vice-Chair), Janice Ratner, Douglas Slaughter, Marylou Theilman Absent: Bob Saul, Anurag Sharma

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; John Musante, Town Manager; members of Select Boards, School Committees and Finance Committees of Amherst, Pelham, Leverett and Shutesbury as well as some administrators; press.

Meeting was called to order at 9:03 am by Rick Hood, Chair, Regional School Committee. Introductions were made.

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION:

1. The Revenue Picture (History of State and Town Funding, Initial Assumptions for FY13)

Superintendent Maria Geryk discussed the state of the schools. We have a high achieving district but it is not doing well for every child. Internal working groups are working to improve academic levels and accountability, and to create interventions. The focus is on the instructional core as well as the teacher/student relationship.

Financially, the schools are trying to be proactive by trying to keep costs down. They are looking at costs for health care, energy, professional development, facilities maintenance, and technology update (security and connectivity). They are also looking at grants, school choice, Medicaid and circuit breaker reimbursements, and partnering with other entities. Other financial items include how to fund OPEB, scheduling, returning retired teachers to the Amherst Health Trust Fund (from GIC), and adapting web-based products for teacher evaluation rather than creating their own.

2. Building the FY2013 Budget (Background Information, Assessments to Member Towns)

Rob Detweiler, Finance Director, distributed and explained a financial data packet. Graphs showed State Aid and Town Assessments from 2001 to 2012. Charts showed information from the Draft FY13 Budget based on a 2% increase in Chapter 70 aid. The operating budget for the Region would increase 3.3% and assessments to the towns would increase as follows: Amherst, 2.8%; Pelham, 3.99%; Leverett, 5.77%; and Shutesbury, 2.72%. School choice slots are added to increase revenue but are not increased so much that additional staff would be required. Use of the E & D Fund was also discussed.

Geryk discussed budget development which includes looking at enrollments and school committee input. This year, fees will be increased, some programs will be phased out, and revenues will increase from school choice and reimbursements from Medicaid. If additional revenue comes in, the region will reduce assessments to the towns rather than adding to the budget.

Comments and questions included a request to look at data regarding unfunded mandates, increasing budgets while enrollment is declining, need to maintain a certain level to maintain a comprehensive high school, and adding choice students to round out classrooms.

3. Guidance from Member Towns (Assessments & Budget Support)

Leverett will probably need an override to fund the schools. It may not pass.

Pelham's share is a large percentage of its budget but it will pay its bills.

Shutesbury is disappointed to have an increase this year. A Shutesbury Select Board member asked for smaller percentage increases and thought it disingenuous for the Regional budget to be driven by the 2.8% increase requested by Amherst.

Amherst requested that budgets increase no more than 2.8% so this increase is within these guidelines. We still need to know what state aid will be. We will know more after the Governor speaks to the MMA. This is an election year and the state is doing better. Questions remain on the Federal level and the future. Caution about digging into E & D funds was expressed.

The \$16,000-\$17,000 cost per pupil numbers should be broken down and explained.

4. Funding OPEB

A study for the funding of OPEB was done in 2010 and needs to be done every 2 years so another study should be done soon. Everyone was aware of this liability and towns either had set up trust funds or were about to and at least one town already started contributing to the trust. The question is how do you fund the Towns' and Region OPEB. The Regional OPEB obligation is currently \$8 million.

5. Regionalization Study

The four towns created study committees. Elaine Puleo (Shutesbury) reported that the committees met together twice and have a \$110,000 grant proposal ready to submit by January 17, after it is signed by the Select boards of the four towns.

6. Questions

The schools are looking at changing the time of day school starts for the region. There are many issues involved such as transportation and afterschool sports.

7. Regional Budget Calendar was distributed.

Meeting adjourned at 11:05 am.

Janice Ratner, acting clerk

DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING

Financial information data packet for Four Town Meeting, Regional Schools, January 7, 2012
FY2013 Regional Budget Development Calendar
(Regional Forecast packet available in limited numbers)