

Approved 2/16/12

**Four Town Meeting  
Amherst Finance Committee Minutes  
Saturday, Feb. 11, 2012  
Amherst Regional Middle School Library**

**ATTENDANCE:**

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

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; John Musante, Town Manager; Maria Geryk, School Superintendent; Rob Detweiller, Director of Finance and Operations for the schools; members of Select Boards, School Committees and Finance Committees of Amherst, Pelham, Leverett and Shutesbury; members of the public.

The meeting was called to order at 8:32 am by Geryk. Introductions were made.

**AGENDA AND DISCUSSION:**

Building the FY2013 Budget, Revenue Picture, Capital Planning

Detweiler distributed the document prepared for today's Four-Town Meeting, which includes new information as well as some pages from the FY 2013 proposed regional school budget presented to the Amherst Finance Committee Feb. 9, 2012. He reviewed the entire document. For instance, page 2 (new), shows changes in payroll and expense accounts between FY 12 and FY 13. He and Geryk pointed out that out-of-district placements for students needing special education have declined, but the expense of each placement continues to increase. The way school-choice revenue and expenses are accounted for has changed.

Detweiler called everyone's attention to the Region's five-year capital plan (pp. 15-19 of the distributed document) for projects that will likely be funded by borrowing.

Retired teachers currently receive health insurance through the state Group Insurance Commission (GIC); a plan to bring them back into the local health insurance pool is expected to save money for the region and the retired teachers, but it hasn't happened yet and those savings are not built into the FY 13 operating budget.

Separately, the GIC quite recently notified the region that its assessment for FY 13 retired teachers benefits will be \$112,000 less than the amount built into the proposed FY 13 budget. Geryk said she will recommend to the Regional School Committee that the savings be used to reduce regional assessments to the towns. Using a rough figure of \$100,000 for the estimated savings, new assessment estimates are \$300,392 for Amherst, an increase of 2.2% from FY 12 but \$77,781 less than estimated in January; \$39,917 for Pelham, an increase of 3.41% from FY 12 but down \$6,830 from January; \$64,190 for Leverett, up 5.18% from FY 12 but \$7,310 less than the January estimate; and \$29,987 for Shutesbury, 2.14% more than in FY 12 but \$8,079 less than listed in January. There was general rejoicing.

Guidance from Member Towns (Assessments & Budget Support)

**Leverett** officials urged the Regional School Committee to use Excess and Deficiency funds to balance the budget, as planned, so they won't have to reduce funding for their

elementary school. Peter D'Errico of the Leverett Select Board said they're still unsure whether they can pay the regional assessment.

**Pelham** will have only \$76,000 more in revenue in FY 13, of which nearly \$40,000 will go to the region, said John Trickey of the Pelham Finance Committee, but Pelham will pay it. He expects the situation to get worse in FY 14 and FY 15.

**Shutesbury** officials said their town can pay the assessment. He noted that for the first time in four years, they are recommending an increase in their elementary school budget.

**Amherst** can pay its assessment, said Steinberg, though the exact amount of aid coming from the state for FY 13 is still unknown. He, too, is anxious about FY 13 and FY 14. Geryk said she will ask Detweiler to meet with finance officials from the four towns to discuss future years. Regarding state aid, Leverett officials said everyone should follow their example and urge legislators to increase the state budget allotment to Chap. 70 school aid. Musante said everyone should push to have the Legislature add the anticipated \$65 million state budget surplus to the base for FY 13 unrestricted aid to cities and towns, rather than put it into a supplemental budget later as the Governor has proposed.

The committees studying regionalization of the elementary schools have met and jointly applied for a planning grant.

#### Calendars

Feb. 28: The Regional School Committee votes the FY 13 budget.

April 28: Leverett Town Meeting

April 30: Amherst Town Meeting starts.

May 5: Pelham and Shutesbury Town Meetings

The meeting adjourned at 10:20 am.

Kay Moran, acting clerk

#### DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING

Packet of information labeled Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Four-Town Meeting, Saturday, February 11, 2012, 8:30-10:30 a.m., Amherst Regional Middle School Library