

AMHERST FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Joint meeting of Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools

Saturday, November 16, 2013

Amherst Regional Middle School Library

The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m.

PRESENT: Andy Steinberg (chair), Sarah Swartz, Anurag Sharma, Janice Ratner, Kay Moran (vice chair), Marylou Theilman. Absent: Doug Slaughter

ALSO PRESENT: Members of the Finance Committees of Leverette, Pelham, and Shutesbury, and members of the Select Boards and School Committees of Amherst, Leverette, Pelham and Shutesbury.

Amherst Town Manager John Musante, Amherst Finance Director Sandy Pooler. Schools Superintendent Maria Geryk, schools Director of Finance and Operations Rob Detweiler.

Geryk announced that the meeting is open to public but not open to public comment or questions

Agenda:

- Welcome and Introductions
- Funding the Regional District's Capital Plan
- Assessment Projections for FY15
- Guidance from Member Towns
- Calendars
- Adjournment

FUNDING THE REGIONAL DISTRICT'S CAPITAL PLAN

(See handout b1 by same title)

Presentation by Detweiler

In FY2010 the Regional District began formulating a formal capital plan for the district, making a list of things that would need replacement at some point (replacement cycle). This became a living document.

FY2013 looks a little different as priorities have evolved and context has changed.

Funding for these projects is expected to come with bond anticipation notes (BANs). If we need to borrow \$1.5 million what impact would it have on the finances, cash flows, and the four towns? What this is about is not numbers but: How do we member towns want to deal with the capital needs of the district? We have different constraints...

See handout b2, spreadsheet printouts

Next look at the capital projects funded with BANs. Discussion of each of the projects as listed and described in the handout. Price estimates are about two years old now...This is a living document! For a summary listing and priority of projects, see Appendix.

Questions/Comments posed by Detweiler and Geryk: Are our buildings functional for the kids we have? Nothing imminent in terms of having to close down the buildings. In terms of enrollment, moderate decrease and then bump again the next two years and then decline again. So, the planning needs to take that into account.

See handout B22: Projected Assessments to Member Towns (March 2, 2013)

Detweiler noted that about \$1.5 million needed to be raised every two years...which necessitated annual debt service obligations going up a bit from the half million dollar debt figure currently. He proposed getting a committee together and evaluate the plan and look at options. Lot of support from the floor for this idea of having a 4 town committee of this sort.

Comments from the floor: Pelham Finance Committee chair John Tricky said Pelham has taken a long view on this. Capital stabilization plan was already in place, line item in that \$40k a year to school. Doing all this in anticipation of all this. Pelham is already moving in that direction.

Others agreed it was a good idea to come up with a plan that evens it out the assessments for the four towns. More discussion ensued. Some noted that such a 4-town committee would allow information to flow to the school committees from an authority that speaks for all 4 towns.

Towns caucused to put forward two names each for this proposed new committee. The consensus was that Pooler and Moran will be Amherst's representatives.

ASSESSMENT PROJECTIONS FY 15

(see handout c1: General Fund Operating Budget Assessment Projects)

Effect on member towns of increasing total assessment, five year rolling averages. Amherst share of the total FY14 77.38 percent, FY15 77.21%

REGIONALIZATION BOARD UPDATE

Report by Steinberg (Chair): Every town has 3 people on this 12 person board, all people committed to working together and looking at the 4 towns as a community. It's been an awful lot of work. Keeping up the website is not going well. Started out by looking at the possibility to look at pre-KG to grade 6 as a region—governance, location, and finances. Realized that finances were a lot more complicated and, there were some real challenges/problems. The impact is being assessed but assessments were being worked out was difficult, not looking at other models. Originally 4 models, down to 3 models now. Meeting coming up on December 5.

As to the question whether the Regional School Committee should take over the regionalization effort: current region could provide some assistance (e.g., website). Regional School Committee would take over the 12-person committee. Amherst specific-issue—if you have a new region to be created, if there is representative Town Meeting, that town has to have a town-wide vote to create the new region, not just a vote at Town Meeting. If amendment to existing regional agreement was to be made, then it can be a vote at the Town Meeting. That would reduce cost

to Amherst quite a bit.

Looking a lot at financial projections: Conclusion: Regionalization of elementary school will enable us to provide more financial stability and quality education.

Looking at regionalization as a four-town collaborative process, although each town circumstances are quite different and specific to it in a lot of different ways.

Question from the floor: We hear Finance, Finance, Finance... Pelham Finance Committee chair John Tricky noted that whatever (financial) savings when attained from regionalization would be minor and likely to disappear quickly. What's the advantage in terms of educational benefit? Steinberg: We will make a better effort on that end. Geryk noted that long range plan addresses that and will make that available. We should acknowledge the work of the people on this board, she said (paraphrased), It's been a very functional group and it has at times been emotional...but this is good work.

GUIDANCE FROM MEMBER TOWNS

Someone asked whether subsequent four-towns meetings could be held in each of the four towns. One person said to the regionalization committee --I have been to some of your meetings, and I cannot hear from some of you. So, let's think of audio.

Comments by Towns--Leverette: New growth is negligible. Particularly challenging position. Pelham, similar situation, "we have no money." Shutesbury taking the largest hit this year. If they get 3 percent assessment increase, that would absorb all their 2.5 percent increase.

Amherst: Preliminary budget guidelines...about 20 percent budget is state aid which remains uncertain until the Governor's budget in January. Still, the guideline for operating budgets across the board (schools, library, and town) is 2.7 percent growth.

Geryk (paraphrased): We recognize the situation that the towns are in. We need to think about sustainability. Will be back in front of you in January.

Question from the floor: Talk of moving away from trimester toward semester.
Geryk: engaged in negotiation...in that conversation with the staff. Will be able to move forward but not yet ready to say what the schedule will be. Anticipate moving to semester schedule in September 15.

CALENDAR

Geryk said the schools are creating 3 budgets--Pelham, Amherst, and Regional budget with the four towns. Handout 2013-2014 Regional Budget Timeline. Regional Committee meeting January 14, February 11, March 11.

Dates for Town Meetings: Leverette First Sat in May, Shutesbury May 3, Pelham May 3, Amherst April 28

Adjourned 10:48 am
Acting Clerk
Anurag Sharma

APPENDIX

A. DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING

ARPS Capital Assessment Worksheet ([click here](#))
 ARPS Capital Plan History ([click here](#))
 ARPS FY15 Assessment Projection ([click here](#))
 ARPS District Capital Plan ([click here](#))
 Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Capital Funding: Update 11/16/13 4-Town Meeting ([click here](#))

B. LIST OF CAPITAL PROJECTS

Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Capital Funding: Update for 11/16/13 Four Town Meeting
 (Pages b5-b22)

Here's a list of the projects (Priority in bold). More details in the handout.

<p>MS Windows and Doors Project Recommended by DOER HS Development Study Classroom High HS Locker Room Renovations High MS Sidewalk Repair High MS Tennis Courts High MS Mech Room Renovation Design High MS Science Lab Design Medium</p>	<p>HS Boiler Room Replacement Medium (low hanging fruit) HS Intercom System - Replace Medium HS Bleacher in Gym High HS Exhaust Fans B.C.D.E Wings Medium HS Auditorium Seats Refurbished Medium HS Parking Lot Repaving Medium HS Replace AC Windows Units Low HS Additional Parking Medium HS North Field Re-grading Medium MS Mechanical HVAC Pump Room Renovation High ME Electrical Service Upgrade High MS Science Labs High (High on Geryk's list) MS Hot Water Upgrades - Showers/Bathrooms Medium MS Balance Air Flow Medium MS Parking Lot Repaving High MS Bleachers in Gym High MS Exhaust Fans Medium MS Pool Re-grouting / Leak Repairs Medium MS Auditorium Seats Refurbished Medium MS Exterior Fire Stairs - Redesign and Build Medium MS Roof Low</p>
--	---

Questions from the floor: Could LSSE contribute to it? Geryk said she would investigate.
 Another question: What was the rough cost to rent the courts and transport kids. Brief discussion ensued about the practicality of doing so and the marginal benefit likely from it.