

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes
Four-Town Meeting
Saturday, February 27, 2016
Amherst Regional Middle School Library**

Attendance: Kay Moran (Chair), Marylou Theilman (Vice-Chair), Janice Ratner, Anurag Sharma, Tim Neale. Absent: Steve Braun, Bernie Kubiak

Others in Attendance: Sonia Aldrich, Amherst Comptroller and Liaison to Finance Committee; Maria Geryk, School Superintendent; Sean Mangano, School Director of Finance ; Kathleen Mazur, School Director of School Human Resources; Select Board, Finance Committee and School Committee members from the Towns of Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury; and audience

The meeting was called to order at 9:05 a.m. by Geryk

Agenda:

Welcome and Introductions:

Geryk welcomed the group and announced that this was a working meeting for the group and therefore there would be no questions or statements taken from the audience. Introductions followed.

FY17 Proposed Budget: *(See FY17 Proposed Budget Handout and Four Town Meeting Regional Schools both date February 27, 2016)*

Mangano reviewed the proposed budget of \$30,804,122, which is a 2.60% increase over the FY16 Budget and a 2% increase in Town assessments. A proposed new alternative Assessment formula will be used in FY17 if all four Towns agree at their annual Town Meetings. An Agreement was reached with Shutesbury which objected to using the current formula as stated in the present Regional Agreement. If approved and for one year only in FY17, the Assessment formula will be calculated using 10% based on a Town's taxable property and 90% based on the 5 year rolling enrollment average. The Regional Agreement uses 100% based on the 5 year rolling enrollment average. Negotiations for future years will be held after this year's budget cycle. Leverett plans to have an advisory Article for their Town Meeting, which asks voters if they want to maintain the 5 year rolling enrollment average, which they call the "Equal Child Amendment". Under the proposed FY17 Amendment Amherst's Assessment remains the same at 2.5% or \$15,196,144, which is \$370,638 more than FY16.

Charts showing SAT Average Scores, Graduation Percentages, and Charter/Choice Students, were presented along with Revenues. The pie charts for State Aid and other Reimbursements show that in FY2001 the Region received 50% of its funding from those sources and 50% from Assessments. In FY2016 only 36% of its funding came from those revenues and 64% come from Assessments.

Budget additions, reductions and adjustments to a level services budget show an overall decrease of \$108,213 in selected areas, which includes a 4.66 reduction in FTE's (Full Time Equivalent) in staffing. Some staffing is shared by Amherst and Pelham. Included in the budget is money for negotiated contracts to replace those that will expire June 30, 2016. The amount is budgeted so that once contracts are settled, the School Department will not have to go back to the Towns for additional money to support the increases.

The proposed projects in the FY17 Capital Plan total \$635,000. With \$10,442 amortization of the Southeast Campus (SEC) renovations (10 years), the total funded Capital Improvements is \$645,442.

Several large project for FY17-24 include the high school and middle school parking lots, which combined, total \$2,635,000. That amount was questioned by a member from Leverett. Mangano suggested that a working group be formed to continue looking at the Capital Projects process.

7-12 Consolidation Update:

Mazur is the key person in charge of the 7-12 Consolidation. She said that the interest in such a move and the discussion have been going on for some time. A lengthy report was given to the RSC in January 2016 with much documentation and which can be found on the School Website. At that January RSC meeting it was recommended that the RSC discuss the plan in more detail in September and provide the opportunity for community input before any vote is taken. In the meantime, three committees will be formed and areas to be addressed further are space, programming and curriculum. At the present time the projected savings of combining the schools is \$800,000 per year.

Initially there will need to be some building improvements to the High School totaling \$800,000 which includes bringing up to code, a ramp between two sections of the building.

As enrollments have declined, both school buildings are under capacity. The high school capacity is 1700 and next year there will be a total of 1382 students between the Middle and High Schools, 70 of whom are Choice-In. If the schools are consolidated, the High School still will be able to accommodate another 400 students. Mazur does not believe that enrollments will increase by that number.

Many organizations have expressed interest in use of the Middle School. In March Amherst's LSSE will be moving into a part of the building. Greenfield Community College will use some space. Art groups, the Boys and Girls Club and others have contacted the School Department expressing interest.

Fees for using space in the Middle School are being developed and will include the cost of heat, utilities, maintenance, etc.

Regionalization:

The RSC voted to defer further discussion about Regionalization until their meeting in January 2017 as Amherst presently has two other major projects: a new elementary school and consolidation of the Middle and High Schools. Leverett has an abatement issue. The Regional Agreement Working Group (RAWG) wants more time to think about it and if approved, the Amended Agreement would be sent to Town Meetings in the Spring of 2017. Fonsh, a RSC and RAWG member, said that the Committee has worked on the Amended Agreement for four and a half years and the timing is not seen as right, as there is too much on the table. (Note: The Article to establish a Committee to explore Regionalization was approved by Amherst Town Meeting in November 2011. The Amherst Committee started meeting at that time.)

Guidance from Member Towns:

It was suggested that a Four-Town Meeting next year include our local representatives to the State Legislature to update members on the financial and other issues relevant to schools that are before the Legislature.

Two of the Towns, Pelham and Shutesbury will hold their annual Town Meetings the first Saturday in May, which is May 7. Leverett also may meet on that date, but may decide to move theirs up to the week before. Amherst Town Meeting starts May 2.

Adjourned: 10:20 a.m.

Submitted by:

Marylou Theilman, Acting Clerk

Documents Used at the Meeting:

FY17 Proposed Budget Handout February 27, 2016

Four Town Meeting Regional Schools February 27, 2016