

Option 2

Town of Amherst Massachusetts

In accordance with Section 11 of Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020, the Amherst Town Council has determined that the public convenience and public health would best served by retaining the eight current polling places and have all but two Voting Precincts (4 and 10) vote at their current polling places. To limit the number of people using the Bangs center, Voting Precincts 4 and 10 – all of District 3 - would vote at the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School. This change would apply only to the 2020 Primary and National Elections. The list of proposed sites under this plan appear as Attachment 1. A map of the Precincts appear as Attachment 2.

The decision to retain current voting places for 8 of our ten voting precincts and relocate only two voting precincts to one new site seeks to achieve three goals: to protect the public health; to assure as many voters as possible access to a polling place near to where they live; and to minimize disruption of past voting practices particularly in a Presidential election year. By preserving as many polling locations as possible, and moving only two voting precincts, Amherst will avoid long lines and waiting times, and be able to provide indoor voting with outdoor waiting lines with sufficient spacing as recommended by CDC and public health officials.

As required by Section 11, this report will be made available on the Town website and at the offices of the Town Clerk not later than three (3) days prior to the Town Council meeting on August 10, 2020 to possibly reconsider the voting location decision of August 3, 2020.

The decision to ensure multiple voting places and consistency with past practices would rescinds an earlier recommendation to consolidate voting into a single site. This decision was made after substantial public input from a broad range of experts, including attorneys familiar with voting access, physicians, public health, disabled, and families with at risk family members across a range of ages and throughout Town. The decision also conforms with CDC strong advice to avoid large numbers voting at any one site given the COVID pandemic and to assure access to those at health risk due to disability, age, or health conditions.

In the sections that follow, the Town Council and Town Clerk provide the rationale for retaining as many polling sites as possible and move only two to one new location. We believe that this approach in 2020 will best serve the public health and public convenience given the short time available prior to the primary and national election. By retaining all 8 current sites and relocating two voting precincts to one new location at the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School (ARHS) located at 21 Mattoon Street for Voting Precincts 4 and 10 – both of which include neighborhoods near the high school – the Town will avoid crowding at the Bang center and offer a new convenient and safe place to vote. As we describe below, retaining existing sites and relocating two voting precincts to offer a less crowded site will avoid disparate adverse impacts on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income, or age.

Current polling locations are familiar, located in places where many residents can walk or travel short distances to vote, and distribute the number of registered voters across sites in a way that minimizes the risk of long waits, lines, or crowds.

Currently ten voting precincts cast votes in eight locations on Election Day. Three voting precincts vote in the same building, the Bangs Center, at separate locations within the building. The Bang Center is not large enough to provide safe entry, exit, and spacing indoors given the concerns about the virus. Therefore, we decided to relocate two Voting Precincts – both in District 3 (Voting Precincts 4 and 10) to the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School. As can be seen in the map, residents in these Voting Precincts live quite close to the High School to enable walking or biking for some. Moreover, there is ample parking at the High School and bus service within 1/4th to 1/3rd miles.

District 4, Voting Precinct 5 would continue to vote at Bangs. With only one Voting Precinct at the Bangs Center there will be ample parking for those wishing to drive to vote.

What the Council and Town Heard from the Public

There were broad and wide public concerns – with an overwhelmingly negative response – to the proposal to consolidate all voting precincts into one location at the High School. Multiple Councilors also raised concerns. We heard from many people by email, phone, during public comment on August 3, and after the Council meeting. The following highlights and summarizes what we heard and the rationale for expanding rather than contracting voting sites.

- Potential to suppress the vote. Experience in other parts of the country finds that restricting voting sites, especially changing them in a critical Presidential election, results in lower voter turn-out, with a disparate impact on minorities, lower-income without cars, and working people who cannot afford to take a long time off to vote. Public comments to the Council noted that:
 - Polling location closures increase the personal cost of in-person voting, by requiring more time to travel to the new location and by requiring more time to wait in line at the new location;
 - When the personal cost of in-person voting increases, it will cause some voters to abstain from voting;
 - Increases in the costs of in-person voting have a disproportionate impact on voters of color who are less trusting of voting by mail.
- Waiting Time and Lines: The resulting increase in the number of people voting at a single voting site would contribute to long lines, long waits, and put people's health at risk given the virus. CDC urges more, not fewer, sites out of a concern for public health.
- Safe Voting During a Pandemic: CDC recommendations strongly advise increasing not decreasing the number of sites. Regarding multiple sites, they recommend:
(<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/election-polling-locations.html>)

- Consider increasing the number of polling locations available for early voting and extending the hours of operation.
 - Maintain or increase the total number of polling places available to the public on Election Day to improve the ability to social distance.
 - Unless there is no other option, do not increase the number of potential registered voters assigned to each polling place.
- Safe Voting During a Pandemic: Other recent reports referenced during public remarks further underscored the need for minimizing the number of people at in-person voting sites. See Report from Free Speech for the People: <https://freespeechforpeople.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/fsfp-report-on-safe-voting-04-07-2020-11.pdf>
 - Vulnerable Population at Risk if the Number of Sites is Restricted: Those most likely to be discouraged – and not vote – would include hourly wage workers (time off due to travel and waiting time costs); those depending on public transportation with long bus rides; those with chronic conditions or children at risk; seniors; and the disabled.
 - Weather: hot, cold, or rainy weather and the potential for long waits traditionally keep voters at home. Keeping polling sites nearer to where people live and with lower risk of lines or waiting times because of the reduced numbers of voters at each voting site.
 - Anti-Voter Tactic: Reducing the number of polling sites has been a clear tactic in other states and areas of the country with a strategic effort to suppress the vote and disenfranchise certain populations, including minorities and lower-income families.
 - Distance to a Polling Site Matters: Current Amherst polling sites are distributed throughout the town, with many polling sites within in walking distance of low and moderate apartment and housing complexes. In North Amherst most live within a mile of one of the two polling sites.
 - In contrast, the High School can be as much as 4 miles away and as much as 5 miles away from South Amherst.
 - Disparate impact: The Brennan Center for Justice studied the consolidation of polling places in Milwaukee prior to this year’s Wisconsin Primary and found that a reduction in voter turnout of 9% was attributable to the elimination of polling places, and that black voters were disproportionately affected (<https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/did-consolidating-polling-places-milwaukee-depress-turnout>). Also see: <https://apnews.com/0dc414e6bf09ed27dd3c801344ead71c>;
 - Voting by mail should be widely encouraged and supported. But this path to voting may be less used or trusted by vulnerable groups so is not a substitute for easy physical access on Election Day. A review of Studies of the 2018 national election and more recent voting indicate that Black/African-American voters are less likely than white voters to register to

vote by mail and more likely to distrust mail voting based on past experiences.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-usa-election-insig/black-voters-dont-trust-mail-ballots-thats-a-problem-for-democrats-idUSKBN2351G0>

- Seniors in Amherst with long time voting habits may also be less likely to request voting by mail. And students coming back to Amherst in late August will arrive too late to request mail ballots for the primary.
- A range of public comments spoke of the convenience of their current polling site and the burden if asked to travel longer distance.
- Avoid Disruption: Above all the Council was urged not to make major changes during a Presidential election year and this pandemic crisis. The emphasis must be on getting the message out widely that the polls as usual will be open and protective and that there are options the provide alternatives to in-person voting

Early Voting and Vote by Mail Ballot Boxes

The Town will provide Early Voting for both the September and November national election at the Bang Community Center and is still in discussion with the University of Massachusetts. Anyone wishing to vote early from any voting precinct will be welcome to vote during the early days before the voting date.

The Town will also provide at least one secure Ballot Box and will explore having additional ballot boxes for mail-in ballots at multiple sites, include a large box at the Town Hall, or a similarly secure location downtown, for those wishing to vote by mail but drop off their ballot in person rather than depending on the mail.

Preparation of the Eight Voting Sites to Protect the Public Health

Prior to the election days, all nine of the polling locations [the eight current locations and the one new location (Voting Precinct 4 and 10 at the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School) will be professionally cleaned and prepared for the election. This may include the rearrangement of furniture, shelves, etc.

During the election days, all nine polling locations will follow strict protocols established by the Town for each site. These will include outside and inside signage, layout of polling site, designated parking, health protocols (social distancing, masks, hand sanitizer, etc.), and others developed based on the best expert advice regarding elections.

Following the election days, all nine polling locations will be professionally cleaned and restored to their original or newly designated use. This may include the rearrangement of furniture, shelves, etc. Top priority will be given to schools and other public and private buildings that are currently being used for other purposes.

By retaining current polling sites and adding a new site, the Town will optimize the likelihood that many residents will live in close physical proximity to their polling places.

The Town will make extra efforts this year at each of the polling sites to provide adequate parking and information for those who must travel by public transportation.

Maintaining Current Polling Sites with One New Site plus efforts to promote early voting and vote by mail in combination will enhance public voting convenience and Minimize Risks to Public Health

After listening closely to widespread testimony and reviewing the advice of voting rights and public health experts, and intense discussions with multiple Town and School staff, this proposal preserves the eight current polling sites and adds the High School for two voting precincts. This will make it possible to provide six feet of social distancing, privacy from other voters, and be easy to clean and wipe down polling booths and all other touch points after every voter in inside spaces and avoid long lines or waiting times before entering the polling building.

All voters will have multiple alternatives to voting in person on Election Day. These include: new expanded Early Voting in-person, voting-by-mail with new postage-paid Vote by Mail, and traditional Absentee Ballots. Voters have the choice of not having to appear in person on Election Day. For those worried about the mail, the Town will provide secure ballot drop boxes to support decisions to vote by mail rather than in person.

The planned polling sites will require intensified efforts to recruit poll workers. In the past, these workers were often retired members of our community. Age and health factors may prevent some of them from working these elections during this global pandemic. If in the unfortunate event that contact tracing becomes necessary, tracing from locations with limited number of voters will be easier than if several thousand are assigned to vote at one or a few locations.

Specifically, in this report we find that maintaining the present eight (8) polling locations and adding one polling location as a new place for two voting precincts will have:

1. No disparate adverse impact on the basis of disability or age.
 - a. Each site will provide physical access and space inside to safely conduct in-person voting and space for social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - b. Parking for those with handicapped placards is available.
 - c. Bangs will continue to serve vulnerable populations from the Ann Whelan apartments. These residents can easily walk and enter the building on ground level.
 - d. Amherst College and Hampshire College students living on those campuses have not traditionally had a polling place on campus. Their access to voting in person on Election Day is the same as it is currently.
2. No disparate adverse impact on the basis of race or national origin.

- a. By retaining current voting sites and enhancing options no voter should feel they have less access to voting than in the past, including those who speak languages other than English
 - b. The Town will post notices in multiple languages of the options available to all.
3. No disparate adverse impact on the basis of income.
- a. The major economic factors for those living on limited incomes are time, distance and transportation costs – especially if wages are lost taking time to vote. By moving only two voting precincts and keeping current sites spread across town and neighborhoods, the change will not increase these costs.
 - b. Early voting will be widely available at the centrally located Bangs Community Center, which is also on major bus routes, prior to each election and mail in early voting with all postage costs prepaid will be available to all voters.
 - c. Substantial outreach is being developed by the Town Clerk in partnership with various agencies to ensure all voters are aware of their voting options well prior to actual in-person voting on Election Day. This includes extensive use of the popular Town website including News & Announcements on the front page, Twitter, Facebook, email notifications to subscribers, use of the subscriber emergency notification phone system (sometimes referred to as reverse 911 call), in Student publications, Senior Center publications, notices to parents via school publications, notices in community rooms of apartment complexes, notices through college and university email lists, etc.

Based on the information provided by the Town Clerk, studies of voting rights experts and CDC recommendations for voting during the pandemic, the Town Council that the revised plan to continue the eight current polling sites and add one new site at the High School for two precincts located in the vicinity of the High School is in accordance with Section 11 of Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020 and will have no disparate adverse impact on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income, or age.

DRAFT MOTION FOR TOWN COUNCIL 08-10-20: VOTED (roll call Zoom) 08-10-20 to locate in-person voting on September 1, 2020 and November 3, 2020 at the current eight polling sites and change two polling places to one new site at the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, 21 Mattoon Street as follows:

- District 1, Voting Precinct 1: [North Zion Korean Church, Church Hall, 1193 North Pleasant Street]
- District 2, Voting Precinct 2: [North Fire Station, 603 East Pleasant Street]
- District 1, Voting Precinct 3: [Immanuel Lutheran Church, 867 North Pleasant Street]
- **District 3, Voting Precinct 4: [Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk OR Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, 21 Mattoon Street – Location Change]**
- District 4, Voting Precinct 5: [Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk]
- District 2, Voting Precinct 6: [Fort River School, 70 South East Street]
- District 5, Voting Precinct 7: [Crocker Farm School, 280 West Street]

- District 5, Voting Precinct 8: Munson Memorial Library, South Amherst Common, 1046 South East Street]
- District 4, Voting Precinct 9: [Wildwood School, 71 Strong Street]
- **District 3, Voting Precinct 10: [Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, 21 Mattoon Street – Location Change]**

Furthermore, this will have no disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income or age. This change shall be in place for 2020. The Town shall study the election results and patterns by mail or in-person with an assessment of any disparate patterns by neighborhood, race, national origin, disability, income, or age and the results of new mail-voting and report back to inform possible future changes in 2021

On behalf of the Amherst Town Council, August 10, 2020

Lynn Griesemer, President
Amherst Town Council

Additional Notes:

1. University of Massachusetts Amherst students living on that campus do not currently have a polling place on campus. However, the Town is still working with UMass staff to encourage student voting. While Early Voting was offered on the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus in 2016 and 2018 with great success, this will not be feasible in 2020 due to the significant limitations as to who has access to campus during the global pandemic, as well as the ongoing challenge of a secure location to leave equipment overnight. Students who cannot leave campus due to global pandemic restrictions in general, or quarantine or isolation in particular, may avail themselves of Absentee or Vote by Mail. Significant outreach by the Town Clerk in partnership with the University will result in students being fully aware of their options and the associated deadlines. Unusually, UMass classes begin August 24 due to the global pandemic. Therefore students living in the dorms and throughout Town are expected to arrive in the community prior to the August 22 voter registration deadline for the September 1, 2020 primary. We thus expect higher than normal turnout for that primary.
3. Additional options for relocating Polls are presented as Appendix C.
2. Additional changes may be made after the September 1, 2020 election.

References:

Town Clerk presentation to the Town Council 07-20-20

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/52156/7b-Election-Polling-Locations-07-20-2020-PB>

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2020/Chapter115>

AN ACT RELATIVE TO VOTING OPTIONS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

SECTION 11. Notwithstanding section 24 of chapter 54 of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, the select board, board of selectmen, town council or city council may, by recorded and public vote, change any polling place to be used at the primary election or the general election at least 20 days prior to the date of the primary election or general election if it is determined that the public convenience or public health would be better served. If the select board, board of selectmen or town council determines that the public convenience or public health would be better served, they may house all polling places in a single building within the municipality, if such building is suitably equipped; provided, however, that alcoholic beverages shall not be served or consumed in that portion of a building used as a polling place, during voting hours or while ballots are being counted therein. In cities, the city council may designate polling places in non-adjacent precincts if they determine the public convenience or public health would be better served. In making a decision to change a polling place, the select board, board of selectmen, town council or city council shall evaluate and report on whether such change would have a disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income or age, and not later than 3 days prior to changing a polling place, shall make publicly available on its website and at the office of the town or city clerk a report on its evaluation. When the polling places have been designated pursuant to this section, the board of registrars shall post on the municipal website and at other such places as it may determine, a description of the polling places and shall notify voters by using an electronic means, to the extent available, such as via email or reverse 911 call.

Town of Amherst website Voter Information:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/81/Voter-Information>

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/52156/7b-Election-Polling-Locations-07-20-2020-PB>

<https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2683>

Posted on: July 21, 2020

Vote by Mail Applications



Official 2020 Vote by Mail Application

Voting by mail is available to all registered Massachusetts voters for all elections in 2020. You do not need an excuse to vote by mail this year. In-person voting will still be available.

To vote by mail, all you need to do is:

1. **Complete** a [Vote by Mail Application](#); or use the pre-addressed paper application card that you may have received in the mail.
2. **Deliver** your application to Amherst Town Clerk, 4 Boltwood Avenue, Amherst, MA 01002 or drop in the drop box on the Main St. side of Town Hall. Or return the pre-addressed paper application card that you may have received in the mail.
3. **Vote** when your ballot arrives;
4. **Return** your ballot.

Applications must reach The Amherst Town Clerk's office by **August 26** for the State Primary. Applications must reach the Amherst Town Clerk's Office by **October 28** for the State Election.

Apply early, in order to have enough time to return your ballot.

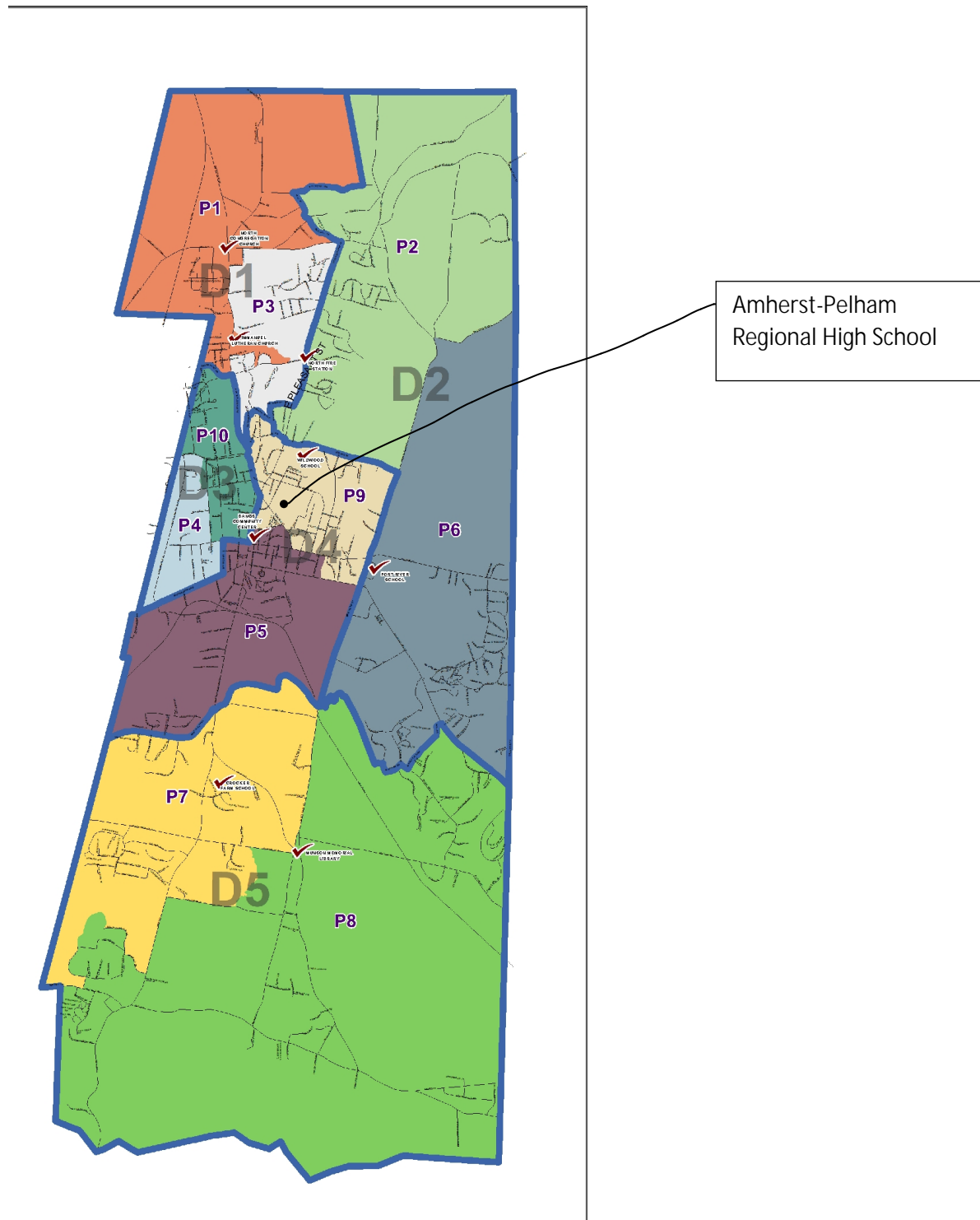
For more information on voting by mail, see the Secretary of Commonwealth's page on [Voting by Mail FAQs](#).

To contact the Amherst Town Clerk, email vote@amherstma.gov or call 413-259-3050 or visit www.amherstma.gov/vote

Appendix A – List of Polling Locations and Proposed Changes for 2 Polls

Precinct	District	Present Location	Proposed Location (If changed)
1	1	North Zion Korean Church, Church Hall, 1193 North Pleasant Street	
2	2	North Fire Station, 603 East Pleasant Street	
3	1	Immanuel Lutheran Church, 867 North Pleasant Street	
4	3	Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk	Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, 21 Mattoon Street
5	4	Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk	
6	2	Fort River School, Gym, 70 South East Street	
7	5	Crocker Farm School, Library, 280 West Street	
8	5	Munson Memorial Library, South Amherst Common, 1046 South East Street	
9	4	Wildwood School, Gym, 71 Strong Street	
10	3	Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk	Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, 21 Mattoon Street

Appendix B: Precinct Map, Amherst Massachusetts (2020)



Appendix C: Additional options for relocating Polls (Note: A-PRHS = Amherst-Pelham Regional High School)

		Present Locations	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Precinct	District	Present Location	Proposed Location (If changed)	Proposed Location (If changed)	Proposed Location (If changed)
1	1	North Zion Korean Church, Church Hall, 1193 North Pleasant Street	A-PRHS		
2	2	North Fire Station, 603 East Pleasant Street	A-PRHS		A-PRHS
3	1	Immanuel Lutheran Church, 867 North Pleasant Street	A-PRHS		
4	3	Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk	A-PRHS	Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, 21 Mattoon Street	A-PRHS?
5	4	Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk	A-PRHS		
6	2	Fort River School, Gym, 70 South East Street	A-PRHS		A-PRHS
7	5	Crocker Farm School, Library, 280 West Street	A-PRHS		A-PRHS
8	5	Munson Memorial Library, South Amherst Common, 1046 South East Street	A-PRHS		
9	4	Wildwood School, Gym, 71 Strong Street	A-PRHS		A-PRHS

10	3	Bangs Community Center, 70 Boltwood Walk	A-PRHS	Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, 21 Mattoon Street	A-PRHS?
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