

MINUTES
AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD
January 4, 2007
Amherst Town Hall Meeting Room

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CALL TO ORDER

Chair Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present:

ATTENDANCE

Amherst School Board: Dwight Brew, Deborah Cort, Pam Dudoff, Nancy Head and Jim O'Mara.

Administrative Team: Porter Dodge, Dr. Mary Jennings, Deb Martel, Jim Miner, Elizabeth Shankel, Kathy Skoglund, and Gerry St. Amand.

Ways and Means Committee: Peg Bennett, CJ Butler, Jay Hennessey, Jim Jacobs and Dana Redmond

Minutes Recorder: Lyn Jennings

Dwight Brew explained the regularly scheduled Amherst School Board meetings, which are now held on the first Thursday of the month, would be televised from the Amherst Town Hall. At this time meetings are not guaranteed to be televised because of location and timing.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mary Jennings asked Gerry St. Amand and Porter Dodge to present their announcements.

Gerry presented the following information to board members:

Gerry St. Amand recognized Aidan Bailey, the fourth grade winner of the National Geographic Geography Bee.

Gerry acknowledged staff attendance at a "Behavior Intervention Workshop" presented by Maureen Tracy.

Gerry thanked Wilma Findley, the music teacher at Clark along with the first grade students for presenting a wonderful holiday program.

Gerry recognized Robert Allwarden, Wilkins School music teacher, for presenting a wonderful holiday program in conjunction with the fourth grade students.

Gerry told board members the fourth grade "Spelling Bee" would take place at the end of January.

Gerry said grades would close on January 26, 2007, with second quarter report cards going home on Friday, February 9, 2007, with students.

Gerry thanked Nancy Head for meeting with staff members to share and discuss proposed building renovations for the Clark and Wilkins Schools.

Porter Dodge presented the following information to school board members:

Holiday Giving

Porter said once again, teachers and staff were very generous in their support of families in need. They brought unwrapped toys for donation to designated families. In addition, the support staff adopted two families and the tremendous response from all ensured both families had the makings for a happy holiday.

Project Safeguard

As we discussed and budgeted, this year Project Safeguard will be held “in-house” by utilizing the auditorium at the high school and classrooms in the middle school. It will be a one-day event and it is currently scheduled for Wednesday, June 13. Speakers are currently being booked and the topics continue to be timely. We expect this one-day event to be just as successful as in the past at a much-reduced cost.

Winter Concerts

Winter concerts were held during the first two weeks of December. As usual, the band and chorus concerts at each grade level were extremely well done. Our music instructors, Larry Ballard, Chris Brunelle, and Susan Nichols are to be commended for providing all with a variety of holiday music and excellent performances by the students.

Oxfam Banquet

For the second year, all seventh grade students and faculty participated in this hands-on event, providing them with a realistic experience about how food is inequitably distributed around the world. Students were the hosts. A video was produced and shown. This was the culminating event of a seventh grade integrated Language Arts and Social Studies unit on world organizations, and it represented hours of work by both students and staff. In particular, we commend Deb Hinrichs for spearheading this project.

Debbie Hinrichs is headed to Saudi Arabia

The Educators to Saudi Arabia Program aims to cultivate a greater awareness and understanding of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in U.S. primary and secondary schools and communities. Twenty-four; 7th-12th grade social studies teachers from across the US were selected out of several hundred applications to participate in the Educators to Saudi Arabia Program. During this ten day trip the educators will examine Saudi education, culture, history and global relations through site visits, panel discussions and cultural activities

in the cities of Dhahran, Riyadh and Jeddah. Upon returning to the U.S., participants will implement an interdisciplinary impact plan drawing on their program experiences.

Debbie Hinrichs recently received her acceptance letter to the program and will fly to Houston on 3/27 for an orientation; the Saudi trip will run from 3/29-4/10th. As part of her application, she had the students generate a list of 300+ questions about what they would want to know about life in Saudi Arabia.

Banner

Donated by Marc Chareth to replace our “National School of Excellence” Banner that was faded by time and almost unreadable.

Pam Dudoff thanked Gerry St. Amand for assisting the *Cabinet* with pictures to accompany an article that was written about the overcrowding in our schools.

Dwight asked members of the school board if they had anything they wanted to pull from the Consent Agenda.
Deborah Cort requested the minutes of November 21, 2006, be pulled from the Consent Agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA

Pam Dudoff moved, seconded by Nancy Head to approve the Consent Agenda consisting of Budget Transfer Number 200707, 00708, 200709, and 200710 as well as the appointment of Nancy Head to replace Deborah Cort as representative to the RSEC Board of Directors. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Dwight commented the November 21, 2006 minutes do not reflect the contents of the approved consent agenda. Approving the minutes were put on hold until the information could be made available.

Dwight Brew invited comments from the Public but none were forthcoming.

PUBLIC TIME

Since the Public Hearing was scheduled to begin at 6:15 p.m. and it was only 6:10 p.m., Dwight Brew suggested waiting until 6:45 p.m. in case some members of the public had gone to the Middle School by mistake.

PUBLIC HEARING

Dwight Brew recessed the Amherst School Board meeting at 6:55 p.m.

Dwight Brew opened the Public Hearing at 6:55 p.m. Dwight explained the purpose of the Public Hearing was for the acceptance

of a donation. Dwight said because the donation is over \$5,000 they need to hold a Public Hearing. Dwight asked Porter to speak about the donation received from the Donna Anne Poulack Foundation.

Porter Dodge provided a handout, which was dated November 19, 2006, addressed to him and sent from the Donna Anne Poulack Foundation.

Porter explained the Donna Anne Poulack Foundation was pleased to donate \$10,000 to the Amherst Middle School for the dedication, cooperation, and hard work demonstrated by Mary Young, Mary Westwater, Brenda Duffy, and Jenny Brion. Porter said the trustees have decided the money should be dispersed through the Special Education Department. Porter said the purpose of the Donna Anne Poulack Foundation is to support organizations that focus on protecting, providing for, and educating children. Porter thanked the foundation for their generous donation.

Dwight Brew asked if anyone from the public had any questions or comments but none were forthcoming.

Porter asked members of the board to accept the donation of \$10,000, which was to be used by the Special Education Department.

The Public Hearing was closed at 6:58 p.m.

Dwight Brew thanked the donor for their generous donation and also thanked the staff since the donation was on their behalf for all their hard work and dedication.

ACTION ITEMS

A motion was made by Pam Dudoff and seconded by Deborah Cort to accept the \$10,000 donation from the Donna Anne Poulack Foundation. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Porter Dodge agreed to come back to the board and let them know what the money was being used for in Special Education.

Deborah Cort will send thank-you notes to the appropriate people.

A. Warrant Articles – Vote – Board members received a handout entitled FY08 Draft Warrant Articles dated January 4, 2007.

Board members reviewed the proposed warrant articles in order to determine what would be presented at the Budget Hearing on January 15, 2007.

Nancy Head moved, seconded by Pam Dudoff to present the renovation warrant article to the voters as read by Nancy:

To see if the school district will raise and appropriate \$5,009,000 (Gross Budget) for renovations and equipment for Clark School, Wilkins School and Amherst Middle School, and to authorize the

issuance of not more than \$4,884,000 of bonds or notes in accordance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act (RSA Chapter 33) and authorize the school board to issue and negotiate such bonds or notes and determine the rate of interest thereon and the maturity and other terms and conditions thereof, with the remaining \$125,000 to come from interest earnings on the invested bond proceeds for said project; and to take any other action necessary to carry out the purpose of this article. Furthermore, to raise and appropriate the additional sum of \$139,737 for the payment of the first interest payment on the aforesaid bonds. The Amherst School Board recommends the passage of this special article. Three-fifths ballot vote required.

All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Dwight Brew read the following draft warrant article for the FY08 Operating Budget:

To see if the school district will raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amount set forth on the budget posted with the warrant, or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling \$21,620,647. (Should this article be defeated, the operating budget shall be \$21,133,915, which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Amherst School District or by law or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only.) The Amherst School Board recommends the passage of this article. Majority ballot vote required.

A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Pam Dudoff to bring the warrant article as presented to the Budget Hearing.

Pam had a question regarding the money from the Lawrence and Spaulding Trust Funds. Pam said she believes the budget indicates they will spend \$6,000 from this fund. Pam asked if it had been determined what this money would be used for?

Betty said they will be spending the money but they are not sure what it will be spent on yet.

All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Dwight read the Facilities Expendable Trust Warrant Article as follows:

To see if the school district will vote to raise and appropriate up to \$80,000 to be added to the Capital Facilities Repair, Maintenance, and improvement Trust Fund (established March, 2003) with up to \$40,000 of this amount to be funded from the year-end undesignated fund balance (surplus) if available on July 1, 2007; and \$40,000 to be raised by taxation. The Amherst School Board recommends the passage of this article. Majority ballot vote required.

A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Deborah Cort to bring the warrant article as presented to the Budget Hearing. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Dwight read the SPED Capital Reserve warrant article:

To see if the school district will vote to create a Capital Reserve Fund under the provisions of RSA 35:1-b for the education of persons with disabilities and to raise and appropriate \$20,000 toward this purpose and to name the school board as agents to expend from this fund. The Amherst School Board recommends the passage of this article. Majority ballot vote required.

A motion was made by Deborah Cort and seconded by Nancy Head to bring the warrant article as presented to the Budget Hearing. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Discussion followed.

Dr. Jennings said this fund would be used for emergency items that can't be seen especially in special education.

Dr. Jennings said you may have dramatic changes during the year and with the creation of this fund, we could draw upon it. Dr. Jennings said Kathy Skoglund has advocated for the creation of this fund.

Betty Shankel said since this is a Capital Reserve Fund it can only be expended by the School Board.

Deborah Cort said at the last board meeting she asked how much money Souhegan puts in their Capital Reserve Fund each year and

have they had to use it yet.

Kathy Skoglund said the first year Souhegan put in \$50,000 and in a subsequent year they have put an additional \$50,000 however, the balance in the account is approximately \$200,000. She said this is due to some terrific investments. Kathy said to date; they have not had to access the account, but believes they will have to this year.

CJ Butler asked if the wording of this draft article was the same as Souhegan's warrant.

Betty Shankel said she hadn't seen the Souhegan wording but it has gone to counsel and the DRA and was approved.

Four members of the board voted in favor of the motion with one opposed, Jim O'Mara. The motion passed.

Jim O'Mara asked to clarify his vote in opposition. Jim said there are situations where we have the opportunity to create a contingency within the operating budget. Jim said he is concerned that another warrant article will create concern amongst the taxpayers. Jim recommends deferring this article for at least a year.

Dwight read the Bean Field warrant article:

To see if the school district will vote to authorize the school board to raise and appropriate \$467,000 for the District to develop three multi-purpose athletic fields and a baseball/softball field on the Bean Property located on the east side of Boston Post Road, so called, more particularly shown on town tax map # 2 as lots 142 and 144, and further to authorize the school board to accept said funds from the Town of Amherst. This is a nonlapsing article under RSA 32:7 and will not lapse until the athletic fields are completed or by June 30, 2012, whichever is earlier. The Amherst School Board recommends the passage of this special article, which is nonlapsing. Majority ballot vote required.

A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Deborah Cort to bring the warrant article as presented to the Budget Hearing.

Discussion followed amongst board members.

Nancy Head said she can't in all conscience support this article. I may personally be for playing fields on the Bean land but I feel strongly that it is in the best interests of the school district, and the taxpayers, to ask the Recreation Department to wait one year before

going ahead with the fields. Let the school district eliminate the land as a possibility for a school, based on factual data before \$500,000 is spent for playing fields.

There are not many possibilities for decent school sites left in Amherst. This is one and it is owned by the school district. The land is flat, accessible, and on town water.

I have done a lot of research on the land since the last meeting. The facts suggest that it is land that should be looked at:

It is a nine acre parcel contiguous to the middle school land, which has something like 26 acres. The minimum for an elementary school is 5 acres with one additional acre for each 100 children. A 400 student school would be appropriate for this site without using any middle school acreage or asking for a waiver.

The lawyer for the transaction, who was also a school board member at the time, said he was not comfortable saying that the reason the land was bought was for fields. This is consistent with the commentary of the warrant article at the time that said the land “has many short- and long-term uses including but not limited to..” playing fields and parking, specialized instructional programs, community use, and office space.

A conservation member went over the aquifer map with me. It appears that buildings are less of a concern on the aquifer than the pesticides and fertilizers used on lawns and fields.

The NESDEC report had one rather neutral reference to the Bean property. The report was not negative toward the property.

The Master Plan architect said “If the Bean parcel is still available, then it would be definitely worthwhile to study the feasibility of locating a new 4/5 school there.”

There are traffic concerns on Boston Post Road near the high school. These concerns are going to have to be addressed eventually whether there is an additional school in the area or not.

In addition, as I understand it, the lease on the Cemetery Fields does not end until 2014 which gives time to delay a year and still be able to develop the fields.

There may be problems that appear with further testing. But any decision should be based on factual, proven, data. We can't sit here and decide whether it would make a good school with the limited knowledge at our disposal at this time. All we can say is that the site has potential and deserves to be looked at further.

I ask that we put this article off for a year.

Nancy said she believes the Bean Property has potential as a school building site and the field project should be put off for a year.

Dwight Brew said the Selectmen would provide the funds to develop the athletic fields and the amount is expected to be about \$450,000. He said this article has zero tax impact to the school district budget.

Discussion followed regarding the wording of the article. Many members of the school board as well as members of Ways and Means said the wording of the article was very confusing. To them, when they read the article, it did not appear to be a no tax impact article.

Pam Dudoff suggested the wording of the article should say raise and appropriate up to \$450,000 since they were not sure if the Selectmen would be raising \$450,000 she did not want the school district's budget to be affected.

Dwight Brew said the current wording of the article does not require the school district to spend any money.

Betty Shankel said the article authorizes the school district to raise and appropriate but it doesn't force them to spend any more than what the Selectmen raise.

Jim O'Mara asked if the \$450,000 is not available by the town, would the school district have to make up the difference.

Dwight Brew said no, the school district would not have to spend any money if they didn't have it. Dwight said if the town provides \$100,000 then we spend \$100,000 on developing the fields, if they raise an additional \$50,000 then we spend an additional \$50,000 on

the fields.

Pam Dudoff said she has a lot of respect for Nancy Head and the Master Plan Committee for all the work they have done. However, Pam said there is a lot of information available that would conclude the Bean Property is not an appropriate site for a school.

Pam highlighted the following:

- Pam said it is recommended a school site have a minimum of 11 acres. Pam said Baboosic Lake is 21 acres of which 7 acres is conservation land which makes the site only 14 acres. She said she considers 14 acres tight. Pam said she doesn't believe 9 acres is enough land to build a school.
- Pam highlighted an annual survey of "risky behavior" among high school students, which found 20.7% of Souhegan High School Students reported "being offered, sold, or given an illegal drug on school property during the past year." Pam said an elementary school would not be appropriate on the Bean Property because it would expose young children to things that aren't appropriate.
- Pam said the other major issue is traffic. The area is already overloaded and another school will make it worse.

Deborah Cort said she would like to see this warrant article go to the Public Hearing. Deborah cited the following reasons:

- The Bean property was purchased with recreation fields in mind.
- The district gave the go ahead for the town to pursue the idea of developing the fields
- She doesn't believe the board intended the property to be used for a school site when it was purchased.
- Bean property was not considered as a future school site when BLR was purchased because it was too small and was considered for fields to accompany an addition of Amherst Middle School.

Dwight Brew said he agreed with a lot of the comments made by Deborah Cort and Pam Dudoff.

Jim O'Mara said the offer by the Selectmen is very generous and he doesn't know if it would be back next year if they hold out on bringing the warrant article to the Public Hearing.

Ways and Means agreed the wording of the article was very

confusing and would be for the voters. Ways and Means asked if it would be possible to get money to develop the fields without naming the property, then the money could be used for other playing fields in other locations.

Ways and Means also asked if there was any way they could include the words “this is not going to effect the school portion of your tax bill” on the warrant article.

Dwight Brew suggested they wait until the Board of Selectmen meet then the wording of the warrant article could be finalized.

Jim O’Mara said they should look at re-wording this article and suggested they request legal counsel to look at crafting the wording.

Four members of the board voted in favor of the motion with one opposed, Nancy Head. The motion passed.

A. Master Plan Committee – Board members received a handout entitled Master Plan Committee, Amherst School District, Charge to the Committee. Dr. Jennings explained this was the first draft and for discussion purposes only. Dr. Jennings said Nancy Head put this document together.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Nancy said they wanted to increase the Master Plan Committee itself and form three sub-committees.

Nancy explained the purpose for the Master Plan Committee.

1. The Committee was responsible for Planning Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the Amherst School District Renovation and Elementary School Building Plan (Master Plan) including recommendations to the School Board on
 - a. The hiring of project architect(s), project manager attorney
 - b. A site for Phase 2 Grade 4 and 5 Elementary School
 - c. Baseline line-item project budgets, maintaining discrete accounting.
 - d. Final educational specifications, site plans, building design for new elementary school.
2. Supervising the work of Phase 1 and Phase 2 with authority to expend funds approved by the School Board and approve change-orders, up to \$9,999.00. Amounts over \$10,000 must be brought to the School Board for approval.

3. Coordinating work for its sub-committees which shall be:
 - a. Publicity: Inform public of project plans and progress.
 - b. Site review: Based on School Board criteria, recommend appropriate site for Phase 2.
 - c. Building: Supervise Phase 1 and Phase 2 with budget approved by the School Board. Change orders of \$10,000 or more require approval by a minimum of three members of the Building Committee, including the school business administrator.

Nancy Head provided the details about the Membership of the Master Plan Committee. Nancy said the Chair of the Master Plan Committee would appoint members of the sub-committees.

Voting Members: Amherst School Board members (2), Members of the Amherst Community (3), Superintendent of Schools, Business Administrator, Building and Grounds Director, Elementary Principal, and Secondary Principal.

Nancy said the Elementary Principal and Secondary Principal has not been voting members but would like to make them voting members.

Non-Voting Members: Liaison to Town boards, Liaison to Mont Vernon, Liaison to Ways & Means.

Nancy explained the Sub-Committee Membership would include members of the sub-committees be appointed by the Chair of the Master Plan Committee.

Publicity: Master Plan Chair, Principal, Superintendent, and Community Reps (4-6)

Building: Master Plan Chair, Business Administrator, Principal, Architect, Project Manager, Building and Grounds Director, Community Reps (4)

Site: Master Plan Chair, Building and Grounds Director, and Community Reps (4-6)

Nancy said she would like to form the Publicity Sub-Committee very soon so they can begin publicizing Phase I more than they have been and then continue with Phase II.

Discussion amongst board members followed.

Jim O'Mara said he does not agree with authorizing any sub-committee to spend funds. He said this is an on-going concern for him.

Jim said they are already talking about Phase II and they have not ever voted on or presented to the public on Phase I.

Jim suggested an odd number of participants might be better.

Dr. Jennings said the school board would authorize contracts. She said the building committee would be responsible for checking in at every board meeting to let them know how things are going. Dr. Jennings said they would present change orders, costs, etc. at each board meeting.

Dr. Jennings said the School Board could designate who they wanted to act as fiscal agents on the committee.

Dr. Jennings said they would really like to get permission from the school board to form the Publicity Committee.

Nancy Head explained there is costs involved, they would like four additional sets of plans with the cost being \$600 and the plans to be placed at the library, in the schools, and one set to be moved around as needed.

Simple handouts would be created and distributed at coffees and in home gatherings.

Deborah Cort created an information booklet that was going to be mailed to all households in Amherst pending information received from council. Deborah checked to find out the cost of printing and mailing it and it would be \$1,000 to print it, and \$600 to mail it. Deborah said the information booklet could also be used as a handout rather than mailed to all households due to the cost.

A motion was made by Nancy Head and seconded by Pam Dudoff to establish a Publicity Committee relating to the Master Plan as proposed.

Jim O'Mara said he recommends having five Community Reps on the committee.

All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the

motion passed.

Board members discussed the money needed to implement the publicity items discussed. They included four sets of plans \$600, \$350 for printing handouts, and coffees \$100.

Deborah said the cost of these items would come out of the Master Plan money.

A motion was made by Nancy Head and seconded by Deborah Cort to approve the Master Plan Committee to spend up to \$1,050.00 which would include the cost of four sets of plans at \$600, coffees at \$100, and printing at \$350.

Four members of the board voted in favor of the motion with one opposed, Jim O'Mara.

Jim asked to clarify his no vote. Jim said he would prefer to see a detailed budget as to how the money will be spent. Jim said he is not opposed to getting the word out.

B. Historical Information for SAU Website – Board members were told the SAU Office is thinking about populating historical information on the SAU Website as the need comes up.

Board members agreed going forward they think this is a good idea and would be very useful.

There is no action by the board needed.

Dwight Brew provided the dates for upcoming meetings –
January 15, 2007 7:00 p.m. Souhegan High School Auditorium. At the Budget Hearing the renovation bond will be presented and the budget will be discussed. At 6:00 p.m. they will have the Public Hearing regarding the Souhegan Budget.
February 1, 2007 – Amherst School Board meeting at 6:00 p.m. in the Amherst Town Hall.
February 8, 2007 – Deliberative Session

OTHER

Betty Shankel explained Voter's Guide information was needed by the Chairman of the School Board and Ways and Means by January 25, 2007.

Betty explained she is working on the Voter's Guide as well as Lisa Ambrosio, and Maryanne Buonadonna.

Nancy Panasati commented there was no attention being paid to negotiations / the teachers on the School Board Agenda.

Dwight Brew explained there was a meeting scheduled for Monday and the board is hopeful to get a fair agreement, which is fair to the employees as well as citizens.

Motion to adjourn made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Nancy Head. All voted in favor and the meeting adjourned at 7:35 pm.

**REVIEW OF
MEETING /
ADJOURNMENT**