

**MINUTES  
AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD  
BOND AND BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING  
January 15, 2007  
Souhegan High School Annex**

**Page 1581**

Chair Dwight Brew called the Public Hearing to order at 7:05 p.m. **CALL TO ORDER**

Present:

**ATTENDANCE**

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

Administrative Team: Porter Dodge, Dr. Mary Jennings, Elizabeth Shankel, and Gerry St. Amand.

Minutes Recorder: Lyn Jennings

Nancy Head read Article 36 – Renovation Bond Article for meeting attendees as follows: **BOND HEARING**

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 additional sum of \$139,737 for the first interest payment on the aforesaid bonds. Three-fifths ballot vote required.

Nancy presented a slide which detailed the Tax Impact / Bond Schedule for FY 2008 through FY 2028 indicating the estimated tax impact was based on this years valuation, and the actual impact will likely be less.

Nancy explained the Total Principal Due was an estimated \$4,884,000. Nancy said the first year's tax impact on a \$400,000 home was an estimated tax of \$31.10. The highest tax impact would be in the year 2009, and on a \$400,000 home the estimated

tax would be \$90.84.

Nancy presented the current Outstanding School Bonds:

Amherst Middle School Addition, ending date FY 2022, Current Year Bond Payment \$318,203.

Souhegan High School, ending date FY 2012, Current Year Bond Payment, \$645,000.

Souhegan High School Annex, ending date FY 2012, Current Year Bond Payment, \$737,905.

Nancy explained the need for this Warrant Article:

1. Aging Buildings – Nancy said the buildings have been well maintained, but need updating.
2. Increased Space Demands – Nancy explained space demands have changed due to an increase in population in the 1990's; Changes in Special Education laws; Increased use of Technology; and Changes in Curriculum and Instruction.

Nancy presented a slide, which detailed the Changes in Education over the past 40 years, which have contributed to the reduction of elementary student capacity of 40-50 year old schools.

Nancy presented a slide, which detailed the History of past-proposed Warrant Articles for additions, renovations or a new school in Amherst.

Nancy explained the Long-Range Master Plan was to be a phased-in approach, which would involve infrastructure and core facility renovations to Clark, Wilkins, and the Amherst Middle School. The second phase of the Long-Range Master Plan will make a recommendation on the current classroom facilities as well as the need for new classrooms and what to do with the Brick School as it relates to the SAU Offices.

Nancy said the Renovation Bond Warrant Article is for the following:

- Renovation of the Clark School for Kindergarten and part of

- the 1<sup>st</sup> grade.
- Renovation of Wilkins School for Grades 1-4.
- Minor renovations and additions at AMS.

Nancy provided the following details for the Clark Elementary School Renovations:

- Replace windows, selected doors.
- Provide vertical lift to meet codes.
- Update mechanical and electrical systems
- Rearrange interior space to provide necessary offices and nurse's space to meet codes.

The estimated cost of the Clark Renovations is \$1,197,000.

Nancy explained to meeting attendees the Wilkins School was built in 1967. The Wilkins Elementary School renovations were summarized as follows:

- Replace windows in older sections; update exterior doors and frames.
- Expand boiler room; install two new boilers and new oil tank.
- Upgrade mechanical systems; install automatic fire sprinkler system.
- Upgrade electrical and communication systems.
- Revise space usage: administrative offices, nurse's office, computer alcove off library, small addition to multi-purpose room, reconfigure boiler and art rooms.

The estimated cost of the Wilkins Renovations is \$2,891,000.

Nancy said there are currently 4 portable classrooms at Wilkins and they plan to add 4 additional portable classrooms next year to address the present need for space.

Nancy said the Amherst Middle School was built in 1974, and explained there are fewer renovations needed because it is a newer school.

The Amherst Middle School needs the following renovations:

- Update mechanical systems

- Update electrical systems
- Revise space usage: administration offices, nurse's office, additional gym storage, freezer space

The estimated cost of the Amherst Middle School Renovations is \$796,000.

Nancy explained the administration hopes to get the 5<sup>th</sup> grade out of AMS but for now, they are staying there.

The Ways and Means Committee was asked their position on Article 36 and Jim Jacobs said the Committee unanimously supports the passage of Article 36 – The Renovation Bond Article.

Dwight Brew asked if meeting attendees had any questions or comments regarding Article 36, however, there were none.

Dwight Brew closed the Public Hearing on the Renovation Bond at 7:23 p.m.

Dwight Brew opened the Public Hearing on the 2007-2008 Proposed Budget.

Deborah Cort read Article 37 – Operating Budget for meeting attendees as follows:

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 \$21,661,801. (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.) Majority ballot vote required.

Deborah Cort said the proposed Amherst School District Operating Budget for FY2008 is \$21,661,801, an increase of \$324,529 or a 1.52% increase over the FY2007 adopted budget.

The Statistics for the Clark School, Wilkins School and the Amherst Middle School for FY07 and the projected statistics for FY08 were presented to the meeting attendees. The total number of students in FY07 was 1,657 and the projected number of students in FY08 is 1,647.

Deborah Cort said the total Amherst School District Professional Staff for FY07 was 150 and it is projected for FY08 at 150. The total Amherst Support Staff for FY07 was 104 and for FY08 it is projected to be 93.

Deborah Cort explained what the Proposed Budget funds:

- Support of the District's technology program.
- The District's ongoing commitment to early literacy intervention.
- Appropriate instructional materials at all levels.
- Our responsibility as a District to continually improve.

Deborah Cort presented the District's New Initiatives:

- Literacy Coach at the elementary level for Clark and Wilkins.
- Expansion of the Early Integration Partnership Program (EIPP) – the program will be expanded to include AMS.
- Social Studies Textbook Adoption
- Middle School Evaluation

The Reductions in this budget include:

- 2 teacher positions at Clark (attrition)
- 11 Support Staff (FTE)
- Maintenance (through Planning)

Deborah Cort presented a slide, which highlighted the Fund 10 Budget for FY07 as compared to FY08. The total FY07 Budget was \$21,337,274 as compared to a proposed FY08 Budget of \$21,661,801. The budget variance was \$324,527, which represents an increase of 1.52%.

Deborah Cort explained to meeting attendees the seventeen-member board, which is made up of the Amherst, Mont Vernon, and Souhegan Cooperative District, all reviewed the SAU 39

Apportionment Formula in November and it was adopted in December.

Deborah explained Amherst's SAU 39 Apportionment for FY08 is \$917,356. Deborah said the FY08 SAU39 budget of \$1,671,965 represents an increase of \$118,657 or a 7.6% increase over FY07.

Deborah explained in large part the increase was due to the following:

- A new English Language Arts Coordinator position that has been added to the SAU39 staff and will support literacy initiatives in each of the districts. This position is budgeted at \$62,000 plus benefits.
- Funding an upcoming retirement.

Deborah also spoke about some of the reductions to the SAU39 budget:

- A reduction in the SAU travel allowance.
- A change in personnel from an accounting position to a bookkeeping position which will better meet the needs at the SAU.
- The elimination of a funded purchasing agent position.
- One discontinued secretarial position.

Dwight explained to meeting attendees the Amherst School District budget is a "gross" budget as required by RSA 32:5 III.

Dwight said all the expenditures are listed in the expense budget. It also includes all expenses that have offsetting revenue including grants and food service.

All income, including offsetting income, is listed as revenue.

Dwight explained the Gross Budget, minus all non-local property tax revenue, is the amount that must be raised by the local education property tax.

Dwight presented the FY 2008 Revenue Summary. Dwight explained the town of Amherst assessed property valuation as of April 1, 2007 will be used to officially calculate the tax rate for this budget. Because this year's valuation is not available yet, last years

valuation was used to project tax rates.

Dwight presented the following Tax Rate Summary:

Estimated FY 2007 Tax Increase on \$400,000 home based on the FY07 valuation is \$251. The estimated FY 2007 Tax Increase on \$400,000 home based on a 2% FY07 valuation increase is \$174.

Dwight explained all state property tax assessed in Amherst, remains in Amherst, to fund the Amherst Schools. Dwight also said the state provides funding to schools through the State Equitable Education Aid. Dwight explained any decrease to the state equitable education aid grant must be offset by an increase in the local education tax.

Dwight said for the 2007-2008 school year, we are expecting our grant to be reduced by \$347,000 to \$1,883,744. Dwight said reducing expenditures or increasing taxes must make up the reduction in the State Equitable Education Aid. This reduction had the impact of \$.019 per thousand, or \$77 per year Amherst School District tax increase on a \$400,000.

Dwight said the current funding plan has been declared unconstitutional , and a new plan will likely immerge.

Pam Dudoff spoke about the Default Budget, and explained how the Default Budget is calculated.

Pam Dudoff presented a slide, which provided the Default Budget Calculation. Pam told meeting attendees to refer to the green sheet of paper they received titled Default Budget – Amherst School District FY 2007-2008, stating this sheet was more detailed.

Pam told meeting attendees based on the Default Budget Calculation, the total decrease would be \$456,649. The total increases to the Default Budget would be \$253,289.

Therefore, the FY 2006-2007 Adopted Budget is \$21,337,275 less default budget decreases of \$456,659 plus default budget increases of \$253,289. The total FY 2007-2008 Default Budget is \$21,133,915.

Pam stated the Default Budget is \$527,886 less than the Proposed

Budget of \$21,661,801. Pam explained if the Proposed Budget failed at the polls, the Default Budget would be implemented.

The Proposed/Default Budget Summary was presented:

|                          |               |               |
|--------------------------|---------------|---------------|
|                          | Appropriation | Tax / \$1,000 |
| Proposed Budget          | \$21,661,801  | \$9.78        |
| Default Budget           | \$21,133,915  | \$9.49        |
| <br>Proposed vs. Default | <br>\$527,886 | <br>\$0.29    |

Pam Dudoff asked for the Ways and Means position on the Budget as presented. Ways and Means said they unanimously support the operating budget as presented.

Jim O’Mara presented Article 38 – Amherst Education Association Contract as follows:

To see if the school district will vote to approve the cost items included in the collective bargaining agreement reached between the Amherst School Board and the Amherst Education Association which calls for the following increases in salaries and benefits at current staffing levels:

|           |                    |
|-----------|--------------------|
| Year      | Estimated Increase |
| 2007-2008 | \$462,014          |
| 2008-2009 | \$502,008          |
| 2009-2010 | \$531,253          |

And further to raise and appropriate the sum of \$462,014 for the 2008-2008 fiscal year, such sum representing the additional costs attributable to the increase in salaries and benefits over those of the appropriation at current staffing levels paid in the prior fiscal year.

Majority ballot vote required.

Jim presented the AEA Cost Items:

- Cost items of the tentative agreement between the Amherst School Board (ASB) and the Amherst Education Association (AEA).
- Duration of the agreement is three years beginning July 1,

- 2007 and expiring on June 30, 2010.  
 - Cost items presented pursuant to NH RSA 273-A II9b)

The following AEA Cost Items were highlighted:

|                           | FY08           | FY09          | FY10          |
|---------------------------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Salary                    | \$433,685      | \$456,609     | \$476,915     |
| Health Ins. Premiums      | \$(30,002)     | (16,016)      | (9,087)       |
| N.H. Retirement           | \$ 25,154      | \$ 26,483     | \$ 27,661     |
| FICA                      | \$ 26,888      | \$ 28,310     | \$ 29,569     |
| Medicare                  | \$ 6,288       | \$ 6,621      | \$ 6,915      |
| <br>Total Estimated Costs | <br>\$ 462,014 | <br>\$502,008 | <br>\$531,253 |

Jim O’Mara said employees made some concessions with regards to their contract. He said employees agreed to pay more in health costs over the next three years.

Jim presented the AEA Cost Items/ Tax Rate Summary:

|                  | Appropriation | Tax/\$1,000 |
|------------------|---------------|-------------|
| FY 2008 Increase | \$462,014     | \$0.26      |
| FY 2009 Increase | \$502,008     | \$0.28      |
| FY 2010 Increase | \$531,253     | \$0.30      |

*This is an estimated tax rate based on March 2006 Amherst Valuation.*

Jim O’Mara asked for Ways and Means position on Article 38. Ways and Means voted six in favor, none opposed.

Jim O’Mara read Article 39 – Amherst Education Association – Special Meeting as follows:

To see if the Amherst School District, if Article 38 is defeated, will authorize the governing body to call one special meeting, at its option to address Article 38 cost items only.

Majority ballot vote required to pass.

Jim O’Mara presented Article 40 – Facilities Expendable Trust Warrant 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.

Majority vote required.

Meeting attendees were asked to refer to the blue sheet of paper they received upon their arrival for a more detailed explanation regarding the Amherst School District Expendable Trust Fund.

Jim said the Current Trust Fund Balance is \$55,799.76. The Trust Fund was set up for unexplained emergencies.

The Expendable Trust Fund Tax Impact was presented:

|                         | Appropriation | Tax/\$1,000  |
|-------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| Funded through Taxation | \$40,000      | \$ 0.02      |
| Funded through Surplus  | \$40,000      | \$ 0.02      |
| <br>Total Appropriation | <br>\$80,000  | <br>\$ 0.04* |

The \$40,000 funded through the available surplus has already been raised.

Ways and Means position on this article was 5 in favor, 1 opposed.

Pam Dudoff presented Article 41 – Special Education Capital Reserve Warrant as follows:

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. Majority ballot vote required.

Pam Dudoff explained this is not an Expendable Trust Fund. In order to spend funds from this Fund, the board would have to authorize the expenditure. Pam explained there was a 4% decrease in the Special Education Budget this year.

The Special Education Capital Reserve Tax Impact was presented:

|                         | Appropriation | Tax/\$1,000 |
|-------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Funded through Taxation | \$20,000      | \$0.01      |

Pam explained on a \$400,000 home the tax impact would be \$4.00.

Ways and Means opposed this article unanimously. Ways and Means felt it was the wrong year for the article to be brought forward since Amherst was already asking the residents to approve five million in renovations.

Pam Dudoff presented the Bean Field Development *Revised* Warrant Article # 42 as follows:

To see if the school district will vote to authorize the school board to accept \$450,000 from the Town of Amherst 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 appropriate the \$450,000 for the District. This is a non-lapsing article under RSA 32:7 and will not laps 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 non-lapsing. Majority ballot vote required.

Pam explained to meeting attendees, they are not asking the voters for any money.

Dana Redmond said the fields are needed.

Ways and Means position on the article was 5 in favor, 1 opposed. The committee felt the funds should not be used until there is a decision on the school.

Pam told meeting attendees there would be no tax impact from the Bean Field Development.

Meeting attendees were asked to attend the Amherst School District Deliberative Session on February 8, 2007, at 7:00 p.m. They were

also reminded to vote at Souhegan High School on March 13, 2007, from 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Meeting attendees were asked if they had any questions.

Jan Bunker said Pam's presentation regarding the Bean Field Development not costing the taxpayer anything was not accurate.

Pam said the selectmen were scheduled to meet on January 16, 2007, and they would have a much simpler and detailed presentation on the source of the funds at the Deliberative Session.

Dwight Brew thanked meeting attendees for coming to the hearing and he also thanked Mary Jennings, Betty Shankel, Porter Dodge, Gerry St. Amand, Renee Sparks, Jim Miner, members of the School Board as well as the Ways and Means Committee for everyone's hard work on the budget.

Dwight Brew closed the Public Hearing was closed at 8:33 p.m.