

MINUTES
AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD
February 1, 2007
Amherst Town Hall Meeting Room

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Chair Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:07 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, 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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A. Administrator's Reports – Board members were given a copy of the AMS Administrator's Report addressed to the School Board and dated February 1, 2007, by Porter Dodge. They also received a copy of Gerard St. Amand's Report dated February 1, 2007, regarding the Clark and Wilkins Schools.

Gerry St. Amand thanked the PTA for their generosity. Gerry said the Amherst PTA has targeted \$9,000 to support the Clark and Wilkins Schools in purchasing playground materials, designing potential walking trails, and investigating potential new equipment for both sites.

Porter Dodge said student progress reports went home today, February 1, 2007, for Trimester 2.

Porter said the PTA would be hosting a Chili Cook-Off February 11, 2007, from 4-6 p.m. in the AMS cafeteria.

Dwight Brew congratulated the winner of the Spelling Bee, Katrina Jabobs an 8th grader. Dwight also congratulated Peter Emerson, a 7th grader and winner of the Geography Bee.

Dr. Jennings told members of the board New England Assessment Data would go out for the 3rd – 8th graders on February 5, 2007.

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

PUBLIC TIME

Dwight Brew asked board members if they wanted anything pulled from the Consent Agenda.

CONSENT AGENDA

The A. Minutes from November 21, 2006, December 12, 2006, January 4, 2007, and January 9, 2007 were pulled from the Consent Agenda.

The C. Nominations were pulled from the Consent Agenda and it was suggested by the board to be discussed in non-public.

The D. Bid Award Recommendation for printing of Annual Report and Voter's Guide was pulled from the Consent Agenda.

A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Deborah Cort to accept B. Treasurer's Report – December 2006 from the Consent Agenda. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

A motion was made by Nancy Head and seconded by Jim O'Mara to accept the A. 1. Minutes of November 21, 2006, as amended. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Deborah Cort to accept the A. 2. Minutes of December 12, 2006, as amended. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

A motion was made by Deborah Cort and seconded by Pam Dudoff to accept the A. 3. Minutes of January 4, 2007, as amended.

A motion to table the minutes of January 4, 2007, was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Pam Dudoff. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

A motion was made by Pam Dudoff and seconded by Deborah Cort to accept the A. 4. Minutes of January 9, 2007, as amended. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Jim O'Mara suggested the administration look into getting a recording system to help Lyn Jennings with recording the conversations / information of the meeting. He said the meetings are often very detailed and this would help greatly. Jim suggested Betty research how much it would cost to get Lyn an audio recording system.

- A. Collaborative Study Groups at Clark/Wilkins – Gerry St. Amand introduced the following teachers from Clark and Wilkins who presented information to the school board regarding Collaborative Study Groups: Kathie McIntyre, Brenda Martucci, Gail Polio, and Linda Mikkola. Gerry also introduced other teachers involved in CSG's however, they did not present to the board: Sharon Verrill, Maureen Lessard, Joanie Edgarton, Karen Mayes, and Jane Blais.

PRESENTATIONS

Gerry explained they have a diverse group involved in CSG's including Administrators, Nurses, Teachers, and Para-educators.

A handout detailing the purpose of a CFG was provided to board members. The purpose of a CFG is to provide professional development that translates into improved student learning.

Gail Polio, a 4th Grade teacher at Wilkins told members of the board it was her 4th year involved in CSG's. She said the reason why many teachers commit to CSG's is because it provides them with the opportunity for structured discussion amongst their peers. She said the CSG opportunity offers equal speak time, a consistent approach, and enables them an opportunity towards increased productivity.

Brenda Martucci, told members of the board it was her 5th year being involved in CSG's. Brenda said she finds the experience rewarding and unique each year. She said the staff is committed to being the best staff they can be. Brenda said CSG's allow the teachers to share student work and their own professional work amongst their peers.

Linda Mikkola told members of the board it was her 31st year of teaching. Linda presented an example of a CSG topic. Linda said as a result of the topic, all grade teachers have a substitute notebook, and an emergency plan in the event they are absent from their class.

Linda said another teacher dilemma one year involved numerous

absences recorded by children. As a result of this as a CSG topic, it was decided when a student has numerous absences, a letter would be sent home to the parents emphasizing the importance of children being in school and on time.

Kathy McIntyre told members of the board it was her 30th year teaching and she is a Media Specialist at Clark/Wilkins. Kathy said six years ago she had an opportunity to join the CSG group as a Coach/Facilitator. Kathy said it has been the best experience and most energizing thing she's ever done in her career as a teacher.

Kathy explained what makes CSG's different from meetings:

- 1) All work is done with protocols – structured conversation.
- 2) Work with norms.
- 3) Make connections.
- 4) Reflect on their work.

Kathy told members of the board they were welcome to come to one of the CSG meetings anytime.

Nancy Head asked how often the CSG's meet. Kathy McIntyre explained they have two groups consisting of 17 members each, and 2 coaches in each group. Kathy said they will meet 8 times this year.

Kathy said everyone identifies topics they would like addressed and with the coaches they determine what type of protocol to use to approach the subject.

Kathy said they encourage speaking but it is not mandatory and they expect members get equal speak time if they want to speak.

Nancy Head asked when the meetings take place and she was told they have five after school meetings and 3 half-day meetings.

Dwight Brew thanked all the presenters and the supporters who showed up. He said the board appreciated and enjoyed the presentation by the teachers.

- B. Environmental Camp Recommendation – Porter Dodge provided board members with a copy of the Report of the Environmental School Evaluation Committee.

Porter said the ad hoc committee was established last fall to

evaluate the three environmental schools. Porter said the Committee convened its final meeting on January 3, 2007. He said the nine members represented a cross-section of the community, school administration, and staff, presenting balanced viewpoints, valued dialog, and healthy debate. The committee members were as follows: SAU Director of Curriculum and Professional Development, Nicole Heimarck, AMS Principal, Porter Dodge, AMS Science Coordinator, Peter Desnoyers, AMS Integrated Arts Coordinator, Ron Reid, Ways and Means Committee Member, Peg Bennett, Amherst School Board Member, Pam Dudoff, Parent, Susan McNary, Parent, Peter de Bruyn Kops, and Souhegan HS Community Council Member, Brittany Leknes.

Porter said the general charge of the committee was to evaluate all three of the environmental school programs.

The report stated committee members researched and discussed the programs at all three grade levels, including the possibility of altering those offered at the sixth and eighth grades.

The committee explored all of the options carefully and concluded the Environmental Schools make a significant contribution to our students' education through experiential education directly tied to the curriculum in a number of subject areas, team building and the overnight experience. Each grade level presented documentation to show how their curriculum tied to the Environmental School.

The data presented showed how the 6th and 8th grade trips have the strongest ties to the curriculum, the 7th grade trip is most disruptive to other programs at AMS, and the 7th grade trip can most likely be replaced by local programs.

Porter thanked the entire committee for all of their hard work and willingness to address this complex topic. He said the final decision for the committee was a difficult one.

Porter said in a 5-3 vote, the committee made the following recommendations to the Amherst School Board:

1. The sixth and eighth grade Environmental schools should remain as part of the Amherst Middle School program. The future science and social studies curriculum revisions will dictate whether they continue, and in what format.
2. The seventh grade Pinkham Notch program should not be

reinstated at the Amherst Middle School. Porter said the trip in March will be the last trip to Pinkham.

3. The committee strongly recommends that a replacement program be designed and offered to the seventh grade, bringing guest lecturers, and specialized instruction to the Middle School, as well as offer “day trips” in lieu of the overnight experience. This program need not be science related but instead may venture into the arts or other curriculum areas as the school sees fit.

Pam Dudoff said she commends the leadership of the committee for allowing candid conversation, which allowed them to come to a not so easy decision.

Dwight Brew expressed his appreciation to the members who served on the committee.

A motion was made by Nancy Head and seconded by Pam Dudoff to accept the Report and Recommendation of the Environmental School Evaluation Committee.

Discussion followed.

Jim O’Mara asked how Dr. Jennings felt about this decision to continue the 6th and 8th grade Environmental Schools and discontinue the 7th grade Environmental School.

Dr. Jennings said she supports the Committee’s recommendation and she feels very strongly the program should match the curriculum. She also questioned how much they should expect the parents to spend. Dr. Jennings said since they are eliminating the 7th grade trip, parents would get a little break from funding trips. She said going forward they would need to fund trips in 6th, 8th and 10th grade.

Dr. Jennings said she encourages the administration and school board to keep an eye on the 6th and 8th grade curriculums and to keep evaluating the trips as appropriate.

All board members voted in favor of the motion to accept the Report and Recommendation of the Environmental School Evaluation Committee and the motion passed.

Jim O’Mara offered a personal observation stating while attending

one of the Environmental School Trips, he saw the faculty work from 5:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m. Jim said the level of commitment it takes by the volunteers is very impressive. Jim said it is not a field trip for the faculty, they work.

- A. November 2, 2006 minutes – Addendum of policy to minutes - Dwight Brew told members of the board at the November 2, 2006, school board meeting, board members voted to adopt the Wellness Policy however, the minutes do not reflect the adoption of the policy.

ACTION ITEMS

A motion was made by Pam Dudoff and seconded by Deborah Cort to affirm the school board did indeed vote during the meeting of November 2, 2006, to adopt the Wellness Policy.

Discussion followed. Board members agreed the title needs to be corrected and the adoption date of November 2, 2006 needs to be included on the document.

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

- A. Review of Budget Process – Board/Admin/Ways and Means - Dr. Jennings thought it would be a good time to review how everyone thought the budget process went this year.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

CJ Butler from Ways and Means said she thought it would be a tough year because they had a new Superintendent and Business Administrator. CJ said she was appreciative of the administrations patience with Ways and Means. CJ said she was very pleased with the quality of the data and cooperation of the budget process.

CJ said she thought the Budget Goals presentation was wonderful, it set the expectations of what they were going to see in the budget.

CJ said the individual presentations by Porter Dodge and Gerry St. Amand were excellent and very helpful.

CJ said Ways and Means always received answers to their questions in a timely manner and the spirit of cooperation was excellent.

CJ said the Ways and Means feedback was not just heard, but accepted in some instances.

CJ had one recommendation for future budgets – not to confuse the voter. CJ said fewer warrant articles and issues are better.

CJ said last year they received a binder containing a lot of backup data for the budget. CJ said Ways and Means found this information very helpful last year. CJ said maybe they could offer a members only website with this type of data because it is very helpful.

CJ's last recommendation was to make sure all handouts were dated and revisions noted.

Dana Redmond said the quality of the hiring at the SAU level has been very good, for example the Facilities Manager. Dana suggested they look at adding the Purchasing position because he believes they will reap some benefits if it is added.

Jim Jacobs noted the lack of coordination between the Souhegan and Amherst School Districts. If one of the districts is going to have a big impact on the tax rate, they should coordinate their requests for the year so they don't both make large requests in the same year. Jim suggested there be dialog between the various committees.

Dwight Brew said Souhegan did take into consideration Amherst's requests this year.

Dr. Jennings said that is why Souhegan did not bring the Wellness Facility forward this year.

Betty Shankel said Souhegan was very cognizant of the Master Plan proposal by Amherst.

Pam Dudoff commended the administration for an incredibly thorough job. Pam said she met with Gerry St. Amand to review his budget and every line was looked at and thought out thoroughly. She said it showed a lot of work was done by the administration.

Dwight said he has been involved in the budget process for the past seven years and this budget had the fewest revisions and he thanked the administration.

CJ Butler commented on the seamless transition involving a new Superintendent and Business Administrator.

CJ said she thought seeing Gerry and Porter as the building heads explaining what their needs were was very impressive and helpful.

Porter said he and Gerry were able to do what they did with regards to the budget because of Jim Miner. Porter said Jim is taking on a lot of the issues he used to handle on a day-to-day basis. Porter said Jim is doing a fantastic job.

Pam Dudoff said we hired a new law firm and was wondering if they could provide some feedback on their performance. Dr. Jennings said they would have liked a better turn around time than they received. Pam asked if feedback was given to the attorney and Dr. Jennings said yes, they let them know they were concerned about the turn around time on some of the issues brought forward.

Betty Shankel thanked Ways and Means for being so helpful during the budget process. Betty said she appreciated all the help she received from everyone, the administration, Mary Jennings, Ways and Means and the board.

Gerry St. Amand said each year the budget process has gotten better but this year by far was the best year and any improvement would be just fine-tuning the process.

Nancy Head said she wanted to include thanking Kathy Skoglund for all her work as well.

B. Charge – Master Plan Committee (2nd reading) – Board members received a copy of the Amherst School Board Charge to the Master Plan Committee.

Dr. Jennings said she was bringing the Master Plan Committee's charge forward again for the second reading.

Dwight Brew provided board members with a handout he created entitled Amherst School Board Charge to the Building Oversight Committee.

Dr. Jennings said they need more participation in the Master Planning process. She said they also need to set up a Building Committee and they need to be ready to move on to Phase II – which involves publicity and site selection.

Nancy Head said the Building Committee should be a separate committee and not under the Master Plan Committee. She said the

Building Committee should have two school board members on it.

Pam Dudoff suggested the name be changed from Amherst School Board Charge to the Building Oversight Committee to the Amherst School Board Charge to the Renovations Oversight Committee. Nancy Head thought this was a good idea and other board members agreed.

Jim O'Mara suggested under Voting Members they change the Community Member with Building Experience to a Community Member with Commercial Building Experience. Board members liked this suggestion.

Jim O'Mara asked what other issues besides change orders did the administration see the voting members voting on. Dr. Jennings said she believed they would only be voting on change orders.

Pam Dudoff said she thought it looked great but asked what they planned on doing with the Brick School and the conversations which need to take place between Amherst, Mont Vernon and Souhegan. She also asked about the Mont Vernon Tuition Agreement. Pam said both these conversations influence each other as well as the Master Plan.

Nancy Head said this is why they have a Mont Vernon and Souhegan representative on the Committee.

Pam said she would like to see something in the charge to show conversations are going to take place.

Dwight Brew said the Mont Vernon Tuition Agreement as well as the future of the Brick School should be sub committee's that report to the board.

Nancy Head said they need four committees:

- 1) Master Plan Committee
- 2) Building Committee
- 3) Mont Vernon Tuition Agreement
- 4) SAU Committee – Brick School''

Dwight said the Brick School is an SAU issue and should be discussed at the SAU board level.

Pam asked if they discussed the Brick School at the four Board

Chairs Meeting. Dwight said no. Pam suggested it be discussed at the four Board Chairs meeting.

The suggestions for the Amherst School Board Charge were summarized as follows:

- Include under number 4. Committee shall coordinate the SAU Brick School and Tuition Agreement.
- Separate the Building Committee out as a separate committee.
- Add a second board member to the Building Committee.
- The authority to expend funds will be through the Master Plan Committee or the Building Committee.

Jim O'Mara said he doesn't think there is a need for a sub-committee to have spending authority. Jim said he thinks a construction manager may be needed to oversee the project.

Nancy Head said she called around to some of the other school districts that had building projects to see how they managed their building committee.

Dwight said in order to finish in early 08, assuming there is a successful vote to proceed with the Renovations Project; he would like to have someone in the buildings early in the summer.

Dwight said the board needs to decide on what they want to do regarding the selection of an architectural firm. He said he is very happy with the firm they've used so far but wants to know if the board wants to go out and solicit bids from other potential firms. Dwight said we have to make sure we are getting the best value for the taxpayer.

Nancy Head said Marinase did recommended hiring a construction manager to help oversee the project.

Jim O'Mara asked how much authority they have to deviate from the current plans. Nancy Head said the current plans are conceptual and we don't have anything beyond these conceptual plans. Nancy said once the architect gets busy with the drawings, some plans may get changed, the current plans are not the final ones however, the amount of money cannot get changed. Jim said he wanted to emphasize his concern authorizing the sub-committee to approve up to \$10,000 for change orders and said he is not sure what amount of money he would be comfortable with allowing them to

authorize. Jim said the committee is not responsible to the voters, through an elected office, but he is as a school board member.

Dwight Brew asked if they pulled out #'s 3 and 4 from the Amherst School Board charge and revisited them at the next meeting if not sooner, would that enable board members to feel more comfortable with what they were voting on as it related to charge. Board members agreed to pull items 3 and 4 from the charge.

A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Deborah Cort to include the amendments of the Amherst School Board Charge to the Building Oversight Committee as discussed which would include the amendments suggested by Pam and Jim and striking #'s 3 and 4 of the charge which will be addressed at the earliest possible opportunity.

A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Nancy Head to accept the Master Plan Committee's charge as presented. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Dwight asked members of the board if they were comfortable with Nancy Head requesting a bid from the incumbent architect. Board members agreed, they were comfortable with Nancy obtaining a bid from the incumbent architect.

Nancy highlighted some of the publicity being done regarding the Master Plan Renovations Project – Public Forums, Tours, Administrators are writing articles that will be in local newspapers, Deborah Cort wrote a booklet which will be handed out, coffees are being held, and tours of Clark, Wilkins and the Middle School are being held for town personnel.

Peg Bennett said there is a perception out there if a taxpayer votes for Phase I – the Renovation Project, then they are also voting for Phase II. Peg said she has made it very clear Phase I is the Renovation Project and if a voter votes to approve the Renovation Project that is all they are approving, spending \$4.9M for school renovations on Clark, Wilkins and the Middle School.

Nancy Head said the renovations can stand-alone and they do not impact Phase II of the project.

Dwight Brew suggested one member of the nine voting members of the Master Plan Committee be Nancy Head.

A motion was made by Dwight Brew and seconded by Pam Dudoff to appoint Nancy Head to the Master Plan Committee and the Master Plan Renovations Oversight Committee. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Dwight said they will wait to appoint a second school board member to the committee until after the elections in March. Deborah Cort is currently on the Master Plan Committee and will remain on the committee until after the March 13, 2007 elections.

C. 2007-2008 School Calendar Planning – Board members were given a copy of the SAU 39 Proposed 2007-2008 School Calendar. Dr. Jennings asked for input from the board. Dr. Jennings said the first day of school for students would be on August 29, 2007. Dr. Jennings said there would be two In-Service Days, the first will be held on October 9, 2007, and the second will be held on November 22, 2007. The tentative last day of school for Amherst and Mont Vernon is June 12, 2008.

Dr. Jennings asked for feedback regarding the vacations as proposed. Dr. Jennings said they are adding an additional day off during the Thanksgiving holiday, since they have found attendance to be very poor the day before Thanksgiving however, it adds another day to the calendar in June.

Jim O'Mara asked if the administration thought about eliminating the February vacation. Jim said he doesn't have an opinion either way, but the students would get out earlier in June

Pam Dudoff said a lot of families go on vacation in February so eliminating this vacation would be difficult.

Jim O'Mara asked if the administration has measured the attendance for hosting Professional Development after a holiday. Dr. Jennings said she didn't have that information but would get it.

OTHER

Dwight told members of the board the next school board meeting was scheduled for March 1, 2007.

A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Pam Dudoff to enter into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3 II (a) By roll call vote, O'Mara – yes; Dudoff- yes; Brew- yes; Cort- yes; and Head – yes. The board entered into Non-Public at 8:15 p.m.

**NON PUBLIC
SESSION: RSA 91-A:3
II (a)**

Pam Dudoff moved, seconded by Nancy Head to come out of Non-Public session. By roll call vote, O'Mara – yes; Dudoff- yes; Brew- yes; Cort- yes; and Head – yes, the board voted to come out of non-public session at 9:05 p.m.

Mary Jennings nominated Christine MacKelvey to fill the position of Computer Education teacher at the Amherst Middle School.

**OTHER -
NOMINATIONS**

Nancy Head moved, seconded by Pam Dudoff, to accept the Superintendent's recommendation. All voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Mary Jennings is checking to see if short-term substitutes need to be approved by the Board.

Motion to adjourn made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Deborah Cort. All members voted in favor of the motion and the meeting was adjourned at 9:08 p.m.

**REVIEW OF
MEETING /
ADJOURNMENT**