

MINUTES
AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD
October 24, 2006
Amherst Middle School Cafeteria

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CALL TO ORDER

Chair Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Present:

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

Administrative Team: Bruce Chakrin, Porter Dodge, Nicole Heimarck, Jim Miner, Elizabeth Shankel, Kathy Skoglund, and Gerry St. Amand

Amherst Master Plan Committee: John Schwope – Mont Vernon Representative

Minutes Recorder: Lyn Jennings

ATTENDANCE

Board Members received copies of the principals' reports in their board packets. Dwight Brew asked if board members had any questions about the principal's reports.

Pam Dudoff made a couple of requests regarding the Principal's reports. Pam asked once the Collaborative Study Groups have completed some of their professional development sessions, with staff at the Clark/Wilkins schools, a presentation be given to the board as to how these sessions are working for the administration. Pam suggested the John's Hopkins University CTY Talent Search be publicized. Pam said this is an opportunity to show the public we are doing something regarding gifted and talented students.

Pam requested a presentation be done regarding NWEA testing. She said she would like to see how the testing went, is the information the administration received helpful and was it what they expected.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

A. Expendable Trust Proposal – Snowguards at Wilkins School –

The Public Hearing was opened by Dwight Brew at 6:33 p.m. Board members received a copy of the proposal submitted by the Melanson Company to install snowguards at the Wilkins School. Meeting attendees were told the Melanson Company was the sole bidder on the project. The bid was for \$28,554.

Dwight asked if anyone from the public wanted to address the board, but no comments were forthcoming.

Dwight closed the Public Hearing at 6:34 p.m.

PUBLIC HEARING

ACTION ITEMS

A. Vote – Allocation of Expendable Trust - A motion was made by Jim O'Mara and seconded by Deborah Cort to authorize Jim Miner to proceed with the installation of the snowguards at the Wilkins School by the Melanson Company for a total of \$28,554 since the Melanson Company holds the original warranty. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

A. AMS Classroom – A motion was made by Pam Dudoff and seconded by Deborah Cort to enter into Non-Public session pursuant to RSA: 91-A:3;(a) at 6:43 p.m to discuss personnel matters. By roll call vote, each member of the board voted in favor: Cort-yes; Head-yes; O'Mara-yes; Dudoff-yes; Brew-yes. The motion passed.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION

The board discussed a personnel matter.

Pam Dudoff moved to come out of Non-Public at 6:58 p.m., and Nancy Head seconded.

By roll call vote, each member of the Board voted in favor: Cort-yes; Head-yes; O'Mara-yes; Dudoff-yes; and Brew-yes. The motion passed.

The Public Forum was opened at 7:00 p.m.

PUBLIC FORUM

Dr. Mary Jennings, Superintendent welcomed meeting attendees.

Amherst School Board members were introduced – Jim O'Mara, Pam Dudoff, Dwight Brew, Nancy Head, and Deborah Cort.

Master Plan Committee members were introduced – John Schwope – Mont Vernon Representative, Gerry St. Amand – Clark and Wilkins Principal, Porter Dodge – AMS Principal, Deborah Cort, Amherst School Board Member, Nancy Head – Master Plan Committee Chair, Jim Miner, Director of Buildings and Grounds and Dr. Mary Jennings, Superintendent.

Dr. Jennings said the options would be presented and reviewed by the Amherst School Board and they would vote on the best option in early November.

Dr. Jennings said this meeting was set up so the public had an opportunity to ask questions prior to their vote.

Dr. Jennings said the buildings are now obstacles for student learning. The administration works around the obstacles however the Master Plan helps to solve these obstacles.

Dr. Jennings introduced Gerry St. Amand, the Principal for Clark/Wilkins.

Gerry St. Amand highlighted some of the problems/issues facing the Clark/Wilkins schools.

Gerry said this year they have two portable classrooms which house four fourth grade classes. He said they need to maintain a separate

security plan for these portable classrooms.

Gerry said they have excellent communication with the portables this year they have two-way radios and phone capabilities.

He said a negative aspect of the portable classrooms is the student and teachers are isolated from the rest of the building. He said a lot of traveling is required between the portables and the main building.

Gerry St. Amand provided a picture of a classroom at Wilkins, which housed four staff members and provided students with necessary academic support.

Gerry said the electricity at Clark/Wilkins was inadequate. Often times he said the faculty needs to be cautious as to how much is plugged in at once.

Gerry said the art room provides not much space to move around and a lot of the artwork and supplies are stored on the stage.

Gerry said they order materials throughout the year because they are unable to store them all at once. Gerry said the 1st – 4th graders are offered a weekly art class. Gerry said the kids, are suffering, they are only able to offer a class once a week because of the lack of class space.

Gerry said at Wilkins they don't really have a music room. He said the music teacher's room is not the classroom teachers often opt to be next to because of the noise.

Gerry said they are not just addressing the future but they are talking about right now as evident by the slides he presented to meeting attendees.

Gerry provided a picture of what they refer to as the "Cafetorium" which was a picture of the combination cafeteria, gymnasium and auditorium. Gerry said they have three lunch periods at Wilkins and serve up to 210 students at each lunch period.

He said most children have ten to twelve minutes to eat. He said while lunch takes place, they are not able to offer any other programs. Gerry said lunchtime is the most challenging part of the day, and unfortunately they are unable to offer students any more time to eat.

Amherst Middle School Principal, Porter Dodge provided some background information on the Amherst Middle School.

Porter said the Middle School was built in 1974 and was built to handle 700 students. It is able to house 32 classrooms with no extra programs.

Porter provided some of the problems with the Amherst Middle School.

Porter said some teachers have no permanent classroom, they are floating. Porter said they are not able to put up children's work around the room. He said the teachers as well as the students are unable to personalize their space. He said they have no place to call their own.

Porter said often times classes are held in the library, which makes it difficult for the students to, actually study in the library.

Porter said some of the stage area has been converted to classroom space, which is inconvenient at lunch or assembly time.

Office space was needed so they converted one of the original 32 classrooms into a Special Education Office which houses 13 professionals and paraprofessionals.

Porter explained they have four grades in three lunches and they have to split the 6th grade, which eats with either the 7th or 8th grade.

Porter said the Middle School was built to house 700-750 student's max and their capacity today is at 840 students. Porter said the new wing really replaced the portable classrooms.

Nancy Head, Master Plan Committee Chair provided meeting attendees with some background information .

Nancy said space needs have been identified since 1996. Nancy said in 2001 the voters of Amherst approved a partial solution, the 12-classroom addition to Amherst Middle School.

The goals of the Master Plan were presented:

- Respond to curriculum needs
- Improve functionality and reduce maintenance
- Provide a safe and healthy physical environment
- Serve community needs

Specific Objectives of the Master Plan were highlighted:

- Remove 5th grade from Middle School
- Maintain class sizes at present levels
- Accommodate existing space needs, including expansion of core facilities
- Upgrade existing building envelope and finishes as required
- Upgrade mechanical and electrical systems
- Provide for future expansion
- Accommodate Mont Vernon students
- Accommodate SAU facilities

Nancy Head provided the criteria for evaluating the Expansion Options:

- Does it meet minimum educational goals?
- How does it resolve site constraints?
- How does it address limitations of existing buildings?
- Does it allow for expansion or changes in the future?

Results of the Master Plan:

- There are six expansion options presented in the Master Plan.
- Options 1a and 1b involve the creation of a new

school at the Baboosic Lake road site.

- Options 2a through 2d explore variations on expansion at Wilkins School.

The Architect of the project, Tibor Farkas presented the highlights of each option as well as the advantages and disadvantages for each option.

Expansion Plan Option 1a:

- Renovate Clark for Kindergarten and SAU Offices
- Renovate Wilkins for Grades 1-2
- Build a new 600 student Grade 3-5 school
- Minor renovations & addition at AMS
- Reassign Brick School to town.

Tibor Farkas explained the Clark School is on a small site consisting of 2½ acres, which precludes any further expansion of this site.

Tibor said parking is tight and the student pick-up/drop off causes congestion on Foundry Street.

Mr. Farkas highlighted the major changes that would take place at the Wilkins school. Tibor said with the proposed changes, the Wilkins school would be able to recapture some of the space they've lost.

Also highlighted were the renovations, which would take place at the AMS.

Mr. Farkas said the new school, which is proposed to house Grades 3-5, would be built on the Baboosic Lake Site, which consists of 21 acres. Of the 21 acres, Mr. Farkas explained 7 acres are conservation land and cannot be developed. If this is the option chosen, they will also be building playgrounds.

A summary of Option 1a was provided which detailed the costs of each facility. The total cost of Option 1a was an estimated \$23,130,000 before State Aid.

The advantages were provided for Option 1a:

- Least disturbance at AMS and Wilkins
- Progressive grade levels avoids competition among schools
- Major construction at new site is less costly, easier logistically and allows better planning
- Further expansion feasible

The disadvantages provided for Option 1a include:

- Site development costs at BLR greater than average; but cost purchasing alternate sight would also be high
- Students will pass through four schools from Grades K through 8

Mr. Farkas explained Expansion Plan Option 1b was similar to 1a with the exception being the Brick School would be renovated to

house the SAU offices.

Expansion Plan Option 1b:

- Renovate Clark for Kindergarten & part of 1st grade
- Renovate Wilkins for Grades 1-3
- Build a new 400 student Grade 4-5 school
- Minor renovations & additions at AMS
- Renovate Brick School for SAU

A summary of Option 1b was provided which detailed the costs to each facility. The total cost of Option 1b was an estimated \$20,795,000 before State Aid.

The advantages were provided for Option 1b:

- Least disturbance at AMS & Wilkins
- Progressive grade levels avoids competition among schools
- Major construction at new site is less costly, easier logistically and allows better planning
- Further expansion feasible at BLR site

The disadvantages provided for Option 1b include:

- Site development costs at BLR greater than average; but cost purchasing alternate site would also be high
- Students will pass through four schools from Grades K through 8
- There are no extra classrooms at Wilkins for future programs

Mr. Farkas explained Expansion Option 2a involves expanding the Wilkins School. He said there is a problem with this option – it is very difficult to increase the number of students at the Wilkins School since the general layout was designed for 400 students.

Expansion Plan Option 2a:

- Renovate Clark for Kindergarten and SAU offices
- Add 22 classrooms, new Multi-Purpose room and other core facilities at Wilkins for Grades 1-5
- Renovate Wilkins
- Minor renovations and additions at AMS
- Reassign Brick School to town

A summary of Option 2a was provided which detailed the costs to each facility. The total cost of Option 2a was an estimated \$14,500,000 before State Aid.

The advantages were provided for Option 2a:

- Eliminates BLR site as a future expansion project – therefore this land can be sold to offset project costs
- Allows students to stay in a single school for all 5 grades of elementary school

The disadvantages provided for Option 2a include:

- Wilkins Elementary will have a starting enrollment of 913 students with a maximum capacity of 940 – a very large school especially in this neighborhood.
- Building corridors and core facilities at Wilkins were designed for 400 students, and must be expanded. Final layout will have less than ideal circulation & compromises on core facilities
- Site congestion at Wilkins will be more severe, with a negative impact on the neighborhood.

Expansion Plan Option 2b involves:

- Renovate Clark for Kindergarten and most of 1st grade
- Add net 19 classrooms, new Multi-Purpose room and other core facilities at Wilkins for Grades 1-5
- Renovate Wilkins
- Minor renovations & additions at AMS
- Renovate Brick School for SAU offices

A summary of Option 2b was provided which detailed the costs to each facility. The total cost of Option 2b was an estimated \$14,500,000 before State Aid.

The advantages were provided for Option 2b:

- Eliminates BLR site as a future expansion project therefore, this land can be sold to offset project costs.
- Allows to students to stay in a single school for most of grades of elementary school. The Brick school is recycled and put to use that voters are comfortable with.

The disadvantages provided for Option 2b include:

- Wilkins Elementary will have a starting enrollment of 820 students with a maximum capacity of 880 – still a very large school for this neighborhood
- Wilkins Elementary corridors & core facilities were designed for 400 students, and must be expanded. Final layout will have less than ideal circulation & compromises on core facilities.
- Site congestion at Wilkins will be more severe than presently, with a negative impact on the neighborhood.

Mr. Farkas explained the only difference with Expansion Plan Option 2c is that the SAU offices would lease commercial space. He explained by leasing space, they would not get any State Aid.

Expansion Plan Option 2c includes:

- Renovate Clark for Kindergarten and most of 1st

- grade
- Add net 19 classrooms, new Multi-Purpose room and other core facilities at Wilkins for Grades 1-5
- Renovate Wilkins
- Minor renovations & additions at AMS
- Lease commercial space for SAU offices

A summary of Option 2c was provided which detailed the costs to each facility. The total cost of Option 2c was an estimated \$13,695,000.

The advantages were provided for Option 2c:

- Eliminates BLR site as a future expansion project therefore, this land can be sold to offset project costs.
- Allows a student to stay in a single school for most grades of elementary school.

The disadvantages provided for Option 2c include:

- Wilkins Elementary will have a starting enrollment of 820 students with a maximum capacity of 880 – still a very large school for this neighborhood
- Wilkins Elementary corridors & core facilities were designed for 400 students, and must be expanded. Final layout will have less than ideal circulation & compromises on core facilities.
- Site congestion at Wilkins will be more severe than presently, with a negative impact on the neighborhood.
- Leasing space for SAU facilities is not cost effective.

Mr. Farkas explained Option 2d was the minimalist option. He said this is the option that requires the least amount of work. If this option were chosen, Grade 5 would remain at AMS.

Expansion Plan Option 2d:

- Renovate Clark for Kindergarten and part of 1st grade
- Renovate Wilkins and expand core facilities
- Add net 9 classrooms, special classrooms & an additional double classroom at Wilkins for Grades 1-4
- Minor renovations and additions at AMS
- Renovate Brick school for SAU offices

A summary of Option 2d was provided which detailed the costs to each facility. The total cost of Option 2d was an estimated \$10,000,000 before State Aid.

The advantages were provided for Option 2d:

- Eliminates BLR site as a future expansion project

therefore, this land can be sold to offset project costs.

- Allows a student to stay in a single school for most grades of elementary school.
- Least costly option

The disadvantages provided for Option 2d include:

- This option does not allow room for further expansion, and may not accommodate Mont Vernon students after 2011.
- Grade 5 is kept at AMS
- Wilkins expansion problematic from many perspectives.

Once all the options were presented, Mr. Farkas made some comparisons between different options.

Comparison between Options 1a & 1b:

- Option 1a costs 12% more (after State aid) than Option 1b, a difference of \$1.7 million.
- Both options will allow for future expansion at the BLR site.
- Option 1a provides for future program expansion at Wilkins, while Option 1b does not.
- Neither option will adversely impact existing neighborhood around Clark and Wilkins.
- Option 1a reassigns Brick School to the Town, while Option 1b renovates it for SAU – either solution has pros and cons.
- Option 1a is the preferred long-term solution, but Option 1b is also a reasonable and cost-effective response.

Comparison between Option 2a & 2b:

- Option 2b will impact Wilkins less and is thus preferable.
- SAU will maintain its own identity at Brick School.
- Option 2b is also marginally less costly.
- Therefore, Option 2b is preferable to Option 2a.

Comparison between Option 2b & 2c:

- Renovating SAU facilities receives State aid at 40% of construction costs.
- Leasing commercial available space results in no State aid.
- Payback on renovating SAU facilities after accounting for State aid is 4.5 years.
- Therefore, renovation of SAU facilities (vs. leasing) is highly recommended.
- Option 2b is preferable to Option 2c.

Comparison between Option 2b & 2d:

- Option 2d has two major flaws that the other Options do not have:
- It retains Grade 5 at AMS
- may not accommodate Mont Vernon students after 2011 without any increase in class sizes.
- Option 2d is the least expensive expansion plan – it costs 30% less than Option 2b.

Comparison between Options 1a & 2b:

- Option 1a costs 37% more than Option 2b, a difference of \$6.0 million after accounting for State Aid.
- Option 1a will not adversely impact existing neighborhood around Clark and Wilkins.
- Option 1a will provide optimal facilities for Grades 3-5 and will reduce congestion at each of the other three schools.
- Option 1a provides for future expandability.
- Option 1a is therefore the preferred long-term solution.

Mr. Farkas closed his presentation by presenting a ranking of the expansion plan options.

- Option 1a is the most comprehensive response to existing needs.
- Option 1b provides nearly the same advantages as 1a.
- Option 2b is the best of the Wilkins expansion options.
- Option 2a has the largest impact at Wilkins
- Option 2c involves leasing space for the SAU, which is not cost effective.
- Option 2d is the least acceptable long-term response since it does not meet the criteria in terms of educational goals.

Dwight Brew, the Amherst School Board Chair presented the financial impact of each option. Dwight said Mr. Farkas' presentation presented the capital cost for each option prior to State Aid being factored into the equation.

Dwight Brew thanked the SAU Administration, Gerry St. Amand, Betty Shankel, Dr. Mary Jennings, and Jim Miner for pulling this information together.

Dwight highlighted in Option 2d which was considered the minimalist solution, the revenue offset was an estimated \$1,182,300 Pre-2011 received from Mont Vernon. Dwight said Post-2011 if Mont Vernon wasn't sending their students to the AMS this would

have to be factored in as revenue lost.

Dwight highlighted the next steps in the process:

- October 24, 2006 – Public Forum
- November 2, 2006 – Board votes on a single option for further development.
- December 2006 – January 2007 – Board votes on Budget and Expansion Option.
- January 2007 Public Hearing on Budget and Warrant Articles.
- February 2007 Amherst Deliberative Session
- March 13, 2007 – Town votes.

Dwight Brew welcomed questions and comments from meeting attendees.

Peter Hanson said he has heard the BLR site has a lot of ledge. He asked if this was true.

Mr. Farkas explained where the ledge was and where the proposed building would sit.

Peter Hanson asked if they were able to get a firm fixed price due to the ledge problem, since they really don't know what it will cost at this point due to the ledge.

Mr. Farkas said it was not a firm fixed price because they do not have an approved proposal.

Peter asked why not after the current agreement with Mont Vernon, since they have the most available land for expansion, have Amherst share in the construction costs with Mont Vernon in Mont Vernon.

Dwight Brew said Mont Vernon has expressed a willingness to discuss the expansion options with Amherst but they had not considered building in Mont Vernon as part of their previous discussions.

Noel Ward commented that the Brick School needs a lot of work and if they decide to turn it over to the town, does the town want it.

Barbara Belpine who is a first grade teacher at Clark School questioned why 4 out of the 6 options presented split the 1st graders between Clark and Wilkins. She believed by splitting the 1st graders between the schools, it would have a negative impact on their education.

Peter Gagnon a resident who abuts the BLR property asked what size core facility can be developed at the BLR site. Gerry, a Civil Engineer explained the facility will be built to house 600 students and can be expanded to house an additional 100 students; therefore, it can accommodate a total of 700 students.

Peter Gagnon asked if the cost of the emergency access road was included in the plan. Gerry said yes, it was included.

Peter Gagnon asked if it was a state requirement to have a second access road to the site. Gerry said no, the state does not require it.

Karen Gagnon commented how she couldn't imagine crossing 101 safely.

Dr. Jennings said it wasn't a question of whether any or one of these plans was chosen, curriculum enrichment would be met.

Dr. Jennings said the Baboosic Lake plans offer the most opportunity for enrichment.

Dr. Jennings said they would be able to provide some daycare facilities, a big enough art class, and a big enough cafeteria if one of the Baboosic Lake plans was chosen.

Dr. Jennings said there are many possibilities if either option 1a or 1b are chosen.

She said while developing these plans, they worked with their educational goals in mind.

Ann Logan said several years ago Amherst was going to build a high school with Milford off the 101 extension and were told no way. She suggested before Amherst decides to build, they should get the necessary approvals first.

The administration said they found the local DOT office very supportive of them developing on the BLR site.

Ann Logan asked Dwight if they've had any discussions with Mont Vernon on buying land in Mont Vernon and building a school. Dwight said, they have not had this type of discussion with Mont Vernon.

Mr. Sullivan suggested Amherst get the necessary approvals prior to building on the BLR site.

Dwight said that they had already presented a plan for a school on the Baboosic Lake Road site with a single entrance that was acceptable to the

Fire Chief. We were exploring if a second entrance off from 101 would also be acceptable.

Dave Peters asked what percentage of students at Clark, Wilkins and AMS were Mont Vernon students. Dwight said Mont Vernon only has 7th and 8th graders and he estimated 50 students in each grade.

Dave Peters commented on the plans to expand at Wilkins. He said already there is a problem with turning and entry space and they need to figure out a way to get traffic off the road during pickup times.

Mr. Peters asked if the new building at Baboosic Lake would have softball fields. Mr. Farkas said yes, it would have two good size recreation fields.

Mr. Peters said he voted for the high school improvements back in 2003 but hopes this time when he goes to vote, they have a more concrete and coherent proposal.

Ellen Grudzien asked where the kids would be housed during renovations.

Mr. Farkas said the renovations would probably take place during

two consecutive summers. He said the renovations at Wilkins would be able to take place during the year and would only involve certain safety precautions be followed.

Ellen Grudzien asked if there were any future plans for full day kindergarten.

Dr. Jennings said if the Clark School housed the SAU Offices it would allow them room for full day kindergarten.

Mike Hartman stated he understands the current capacity as of October enrollment was 1,649 students. He asked what the maximum capacity for each school was without being overcrowded.

The school board as well as the administration did not have this information available but agreed to get back to Mr. Hartman with the information.

Tom Harper said if Baboosic Lake was partially sold off, most likely it would be used as residential property. He said this should be said so members are aware and this would likely generate additional students.

Tom said the town budget is no different than anyone else's personal budget and right now, his taxes are \$18,000 per year. He said with the proposed plans, what would it equate to in taxes on his bill. Tom said the board needs to understand the tax burden the proposals place upon people, he said there is only so much money to go around.

Amy Hansen, a teacher at Wilkins said she sees the inadequacies in the classrooms, she has only two plugs in her classroom, which makes it difficult to teach in this environment, but they have learned to adapt.

Amy thanked the board for all their work on this project.

Dennis Olsen asked if we were committed to this plan, or could we walk away from it today.

Dwight said we could walk away from it today.

Dennis said he believes the plan fails the taxpayers because he said in another ten years they would be sitting here again discussing the same issues and then again in another ten years.

Dennis suggested board members go online and take a look at the school Weare just built and he said for a lot less money than what is being proposed in Amherst. He said go to www.wearenh.gov to look at the school. He said it was a very good plan and he believes it would fit well on the school site at Wilkins.

Dennis said he believes the Baboosic Lake site has lots of issues.

JJ asked if the board could address why they believe the 5th graders should or should not be at AMS.

Porter said educationally, the 5th grade doesn't fit in a Middle School concept. He said a better combination would be grades 3-4-5 or 4-5. He said they also receive a lot of bus complaints.

Porter said there is a big difference in maturity between a 5th grader

and an 8th grader.

Porter said if the 5th graders were not at AMS it would free up 8 classroom spaces. This would help with accommodating four floating teachers, the Early Intervention Program needs a classroom as well as two portable classrooms would not be needed.

ADJOURNMENT

Pam Dudoff moved to adjourn Deborah Cort seconded the motion. All board members voted in favor of the motion. The motion passed. The meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.