

MINUTES
AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD
December 7, 2006
Amherst Middle School Music Room

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CALL TO ORDER

Chair Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

Present:

ATTENDANCE

Amherst School Board: Dwight Brew, Deborah Cort, Pam Dudoff, Nancy Head and Jim O'Mara (arrived 6:12 p.m.).

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

Ways and Means Committee: Jim Jacobs, CJ Butler, Dana Redmond, and Bill Overholt

Minutes Recorder: Lyn Jennings

Dr. Jennings announced two donations were received for the Amherst Middle School.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Porter Dodge provided the details of the donations.

An anonymous donor gave the first donation. Porter said it was from a family in town who wanted to donate \$1,000 to be used towards the AMS Enrichment Program.

The second donation was from the Donna Anne Poulack Foundation in honor of Mary Westwater (Reading), Jenny Brion (Speech/Language), Mary Young and Brenda Duffy (Special Ed), all teachers at AMS. The donation was for \$10,000. Mary Jennings said in order for this donation to be accepted, they would need to hold a Public Hearing.

A motion was made by Pam Dudoff and seconded by Nancy Head to accept the \$1,000 donation with appreciation. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Nancy Head told board members the School Board was going to provide cider from 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. in the Community Room on Sunday, December 10, 2006. Nancy said the renovation plans for each of the three schools would be on display. Nancy said members of the school board as well as the Superintendent would be available to answer any questions by community members concerning the proposed \$4.9M in renovations.

Dwight Brew invited comments from the Public. Reed Panasiti a member of the Board of Selectmen asked for an update on the Bean

PUBLIC TIME

property.

Dwight Brew requested D. Personnel – Acceptance of Leave of Absence be pulled from the Consent Agenda.

Jim O’Mara requested B. Manifest be pulled from the Consent Agenda.

A motion was made by Pam Dudoff and seconded by Deborah Cort to approve Consent Agenda Items A. Minutes – November 2, 2006 and C. Treasurer’s Report. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Dwight Brew requested some clarification on an employee’s request for a leave of Absence. Discussion followed.

A motion was made by Pam Dudoff and seconded by Nancy Head to accept the employee’s request for a leave of absence contingent upon the Superintendent receiving notification by May 1, 2007 from the employee whether she plans to return to work during the 2007-2008 school year. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

Upon review of the November 2006 Reconciliation Report of the Manifests, Jim O’Mara questioned what service Pro-Ed and Pro-Ed Inc. provide. Discussion followed. It was agreed, Betty would provide more detail on Pro-Ed and Pro-Ed Inc. when she received it.

A motion was made by Jim O’Mara and seconded by Deborah Cort to approve the B. Manifests. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

A. School Bus Contract Update – Dr. Jennings told members of the board they have an extension for three years this being the first of those years.

Dr. Jennings said she understands there was some concern that not all the buses had cameras on them.

Dr. Jennings said the bus company was contacted and they have now replaced all the cameras with digital cameras that have sound, which fulfills the terms of the contract.

Pam Dudoff asked when the administration plans to begin the process to negotiate a new contract. Pam said the last time the administration began their research, they determined they would not have enough time and would run out of time therefore, they postponed it.

PRESENTATIONS

Betty said the current contract is in place until FY2009 so she will look to start the review process in the Fall of 2008.

Pam questioned the amount of time it would take Betty to do her research because the last time the administration wanted to look at negotiating the contract they said it would take about a year to a year and a half to complete the review process.

Betty said she has been involved in Bus Contract Negotiations in the past and feels to begin her research in the Fall of 2008 will be a sufficient amount of time to complete the process.

B. Bean Field Update – Dwight Brew said the Recreation Department and the Town of Amherst have been working for a number of years to put athletic fields on the Bean property.

Dwight explained that he believed the town and Recreation Commission had agreed to come up with the funds to build the fields on the Bean property.

A. Number of FY08 Early Retirement Acceptances – A motion was made by Jim O’Mara and seconded by Pam Dudoff to comply with the collective bargaining agreement with regards to early retirements, which is 3% or five employees. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

**DISCUSSION/ACTION
ITEMS**

B. Policy Review – Pam Dudoff provided a handout to board members regarding the NHSBA Policy Manual Review.

Pam said she and Deborah Cort met with Dr. Jennings to considering using the Policy Manual Review Service of the NHSBA. Deborah Cort said she has heard positive comments from other School Districts that have used this service.

Pam said she would get more information regarding what exactly would be done for the \$900 fee.

Pam said Dr. Jennings thought it would be valuable for all of our School Districts to have their policy manuals reviewed at the same time in order to provide guidance for how we might work together.

Pam said Mont Vernon has decided to go through with this service and Steve had asked her to share this information with him so that the Souhegan Board can consider it as well.

Pam said she spoke with NHSBA staff attorney, Barrett M. Christina, who would be performing the review. Pam said the board would send a hard copy of the Policy Handbook and the Student Handbooks and Attorney Christina would match it up with the NHSBA Sample Policies in terms of coding, which policies we do and don't have, whether the policies cite the appropriate statutes and whether policies covering areas in which statutes require parent and student notification are included in the student handbooks. Pam said Attorney Christina will read all of the material and make hand written comments on each policy indicating if they are okay and if not noting the specific sections where changes are needed.

Pam said Attorney Christina will also write a 3 – 6 page report summarizing the state of the Policies; making recommendations for how to proceed in order to get them in good shape.

Pam Dudoff moved which was seconded by Deborah Cort to expend \$900 to have the NHSBA's attorney, as a sole source vendor, review the Amherst School District Policy Manual and our Student Handbooks in order to make recommendations regarding changes that are needed to ensure that we are in compliance with New Hampshire Statutes and limit the District's liability to the maximum extent possible.

Discussion about the motion followed.

Jim O'Mara asked if the NHSBA would be reviewing the operating or personnel policies. Pam said they would be reviewing the operating policies.

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

C. 2nd Draft of FY08 budget – Board members received a handout titled Amherst School District FY08 Budget Summary dated December 7, 2006.

Dwight Brew said Betty was going to summarize the changes of the FY08 Budget as compared to Draft 1. Dwight said once Betty was completed with her presentation, Board members and Ways and Means could make their comments.

Betty highlighted the following changes in Draft 2 of the Budget:

- Per the board's request, she has taken the salaries out from

among the different lines and put them where they belonged.

- Betty said she also included the Environmental Camp amount in the budget.
- The environmental camp dollar amount was included in the budget.
- A small adjustment was made to Special Education.
- The SAU portion went from \$867,000 to \$917,000.
- \$10,000 was included in the New Equipment – School Board expense line.

Dwight said this is not a requirement however; the new cable provider is working with town to provide a live broadcast for a second cable channel for AMS, Clark, Wilkins and Souhegan.

Dwight said he spoke with Steve Coughlan and he feels putting \$10,000 in the budget would be sufficient to get them going with live broadcasts of school events and board meetings. Dwight said Steve is putting \$10,000 in the Souhegan budget as well.

By broadcasting meetings on television, it will showcase the number of good things going on in the school.

Jim O'Mara asked if we had Year-to-Date numbers in terms of expenditures. He said if we did, we could think about appropriating this today rather than waiting until the next budget cycle. Jim said if a surplus was identified, we could possibly allocate some of those monies now and reduce our request for next year.

Pam Dudoff said she would support having this type of equipment but would leave the purchase to the administration to figure out the logistics. Pam said she would look to Betty for a recommendation as to the best way to fund the expense.

Jim O'Mara said he thinks the purchase is a school board expense and the board should sell it like one.

Pam Dudoff presented a handout summarizing the Elementary School Budget Subcommittee Report.

Pam said the committee consisting of herself, Jim Jacobs, Lynne Doherty and Gerry St. Amand met on December 5, 2006.

Pam said in reviewing the budget it became clear that Gerry had worked with SAU administration to align budget line items with actual expenditures. Gerry also reviewed last years' actual

expenditures as well as specific needs requested by staff for every line item. Pam said this zero-based budgeting approach was made possible because Gerry now has a half-time assistant principal at Wilkins to handle student discipline issues.

Pam said because of the re-alignment of line items with actual expenditures and the zero-based budgeting approach, one cannot derive the proposed budget item by taking last years budget amount plus or minus the proposed staff/programmatic changes. This presented some challenges in reviewing the budget.

The subcommittee reviewed many line items in the budget and the Subcommittee Report detailed their findings.

Nancy Head provided board members with a handout detailing the Special Education Budget. Nancy said the subcommittee consisted of Kathy Skoglund, C.J. Butler, and herself.

The subcommittee asked Kathy if the special education budget was a realistic one. Kathy said it was however, there is no room for movement should a new family or two move into town with identified special needs children.

The subcommittee cited several factors for the decreasing numbers in special education. To name a few:

1. There are fewer preschoolers in the “pipeline.”
2. Teacher training has helped keep referrals down.
3. Coordinators are offering on-the-spot help.
4. People are more cautious about jumping to conclusions.
5. The EEIP program has helped more students become independent.

There is no formal Response to Intervention program but there has been good coordination and emphasis on literacy between regular and special education staff and pre-referral interventions are more common. Kathy said due to this; you should see a decrease in special education numbers.

There are currently 219 special education students at this time. Total costs are down considerably because the numbers are down but this could change depending on who moves into town.

Staffing changes were provided as follows:

- There is an increase of one teacher to the AMS budget.
- There will be two less special ed assistants at AMS.
- There will be a total of 9 fewer paraprofessionals next year.

Teaching supplies increased by \$8,964 as a result of the strong emphasis on literacy.

Dwight Brew said he met with Peg Bennett and Porter Dodge to review the Amherst Budget. Dwight said nothing in the budget jumped out at either he or Peg.

Dwight said the Amherst budget included a request to reduce the number of fundraising dances.

Porter Dodge said discussion took place amongst the administration and it was decided they would host nine fundraising dances for the year, which would equate to one dance per sports team.

Porter said they discussed eliminating the fundraising dances altogether as well as hosting fifteen dances per year but determined this was the best solution. Porter said fifteen dances a year are too many dances for the students as well as the administrators.

Dwight said by reducing the number of dances, a significant chunk of revenue would need to be made up.

Dr. Jennings said as presented, this budget is relying less heavily on the revenue generated from the dances.

Betty Shankel provided board members with a Draft Revenue Summary for the Amherst School District for 2007-2008.

Betty said the estimated Amherst School District State tax rate for next year is \$9.76 per \$1,000.

Jim O'Mara asked what the percentage increase was excluding Capital Reserve. Betty said it was a 1.33% increase.

Betty said the budget as presented represented a 6.66% increase on the tax rate which is due to the loss of revenue. Betty said they were expecting \$700,000 less in revenue as compared to 2006-2007.

D. Warrants –

1. Master Plan Warrant - Board members received a handout in their board packets entitled Amherst School District FY08 Draft Warrant Article December 7, 2006.

Dwight Brew asked Betty if they had run this warrant article by the DRA for their review. Betty said she had their lawyer review the warrant article. Dwight requested Betty have the DRA review it as well.

Betty said they should decide on the Bond Schedule for the project. A handout was provided for a General Obligations Bond. Betty provided the financial scenarios for a 10, 20, and 30-year bond. Betty said the board did not need to make a decision tonight however; they should at the next meeting.

Board members asked if Betty received in writing confirmation the District would receive 40% State Aid. Betty said she did not receive confirmation from Ed Murdow in writing, however, she would request it.

E. Potential Warrants –

1. Expendable Trust Warrant – Betty said she met with the appropriate individuals last night regarding the Expendable Trust Account, which has a current balance of \$52,000 not including accrued interest. Betty said the committee would like to keep a balance of at least \$100,000 in it for emergencies. Betty suggested having a warrant to replenish the Expendable Trust Fund for either \$80,000 or \$40,000.

A motion was made by Deborah Cort and seconded by Nancy Head to have a warrant article for \$80,000 to replenish the Expendable Trust Fund. All members of the board voted in favor of the motion and the motion passed.

2. Deferred Obligation Warrant – Dr. Jennings spoke to this potential warrant article.

Dr. Jennings said we as a district have an obligation to our early retirees.

Dr. Jennings provided a handout, which detailed the Early Retirement Cost Out for FY08. The FY07 Payout is \$103,349.39

and the FY08 Payout is \$238,603.63.

Discussion amongst the board followed.

Pam Dudoff said they could try to get this warrant article approved this year or wait two years because they will have a new building next year.

Jim O'Mara said the AEA Agreement is not included in this budget which is a big chunk of change so he would not recommend adding this warrant this year to the budget.

Members of the board agreed this is a liability and they should plan ahead, but this is not the year.

3. SPED Capital Reserve – Kathy Skoglund presented a handout detailing the justification for the Special Education Expendable Trust.

Kathy's handout provided seven reasons for creating the trust:

1. Volatility of special education costs.
2. Number of Budget Transfers (annually)
3. Move-ins/unanticipated students.
4. Increase in significance of disabilities.
5. Impact on "regular" education budget.
6. State-wide – Kathy surveyed 12 school districts and 95% had an Expendable Trust for SPED.
7. Souhegan Cooperative School District – Kathy explained they have not needed to access the funds as of yet, but may need to this year.

Kathy said she feels very strongly this should go on as a warrant article this year.

Deborah Cort said the budget is very slim. Deborah said because it's an Expendable Trust and based on what you need to do to spend the funds, it is worth exploring putting it on the ballot.

Deborah Cort asked what Souhegan started their SPED Capital Reserve account with and Kathy said \$50,000. Deborah asked Kathy to find out how much has gone into the account each year.

Pam said Gerry's budget reflects actual expenditures and there is no cushion. Pam said she thinks we need this kind of backup.

Nancy Head agreed, she thinks they should have this on the ballot as a warrant article.

Jim O'Mara said if they put too much on the ballot the voters would say no. Jim suggested they make a supplemental appropriation if needed.

Based on the board's feedback, Kathy will do a little more homework on the creation of a Special Education Expendable Trust.

F. Amherst School District Goals – This topic will be deferred to the next board meeting.

G. Board Meeting Schedule for Remainder of Year – Board members reviewed the meeting dates provided by Dr. Jennings for the rest of the year as well as the first meeting for 2007. The first meeting of 2007 for the Amherst School Board will be on January 4, 2007.

H. Televising Board Meetings – Dwight said he spoke with the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen and it was agreed, the school board could have access to the Town Hall to televise their meetings. Dwight explained he would like to start having the meetings in the town hall if available on the second Tuesday of the month.

Deborah Cort provided board members with a Draft handout, which detailed the Amherst School District Master Plan. Deborah said the Master Plan subcommittee was putting this together and welcomed feedback and input from the school board.

OTHER

Deborah said they would like this flyer mailed to all homes in Amherst.

Deborah also handed out a note card size piece of paper, which contained a Quiz about the Amherst schools. Deborah said this would be handed out on Sunday along with the cider by the Master Plan Committee

Motion to adjourn made by Deborah Cort and seconded by Jim O'Mara. All voted in favor and the meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm.

**REVIEW OF
MEETING /
ADJOURNMENT**