

**AMHERST SCHOOL BOARD  
BUDGET PUBLIC HEARING**

**January 13, 2010**

**DRAFT MINUTES**

Chairman Head called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. and introduced the Board Members.

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

**Present**

**ATTENDANCE**

Amherst School Board: Dwight Brew, Peg Bennett, Peter Maresco, Rob Graybill and Nancy Head.

Administrative Team: Superintendent Mary Jennings, and Elizabeth Shankel.

Minutes Recorder: Heather Loewy Nichols

Chairman Head explained that in spite of increased costs the Board is presenting a budget that is less than .75% increase. She then read Warrant Article 12 noting that the article is to pass an operating budget of \$23,370,142 and if it does not pass a default budget of \$23,007,421 will go into effect. She explained that this budget is an increase of \$156,142 or % .67 over FY2010. She also reviewed summaries of the general operating budget, food services and special expenses budgets.

Ms. Head explained that the Regular Education program is the heart of the educational system and is where the greatest amount of money is spent. She explained that this budget includes teacher's salaries, curriculum, and supplies and has been increased due to the implementation and expansion of a new core reading program as part of the district's five year goal.

Ms. Head explained that the Special Education budget is driven by the needs of the Special Education students as called for by their Individualized Education Plan. She also noted that Special Education was able to decrease their staff in part due to the Response to Intervention program and the flexibility of the staff. She noted that there is an increase in benefits but not in wages.

Ms. Head reviewed the other budget categories noting that most of the increases in these areas are due to benefits.

Ms. Head stated that due to the efforts of Jim Minor, despite rising costs the facilities budget is down.

Ms. Head explained that last year there were big cuts in the technology replacement budget and those expenses can only be put off for so long. She also

noted that this budget includes the addition of a technology person to maintain the technology in the schools.

Ms. Head stated that fund 21 is for food service and noted that the increases in expenses are due to salary and benefits.

Ms. Head explained that the budget increases are due to the implementation of the new core Scotts Foreman program, a reworking of world language, upgrades in technology, and the addition of a technology person. She explained that the health benefits costs increased 22.5% and the administration is trying to find other less expensive options that employees could join voluntarily. She also noted that there is a 15.23% increase in pension costs and the district is in the second year of a three year ASSA agreement which includes a 3% raise for the support staff.

Ms. Head explained that enrollments have been expected to take a downward trend although the Middle School is still seeing some growth. She noted that this budget includes a 3.5 professional staff reduction and 20 fewer support staff positions in the three schools. She also noted that the district is in year four of a five year strategic plan which includes a literacy initiative that assesses where a child is in their learning and then remediates weaknesses and expands skills through proven reading instruction. She also noted that the new science program is in year two of implementation and the district is implementing Response to Intervention which is a three tier system that helps students before they fail and end up in the Special Education system. She stated that it is exciting to reverse the trend of having a separate Special Education program but rather have both Regular Education and Special Education working together.

Mr. Maresco reviewed the apportionment formula for the SAU 39 budget and noted that Amherst is responsible for 56% of the overall cost, at a \$29,000 increase from last year. He explained that the four main drivers of the SAU budget are a server that needs to be replaced, maintenance of the new telephone system, contracted salary and benefit increases, and the cost of a consultant for the Superintendent search.

Ms. Bennett reviewed the revenue summary for the audience noting that the amount to be raised through taxation is \$15,689,399 which is an increase of \$286,507. The estimated tax impact in Amherst will be \$9.78. Ms. Bennett also reviewed the Adequate Education Grant and noted that that the district expects the funding from this grant to remain flat.

Mr. Brew explained that the default budget is the budget that will be in affect if

the proposed operating budget is not approved. He further explained that the default budget is reduced by the staff reductions but cannot be increased to support the reading curriculum roll out. He noted that it reflects the removal of three Regular Education teaching positions, .5 Special Education teachers, and 1.5 paraprofessionals and removes all new equipment. He explained that the increased cost of benefits are included, the SAU costs remain increased, operation and maintenance budgets are decreased, and student transportation is increased due to it being the second year of the contract. He stated that the default budget is \$363,723 less than the proposed operating budget and \$200,000 less than this year's operating budget. He explained that the Board and administration have already had tough cuts, and it would not be easy to run the school with a default budget.

Mr. Brew stated that in these difficult times the district has been able to absorb increases like health benefits and support their initiatives and hopes that the public will support the budget.

Mark Vincent, of the Ways and Means Committee, stated that the Committee is unanimously and enthusiastically in favor of the budget and thanked the Board and Administration for their work. He noted that every part of the budget where increases were wanted an offsetting decrease was made somewhere else and the SAU Board strives to keep their budget as lean as possible.

Chairman Head called for public comment and heard none.

Chairman Head asked that the public attend the deliberative session on February 4, 2010 and vote on March 9 2010.

Chairman Head declared the meeting to be closed at 7:40 p.m.