

Amherst School District Ways and Means Committee Meeting

October 28, 2020, 6:00pm (via Zoom)

In Attendance

From the Ways and Means Committee: Victoria Parisi (Chair), Christine Grayson (Secretary), Kelly Schmidt, Jeff Candito, Marilyn Gibson, and Samantha Linton.

From the Amherst School Board:

From the SAU 39 Administration: Michele Croteau (Business Administrator)

Subcommittee Review

- Technology (Ms. Grayson)
- Curriculum (Ms. Gibson)
- Special Services (Ms. Schmidt)
- Capital/Misc. (Ms. Grayson)
- Facilities (Ms. Grayson)

Discussions

Capital Reserve Funding (CRF) Different ways of funding a CRF were discussed. They include: specifically asking for an amount, to be raised with a tax levy, and specifying an amount to fund if there is undesignated fund balance (UFB) available at the end of a fiscal year. There are pros and cons to each. Much discussion on this topic revolved around the FY22 budget, and the other possible large requests (an operating budget increase of 8.2%, and a facilities warrant article based on a recommendation from the Joint Facilities Advisory Committee (JFAC)).

Capital (UV Robots) The Amherst School Board (ASB) discussed the request for UV robots at their 10/27/20 Budget Workshop Meeting. The consensus was that they did not want to budget for these robots in the FY22 budget, and asked that the lease contracts not be signed. The contracts were for 3 robots at \$30,000 per year, for 5 years. At this Ways and Means meeting, Ms. Croteau reviewed with the Committee how this works. She stated that when the ASB approved the \$1.5 million (from FY20 UFB) to be submitted for approval by the NH Department of Education (NHDOE) under Executive Order #38 (for Covid related expenditures), they effectively approved the first year lease of these robots, as they were included in the list of expenditures. What they said in the 10/27/20 meeting is that they do not want to fund it going forward. This makes for an unclear situation, since signing a 5 year contract would legally require the district to pay for the robots for those years. The board would like to drop the budget by \$90,000 (1 year of the lease, for 3 robots at \$30,000 each), which shrinks the difference between the default budget and the proposed budget. Ms. Croteau indicated that the board fell short of saying these costs should be taken out of the budget. She will discuss with Superintendent Adam Steel.

Percent Increase Over FY21 Budget With the adjustments found on the "Proposed Changes After 10/01/20" worksheet, the increase would be 6.3%. This assumes the board will adopt all changes listed. If the UV robots are also removed, the increase would be 6%.

Curriculum Administration was asked what the priorities are for each budget area. When asked this for Curriculum, they responded that they do not want to cut this budget. Also discussed was the amount budgeted for Professional Development. It was noted that the Amherst Education Association (AEA) has significantly more budgeted and included in their Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) than Mont Vernon teacher's CBA. Ways and Means would like this to be considered when CBAs are up for negotiation again (summer of 2021). Labor and associated contract costs (such as Professional Development) make this area the highest spend in the budget yearly.

Amherst Board of Selectmen (BOS) Meeting Ms. Schmidt brought to the Committee's attention that the BOS held a Special Meeting on 10/23/20 to discuss setting the tax rate for 2021. Ms. Schmidt watched the recorded meeting, and observed negative commentary and disparaging remarks being made publicly about the school district. Additionally, they erroneously stated publicly that the increase for schools is 9%. It appears that no members of ASB were present at the BOS meeting. No ASB members were present at this Ways and Means meeting either. Ways and Means recommends that the ASB Liaison attend all BOS meetings. Ms. Parisi will contact Elizabeth Kuzsma (ASB Chair) and Superintendent Steel to discuss this issue.

Additional Federal Funding Available Mr. Canditio asked about additional funding available from a SPSRF Grant. Ms. Croteau said she has a meeting on 11/03/20 to learn about the details of this funding. The Amherst amount appears to be \$245,000, which breaks down to \$200/student. It is available for Covid related expenditures between 03/02/20 and 12/30/20.

Outstanding Items The Ways and Means Committee is waiting for a more detailed answer regarding non-CBA employee salary increases in the default budget year. The question was vaguely answered on the "Q&A" worksheet, but the committee is looking for an actual dollar amount of these increases. The concern is that these increases artificially inflated the next year's budget. Ms. Croteau will speak to Superintendent Steel about this.

Wrap Up Ms. Parisi will put together a few slides to present the Ways and Means opinion at the ASB meeting on 11/09/20. Overall, the consensus of the Committee is that the increase of 6.3% (after adjustments) is still too high. They would like to see it closer to the default, especially when considering the possibility of a large facilities project. The SAU budget doesn't wrap up until mid-November, so there will be more to review after Mr. Canditio reports back. The ASB is expected to vote on the FY22 budget at their 12/14/20 meeting. If approved by them, Ways and Means anticipates voting on the recommendation at their 12/15/20 meeting.

The next Ways and Means Committee Meeting is November 3, 2020 at 6:00pm.

The next Amherst School Board Budget Workshop is November 4, 2020 at 6:00pm.

The next Amherst School Board Meeting is November 9, 2020 at 6:00pm. Ms. Parisi will present the W&M opinions and recommendations.

The next joint meeting between ASB and W&M is on November 16, 2020 at 6:00pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Grayson