

## Amherst School District Ways and Means Committee Meeting

December 8, 2020, 6:00pm (via Zoom)

### **In Attendance**

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

From the Amherst School Board: Beth Kuzsma, Ellen Grudzien, and Tom Gauthier

From the SAU 39 Administration: Michele Croteau

### **Discussions**

#### **Non-CBA Wage Increases in FY20**

This discussion stemmed from a question posed by Mr. Candito. Earlier in this budget process, he asked if non-CBA personnel received raises in FY20, which was a default budget year. The answer is yes. These raises increase employee's salary bases, therefore becoming a part of the next year's default budget calculation, and all default budget calculations going forward. Per Ms. Croteau, these increases are at the discretion of the Superintendent. W&M questioned if this was a prudent use of public funds, especially in a default year.

For the FY22 budget year, the Committee was presented with a spreadsheet of non-CBA personnel and their proposed increases. It is approximately \$58,000 including taxes and benefits. These increases are not included in the FY22 default calculation or proposed budget, but can be granted by the Superintendent if the money can be "found" in the budget that is passed (default or proposed). Due to the timing of the budget process, these increases have to be absorbed by the budget that is passed, if there is money available. Again, the Committee questioned if this is a prudent use of public funds, given the district's current financial struggles, including providing required laptops to our students. The Committee has heard at many ASB meetings this budget season that the district needs laptops for all of our students due to remote learning during the current pandemic. Many laptops don't work properly, yet are still given to student to use. Additionally, it was noted that these non-CBA increases seem to be higher than general cost-of-living increases. Ms. Croteau indicated that the potential FY22 non-CBA salary increases are in line with other NH school districts. W&M does not dispute that; the question is if public funds are best spent on this, given our current situation. The salary increase pool is approximately a 3% increase (the salary only portion; adding in the cost of taxes and benefits increases this percentage). The Committee questioned why 3% is the amount used for this pool each year.

Overall, the W&M Committee is concerned not only with the financial impact of these potential increases, but also the optics of giving such increases when the board could possibly put forth a facilities warrant article requesting \$90 million. It was also noted that non-CBA increases do not seem to be in alignment with board goals; but providing laptops to students that need them would be in alignment with board goals.

As this discussion evolved, AEA and ASSA contracts were mentioned. The financial impact of these contracts are significant, and labor is the highest percentage of costs in the district budget. It is the desire of the W&M Committee to discuss these contracts with the board and administration before negotiations begin on new contacts (anticipated to be in the summer of 2021).

The Committee suggested that the these potential non-CBA increases be budgeted in future years, so the process is more transparent. They also suggested that the board direct the Superintendent as to exactly what they want done with non-CBA increases. Although the increases are at the discretion of the Superintendent, the board is charged with setting the direction and policy of the district.

## **Amherst-Mont Vernon Contract**

The tuition agreement contract has several changes. Mont Vernon used to pay a discounted portion of the Cost Per Pupil (CPP) calculation. The new contract has MV just pay for the students that are actually in the ASD. This works out slightly more in favor of the ASD, and is a simpler calculation. It is a 5 year contract. Some additions to the contract include: periodic interviews with MV students reported back to the MVSD, testing scores reporting, additional meetings and curriculum sharing for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. ASB and MVSB have approved these changes. MV also has the ability to review the contract in the event of significant changes that could impact their students (for example, a large facilities project in the ASD).

## **Brick School Leasing Agreement**

The ASD owns the Brick School, and leases it back to the SAU for \$1/year. The new contract removes the requirement for the SAU to put aside \$30k per year for potential repairs to the building. Instead, it stipulates that the SAU is responsible for repairs needed to the building.

## **Voting as a Ways and Means Member**

Ms. Parisi discussed how voting as a W&M Member is different than your individual Amherst citizen vote at the polls on the budget and warrant articles. Both votes do not need to be the same. You vote as W&M is based on the reasoning behind the budget presented. For example: is it sound? And does it reasonably reflect the district's short and long term needs? Your personal vote is just that – based on your personal reasons.

The W&M vote does not have to be unanimous. If there are concerns, these should be voiced to the school board through our Chair. The Committee needs to give Ms. Parisi information to write the narrative that will appear in the Voter's Guide. Ms. Parisi will write the first draft, and the Committee will provide feedback and suggestions.

## **Other Discussions**

Ms. Schmidt asked if the board will also be putting forth a warrant article on the ballot for the life-cycle maintenance items (derived from the Onsite InSite report). Ms. Croteau said that the amount scheduled for this year would be \$500k. The board will vote on this at the December 14<sup>th</sup> meeting. The importance of communication was stressed, as there could be confusion (in the public) over the necessity of this article. The idea behind it is to continue to fund the necessary maintenance in the event a facilities warrant article does not pass this year. The buildings will still require maintenance. Additionally, if the board votes to include the \$500k maintenance warrant article, it is intended that this money could be used as part of any facilities projects/repairs in the future, if a facilities warrant article (project, new builds, repairs) passes this year, or in the future.

It is the Committee's understanding that the board would like to get to a 4% increase (over last year's budget) as a proposed budget increase, and have asked the administration how to get there. Their only directive to get to this number has been to not include the UV robot contract in the budget. It is their hope to see these recommendations at the December 14<sup>th</sup> meeting.

It is Committee's understanding that the board will vote on all budget items (the operating budget and all warrant articles), and that those numbers will be shown in the budget worksheets, so that W&M can properly review it all, and meet on December 15<sup>th</sup> to vote on their recommendations.

The next Amherst School Board Meeting on December 14, 2020, where the board is expected to vote on the budget.

The next Ways and Means Committee Meeting is December 15, where the Committee is expected to vote on supporting/not supporting the ASB's budget.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Grayson