

1 Amherst School Board

2 Bond Hearing – Souhegan High School Theater

3 Monday, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023

4 Meeting Minutes- Approved 02 16 2023

5 Attendees:

6 Administration: Interim Superintendent- Steven Chamberlin, Assistant Superintendent- Christine  
7 Landwehrle and SAU #39 Business Administrator- Amy Facey.

8 Amherst School Board: Chair- Tom Gauthier, Vice Chair- Victoria Parisi, Secretary- Jason  
9 White, Josh Conklin, and Terri Behm.

10 Meeting Minutes: Danae A. Marotta

11 Public: Will and Jeanne Ludt, 3 School Street, Amherst NH, Greg Fritz, 2 Deer Hollow Drive,  
12 Amherst NH, and Shannon Gascoyne 5 Parker Farm Lane, Amherst NH.

13 I. Call to Order

14 **Chair of the Amherst School Board, Mr. Tom Gauthier, called the Bond Hearing to order**  
15 **at 6:00PM.**

16 He noted that this is our Bond Public Hearing. Tonight, we'll talk about the rationale and  
17 the thinking behind it. Over the last couple of years this is a project that we talked about in great  
18 depth. We'll go over the details, talk about the new approach that we have with a one school.  
19 We'll talk about the different ways to fund this and then at the end of the night we'll take  
20 questions in person and virtually.

21  
22 We will take comments from our online guests tonight. You'll have three minutes to  
23 Speak. In order to speak you need to raise the virtual hand, enter your full name into your  
24 avatar or your profile, turn your camera on and then say your full name and town of  
25 residence. You'll have three minutes to ask your question or comment. We'll do our best to  
26 answer those questions with as much fidelity and information as we have.

27  
28 Mr. Gauthier turned the presentation over to Amherst School Board Vice Chair, Ms. Victoria  
29 Parisi.

30  
31 A new building becomes a tailwind in our improvement journey rather than a headwind.  
32 The Amherst School Board is presenting the construction of a new elementary school on the  
33 March 14th ballot. The total bond amount will be \$54, 250,179 dollars. As Mr. Gauthier  
34 mentioned, this is at the Wilkins site and does not include the Middle School.

35  
36 This warrant article is the end result of a multi- year effort led by the Joint Facilities Advisory  
37 Committee (JFAC). A group of town volunteers, board members, and SAU and Amherst School  
38 District Staff and Administration. The Board made the decision to put elementary project on this  
39 year's ballot.

Ms. Parisi displayed the timeline of events.

Since 2017, the Amherst School District and administration have made significant strides in planning for our facilities. Beginning with an external capital needs assessment that analyzed the 20 year costs to operate the schools, the SAU Board then formed JFAC (Joint Facilities Advisory Committee) to review the report and status of facilities with an eye to the future. In 2020, Once voters approved the costs for investigating options for long term solutions, through voting for the budget, Lavallee Brensinger Architects were hired to develop facility options. During that year, a variety of options for ways to address the aging buildings and space constraints were discussed. Eventually, after analyzing all of the options, JFAC brought a recommendation to build a new elementary school to the board and renovate the middle school. This is what was on last year's ballot. This year, after close to a year of further review and revision of cost estimates, the Board has decided to only bring forth a warrant article to build a new elementary school.

The bond warrant article is important in the Amherst School District journey. Tonight, we will present you with a lot of information and hopefully answer many of your questions.

Ms. Parisi continued, the school buildings are older, and they have end of life systems that are not energy efficient. They are also costly to maintain, and we want to utilize the existing land and buildings in the most efficient manner possible. Security is important, as well as technology rich and adequate classroom spaces. These are the facility project goals that have been stated over a number of years. Life safety systems at the elementary school are at the end of life. These systems are due for replacement in the capital needs assessment. HVAC systems are at the top of this list- they're not stable or efficient.

With the use of portable classrooms, controlled access is not possible. The building simply does not have the space for staff to deliver best practices to students- including full day kindergarten and development of local special programs. The Amherst School District is driven by research and evidence based instructional strategies. A new building would be a tailwind in our improvement journey rather than a headwind.

Currently, there are several impacts to student learning there are limited teacher collaboration spaces, art and music are very close to being moved to mobile carts which would provide a much different program to students, intervention space is high noise and high distraction with multiple interventionists and groups of students sharing space. To support literacy acquisition, the library needs updating. Finally, one building would create efficiencies and opportunities for administrators to be instructional leaders.

Throughout this process, we have been asked how the district will measure the impact of a new building. We will look for the following 4 items.

- Reduced staff and student absences demonstrating the impact of effective HVAC
- Improved standardized test scores
- Increased employment applications
- Possibility of an increase in new students

Ms. Parisi added, the Amherst School Board seeks to make a strategic investment in the facilities of the Amherst School District. The expected life of the Wilkins and AMS buildings is 50 years. Wilkins is 55 years old, and AMS is 50 years old. In Amherst, short term solutions have been favored by the voters. Over the last 30 years, that includes portable trailers and small additions. Larger initiatives, such as building an upper elementary school to alleviate crowding, have narrowly failed. This brings us to the situation we are in today.

Our current systems will require significant funding to replace within the next 15 years. ASB has been dedicated to funding maintenance identified in the 2017 capital needs assessment through the existing capital reserve fund. Once a new elementary is built, the district will receive a maintenance program from the construction management firm. This will ensure proper maintenance, maintain consistency despite inevitable board and administration turnover, and allow future leaders to plan and budget for capital improvements

Ms. Parisi displayed pictures of Clark School. The picture in the center of the slide shows where kindergarten students receive their lunches in the hallway. There is no kitchen at Clark, so meals are made at Wilkins and driven to Clark in the private car of a staff member. You'll also notice that there are carts being stored in this hallway as well as book storage on the bench near the brick wall. Continuing with the theme of an area doing double duty- the multipurpose room is serving as the lunchroom and the location of all specials- art, music, library, and physical education. The other spaces in the building have been utilized for classroom space and interventions. While we're speaking about Clark, I think it's important to note that the portion of the building which is the MPR was partially funded through private donations when it became clear that a multipurpose room was needed. Without this space, all of these specials and lunch would have to take place in individual kindergarten classrooms.

Ms. Parisi displayed photos from the Wilkins School. In the middle, you see the technology teacher pushing a cart through the hallway. Because of the press on classroom space, the building no longer has a technology or computer lab. Instead, this teacher travels to classrooms with devices on a cart. It has been estimated that a large portion of her day is inefficiently used by having to move classrooms. Again, physical space is a large concern in all of these pictures. The picture on the left shows intervention space that is shared by multiple staff and groups of students throughout the day. Last year's conference room has been reassigned for student space, so the picture on the right shows the only conference room table in the building. This is located in an area behind the stage which is also needed for student lunch space. The room also holds many pieces of curriculum- Space that was available for book storage just a few years ago is no longer an option.

Current project goals are to maintain 2020 facility project goals, minimize cost impact to taxpayers and address the Amherst Middle School projects in a different way rather than a total renovation. These three goals were realized after the 2022 bond vote failed. The administration, JFAC and board members have been discussing these questions with community members and receiving feedback and deciding what our future progress would look like.

The proposed project will create a one building elementary school to house preschool through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The Amherst Middle School will house grades 6, 7, and 8. This configuration is

developmentally appropriate, and allows for AMS have appropriate student space without requiring an addition which would be an added expense that the Board and JFAC did not wish to present to the community. This configuration was determined to be the most appropriate from a financial standpoint as well as supporting the students. The reconfiguration will continue to provide adequate space to conduct special services while offering privacy and dignity for every student. It will continue to offer music, art, and PE to kindergarten students. It will increase the capacity in the cafeteria and gym at the elementary school and eliminate the need and expense of portable classrooms.

Ms. Parisi added that this leaves many wondering about the future of Clark. JFAC identified this question early on in the process and developed a committee to engage the community in 2021. The idea was to generate ideas for what the future of the building could be, discuss potential outcomes and concerns, and be sure to include the residents of Amherst in the future plan for the site. With that being said, Clark School will remain a school with classroom space during the construction phase. In the long-term, a number of possibilities exist, from a town owned property to park space to sale. All will require additional input from the community and various Boards.

Moving on to the conceptual designs which are the work of Banwell Architects, a New England architectural firm with offices in NH and VT, with a proven track record of success with school facility projects.

- The elementary building will include a renovation of the multipurpose room.
  - New Kitchen (Including Equipment)
  - Asbestos Abatement of Existing Multipurpose Room
  - Replacement of Flooring, Doors, and Windows
  - Technology Upgrades
  - Security Upgrades
- Major Addition - 136,660 square feet
  - New Exterior Envelope (Brick, Insulation, Siding, Roof, etc.)
  - New MEP System Including High Efficiency HVAC
  - New Interior (Flooring, Doors, Windows, FFE, etc.)
- Sitework

It will also include a new addition, making up for the bulk of the building. Significant effort has been put into the programming to ensure the size of the building is adequate for current and future enrollment. This means that administrators at the buildings have discussed what is needed. This project programming has been simplified to include the meat and potatoes of what is needed. Not everyone gets what they wish for, and everyone makes compromises. The site for the school will have additional site work.

Ms. Parisi displayed the conceptual design- entrance approach. The MPR on left, maintains the traditional feel of Amherst. Consider this the beginning of the design process, not the end. Design is an evolving effort and will continue to be refined.

182 She displayed the ariel viewpoint. There will be several outside play spaces and areas for  
183 different age groups. Playgrounds will be located on the south of the building with nearby  
184 classroom hallway entrances. The grove area where over the log is played will remain.  
185 Additionally, there will be space in the back field for additional outdoor classroom spaces. This  
186 side of the building also shows the parent drop off loop.

187 She noted the view from the Upper Wilkins field. You'll notice the bus and car loop that are  
188 designed to bring traffic off of Boston Post Road. Again, this is conceptual, and shows a  
189 courtyard providing additional daylight to classrooms.

190 The site plan was developed with civil engineering firm of Tighe and Bond who have completed  
191 a number of school projects. This is the initial site plan. We want multiple play areas for multiple  
192 grades- it is a priority of the administration and Board to have these included. The access road to  
193 Jones Road for emergency usage during the school day and plan to be used to alleviate Boston  
194 Post Road traffic. The Board has been in touch with the Town committees who plan to review  
195 the traffic of the area in the next several years and the 2022 report cites favorably for the  
196 combination of the two school buildings. There is increased parking for school events.  
197 Additionally, we have been in touch with neighbors throughout the community forums.

198 After hours recreation opportunities will open up as the current mpr provides a mini gym after  
199 school hours with the addition of the full-size gym. You'll notice the youngest students are on  
200 the first floor. The spaces at the front will be accessible and back of the building will be secure.  
201 This enclosed courtyard will provide enclosed, secure outdoor space. The courtyard also allows  
202 for 8 classrooms on both floors to have windows for natural light and air flow, which has a  
203 positive impact on learning.

204 The second floor contains more classrooms. There are several staircases, special services located  
205 on both floors close to classrooms, and additional natural light from the courtyard into  
206 classrooms and hallways.

207 When the Amherst School Board first brought the project to the 2021 bond hearing, there were  
208 very rough estimates from Lavallee Brensinger for \$98m for both buildings. That price tag was  
209 too high, Lavallee knew it, and the ASB knew it, but it was the best estimates at the time based  
210 on the proposed design submitted by Lavallee.

211 With feedback from the community, further assessing the programming, and going back to the  
212 drawing board, Banwell Architects was able to present us with a 2 story elementary school  
213 building at a lower cost. That was the cost presented in the 2022 warrant article as 52.2 million  
214 dollars. While further confirming the programming needs and analyzing the costs- including  
215 construction escalation- the 2023 warrant article is \$54,250,179. This is a guaranteed maximum  
216 price as is standard in working with a construction manager.

217 As has been presented tonight, since 2017 there has been an eye to the facility needs of the  
218 district. The problems aren't going away. Systems continue to age past their anticipated life and  
219 enrollment projections remain steady with a gradual increase. Construction escalation and rising  
220 interest rates are the primary cost drivers.

Using conservative 4% per year for construction escalation:

- \$54M equates to \$2.2M per year
- In 5 years, project may cost \$66M
- In 10 years, project may cost \$81M
- Rise in interest rates further increase cost

As predicted, municipal bond rates have risen and are projected to continue to rise.

The application was deemed a priority for the ASB and Administration. The ASB is advocating for increase in building aid with local legislative representatives

Building projects were ranked on various criteria:

- Safety and Security
- Obsolete or Inefficient Conditions
- Overcrowding/Increased Enrollment
- Operational Cost Efficiency
- Maintenance Program
- District's eligibility for Free & Reduced Meals

The NHDOE received largest number of applications since moratorium lifted in 2020. Amherst's Elementary School Project was ranked 7 out of 17. This ranking from an outside source demonstrates significant need. The final awards will be based on ranking, state appropriation, and voter approval. Funding is possible but not highly likely.

The SAU administration has engaged NHMBB to assist with financing. The advantage of NHMBB- is that it pools smaller bonds to reduce cost, increase efficiencies, and has proven record supporting NH school districts. the current proposal is Level Debt with current interest rate is 6%. Bond sale on Tuesday Jan 10<sup>th</sup> could have new estimates from the bond bank. Based on updated estimates, we may consider shorter term of 25 years to favor the taxpayer. It's good to know how building aid impacts our bond process. The NHMBB application requires submission date June 19 is prior to state budget biannual finalization. Once the article passes, if it passes, we can obtain a bond anticipation note (BAN) to start the project before we know about building aid. This will include design and site work and allow design to move forward.

Ms. Parisi displayed tables for the details to cost of the bond. For an average home of \$482,000 which is the amount determined by the Town, the cost would be begin at 57 cents per thousand (\$277) and then hold steady at 800 for the life of the loan. The Board discussed the option of level debt or level principal and voted to support level debt at this time. Level debt will impact today's taxpayer at the same rate as taxpayers who reside in town at the end of the loan. The cost is slightly less per taxpayer using this model though the overall impact to town is higher in interest.

She presented a graphic representation of level debt financing.

Ms. Parisi read Article 12- Facility Project Bond.

288 **Article 12- Facility Project Bond**

289  
290 *“To see if the District will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of fifty four million two*  
291 *hundred and fifty thousand one hundred seventy nine dollars (\$54,250,179) (gross budget) to*  
292 *finance the major addition, reconstruction and renovation project for the Clark / Wilkins*  
293 *Elementary School, located at 14 Foundry Street, Amherst, NH and 80 Boston Post Road,*  
294 *Amherst, NH and to authorize the issuance of not more than \$54,250,179 of bonds or notes*  
295 *under and in compliance with the Municipal Finance Act, RSA 33:1 et seq., as amended; to*  
296 *authorize the School Board to apply for, obtain and accept federal, state or other aid, if any,*  
297 *which may be available for said project and to comply with all laws applicable to said project;*  
298 *to authorize the School Board to issue, negotiate, sell and deliver said bonds and notes and to*  
299 *determine the rate of interest thereon and the maturity and other terms thereof; and to*  
300 *authorize the School Board to take any action or to pass any other vote relative thereto, and*  
301 *further to raise and appropriate an additional sum of one million three hundred fifty six*  
302 *thousand two hundred fifty five dollars (\$1,356,255) for the first year’s interest payment on*  
303 *the bond.*

304  
305 **3/5 Ballot Vote Required.”**

306  
307 Thank you for coming tonight. Town voting day is March 14<sup>th</sup> 2023 at Souhegan High School.  
308 Mr. Gauthier noted that they will be holding their public hearing tomorrow night here in the  
309 Souhegan High School Theater at 7:00PM.

310 **II. Public Comment**

311 Ms. Jeanne Ludt, 3 School Street, Amherst NH, inquired why they chose to build new versus  
312 renovating Clark and Wilkins in terms of the cost estimates. Also, you did not mention the new  
313 gym space that will benefit the community.

314 Mr. Gauthier responded that the new gym space would alleviate internal space conflicts. The  
315 extra space would benefit the community as well.

316 Ms. Parisi added that it is something that they have shown in past presentations and will explain  
317 at the deliberative session.

318 Mr. Will Ludt, 3 School Street, Amherst, NH, commented that he knows that they are working  
319 on getting state funding and there is no way to know ahead of time. That would be a plus for the  
320 public to know what they will be getting ahead of time.

321 Mr. Gauthier added that they have done their due diligence.

322 Mr. Chamberlin remarked that the State is just starting their budget process now. They like to  
323 have the budget done by July 1<sup>st</sup>, the bond sale is June 19<sup>th</sup> and the vote is March 14<sup>th</sup>. There is  
324 no expectation that the state will have their budget done in time for either of those two deadlines.  
325 There are a few Legislative Service Requests (LSR). They are doing everything they can to get  
326 it.

327 Mr. Will Ludt, 3 School Street, Amherst inquired if there were any portables at Amherst Middle  
328 School.

329 Mr. Gauthier replied that if the warrant passes, they would move the 5<sup>th</sup> grade back to the  
330 elementary school. We are also committed to making the buildings watertight.

331 Mr. Will Ludt, 3 School Street, Amherst NH, commented that he appreciated the slides. He  
332 inquired if they were still thinking about solar on the rooftops.

333 Mr. Gauthier replied that the building will be built to house potential solar panels down the road.  
334 The board voted to postpone this project to do further research.

335 Mr. Greg Fritz, 2 Deer Hollow Drive, Amherst, NH, commented that the level principal debt  
336 would be preferred. He suggested that they use 25 years. He still does not understand the total  
337 cost, it doesn't make sense with the other than that it will be a real hard thing to judge.

338 Ms. Shannon Gascoyne, 5 Parker Farm Lane, Amherst NH, commented that she is on the  
339 Amherst Building and Grounds subcommittee which is a subcommittee of JFAC. Amherst  
340 Middle School work is not on hold. When a new elementary school is built that will go a long  
341 way to release the pressure valve on their space constraints. Our Capital Reserve Funding that we  
342 put away each year will go to work on these items at our schools is being split up at Clark,  
343 Wilkins, and AMS. When a new elementary school is constructed, the bond will cover that. In  
344 those first years we will be able to direct all of our capital reserve savings funds to the needs of  
345 Amherst Middle School. This is really important because we will still have great needs there that  
346 we are planning for and putting away money. I wanted to make certain that was highlighted and  
347 noted. Thank you.

348 Mr. Gauthier thanked Ms. Gascoyne for all of her work on the committees as a volunteer.

349 The Board thanked the participants for their comments and questions.

350 III. Public Comment- Zoom

351 No Public Comment

352 IV. Bond Hearing Adjourned

353 **Chairman Gauthier adjourned the meeting at 6:30PM.**