

**Amherst School District**

**Ways and Means Committee Meeting  
Wednesday, April 20, 2022, 6:00pm  
Brick School Community Room**

*In Attendance:* Christine Grayson (Interim Chair). Jeff Candito, Marilyn Gibson. Greg Fritz, Dwayne Purvis, Mike Akillian, Kelly Schmidt, Victoria Parisi (ASB Liaison), Amy Facey (SAU Business Administrator)

Several new people have been appointed to the committee since the last meeting. Everyone introduced themselves. The purpose of this meeting is to not only wrap up the previous budget season, but to open the discussion on communication with ASB in the hopes that we can work more closely together.

Process Discussion

Amy will be stepping down from the BA position, and applying for the part time position. This would provide consistency into the next budget cycle. She will work with the new BA. The goal is to have all of the tools needed to complete analysis, and transparency. In the future, the spreadsheets will likely be a hybrid of what is used now and reports exported from the financial accounting system used by the SAU.

Discussions regarding what the W&M role is ensued – numbers, philosophies, etc. These conversations will be taken up in more depth at future meetings, and discussions with ASB.

There were several comments regarding communication with the board. Some members felt that when questions are asked, especially in a public meeting, the questions are acknowledged but never answered. This is another piece that W&M will work with ASB to resolve. Victoria assured everyone that the board does want to listen and answer questions, and will facilitate improvement of the processes.

There was discussion of the importance of educational philosophies and outcome-oriented plans, and how it relates to the budget discussion. This will be explored more in-depth at a future meeting. It was suggested that the committee develop calendar milestones (and associated meeting agendas) more closely aligned with deadlines in the budget calendar.

Warrant Article Discussion

*Article 12 – Construction Bond:* Those that supported it felt that their questions had been answered, they had enough information to make a decision to support, and believe strongly that the suggested construction/improvements are necessary. Those that did not support stated that it was a lot of money to ask for, especially considering the other large asks (AEA contract, increase in operating budget, SCSD warrant articles). Also mentioned was the myriad of issues that have come up in the past year or so in the SAU; although not directly related to the budget or this project, some of these issues have caused people to question the trust level with SAU administration. Others mentioned that there was no clear value statement for the project, and that it seemed more like a sales pitch rather than an educational campaign.

*Article 13 – Solar Panels:* Many felt that was not a necessary ask. Panels can be put on a building later. Some felt positive about it, since it has a positive return on investment and is environmentally conscious.

*Article 14 – Operating Budget:* Those that supported cited the rising costs of special education as something not within the control of the board as one piece of the picture. The board and administration did make cuts to the original proposed budget. The budget seemed in-line. Those that did not support cited several reasons: year-over-year large increases, in 6 years, budgets have gone up 30%, a lot to ask for in a year with other large requests, we don't need more people, we need better people, it should be a results-oriented plan, and there needs to be a strategic vision.

*Article 15 – Collective Bargaining Agreement with AEA:* It is unanimously thought that we have great teachers, and they do a great job, especially through the pandemic. Thoughts on the contract itself included: COLA is too high, steps plus COLA results in larger increases (6% and above), increase like this are not realistic in today's world, half of the staff's compensation is over \$100k, the exponential growth of salaries can't be maintained by taxpayers, and want to see a balance (teachers is good/safe buildings, less of monetary increase).

*Article 16 – Capital Facilities Expendable Trust Fund:* The general consensus was that this is smart planning. It will be funded if there is fund balance available at the end of the year.

#### Other Discussions

- Our schools need to be aligned. It doesn't matter that there are several districts involved.
- There is dissatisfaction with the SAU budget process. Not enough outside involvement; it doesn't matter what input there is, nothing is ever considered.
- Victoria asked W&M to come up with ideas for AEA contract negotiations
- W&M should review current AEA contract, the AEA contract that was proposed, and the current ASSA contract, to be familiar as discussions begin.

The committee would like to meet again in 3-4 weeks. Our next meeting will be an organizational meeting, as well as other topics to be determined. Christine will work on scheduling the next meeting. If anyone has any requests for items to be placed on the agenda, please email them to Christine.