

Amherst School District Ways and Means Committee
Meeting Minutes
Brick School Meeting Room
Tuesday, October 3, 2023, 6:00 PM

1 Attendees: Caitlin Thompson, Brittany Donovan, Caleb Baird, Chris Goodrich, Peter Maresco,
2 Matt Comstock, Matt Borden (alternate). Brian Coogan was absent.

3 Also in attendance was Business Administrator Amy Facey and Amherst School District
4 Moderator Ellen Grudzien.

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6 **1. Introduction and Assignment of Roles**

7 The meeting started with Ellen explaining the roles of chairperson and secretary. This body
8 needs to nominate one for each role or a member can volunteer. Caleb volunteered as the
9 chairperson. Chris also nominated Caleb, and all were in agreement with Caleb's assignment.
10 Matt Comstock volunteered as secretary, and all were in agreement with Matt's assignment.

11 **2. Budget Process and Spreadsheet Overview**

12 The meeting continued with Amy Facey explaining the schedule of the Ways and Means
13 Committee and the breakdown of the subcommittees. Tonight, is the organizational meeting for
14 Ways and Means. Draft One of the Amherst School District budget will be presented to the board
15 on October 19, 2023. The budget question submission form will be opened the next day.
16 Subcommittee meetings are scheduled for October 30, 2023, through November 3, 2023. A
17 quorum is not required for these meetings since they are subcommittees. The subcommittee
18 meetings are all public meetings. There is a Ways and Mean Committee meeting on November
19 14, 2023, for the committee to share notes from the subcommittee meetings. Draft Two of the
20 budget will be posted on November 16, 2023. Ways and Means will meet again on December 5,
21 2023, to review findings. A budget workshop of the ASD School Board is scheduled for
22 December 12, 2023. Draft Three of the budget will be submitted on December 19, 2023. Ways
23 and Means will have an additional meeting by January 4, 2024, if the committee has not already
24 finished their recommendations for the public hearing. There will potentially be a bond hearing
25 on January 8, 2024, and the budget hearing will be on January 9, 2024. The Amherst School
26 District deliberative session will occur on February 5, 2024. Prior to that meeting Ways and
27 Means will have taken a vote on the warrant articles. District voting day is on March 12, 2024.

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29 The meeting paused for group introduction. Amy Facey introduced herself as the Business
30 Administrator for the district. The group also introduced themselves as Matt Comstock, Caitlin
31 Thompson, Brittany Donovan, Caleb Baird, Chris Goodrich, Peter Maresco, and Matt Borden.
32 The group is made up of residents with wide experience and education including finance,
33 accounting, engineering, manufacturing, sales, pharmaceuticals, and school boards.

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35 The budgeting spreadsheet was walked through, by Amy, to give context to the subcommittee
36 assignments. Amy gave some history of the budget process dating back to printing out

37 cumbersome budget sheets. Overtime the process was moved to a Google Sheet. Last budget
38 year, Amy tried to simplify the process and came up with the current iteration of the budget
39 spreadsheet. The same type of spreadsheet is used for all of the school districts in Amherst. She
40 reported that it was a well-received format. She continued to explain the different sections on the
41 table of contents including all linked content and work sheets. The question submission form is
42 used for the Ways and Means committee to communicate questions on specific topics within the
43 budget to the school board. These questions are automatically populated into a log that is visible
44 to all viewers as well as the responses from the applicable parties. Each question will be assigned
45 to a specific respondent, and they do their best to answer the question within 24-48 hours. If
46 there is a follow up question to the response, let Amy know and she will open a dialogue to make
47 sure your question is answered.

48 The budget itself is organized by categories and account numbers. Prior fiscal year data is
49 included on the spreadsheet as well as the current working budget and next fiscal year proposed
50 budget. Other data is included such as three-year averages as well as gross and percentage-based
51 differences.

52 Ellen asked if there was a good description of how the default budget works. Amy replied
53 that the default is basically the prior year budget less the warrant articles that were passed, less
54 one-time large expenditures, and added are contractual obligations. Increase in transportation
55 costs as well as non-union benefits are not included in the default budget. There have been
56 various conversations as to what should be included but it is ultimately up to the school board to
57 determine the default budget within the scope of the law.

58 Matt Borden asked if inflation is accounted for. Amy responded that they are not allowed to
59 consider inflation.

60 Amy continued through the budget spreadsheet by tabs. She noted that they made
61 adjustments last year at the request of the Ways and Means committee. The categories chart is
62 shared at the budget presentation and gives a graphical breakdown of the different categories.
63 The budget assumptions are laid out as well. Amy reported that health and dental costs are
64 projected to increase about 20% and 4% respectively. This is occurring statewide. Those
65 numbers come from Health Trust, a state-based organization that provides healthcare coverage to
66 public sector employees. Amy continued through the tabs of the spreadsheet including an
67 account code breakdown and enrollment/potential future enrollment in the school district.
68 Warrant articles are broken out on their own tabs as well. Amy highlighted that this group is
69 more focused on expenditures and not revenue driven by the tax base. An estimated tax impact
70 will be provided for the warrant articles when those are calculated.

71 Caitlin asked a clarifying question about if his is a live document. Amy noted that it is but
72 she will lock the cells so accidental changes are not made by viewers of the document. It is also a
73 publicly available document on the SAU website. Caitlin asked if there are any restrictions in
74 regard to saving files on personal computers. Amy replied that since it is publicly available, there
75 are no restrictions to saving files on a personal computer or device.

76 Chris asked how many committee members should be on each subcommittee. Amy answered
77 certainly one and often there are two ways and means members per subcommittee depending on
78 the magnitude of the topic.

79 **3. Subcommittee Assignments**

80 The group proceeded to assign subcommittee assignments by volunteering.

81 **School Nutrition:** Brittany Donovan

82 **Transportation:** Matt Comstock

83 **AMS-Curriculum:** Caitlin Thompson, Peter Maresco

84 **AMS-Administration:** Brian Coogan, Peter Maresco

85 **CW-Curriculum:** Brittany Donovan, Matt Borden

86 **CW-Administration:** Chris Goodrich

87 **Technology:** Matt Comstock

88 **Facilities:** Chris Goodrich, Matt Borden

89 **Student Services:** Caleb Baird

90 **Capital Items/Grants:** Caitlin Thompson

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92 **4. Other Business**

93 Caleb noted that all communication among the Way and Mean committee should be done
94 via our SAU provided emails. Additionally, any social media interactions need to be done as an
95 individual citizen and that no one is to speak on behalf of the committee on social media. Matt
96 Comstock agreed and thought that it would be best if the committee as a whole did not have a
97 social media presence at all.

98 Amy noted that any emails that contain a quorum of members should also be put in the
99 minutes at the next meeting. Caitlin asked how we should handle members of the town reaching
100 out to us as individuals via our SAU email. Caleb thought that the response should be that the
101 any questions will be brought to the next meeting and the response will be in the minutes. Any
102 email response to a question should come from the chair of the committee.

103 Ellen brought up that we should discuss whether or not there should be a public comment
104 period at our meetings. Amy noted that we are not a school board, and it is up to us. Matt
105 Comstock brought up that this committee is not a board that makes decisions in town. We do not
106 control or set the budget, nor make decisions for the school district. It was decided that if a
107 resident wants to make a public comment, they are welcome to but there does not need to be a
108 back-and-forth question and answer period. A two-minute comment per resident should suffice.

109 Peter brought up that last year he had a conversation with one of his neighbors about the
110 vote that occurred last year. His takeaway from the conversation was that the Ways and Means
111 committee should come up with a short concise summary of the warrant articles to attempt to
112 educate the voters of the town about what is being presented in the budget.

113 **5. Public Comments**

114 Caleb asked if there were any public comments at this time.

115 Dwyane Purvis commented that their Ways and Means allowed for public access and
116 comment. They did not want to present anything as if they were operating in a vacuum. His
117 question was that are we as a committee going to be posting an agenda prior to the meeting.

118 Greg Fritz commented that the Ways and Means will also need to vote on citizen
119 petitions that make it to the ballot. He learned this last year through his experience.

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121 The meeting adjourned at 7:06 PM.

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123 Minutes record by: Matt Comstock