

Amherst School District Ways and Means Committee
Meeting Minutes
Brick School Meeting Room
Tuesday, November 14, 2023, 6:00 PM

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

3 Also in attendance was Business Administrator Amy Facey.
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5 **1. Prior meeting minutes**
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7 *A MOTION was made by Caitlin Thompson and SECONDED by Matt Borden to approve the*
8 *meeting minutes of October 3, 2023, as presented.*

9 *Vote: 4-0-0; motion carried unanimously.*
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11 **2. Sub-committee meetings overview and discussion**
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13 **a. School Nutrition Services**
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15 There was no one in attendance tonight who attended the School Nutrition Services sub-
16 committee meeting. This will need to be discussed at a later date.
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18 **b. Transportation**
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20 Matt Comstock attended. We are currently under contract for both school busses and
21 special education transportation. There is a \$328K increase in the budget for FY25. This is
22 largely driven by an increase in special education transportation. The district is in the first year of
23 a new contract for this service. Their hope was that it would be a competitive bidding process
24 and they presented their needs to 4-5 different providers. Ultimately, only 1 provider submitted a
25 bid for the service. The district also expects an increased demand for special education
26 transportation as there has been an increase at the elementary level in children with autism and
27 other developmental needs. Regarding school busses, the amount budgeted for FY24 and voted
28 on, is based on the FY22 rate and 17 routes. The FY22 rate is still being used because the budget
29 has been the default budget every year since then. Currently the school runs 15 routes to try to
30 make up the gap between the FY22 cost and the actual current day cost. They want to add a 16th
31 route for FY25 because students are losing too much instructional time due to bus delays. The
32 16th route will allow for a few number of stops and a quicker route to make sure kids are at
33 school on time.
34

35 Caitlin Thompson asked about athletics and how those are treated. Currently, the schools
36 have to work with the bus company to provide busses for athletics at a different cost. At the sub-
37 committee meeting we discussed the creation of a vehicle trust. Souhegan did this a few years
38 ago and purchased a couple of 12 passenger vans. They are to be driven by coaches or volunteers
39 to sporting events which eliminates the need for additional school busses for athletics. The
40 Amherst School District is planning to have a warrant article this year to create their own vehicle
41 fund to facilitate purchasing vehicles for this same purpose.
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43 **c. AMS-Administration**

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45 There was no one in attendance tonight who attended the AMS-Administration sub-
46 committee meeting. This will need to be discussed at a later date.

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48 **d. AMS-Curriculum**

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50 Caitlin Thompson attended. Similar to other sub-committees, they took a zero-based
51 budget approach. Prior to starting the budget process, they took a complete inventory of supplies
52 on hand that did not need to be purchased. One of the topics of discussion was on ecology
53 school. In 6th and 8th grade, the children take a week trip to ecology school in Maine. Part of the
54 cost is for teachers to attend and their overnight contracted rate. There was discussion that there
55 are sometimes during the day that the teachers are not as critical to the instruction as the staff of
56 the eco-school is taking the reins. The staffing cost for these trips is around \$40K total. There
57 was discussion among the sub-committee about if these trips needed to be rethought.

58 The school is piloting using workbooks for math as an alternative to text books. There
59 was discussion about literacy as well and what the program is going to look like. The school
60 decided that literacy is a forward-looking priority and that the focus for this year is on math.

61 The children also take a trip to “Battleship Cove” which is a similar trip to ecology
62 school. The school is going to rethink this program as well as it may not be accommodating to all
63 students.

64 There is a budget reset occurring for the summer school program as well.

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66
67 **e. CW-Administration**

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69 Chris Goodrich attended. The largest differences between FY24 and FY25 are driven by
70 health insurance increases. There is a greater than 21% increase in cost, about \$800K for the
71 entire budget across the district. There is more kindergarten space needed to accommodate the
72 need. There is currently a role that is split between pre-K coordination and teaching. That role is
73 being converted to full-time Early Education Director to better accommodate needs. There is
74 dedicated money to keep the co-curriculars. There is a significant increase in copier costs, of
75 about 30%. There will be monitoring to make sure that the copiers are being used appropriately.
76 Overall, they took a zero-based approach to budgeting.

77
78 Caitlin Thompson commented about the split role and that it was discussed in student
79 services as well.

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81 **f. CW-Curriculum**

82
83 Matt Borden attended. The big discussion was around health insurance. This is common
84 across the budget. Staff longevity was discussed as an increase in the budget. Workbooks versus
85 textbooks was another common theme in this discussion. There is a change occurring to the ESL,
86 English as a second language, program. Previously, this was done via video tutoring and videos.
87 Now, they will be sharing a resource with the high school. There is a staffing increase but that is
88 offset by a decrease in the software costs. Student recognition was another topic of conversation.

89 It is essentially the 4th grade graduation. It was originally put in place outside during covid, since
90 implementing the feedback from families has been so great that it is now a budgeted event.

91
92 The school took a zero-based budget approach.

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94
95 **g. Technology**

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97 Matt Comstock attended. Overall there is a \$138K increase in the budget between the
98 FY24 voted budget and the FY25 proposed budget. Historically, when money is needed
99 elsewhere in the budget it gets pulled from Technology. The increases this year are driven by the
100 need to replace comm network equipment. The schools utilize physical servers for some of their
101 data storage. This includes HIPPA documents in the nurses office, accounting, power, and
102 library. It was determined that it was actually less expensive to keep library data on the server
103 than in the cloud. There is a need to replace aging classroom projectors and Smartboards with
104 Interactive Displays. The Interactive Displays are expected to have a great longevity than the
105 Smartboards and the teachers and students prefer the Interactive Displays over Smartboards.
106 Brian Miller, the Technology Director, has a detailed three year technology plan that is publicly
107 available from the budget table of contents. There is a need to replace end of life teacher and
108 student laptops this year as well.

109
110 Matt Borden asked about what happens to the devices that reach the end of life. Is there
111 any opportunity to recoup revenue from EOL laptops? This was not answered at the sub-
112 committee meeting but should be investigated.

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114 **h. Facilities**

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116 Matt Borden and Matt Comstock both attended. There is a five-year facilities plan that is
117 very detailed. We are getting to the end of our heating and electric contract at the end of FY25.
118 The facilities plan is public and included in the table of contents on the FY25 Budget document.
119 Most of the conversation was based around future costs due to heating and electricity costs.
120 Regular maintenance is being and has been conducted on all grounds and buildings. Across the
121 schools in town there is \$435K of preventative maintenance projected to be conducted in FY25.
122 This is about 3.5 times greater than what occurred during FY21.

123
124 **i. Student Services**

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126 Catilin Thompson attended. Student Services is geared towards special education, IEP
127 plans and serving students who have been identified as requiring assistance at school. There was
128 discussion around revisiting how the staffing is done for student services. The district can only
129 budget for what they know of today and find it difficult to budget for the unknowns in the future
130 as new children come into the district. There has been a shift towards having full-time resources
131 at each school. This will provide a great benefit to the children instead of splitting time between
132 schools. The district is down 6 paraprofessional positions currently. The school is dealing with
133 this the best they can. There was a discussion about how to best utilize the staff that they have. The
134 end-goal is to create plans that result in students not requiring 1 on 1 assistance in class. Health

135 insurance was a big increase in this budget. The overall budget is decreasing this year due to the
136 lack of paraprofessionals. The staff are working to figure out how to best use their limited space
137 and supplies. Amherst as a district is known as a good place for special education because we
138 care about our students and take everyone's needs seriously.

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141 **j. Capital/Misc.**

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143 Caitlin Thompson attended. This category is for any capital needs across the district. This
144 includes a line item for interest due to improvements to the AMS building as they added new
145 space 15-20 years ago. There was discussion at the meeting about the District Assessment line
146 item. This line item is the Amherst School District's portion of the SAU 39 costs. Ultimately it
147 pays for the 21 people who work at the SAU office such as the super intendant and business
148 administrator. It is planned that \$1.7 million will be pulled from the capital reserve fund to pay
149 for roof repair/replacements and HVAC at the AMS building. The funds used previously were
150 for a very small portion of the roof, the \$1.7 million would pay for a large portion of roof
151 replacement and HVAC for 12 classrooms. They are changing to rooftop HVAC to allow for
152 more space in the classrooms. Units under the windows in the classroom are being removed.
153 They are using this opportunity to replace the windows as well that need replacement. There is
154 no impact to budget for this cost since it would be coming from the capital reserve fund. The
155 sub-committee meeting started to turn towards the Wilkins building and it was decided that
156 should be a larger conversation. In short, there are currently two different proposals being
157 evaluated regarding needed improvements to that building. There is a public meeting on
158 December 5th to discuss the Wilkins plan in greater depth. This is the same night as a scheduled
159 ways and means meeting. There was discussion about moving ways and means to allow for
160 attendance. We will follow up via email to reschedule our meeting.

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162 **3. Description of ASD Ways and Means on the SAU 39 website**

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164 The current verbiage from the SAU 39 website was read. Matt Borden brought up that the
165 mission statement doesn't sound like much of a mission statement and more of a description.
166 Chris Goodrich thought that changes could be made but a larger group would be more beneficial
167 to providing input. Matt Comstock agreed. It was agreed that we could share opinions via email
168 about a mission statement that will be included in the next meeting minutes. Caitlin Thompson
169 volunteered to kick off that email chain.

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171 **4. Remote attendance of meetings**

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173 The group decided to table the larger conversation but was not opposed to remote attendance.

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175 **5. SAU Budget Committee Assignment**

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177 Peter Maresco was previously assigned to the SAU Budget Committee.

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179 **6. Other business**

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181 The public hearing for the bond is January 8 and the budget public hearing is January 9. The
182 group discussed the scheduling of the December 5 ways and means meeting. We questioned if it
183 was necessary to meet between drafts 2 and draft 3 of the budget or if it just makes sense to meet
184 after draft 3 is released. A survey will be sent out to the whole group to determine the date of the
185 meeting after draft 3 is released.
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187 The meeting adjourned at 7:56

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189 Minutes record by: Matt Comstock