

**Minutes**  
**Deliberative Session Meeting for the Amherst School District**  
**February 5, 2024**  
**Souhegan High School Theater**  
**Amherst, New Hampshire**

Attendance:

Administration: Mike Berry- Superintendent, Amy Facey- SAU #39 Business Administrator, Christine Landwehrle- Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education, Steven Chamberlin- Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, Kathleen Murphy- Principal of Clark/Wilkins School, Anna Parrill- Assistant Principal Clark/Wilkins School, and Kristen Gauthier- Principal of Amherst Middle School.

Amherst School Board Members: Ton Gauthier- Chair, Jason White- Vice Chair, Terri Behm- Secretary, Shannon Gascoyne, and Tim Theberge.

School District Moderator: Ellen Gruzdien

School District Clerk: Tony Ortiz

School District Treasurer: Margaret Bennett

Amherst Ways and Means Committee: Chair- Caleb Baird, Secretary-Matthew Comstock, Matthew Borden, Brittany Donovan, Christopher Goodrich, Peter Maresco and Caitlin Thompson.

Attorney for the District: Allison Tamposi Esq. Wadleigh Starr & Peters PLLC, 95 Market St, Manchester, NH 03101

Meeting Minutes: Danae A. Marotta

Public: (speakers or commenters): Victoria Parisi, 3 Church Street, Amherst NH, George Bower, 183 Mack Hill Road, Amherst NH, Aaron Kaplan, 31 Mack Hill Rd, Amherst NH, Dwayne Purvis, 145 Hollis Rd, Amherst NH, Mozammel Hussaini, 33 Eagle Rock Road, Amherst NH, Kristen Van Goor, 1 High Meadow Lane, Amherst NH, Elizabeth Purvis, 145 Hollis Road, Amherst NH, Shiela Rousch, 20 Nathan Lord Lane, Amherst NH, Jason Hennessey, 455 Boston Post Road, Amherst NH, Marcella Dube, 48 New Boston Road, Amherst NH, Michelle Emmond, 8 Davis Lane, Amherst NH, Julie Scott, 11 Thistle Dr. Amherst NH, Kelly Schmidt, 11 Patricia Lane, Amherst NH, Chris Goodrich, 91 Christian Hill Rd, Amherst NH, Steve Coughlan, 11 Eaton Road, Amherst NH, Lisa Eastland, 19 River Road, Amherst NH, Jeff Candito, 35 Buckridge Dr. Amherst NH, Amy Hanson, 12 Cricket Corner Rd, Amherst NH, Mark Bender, 20 Grater Dr, Amherst, NH.

The number of voting attendees: 116

**Moderator of the Amherst School District, Ms. Ellen Gruzdien, called the 2024 Amherst School District Deliberative Session to order at 6:04 PM.**

The Moderator asked the public to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

On Tuesday, March 12<sup>th</sup> we shall vote via paper ballot here at the high school from 6:00AM to 8:00PM on each warrant as we agree to its wording this evening.

The Moderator introduced the Amherst School District Board, Chair Tom Gauthier. Vice Chair Jason White, Secretary Terri Behm, Shannon Gascoyne, and Tim Theberge.

The Moderator introduced the Administration, Superintendent, Mr. Mike Berry, Business Administrator, Ms. Amy Facey, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education, Mr. Steven Chamberlin, and Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education, Ms. Christine Landwehrle. The Moderator then introduced district legal counsel, Ms. Allison Tamposi. Esq.

The Moderator introduced Amherst Ways and Means Committee Members, Chair, Mr. Caleb Baird. Secretary, Matthew Comstock, Mr. Matthew Borden, Ms. Brittany Donovan, Mr. Christopher Goodrich, Mr. Peter Maresco, and Ms. Caitlin Thompson.

The Moderator continued her introduction, explaining the Moderator's Rules of Procedure. The Moderator will not follow Robert's Rules. The Moderator will use the following general rules of procedure, whose main purpose is to keep things moving and not get bogged down in procedural quagmires.

1. Every resident who wishes to vote must have checked in with the Supervisors of the Checklist outside the auditorium door and have a colored dot visible on their clothing.
2. The Moderator will take Articles in the order they appear on the Warrant unless the Moderator announces the intent to take Articles out of order.
3. Motions to amend must be made in writing and will be voted separately. Amendments will not be allowed to accumulate.
4. Each speaker shall state name and limit their time at the microphone to three minutes. You are not required to state your address. No individual will be allowed to speak a second time until all others wishing to speak for the first time have done so.
5. Speakers wishing to address the meeting should form a line at the two microphones. The Moderator will attempt to alternate pro and con. The con microphone will be to my left and the pro microphone will be to my right.
6. The Moderator will only accept a motion to be made at the microphone.
7. No motion to call the question shall be accepted by the Moderator until there has been sufficient debate on the article.
8. A motion to restrict reconsideration in accordance with RSA 40 Section 10 should be made immediately following the announcement of the vote on that article.
9. The Moderator will dispense with reading the warrant at this time; however, each warrant article will be read when it is moved to the floor for deliberation and action. The warrant is also printed in the Voters' Guide. The Annual Report and Voters' Guide to Official Ballot Voting will be sent to all residents prior to March 5<sup>th</sup>.

***The Moderator noted the Election of Officers.***

***Article 11. Election of Officers (voting by official ballot March 12, 2024)***

85 *To the following school district offices:*

86 *a. To choose one (1) School Board Member for the ensuing three (3) years.*

87 **The Moderator instructed the Clerk to place Warrant Article #11 on the Ballot as**  
88 **currently worded and thus, declared.**

89 She added that this warrant article cannot be changed by this meeting.

90 The Moderator introduced Superintendent, Mike Berry, to discuss the status of the Amherst  
91 School District.

92 Mr. Berry commented I am humbled and privileged to serve the Amherst and Mont Vernon  
93 communities. It is a tremendous opportunity and responsibility. As Superintendent, I care about  
94 all stakeholders including the taxpayer. We intend to use every dollar efficiently and be as  
95 transparent as possible. Schools are a fundamental part of a community and I believe a respectful  
96 partnership between schools and their communities are essential. In SAU 39, we have committed  
97 ourselves to engage, challenge and support all learners. We will create schools with the optimum  
98 balance of high academic expectations while ensuring care for the whole student. Like most, our  
99 school districts are navigating the new realities of our post pandemic hyperconnected global  
100 society that requires us to approach education differently. Input from community members and  
101 the boards about the importance of developing a Strategic Plan is not lost on me. Reviewing the  
102 work of the last three superintendents has been valuable. The Framework for Progress provides a  
103 foundation for developing an effective operational and difference making strategic plan. The  
104 long-term plan would provide the overarching direction for the SAU, allowing each school to  
105 develop site specific goals and action steps. This work will be forthcoming in collaboration with  
106 the individual boards. If you did not receive or pick up the Framework of Progress there are  
107 some copies, QR codes, emails and it is on social media. If there's any questions regarding that  
108 you can please reach out. Know this, we are strong and capable SAU with the resources to fill  
109 the promise of public education. It is essential that we work towards the goal of transforming  
110 every school into a reliable vehicle for continual instructional improvement. This is a critical step  
111 towards ensuring our educational institutions provide students with the highest quality education  
112 possible, an education that leads to productive citizens who give back to their community. The  
113 leadership of SAU 39 is committed to promoting consistency and stability across all schools  
114 while improving literacy and mathematics, expanding and improving the use of instructional  
115 time, supporting the continual improvement of instructional practices and strengthening  
116 partnerships. The urgencies of these realities is the catalyst for this framework. I wanted to  
117 highlight and communicate the good work that has occurred and is ongoing and the Amherst  
118 Mount Vernon and Souhegan School Districts. I continually look for ways to narrow energies  
119 and remove the distractions that impede learning and negatively impact the educational  
120 experience for our students. There needs to be a certain amount of autonomy from school to  
121 school and district to district allowing for individual creativity, different implementations, or  
122 unconventional methods. The Framework for Progress is the North Star all our schools will  
123 follow. All work has to connect to this destination. I want to assure people in this room and  
124 moving forward. The framework is not a reform movement, it's not a reform effort it is an  
125 improvement effort. As we work on this, I encourage people to give us space and grace because

it is a longer process than people expect. This will serve as a bridge to the fully developed strategic plan. Please know that we are working with a sense of urgency increasing our pace of change as our students and staff are counting on us to do so. I believe SAU 39 is poised to achieve great things in the coming years as we strengthen the educational environment for our students and educators. I have no doubt together we can make this journey a reality. I invite you to join me, with confidence, as we take on this work and continue the good work that's been going on for a number of years. We welcome your ongoing feedback and urge you to partner with us as we move forward. I appreciate you coming tonight and your participation in this process. Thank you.

The Moderator thanked Superintendent, Mr. Mike Berry.

The Moderator recognized the Amherst School Board to make their presentation.

Amherst School Board Chair, Mr. Tom Gauthier, noted that he will review the five articles spread over five categories. First, we have our elementary school construction project bond. We have our budget, the proposed as well as the default budget. We also have a contribution to our Capital Reserve Fund for long term building maintenance and two new proposed trust funds, one to support ongoing technology needs and plans and second to fund a fleet of vehicles that will support supplemental transportation in the district.

The main goal of the Board and the Administration is to present a budget that will pass muster with voters for the first time in three years. We are currently operating under a default budget for the second straight year. Using a zero-based budget approach, Mr. Berry, the Administration, and the Board are presenting the budget you will see here tonight. Before we dive into the themes of the budget, I want to speak briefly on the zero-based budget approach. This is something that I think is misunderstood to a certain extent. This budget is put together starting at \$0. It is not based on starting point of last year's default budget. Mr. Tim Theberge will explain more later in the meeting. With Superintendent Berry and the Administration, every expense put into the budget by department heads, building leaders and administration has been fully justified. There is rigorous input at the building and department level. This intensity and ownership of the budget under a first-year superintendent has been ratcheted up and from a Board looking to get a budget passed for the first time in three years.

Now, there are some categories that fill up quickly, we know that we are going to need teachers, and we will look at Mr. Roger Preston's Maintenance Plan and see what is coming up for repair. When these items are put into the budget, we the Board, Administration and Building Leaders are asking questions such as "is this the best way to accomplish this task?" and "do we need every teacher, or every staff member?" You will see tonight we have removed a full-time teaching position because it was not necessary to meet class size goals. We have reduced paraprofessional staffing in special education because there aren't the needs that we have seen in past years. We also looked at budget items foreseen and planned for the past years. Lastly, do we have the data to back up a budget item and can we be creative to fill the budget request or can we do without it all together.

Adding to this, as a Board, Administration and at the building level, we continue to develop long term plans to avoid sharp spikes and declines in the budget. You will see that tonight with the proposal of two new Capital Trust Funds. We also continue to work with the administration to make sure that every department has a solid five-year plan. That allows for more long-term planning and budget stability.

As you can see there is a focus on Reading using evidence and research-based practices. As Mr. Chamberlin has discussed quite a bit over the last year and half, we know that Literacy is the foundation upon which a lifetime of skills are built. We want to capture and expand instructional time ensuring that every minute counts. That effort began with the new CBA's approved by the voters last year. The Board and Administration continue to look for ways to expand instructional time and quality. Lastly, supervision and evaluation of teachers and staff, setting expectations, providing constructive feedback, ensuring teachers grow and develop in their craft, which benefits them and students.

As we go through the presentation tonight, you will see what items impacted the budget the most. First, there is a 21.8% increase in Health Insurance. Last year's rate increase was roughly 5%. Dental is almost 5% this year, it was under 1% a year ago. You will see the impact of their new Collective Bargaining Agreements. This was approved by the voters last year for the teachers and support staff. We have changes in staffing due to enrollment and student needs both regular and special education. Under Superintendent Berry, we continued the work started last year by Mr. Chamberlin with a focus on district wide literacy achievement. We have an additional bus to help kids to get to school on time, plus changes in special education transportation. We will also continue to work on long term and short-term facilities needs.

The Moderator read Article #12 Bond Warrant Article.

***To see if the District will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of forty nine million nine hundred and ninety seven thousand two hundred fourteen dollars (\$49,997,214) (gross budget) to finance the major addition, reconstruction and renovation project for the Wilkins Elementary School building, located at 80 Boston Post Road, Amherst, NH and to authorize the issuance of not more than forty nine million nine hundred and ninety seven thousand two hundred fourteen dollars (\$49,997,214) of bonds or notes under and in compliance with the Municipal Finance Act, RSA 33:1 et seq., as amended; to authorize the School Board to apply for, obtain and accept federal, state or other aid, if any, which may be available for said project and to comply with all laws applicable to said project; to authorize the School Board to issue, negotiate, sell and deliver said bonds and notes and to determine the rate of interest thereon and the maturity and other terms thereof; and to authorize the School Board to take any action or to pass any other vote relative thereto, and further to raise and appropriate an additional sum of one million two hundred forty nine thousand nine hundred thirty dollars (\$1,249,930) for the first year's interest payment on the bond.***

***3/5 ballot vote required.***

***Recommended by the Amherst School Board (5-0)***

*Recommended by the Amherst School District Ways & Means (advisory budget committee) (7-0)*

*Estimated tax impact of passing this article is: \$0.52 per thousand.*

**The Moderator recognized Victoria Parisi, 3 Church Street, Amherst to move Article 12 Bond Warrant Article. George Bower, 183 Mack Hill Road, Amherst seconded the motion.**

The Moderator noted that Ms. Shannon Gascoyne, Amherst School Board Member and Ms. Terri Behm, Amherst School Board Secretary will be presenting this article.

Ms. Gascoyne noted that we will spend a brief portion of our presentation providing some historical context for those who may be newer to town or tuning in for the first time, and then we will work our way through the details of the last several months' worth of work culminating in the proposed request for FY25. Our aim is to provide a comprehensive look at the overall request and to answer as many of your questions as possible. When we arrive at the public comment portion of the evening, we will draw on the expertise of our fellow Board Members, SAU Leadership Team, and representatives from Banwell Architects, DEW Construction, and the civil engineering firm of Tighe & Bond. Before we dig in, we would like to take a moment to thank the members of this year's Amherst Building and Grounds Committee. This group gave generously of their time, meeting multiple times a month to pour over numerous iterations of floor plans, designs, and costs. They are an indispensable part of the process, and we are grateful for their participation.

The Amherst School District has grappled with capacity issues for decades. The 20-year-old temporary portables still housing students in the back of Wilkins are a testament to this. Wilkins opened its doors in 1967 and according to *A Sleeping Town Awakens a History of Amherst, NH*, a 14-room addition was needed almost immediately. In short, we have struggled with the need for more space from day one. Today, 57 years later, we continue to operate and maintain an elementary school building that is not appropriately sized for our current student population, requiring the use of detached portable classrooms and temporary office trailers to augment space. An elementary school building where the mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems have been well maintained, but they are now at the end of their useful life, with most grandfathered in as they would not meet current codes and standards. As we approach and plan for FY 25, the Amherst School Board remains steadfastly committed to addressing the infrastructure needs in our district for the long term.

Ms. Behm added the work being presented this evening is the result and evolution of a multi-year process which began in 2017. We have made significant strides in planning for our facilities, with input from multiple stakeholder groups, experts, administration, and residents. Thanks to your continued support of our Capital Maintenance Reserve Fund, we completed a small section of the roof at Amherst Middle School last summer. We will be completing a larger phase of the roof and HVAC project at AMS summer of 2024. Tonight, we will be presenting a revised plan to address our elementary school. The last two years have seen defeated bond requests for a new pre-K to grade 5 Clark-Wilkins School on the existing Wilkins site. Following post-election resident surveys and resident feedback sessions, the Amherst School Board spent

time in retreat during the summer of 2023 focused on facilities. While community support for a bond request HAS received slight gains year over year, the response from you, our community, has been that while you understand the need, the size of the requests have been too great. You have indicated that you would also like to see a fully costed renovation/addition option, and the majority of you responding to our surveys indicated you would like to see a smaller project brought forward. Additionally, you shared your concerns regarding the future of the Clark School building and your wonders about utilization of the Souhegan High School. We are grateful for your feedback. The warrant article being presented and proposed this evening seeks to strike a balance between what you have told us and what best meets the needs of our students and educators.

With community feedback in mind, the Amherst School Board directed the SAU leadership, along with the Building and Grounds Committee and the building administration at Clark-Wilkins, to work with our architect and construction manager to develop two fully costed proposals, a Renovation/Addition, and a Build to Suit option, with cost breakdowns for a Grades 1-5 Wilkins School configuration on the existing site. Bringing grade five to the elementary remains a critical component of the plan to both place students where they are most developmentally appropriate, and to alleviate a bit of the space constraints that we continue to experience and endure at the Amherst Middle School. This plan also maintains the Clark School for pre-K and Kindergarten, where we will continue to maintain and plan for program needs. We did explore the possibility with the Souhegan Cooperative School Board of relocating the preschool program to the high school annex, with the idea of perhaps offering a CTE program to high school students. After a lengthy discussion, it was determined not to move forward with this idea. Additionally, the Souhegan Cooperative School Board undertook an updated and exhaustive space utilization analysis of current square footage use at Souhegan High School. The Amherst School Board is appreciative of the Souhegan Cooperative School Board and all of their work in this area.

Ms. Behm continued, two options were fully costed and the Build to Suit option was unanimously favored by the Amherst Building and Grounds Committee in their discussion on November 29, 2023, and by the Amherst School Board. Both options and their costs were presented in detail at the January Bond Hearing, but we will be focusing primarily on the favored Build to Suit option tonight. As you will see in the following presentation, the Build to Suit option represents the most reasonable design based on the needs of students and our educational program. It is a functional design that meets our present needs and is built to carry us into the future for decades to come.

Ms. Gascoyne commented the design being presented maintains and renovates the existing multi-purpose room for use as a dedicated cafeteria. The design represents an 18.5% reduction in overall square footage to last year's plan; this was achieved by removing two grades from the plan and working through each space in detail to ensure the final floor plan design was appropriately and conservatively sized. Additionally, adjustments were made to the design for improved value – for example, Masonry exterior walls are concentrated to higher visibility and locations of resilience, and Masonry interior walls are limited to corridors, toilets, and gyms. This design represents a classic elementary school structure. You enter the building into a secure

vestibule with an administrative window. Grades 1-2 are located on the first floor, along with student services and specialized programming, the cafeteria, gym, library, and music & art.

She displayed the second floor renderings. The second floor houses grades 3, 4, and 5 with their associated educational supports located adjacent to the grade pods. The building design offers a smaller footprint on the site, reduced by 18.5% compared to last year's. The building is also set farther away from the edge of the wetland buffer than in previous designs. It offers an efficient drop/off and pick/up loop, along with ample parking for staff and school events. The conceptual exterior renderings maintain a familiar timeless look, profile, and feel to what we have had in the village for 57 years. Should this project pass in March we anticipate a summer of 2025 groundbreaking with construction complete in Spring/Summer of 2027. Detailed phasing plans and updates will be communicated and available throughout the course of the project. Care will be taken to work in phases that present the least disruption and impact to the school community.

Ms. Behm noted the project features. We have grouped the features of this project into four categories. This plan offers functional spaces that will endure the test of time, enhanced and present-day safety and security features, new mechanical, electrical, and plumbing (MEP) systems, and improved traffic flow. When we looked at creating simple and functional spaces, we began with a re-review of our programs and how they interplay with space. By removing preschool and kindergarten from the program, and by reviewing and adjusting spaces like the gym, we were able to reduce the building footprint by 18.5% over last year. We reviewed enrollment projections to arrive at a conservative and appropriately sized structure. This plan has a design capacity of 756 students, or 7 classrooms per grade, with 3 flexible classroom spaces built in to be used for programming or classroom space as needed to serve bubble years, student services, and program needs. It has a core enrollment capacity of 864, which refers to our core spaces, such as the Cafeteria, Media Center, and Gym.

I'd like to share a little bit about enrollment projections while we are on this slide. We are entering our third year of working with NESDEC, the New England School Development Council, to project enrollments. NESDEC is a not-for-profit educational organization that serves 300 school affiliates in New England, including 38 in NH, such as Hollis-Brookline, Oyster River, Merrimack, Milford, and Londonderry, to name a few. The first year they were under on their projections by 23 students, and the following year (FY24), they were over by 31 in grades K-8. NESDEC reviews annually each Fall/Winter and provides a Spring update with any adjustments. Over the next three years, grades K-4 enrollments are projected to increase by 55 students, and grades 5-8 enrollments are projected to increase by 8 students as students move through the grades. Projections involve a number of considerations, included but not limited to migration rates, birth rates, retention rates, and building permits. The projections are useful and are just that – projections. This information and the updates provided by NESDEC are used as a guide for resource planning purposes. Because not even NESDEC has a crystal ball, this building has been designed to support a future addition should it be required. As Ms. Gascoyne pointed out, the design maintains a familiar look, profile, and feel to what we are accustomed to in the village, updated to meet modern codes, standards, and requirements. It will feel as though it has always been here. The following are aspirational, conceptual design photos. We intend to complete a full update and audit of our existing furnishes, fixtures, and equipment and utilize as



much of our existing equipment as possible. The spaces we are creating are simple, classic spaces with natural light and improved ventilation and space.

Ms. Behm displayed an example of an art room with the essentials, a sink and project/supply storage.

She noted that currently, individual instruction spaces are woefully lacking. This design provides quiet spaces for educators to work with students in smaller group or individual settings, free of distraction and noise. Here is an example of a corridor with cubbies. Moving cubbies into the hallway allows for the most efficient use of classroom square footage and keeps those muddy boots and jackets out of the workspace. Here is an example of a music classroom, again very simple and flexible. Finally, this slide shows an example of the gym, which will serve as a dedicated space for our physical education program, after-school clubs and offerings, and be available for community use on evenings and weekends. The gym will be accessible through the main entrance, while the remainder of the school may be locked down.

Ms. Behm discussed the safety and security features. I know this topic is of special interest to many parents. As an active member of the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) in Amherst, I also believe in being proactive and prepared. A new building will feature present day safety and security features, including but not limited to, a front entrance sequence designed to meet Homeland Security Emergency Management specifications, removal of the need for detached portables, and an upgraded alarm and phone system and comprehensive camera system. A new building will address the deficiencies shown in this slide. It will also offer enhanced and secure exterior doors and an improved fire safety system, including a voice evacuation system in compliance with current codes.

Ms. Gascoyne mentioned that Yeaton Associates out of Bedford, NH, conducted an additional and updated review of our MEP systems and designed the specifications for this option. Last year the board informed you of the deficiencies of this building - this year we are sharing how this plan addresses those deficiencies. Some of the features of a new building with new systems include energy efficient systems, systems that meet present-day codes and standards, and improved ventilation systems. Temperature control, automatic lighting controls, and a new switchboard and panel, to name a few.

Anyone who resides in the village, has a reason to drive through the village between the hours of 7:30-8:15 or 2:00- 2:30, or for any caregiver who has ever experienced pick up/drop off at Wilkins, knows that the current site design does not efficiently or adequately support our community. The draft site plan was developed by the civil engineering firm of Tighe & Bond. It is in conceptual draft form; test pits and borings have been taken to ensure the site can be developed as designed. The design proposed pulls 75 cars off the road during parent pick-up/drop-off. This is approximately 45 more cars than what we have capacity for today. Additionally, the parking lot is increased for school and community events. Currently, at every school and community event taking place at Wilkins, the fire lane is repeatedly blocked by parked cars and overflows into the street along BPR. The Jones Rd. exit is currently planned to serve as an exit point for buses and a secondary emergency egress, with a gate to control use and traffic. For those of you who appreciate a variety of comparisons and considerations, we have

attempted to provide you a high-level overview on the next few slides. We appreciate the feedback we received from our B&G committee, and residents attending the January Bond Hearing, suggesting we include this type of information.

Ms. Gascoyne presented a high-level overview of the difference between last year's proposal and this year. As you'll note, the total cost has been reduced, along with a reduction in the overall square footage and footprint on the site. This slide shows how the costs compare. As part of our work this year going back to the drawing board, we worked with our architects and construction manager to further refine cost in detail for the following scenarios, maintaining the status quo, a reno/addition, and a build to suit. In the Status Quo scenario, the 5th grade remains at AMS, and we continue to rely on temporary portables to augment our space needs at the elementary school. It is worth noting that the \$33,134,904 estimate does not take into account the replacement costs of portable buildings over time, which must also be considered as the lifespan of a portable building is not the same as brick and mortar. This scenario also creates unpredictable tax spikes and places the education operating budget at risk should needs be placed in the budget. As a reminder, we spent extensive time reviewing and discussing the costs associated with the Renovation/Addition and the Build to Suit options at our January Bond Hearing. As you will see over the next two slides while the reno/addition option was slightly less expensive it created a building that was not as efficient in form or function. Additionally, it required extensive repair of existing elements and systems all while retaining older walls. It also did nothing for anything below the existing foundation and it maintains several existing classrooms that are currently undersized for our programs. The Build to Suit option offers the most bang for your buck and responsibly and reasonably threads the needle between the community feedback we have received and educational requirements. The next two slides are a high-level representation of how the current building compares to the proposed in terms of space. Please note that these slides represent general education classrooms and special programs and student services; the cafeteria, bathrooms, hallways, and administrative spaces are not included in these comparisons. Currently, the main building at Wilkins has 27 rooms allocated for grades 1-4 general education instruction. The proposed plan includes 43 rooms to accommodate grades 1-5 general education instruction, with dedicated space for Music, PE, and Technology. This is a 24,330 net square foot increase in general education space to meet our current need. Currently, we have 8 rooms dedicated to serving our student services programming – this includes spaces for speech pathology, Reading and Math Intervention & Enrichment, Special Education Programs (MyTime and Stars), Calming Spaces, and OT/PT. Many of these spaces are doubling up and utilizing any pocket of space in the building they can find. The new design provides appropriate space for our educational professionals to work with students in spaces that are conducive to learning. Providing individual supports such as speech services in a room shared with other adults and students is challenging, as you can imagine. Additionally, this increase accounts for 3 flexible classroom spaces, which may be used for student service programming or general education classroom space as needed to accommodate enrollment requirements. This is a 7,206 net square foot increase in student services space to meet our current need.

Ms. Behm added the SAU administration has engaged the New Hampshire Municipal Bond Bank to assist with financing. The Advantage of the bond bank is that it pools smaller bonds to reduce cost, increases efficiencies, and has a proven track record of supporting NH school districts. The current proposal is a Level Principal 25-year term calculated using a cautiously

conservative rate of 4% as provided by the bond bank. The NH Municipal Bond Bank is different than a regular bank. The rate is unknown until the time of sale on the open market, which is why an extremely conservative estimate is applied for planning purposes. This slide represents the estimated tax impact based on the current valuation and average home value provided by the town of Amherst and does not include any potential savings from a refinancing. The information presented this evening is a conservative estimate utilizing the prudent and cautious rate provided by the bond bank for planning purposes. Here is a graphical representation of the tax impact over the life of the bond, with payments decreasing over the life of the loan. Last year's proposal was ranked 7 out of 17 building aid proposals submitted to the state. Even though our project was ranked 7th, there would be insufficient state funding available after funding the projects ahead of us. The Amherst School Board, along with SAU Leadership, continue to advocate for an increase in funds for and changes to the building aid process with local legislative representatives.

Ms. Gascoyne noted that as you heard Superintendent Berry say at the start of the presentation our mission is to engage, challenge and support all learners. We can't talk about our buildings without discussing their impact on student learning. Research and evidence-based instructional practices drive the Amherst School District. The project being proposed is a classic design that will serve the district for decades, as educational best practices and curriculums evolve. There are no pie-shaped classrooms, movable walls, or oddly shaped nooks and crannies, just a classic New England structure built to endure. Our goal is to create an environment where educators can teach to the best of their ability and students can learn to the best of theirs. Right now, our building hinders those things. In our building, we lose instructional time when we place educators on carts traveling from room to room (such as our technology teacher) or when we move programs to areas of the school for which they are not designed, like Music, which is currently on the stage, which is in the cafeteria and also shared with the gym. Classrooms with adequate space to spread out allow teachers to reconfigure seating arrangements and allow for a variety of teaching methods. They also make it possible to create private study areas and smaller learning centers that reduce visual and auditory interruptions. The MPR is currently our lunchroom, PE space, and Music Room. Our programming schedule is driven by the lunch schedule. Temperature fluctuations and a lack of consistent temperature control are an ongoing issue. The temperature affects engagement levels and overall productivity, no matter what age you are. According to the EPA, there is evidence that modest changes in room temperature affect student's abilities to perform in tasks requiring mental concentration. Children in classrooms with high outdoor air ventilation rates tend to achieve higher scores on standardized tests in math and reading.

Ms. Gascoyne concluded their presentation; this project offers functional spaces with a timeless design allowing for the implementation of a variety of teaching methods and styles. The design allows for future additions to be built onto the site, should an unanticipated boom occur in town. It addresses present-day safety and security concerns, replaces MEP systems with energy efficient systems, and provides optimal indoor air quality and ventilation. Finally, this design improves the traffic flow through the village by maintaining a smaller footprint and increasing the number of cars that are taken from the road during the drop/off pick up hours. It is a structure that has been designed to serve the present needs of our current student population and generations to follow. It is a design that takes into consideration all that we have heard from

you, our community, over the last several years. We have endeavored to scale this project to one that you are able to support. We recognize that this is a major investment in the future of our town and public education in Amherst. Thank you for being a part of the evolution of this work. The article you see before you is the product of your feedback over the years and input from countless community volunteers and stakeholder groups. We look forward to your comments and questions.

The Moderator thanked Ms. Gascoyne and Ms. Behm.

The Moderator asked the Ways and Means Committee for a report.

Chair of the Ways and Means, Mr. Caleb Baird, commented by engaging an extensive conversation and research alongside the Amherst School Board as well as the staff and leadership throughout the SAU 39 the Ways and Means Committee unanimously agreed that this project is in the best fiscal interest of the town with the vote of seven in favor zero against supporting article 12. Through three plus years of research in engaging community for feedback and multiple iterations of this project, the Ways and Means believes that an exhaustive effort was undertaken by both the Amherst School Board and the SAU Administration. This is to create a solution that takes into account the fiscal concerns of the residents of Amherst, minimizing tax impacts as much as possible while still creating a facility that would meet the current and future spaces for the district, provide a learning environment to facilitate high academic achievement and deliver the highest standard for student safety. As Ms. Gascoyne alluded, if Article 12 is not approved by the voters, the Wilkins School would still likely require maintenance throughout the next decade. This would create a similar tax burden and only address structural and mechanical issues such as plumbing and HVAC which are at their end of life. This would not resolve any space constraints, current sub optimal learning environments or safety concerns. All this coupled with the fact that construction costs are will likely continue to rise in the coming years led the Ways and Means to the conclusion that this article is in the best interest of the town at this time.

The Moderator opened it up to the public for comments or questions. Please state your name, each speaker will have three minutes for their comments.

Mr. Aaron Kaplan, 31 Mack Hill Rd, Amherst, commented the voters of Amherst have twice said no to a sprawling new school, yet you proposed another oversized facility that would be larger than the Wilkins, AMS and portables combined. Even your architect lists under drawbacks “a long walk from beginning to the end of the building”. At the recent December 5th Amherst Board Meeting, an elected official, school official stated, “we’ve exhausted the conversation, if anyone is surprised by this proposal come March then shame on them”. I am surprised that after years of being asked to weigh all options the Amherst Board refuses to do so and has apparently misinformed the public on the matter. Early last year, a Souhegan Board Member implored you to approach them to discuss moving seventh and or eighth grade into the underutilized Annex. Instead, this board proposed to put preschool students in the Annex, which was unsurprisingly shut down, however, Souhegan September 11th minutes clearly state an open invitation to discuss other uses for the Annex. Despite that, this Board apparently chooses to smear the Souhegan Board and misinform our citizens that Souhegan is to blame. I am surprised that you proposed to turn Wilkins into a construction site for a minimum of two or more years putting every child and employee at an unnecessary risk of exposure to construction

related hazards. Google Search “construction dust hazards” and you will be alarmed. There is security risk involved with having construction contractors and subcontractors working alongside elementary age children and staff. Your claims of security risk of existing portables fall flat when you propose to empty all of Wilkins into portables during a multi-year project. Construction sites are hazardous as evidenced by the following incidents and lawsuits related to your contractor. A construction worker's death caused by falling material on him at a hospital construction site, Vermont OSHA safety issues, violations issued to DEW Construction which were dismissed on a technicality, Tree Top Condo Association that sued DEW for faulty construction including chronic roof leaks and faulty boilers the very items you proposed to fix with this project. \$3 million was paid to settle the matter and a local Vermont publication wrote that “DEW used the subcontractor who employed illegal migrants at multiple construction sites”. These cases don't necessarily disqualify a company from being hired but they highlight the risk. You do not take on these risks unless it is absolutely necessary to do so. The Mont Vernon Board is considering pulling the seventh and eighth grade from AMS while this board proposes to expand. You refuse to engage with the Souhegan Board despite being invited. Your letter to the Selectman right after the last election asking for \$125,000 in Impact Fees to design another new school tells me you did not intend to weigh all options. The loss of sports moving fifth grade to Wilkins would lead to a less physically active student body denying the memories and lessons that are learned through these programs. I'm surprised by all this and there's no shame in that. I leave you with these two questions, I get it you don't like what I have to say.

The Moderator asked Mr. Gauthier if he was prepared to answer questions.

Mr. Gauthier replied yes if they have the statistics and information. Anything that we cannot answer we are glad to respond after.

Mr. Kaplan inquired why have you repeatedly stated that the Souhegan Board is to blame for the lack of fully discussing the millions of dollars of underutilized space in our district? Which of the aforementioned lawsuits and safety incidents were you aware of and what discussions have you had with DEW Construction and Banwell Associates to ensure that none of these occur here? I hope this is not the first you are hearing about these. This question should be answered by the Board and not by any third party.

Mr. Gauthier responded that they have discussed this ad nauseum in our SAU meetings. We have discussed this in our meetings between Souhegan and Amherst alone to talk about facilities. I think Mont Vernon was there, it was more of a facility focused SAU meeting. We have agreed to disagree on how we are approaching this. Souhegan has repeatedly said that they want to use that space for their needs as well, I believe that it was the October meeting.

Ms. Gascoyne noted that it was at the September meeting.

Mr. Gauthier added that they voted 6-1 not to pursue any further use of their buildings for the Amherst buildings. They said that they were always willing to have those conversations but they're not when they say they want to pursue it for their buildings. Ms. Stephanie Grund the Souhegan Board Chair is in attendance so if there is anything that he is misrepresenting it is not by intention. Our thought was if we do not want to put seventh and eighth grade in that building,

it is not developmentally appropriate, then we also wanted to use preschool as an opportunity for Souhegan students and they did not want to do that either. This has been two groups that really do not want to work together on this project because we want to use those facilities and spaces for their own needs. We do not want to put seventh and eighth graders in the Annex and we are on the same spot to not go forward with that approach.

Ms. Gascoyne mentioned that it was a great collaborative meeting. It was noted multiple times that adding an additional grade or grades of students beyond 9 to 12 would create significant crowding and constraints in the Main Building here at Souhegan. It was also noted several times during the meeting that any discussion to bring those additional grades onto the high school campus would require potential construction on the existing Souhegan High School site in order to avoid cramming this building. What we're not interested in doing on the Amherst Board is trading our problem for the same problem here. Additional construction would likely be needed the Amherst School Board does not find this to be realistic, viable, cost effective or academically optimal for the many needs that we have across our entire District K to 8. Souhegan High School also has their own needs here for their curriculum and for their building. I was not at the meeting Chairman Gauthier was, but I have watched it several times preparing for this meeting.

Mr. Gauthier commented regarding the second question, I do not think that I am in the proper position to speak on any suits that they have had. You can refer that to DEW if you have questions. I am not comfortable speaking on anything that I was not involved in but I believe that we did vet companies and did RFP's and this was the company that we chose to go forward with.

Mr. Dwayne Purvis, 145 Hollis St. Amherst, noted to be clear he does not support the ASD building project again. All buildings are assets of the community to be used for the purposes of providing public education. We elect school boards to govern the school districts. We want to trust school boards to make honest and reasonable decisions as to the best possible educational outcomes. JFAC or Building and Grounds has advised the ASB to make yet a third request for the demolition of the Wilkins School to build a new Wilkins School, however, JFAC and the ASB have refused to consider utilization any available school space for the middle school community. This was made clear at the May 21st, 2020, meeting. I believe both JFAC and ASB have vigorously shunned any suggestion to reconfigure the school district by cooperating with Souhegan to expand the Cooperative with both seventh and eighth grades. Souhegan has demonstrated both in September 2022 and in 2023 and the administration even acknowledged them that there is space no one has had any kind of discussion for analysis as to how it can work. As it was mentioned prior SCSB has a standing offer to any SAU 39 school district to just ask and they'll work together to determine how the new Cooperative will look. The ASB has not considered the merits of having a lower elementary school using existing space. A lower elementary school one through three and an upper elementary school four through six at the AMS site. This could be a responsible use of the existing buildings. Sadly, both JFAC and ASB insist on a new excessively large elementary school, relocating fifth grade down to the lower elementary school and creating more congestion within the Amherst Village. Even more unfortunate, your necessary expense will be levied on 100% of the taxpayers, even though approximately 75% to 80% of us don't have children in the Amherst Schools. All residents don't have children in the schools. The failure of the ASB to seriously consider or encourage

the Strategic Plan and proven instruction methodologies for better educational outcomes are serious concerns. Amherst schools once had academic outcomes that were the envy of other schools. Now, Amherst schools' performance is just better than average to mediocre. There are many reasons for this, and a lot of blame to go around. No more excuses. The "buck" stops with the ASB. Own it and focus on the real issues and be fair to the children and the entire community.

Ms. Lisa Eastland, 19 River Road, Amherst commented that we have been voting on this a couple of years ago, this is the third time around. Each time the School Board comes back with a lesser project. If it goes to the ballot and the vote is no, are we going to come back with another project. Why should we say yes, this time if there is always a way to make it cheaper?

Mr. Gauthier replied that it is not just cheaper but a scaled down version as well. This year it is grades 1-5 while still maintaining Clark. We have not had the next step discussion so I wouldn't want to speculate on what we might continue to talk about further. Getting fifth grade students down to Wilkins which is a traditional elementary school model is what our focus is on right now.

Ms. Gascoyne added that she would be hard pressed to support anything more scaled down. Where we started three years ago, as you'll recall the 2022 bond request included Amherst Middle School and a consolidation of Clark Wilkins at a time when interest rates were still at historic lows. We were hoping to realize this savings from bidding the project concurrently and utilizing one construction manager. In the end, we're trying to respond to the feedback that we're hearing from the community the cost was too great to bear and that option was defeated at the polls last year. We offered just the elementary school portion of that project, again defeated at the polls. The current plan presented is really in direct response to all of that feedback. We really are trying to as Ms. Behm said earlier thread that needle between what we've heard while still managing to offer something that serves the best needs of our programs and our students. To directly answer your question, in my mind I don't think we can scale back any further from this and bring something of this magnitude forward again.

Ms. Behm mentioned I will say the one thing that we know that we really can't reasonably do is we've made concessions, listened, and honestly tried our very best to still bring something that meets as many needs, fixes as many things as possible and is the best use of tax dollars. At this point, year over year the costs go up 4%. Probably, if it does not get passed this year the very same project would be on next year but at a higher cost. The scale cannot go down anymore. What started us on this road is that they have many large systems that are end of life and they are literally out of space. We have people meeting in closets that have been converted into meeting spaces. We have meetings happening in trailers because there was no private space to have meetings with parents. We are taking use of every square inch of that building and being as creative as we can be, but creativity can only go so far. We are truly at the end of what we can do with our existing and we know that and that is why we have put it back on the slides. The Status Quo is what we would have to go to if this was defeated.

Ms. Victoria Parisi, 3 School Street, Amherst NH, commented I want to thank the Amherst School Board. The needs have not changed the reason why you brought this to the community

years ago is the same reason that you're bringing it now. By backing down when the community has voted no shows you and shows the rest of us in town who do go in the schools and who do understand the need that the need is still present, and the needs to be addressed. While it's changed over the years, I appreciate a variety of people. We've had change in administration, school board members and Ways and Means members, yet the same project keeps coming back. I appreciate that. I also want to express appreciation for the Souhegan Board. Amherst students go to the Amherst School District and the Souhegan Cooperative School District they are the same student. When I began working on this project years ago, I only had children in the Amherst School District. If I had only focused on the Amherst School District my now Souhegan Cooperative School District students would be missing out, that would have been wrong with me. Thank you to the Souhegan School Board Members who are addressing the best use of spaces for our students who are in grades 9-12, it is much appreciated by many of us.

Mr. Jeff Candito, 36 Buckridge Dr. Amherst, remarked I want to say thank you to the Board, this is a lot of work you did and for putting the actual full cost \$76.2 million. The total cost of the average homeowner was still not presented. What is this going to cost people over 25 years? People need to hear that. Last year I asked for it and I didn't get it this year. I was hoping to hear it in the presentation tonight and I did not. I'm reading through goal six on the Framework for Progress and I'm not convinced that the Superintendent supports the new building. I was just hoping he could share his thoughts on the new building and whether he supports a new building at this time. Thank you.

Mr. Gauthier responded that they would get back to him with the full cost. Roughly, it is \$1.60 in the second year which is the high-water mark, at home valuation of \$482,000 for the average home you are looking at \$640 and at \$0.80 it is \$420. Remember, it is just an estimate. There are a lot of other factors to consider. They can refinance the bond at some point and that would change the calculations. They will do another home valuation, possibly next year. They can share those estimates with him.

Mr. Berry replied for me this project has been going on for numerous years. A lot of people have been involved in the project, many board members, and Ways and Means Committee Members. I've been in this SAU since 2020. I do think the buildings need to be addressed. I do think that Wilkins needs a space to enhance education in that build. The plan that's been developed has been discussed at nauseum, weighed in and people are coming up with this plan. As someone who serves at the pleasure of Amherst and Mont Vernon, I do think that this project is warranted. I believe my full assessment is complete. I have an extensive comprehensive entry plan and hundreds of conversations since June 1<sup>st</sup>. I've met at length with anyone who's wanted to have a conversation with me about the state of public education in Amherst. I think we've addressed and put things in place to give us a bridge to a strategic plan that is coming down the road. I think we're working at a very responsible and fast pace to address some of the concerns that have been addressed by the Amherst, Souhegan, Mont Vernon Boards and the community members. We have to continue to move forward. If this is the project that the Amherst School Board supports based on what the work that we've done, I think it needs to be discussed further. I appreciate the opportunity to address and appreciate the question.



Mr. Pete Maresco, 16 Mosswood Circle, Amherst, remarked that he would like to respond as a citizen and not a Member of the Ways and Means Committee. I thought that this new school project was needed. What drove it home for me was that my daughter who's my oldest started at the Wilkins School, in 2002. I see a lot of the same teachers that my kids had when they went through the school system, and they had a wonderful experience. They're both now out of college and on to great careers. I want that opportunity to be there for everybody else. I see those same teachers still working in the same environment they were working in in 2002. There are upgrades needed, this project addresses those. The other thing that's troubling me are other options that I hear are available such as the high school. I also heard that there's going to be construction needed with that. We would still have to invest \$33 million to update the Wilkins School because if you want to keep using it you're going to have to keep all the facilities working properly but the overall cost to me is going to be the same. I think this is a well thought out Project. I think our teachers and students need it. Thank you.

Mr. Mozammel Hussaini, 33 Eagle Rock Road, Amherst, thanked the school board for their efforts, diligence, and perseverance. There is no doubt that Wilkins School needs a lot of attention and investment. As you recall, I have asked for some breakdown. If I understand your presentation, you are adding 6,406 square feet to your footprint and with \$350 per square foot construction cost. You are saying that 55,242 current feet that you have is going to take roughly \$23m to renovate and upgrade HVAC and MEP and another \$26.8m to add a total of 40 rooms. You said you needed 16 rooms for instructional purposes and 24 additional rooms for student purposes. What are those cost breakdowns? It seems very high to me. I did not see a warrant article where the town agreed that you move the fifth grade from the existing location to the existing elementary school. We need to understand as residents what are the benefits. We need to see options. You also have \$2.8 or \$2.9m in the trust fund, why are we not keeping up with the mechanics? I understand that Wilkins needs space, but the numbers do not make any sense.

Mr. Gauthier responded that the trust fund is down to \$300,000 because they expended funds due to the roof project at AMS. They are going to be asking for another Unassigned Fund Balance contribution to get it back up to close to \$1m. That fund has been funded for the last four or five years after it started with a balance of about \$20k. We have done a couple of projects and two phases of the AMS roof project. Voting day will determine the size of the contributions and what other plans we have going forward for Clark and Wilkins. In terms of the breakdown of the cost, I don't think it is a true comparison. When we discuss a renovation to Wilkins for \$33m that is just systems, it is not widening hallways, expanding or adding classrooms. It is strictly doing the MEP, which will make up a cost of the proposed \$49m project.

Ms. Gascoyne commented that the \$49m is composed of many things, concrete, masonry, steel, glass, windows, roofing, and doors etc.

The Moderator repeated Mr. Hussaini's question regarding bringing the fifth grade down to Wilkins and why that has not been on a warrant article.

Mr. Gauthier replied it is the same reason why they haven't had seventh and eighth grade on a warrant article that everyone seems to be eager to do. I don't know that it's necessary to have those conversations. Fifth grade is part of the Amherst School District and I think we can do that

if it is educationally appropriate. I don't know that it is something that needs to be on a warrant article. When they built AMS, it was more likely a space issue.

Ms. Gascoyne added that first grade used to be at the Clark School. First grade got moved to the Wilkins School because we did not have space to accommodate our enrollment, so we used the structures that we have in our district. This is no different than that and it was not on a warrant article at that time either.

The Moderator asked for further discussion.

Ms. Kristen Van Goor, 1 High Meadow Lane, Amherst, thanked the board for coming back again with a reasonable and practical proposal for our kids and community. This is about coming together as Amherst, a town known for great schools, a reason why people move here and part of the value of their homes that we all enjoy. Whether you have kids in the school today, or in the past, your grandkids or neighbors are going to school here, I urge this community to do what we need to do for our children. These need to be safe, need to be well constructed and well ventilated. Thank you for focusing on that very basic health, safety and learning features that all our kids deserve and have a right to.

The Moderator asked for new speakers to the discussion.

Ms. Elizabeth Purvis, 145 Hollis Road, Amherst, commented that she went to the Amherst Schools K-12. Thank you for the thoughtful proposal. She inquired about the schedule for renovations. There was a previous speaker that mentioned safety concerns and learning in a construction environment. She asked about the liberal estimate for the breakdown in costs. Finally, what are the anticipated class sizes, and would that require more teachers?

Ms. Gascoyne responded that in terms of staff, they will be working with the existing FTE's. They will be bringing a grade level down from the middle school; therefore, reassignments are likely. She displayed the Existing to Proposed Space Comparison. Currently, they do not have a classroom for Music, Technology, or a gym, it is not included in the count of 27 so we will get that. It is seven classrooms per grade 1-5 and they do not have grade five in the elementary school, so they are gaining that. Also, four fourth grade classrooms are not in the building but the detached portables behind Wilkins.

Mr. Gauthier added that they are essentially building 7 classrooms per grade and flex spaces. Regarding the liberal estimate, when we ask for the bond of \$49m that is what we are committed to and we will work with DEW and Banwell to come up with draft plans.

Ms. Gascoyne remarked that they mean a cautious estimate. The New Hampshire Municipal Bond Bank gave us the interest rate of 4% for planning purposes. That is based on the most recent bond sale, it can come in lower than that, but they will not know until those bonds are sold on the open market. The \$49.9m is the guaranteed maximum price that they are going into this project with. Anything below that will get returned to the taxpayer. The detailed phasing plan would still need to be fully developed and communicated with the community. The firms that were chosen were picked because of their experience working with schools. There will potentially be portables needed. She displayed the site plan. I believe that the back portion will

be constructed first so they will be able to utilize the existing building. Once that is completed, they can utilize the new space in the back while the front space is being demolished. This would be work that takes place over the summers when students are not in school. We would not want to move the fifth grade out of the middle school until the building is ready. I do not have all the answers but that is where we are in the process.

Mr. Matt Wheaton, DEW Construction, commented that Ms. Gascoyne was correct. The rear addition was going to be constructed from March 2025 to March 2026. The summer of 2026 is when the modulares come in. Once the rear addition is completed and the modulares are in place, we demolish the center part of the school and construct that from August 2026 to August 2027. The modulares will only be utilized for approximately 12 months.

Ms. Shiela Rousch, 20 Nathan Lord Lane, Amherst, commented that I have been in this district for 8 years. I used to sub but am now a paraprofessional at Souhegan. I think that this is an amazing project. I am also a real estate agent, and this is a highly desirable town. This would only enhance our area. I am concerned about what it will do to the taxes. Wilkins is in dire need of help. I also work with the children in the specialized services area, and they need more equipment. It makes it hard to work with these children and give them the services they need with limited space. Also, the pickup line at Wilkins is not safe and is chaotic. She inquired if there will be solar for efficiency.

Ms. Gascoyne replied that the first year the board brought a facility project forward there was a warrant article for solar. That also did not pass because it was contingent on the building. This project does not have solar panels planned. It does have the capacity with the design of the roof to hold solar panels at a time the community deems they would like to do so.

Mr. Jason Hennessey, 455 Boston Post Road Amherst, noted that I think that most people in town would agree that if this was really needed and all the alternatives were explored of course we would do it. When I was looking at the Department of Education statistics what I saw was that when this was first proposed in 2021, we had a decrease of about 350 students from 2006. What are we doing that we need more space? I have heard that the portables have 4 classrooms, that could account for 60-80 students. What need analysis has been done? And what are we doing now that we didn't used to do? Are there things that they could potentially outsource? What are some of the alternatives? Have we asked parents would you be willing to tuition your kids to other districts, private schools, or other public schools? If we are looking at \$76m all in, there are a lot of other alternatives that would be a lot less than that where we could provide good education. We have heard about the Souhegan Annex. When I looked it up on the Department of Education website Souhegan has 300 less students than in 2006. Amherst is following the rest of the State which is having shrinking enrollments.

Ms. Gascoyne replied that there are multiple factors that account for the need for upgraded facilities and additional space. During the time period you referenced in 2006, when our enrollments were greater than they are today we utilized approximately 10 portable classrooms throughout the Amherst School District. The systems that we're currently seeking to upgrade with this plan and bring in line with current compliance standards were 20 years younger at the time and at a very different place in their life cycle. Additionally, many of our

special programs we did not have in house and those students were tuitioned to different districts. Regarding your comment on have we asked parents if they would like to tuition their students to other towns, no. We have a responsibility to provide public education to any resident of our town who comes to our schools seeking it. Other options that have been explored over the years, we considered building new at Birch Park site owned by the district. The site was purchased 20 years ago for a school. The purchase of the land passed but the construction failed. We did re-review this site with our architects and secondary egress challenges and extensive site development costs were an obstacle. We looked at expanding and renovating onto existing sites we've talked about earlier today. We did look at the fully costed addition/ renovation onto the Wilkins site. The delta between this design that we put forward this year was \$3 million. As I stated earlier in our presentation it didn't offer the form, function, or efficiencies that we'll gain with the Build to Suit option. We discussed at one point in time the notion of using empty retailer office spaces. Any of these types of spaces provided limited access to the outdoors which is something that our community has voiced as a priority.

Mr. Gauthier added that Special Education requires a lot of space for one-on-one programming that we don't have. There are a lot of conjoined spaces. The number at the time of the Special Education audit was roughly \$5m a year that we have been saving by keeping Special Education students in house and not using out of district placement. That was even if you were able to able to acquire transportation and space in some of those other districts' programs. There is a benefit for students to stay with their friends and have a normal school experience.

Ms. Marcella Dube, 48 New Boston Road, Amherst, commented that she is an Amherst resident of 20 years. I have four children all go through the school district, thank you all very much for the work you have put in. I do not have statistics or numbers, but I have had four kids come through the school. They have all spent time in the portables. Anyone that has not had their children in the portables would be very surprised at the condition that they are in. Wilkins is using their multi-purpose room for lunch, music, and gym. I know that people move here for the school system and lots of people moving here still. I live just outside the village and if you are anywhere near Wilkins, you are in pickup or drop off you need to circumvent. I encourage anything that they can do to enhance our school. I do not believe that repairing a 57-year-old building repeatedly is the solution to the problem. Thank you.

Ms. Michelle Emmond, 8 Davis Lane, Amherst, mentioned that she remembers the first year that the Wilkins School was being built, she was in fifth grade at the Clark School. I was so excited because the following year I was going to be a sixth grader at the Wilkins School. The very first year I got to be there, what a thrill. Many years later as a first-time teacher at Wilkins from 1978- 2005, I have many big feelings about space and the 11 years following when I was teaching at AMS. At the end of 2005, there were a lot of different services being offered in classrooms and sometimes a meeting, so many different purposes going on that used to be a third-grade classroom but now was petitioned with peg board because that would unofficially section off the room. That was in 2005, and I know that some things have adjusted but that problem has prevailed. I am thrilled to see this plan and hope that this gets passed with our support. My husband and I are now retired in Amherst, and we are thrilled to support this community. Thank you.

Ms. Julie Scott, 11 Thistle Dr. Amherst, commented that her concern was that two years ago you presented a proposal to renovate AMS and Wilkins, last year it was changed to Wilkins, this year it is still just Wilkins but now we are using Clark School. I am concerned that it is a lot of money, and the total average cost per house. I am concerned that if this passes there are two other schools in the ASD, not to mention Souhegan, that we have to maintain. Are we going to be faced with additional work at AMS and Clark?

Mr. Gauthier responded that at some point this district, this town will be faced with probably \$100m plus in projects for their school buildings. It is just a matter of how they want to divide that up. Do they want to vote everything down and try to piece meal these schools with leaking roofs at AMS? That is part of a \$15m renovation project which is \$2m in. We will have the discussion next year about how we are going to finish this roofing project. Money is going to be spent somewhere, it is just a matter of where you do it. We think that doing it at the elementary school gives us a solid base for 1-5, gives us the biggest growth opportunity, and the best site plan. We can then start to piecemeal the other schools. You are probably looking at \$100m over the course of the next ten years.

The Moderator noted that she will allow for two more speakers.

Ms. Kelly Schmidt, 11 Patricia Lane, Amherst NH, commented one of my children is a current third grader. She has gone through the using the multi-purpose room for just lunch and gym to now having lunch, gym, and music. She's always had some anxiety issues that have prevented her from wanting to attend school. The past several years though it has never been about that room. This year it is about that room. She does not want to go on Wednesdays or Tuesdays because that's PE and that's music. I asked her at the beginning of the year about music and she was came home she was so excited third grade is recorder year. She's learning the recorder she thought that was fantastic at the beginning. She hates music now. She hates it because it competes with the noise of PE and can't enjoy her experience. It's a sad thing to have a child not want to go to school because of our buildings and because of the situation of our buildings. Neither of my children will get to benefit from this new building and yet I am still in support. What will happen to them in the interim with the portables. The portable count that we have going into the project does it just account for when they're displaced from their current location or will it potentially solve next year the dilemma and helping those kids that aren't going to get the benefit of this. I'm curious if the portable count includes adding a little more for the interim for those kids to help the music situation. I want the community to be aware that we are making that concession for current students. For the average homeowner, it is \$7,509 for those 11 years. I extrapolated out the decline in cost over the subsequent years and that would be between \$7,000 to \$7,500. The total for the average cost home for 25 years, would be approximately \$14,556. It is just an estimate.

Mr. Gauthier responded that they are not adding portables, we are going for the bare minimum that we need for construction, that is the plan. There is every chance that Music goes on a cart next year if we have increased Special Education needs or have an unusually large class size.

Mr. Chris Goodrich, 91 Christian Hill Rd. Amherst, commented that he is speaking as a citizen. I moved here twelve years ago with my wife at the time for multiple reasons. One of which being the reputation of the school system, that was before I was a parent. It saddens me to hear

949 stories his son tells him from the third grade from the eight-year-old perspective about the short  
950 comings. I thank you for putting this project together. I know that two years ago the dollar  
951 value was too high, and a number was given to you by the community, and you met that number.  
952 I thank you for that. My child will not benefit from this, but I hope that everyone else who  
953 moves here for the town and the school systems benefit from it. The worst year is FY 26, \$798  
954 for the year for the average home that is \$66 per month. That is amazing that we can get that for  
955 \$66 per month.

956  
957 Mr. Greg Fritz, 2 Deer Hollow Dr. Amherst, commented the support for this proposal means that  
958 last year's vote was correct. We heard last year a lot of the same arguments that this is the  
959 cheapest building we can do, is has all the requirements we need and now we find out that we  
960 can do it all for 25% less than last year. I'm proud to have served on the Buildings and Grounds  
961 group this year that helped support the residents of town by helping on this project. To correct  
962 the record of the presentation earlier, Building and Grounds did not support this as a committee  
963 and there was no vote, no record that we had of support as a committee. It was not  
964 recommended out of the committee. I know this is false, I don't know everything else you're  
965 talking about that's false, and I wonder what else is false. That's really hurting a lot of the trust  
966 and I think you're seeing a lot of people talking tonight to the same microphones I spoke to last  
967 year. I think that's something we need to really work on as a community. Last year we had about  
968 60% of the residents vote against this building that's majority. Of the majority, I believe the  
969 only person who from that majority came to serve on either the Building and Grounds, the Ways  
970 and Means or the School Board. We need more people who want to have good schools and good  
971 facilities to step up and help educate and work with people that want this because they listen to  
972 the voices here tonight who comes to these meetings gets a voice. There's a lot of reasons why  
973 this building is not great but they're not hearing it from us. I would encourage everyone to stay  
974 in the game and keep helping design this. I support moving this to the ballot tonight, I don't  
975 support it in March for several reasons. Without design requirements, I cannot say that this  
976 design meets the requirements. I look forward to working with you and I think next year we'll  
977 have a design that matches the requirements set forth and we'll get this right.

978  
979 Ms. Gascoyne noted that at the November 29<sup>th</sup> Buildings and Grounds Meeting, we did go  
980 through line by line for the cost information for a renovation/addition and a build to suit option.  
981 About two hours into the meeting, I did as Chair, ask each member of the committee which  
982 option, they favored. The committee unanimously favored the Build to Suit option. We did not  
983 take an official motion or vote. The committee did all favor that option in that meeting.

984  
985 The Moderator requested that Mr. Fritz sit down or else have someone escort him out of the  
986 room.

987  
988 Mr. Fritz responded that you stated that we have a chance to speak twice after everyone has  
989 spoken.

990  
991 The Moderator again requested that Mr. Fritz sit down.

992  
993 The Moderator asked for the Assistant Moderator to escort Mr. Fritz out of the room.

994

The Moderator instructed the Clerk to place Warrant Article #12 on the Ballot as currently worded and thus, declared.

The Moderator took a motion to restrict reconsideration.

Mr. Steve Coughlan, 35 Eaton Road, Amherst, motioned to restrict reconsideration. Ms. Lisa Eastland, 19 River Road, Amherst, seconded the motion. A vote was taken by voters holding up their cards. Motion passed the article is restricted.

The Moderator read Article #13 Operating Budget

**Article 13.**

*Shall the Amherst School District raise and appropriate as an operating budget, not including appropriations by special warrant articles and other appropriations voted separately, the amounts set forth on the budget posted with the warrant or as amended by vote of the first session, for the purposes set forth therein, totaling thirty four million fifty five thousand nine hundred eighty five dollars (\$34,055,985)? Should this article be defeated, the default budget shall be thirty three million one hundred sixteen thousand five hundred nine dollars (\$33,116,509) which is the same as last year, with certain adjustments required by previous action of the Amherst School District or by law; or the governing body may hold one special meeting, in accordance with RSA 40:13, X and XVI, to take up the issue of a revised operating budget only? Majority vote required.*

*Recommended by the Amherst School Board (5-0)*

*Recommended by the Amherst School District Ways & Means (advisory budget committee) 7-0)*

*Estimated tax impact of passing this article is: \$0.56 per thousand.*

*Estimated tax impact of not passing this article is: \$0.17 per thousand.*

*\*NOTE: Warrant Article 13 (operating budget) does not include appropriations proposed in any other warrant articles.*

The Moderator recognized Mr. Gauthier to present warrant article #13.

Mr. Gauthier remarked we will dig into the budget and start to break down what we are seeing in the proposed budget for this year. You can see in the top line we are currently operating in a default budget for FY 24 approximately 32.8 million. We are proposing a 3.8% increase for next year which is about \$1.26 million to bring that proposed budget to a total of \$34 million. To give some context to that 3.8% last year, we proposed a budget increase of 3.9% but that did not include any wage increases for teachers and support staff as those were being presented to voters in two CBA's that were on last year's ballot. When you look at this year's change, it is 3.8% that includes two years costs of those contracts, the wages, and benefits plus an additional student

day on the calendar. The allocation of the funds in the budget breaks down into three different categories the general fund, directly impacts the tax rate this is up 3.3%. Food service is up nearly half a percent and then grants are up a tenth of a percent. Those last two categories are both offset by revenue hopefully resulting in a wash. It is worth noting that we had about \$192,000 in surplus in Food Services last year essentially making it a profitable business unit within the school district. Through the first four months or so of this year we were trending towards another surplus of \$35,000 but we won't know until the end of the summer or end of the school year. When you dive into budget categories, you can see where the changes come from. Clark Wilkins is the largest increase primarily due to the inclusion of the wages and benefits that I mentioned, huge health insurance increases that we talked about earlier as well. We also have two special education fellows from St. Anslem that are not included in the default budget and then with the addition of a new school day next year there are increases that go along with operations. Facilities includes increases in preventative maintenance, repairs, security, service contract increases. Special services programming continues to adjust to meet student need. There is a large increase in special education transportation but that is also being offset by a reduction in out of state special education tuition. We also have fewer paraprofessionals next year based on need. We will have a new LEA representative to supervise special education IEPs at Amherst Middle School. This was a concession that we worked with Superintendent Berry. It's an administrative level position. We agreed on keeping the budget tight going with the 0.6 full-time equivalent for the LEA representative. This is going to free up building administrators to be able to work in the building supervising teachers and working on other issues. We also have our new Student Services Director Dr. Heather Jennings. Next year she's going to be working on an audit of the special needs program. That audit has begun but it's going to be used to make sure that we're staffing appropriately, the services that we're providing are accurate and we are truly meeting the needs of students. That audit is ongoing and will be used to impact the budget next year. With technology, you have ongoing device replacements, network enhancement, and equipment upgrades. Later tonight we will also talk about a capital reserve fund for technology so that we can see that number stabilize a little bit and start to have long term planning. We are adding another bus to our daily transportation schedule going from 15 to 16. I mentioned a few times the increases in the budget being driven by a few factors namely personnel as it is with 80% of our budget. You can see the teacher contracts but also the health and dental benefits it accounts for about \$816,000 of our \$1,259,304 increase. We hope it is an anomaly. The way health insurance has been going and the claims that we had in the district last year that number is extremely high. Our overall salary line is down a little bit that's primarily due to retirements and adjusting staff to meet the needs of students. We're eliminating an AMS position in one of our grades based on class sizes so that is a cost savings. About one-third of our proposed increase comes from other budgetary areas facilities, technology, and transportation. Food Services and grants are offset by revenue.

Mr. Gauthier continued, looking at the staffing structure changes for next year there is an overall savings on the budget line. We are adding the LEA representative at AMS, an additional kindergarten teacher and paraprofessional, and a .4 Library Assistant. All three of those positions are in the proposed budget they are not going to be included in the default budget. They're priorities for us. We look at class sizes for next year. Seven of nine grades are expected to meet our targets for class sizes. Grades two and four are expected to be just above the desired range but does not warrant another teacher. There is a reduction of two fifth grade teachers.



1087 next year going from eight to six. One of those fifth-grade positions has been eliminated and the  
1088 other one is being moved to sixth grade because we do have a large fifth grade currently at  
1089 AMS.

1090 Mr. Theberge presented the default budget. He began his presentation by reminding the public  
1091 that a default budget is not actually a budget. A budget is a moral document based on planning  
1092 projections and goals. The default budget is just a calculation. The board doesn't start with the  
1093 default and build from there, that's not how the process works. The budget is a state prescribed  
1094 calculation it is New Hampshire RSA 40:13 IX (b). You are statutory required to add or subtract  
1095 certain items. To calculate the default, we start with the approved budget subtract last year's  
1096 special warrant article then add and subtract items specified in the RSA, salaries, and benefits,  
1097 increases in other costs even if they are offset by revenue. We adjust for debt service. The  
1098 calculation requires us to subtract out other costs not allowed in the calculation per the RSA even  
1099 if the district will incur these costs or a portion of these costs in the coming school year. The  
1100 default budget calculated according to the RSA is \$33,116, 509. The difference between the  
1101 default budget and the proposed budget is 2.8%. Residents often ask what is in the budget that  
1102 isn't the default. It's important to reiterate that the board does not start with the default and uses  
1103 zero based budgeting. Under a default budget, reduction in programs, staffing and/or facilities  
1104 related to activities will need to be made. Those adjustments will be made, if needed, after the  
1105 townwide election in March. From the voter, taxpayer, and School administration perspective  
1106 the difference between the operating budget is what matters. That is what determines which  
1107 programs the district can offer. The decisions on specific reductions will be made by the board  
1108 based on a hierarchy of priorities provided by the Superintendent.

1109  
1110 Mr. Theberge displayed the FY25 Default to Proposed Budget Calculation slide. This slide  
1111 provides one view of the differences between certain items or categories that are in the proposed  
1112 budget that are not in the default. This slide provides detail on things that won't happen under a  
1113 default or likely won't happen under a default. There are maintenance, facilities, technology, and  
1114 transportation. The proposed budget includes an additional bus route to alleviate ongoing  
1115 timeliness. The budgets for materials, supplies and other needed services will likely be reduced,  
1116 we hope not to get to that point. If we do, the board will decide based on input from the  
1117 administration what does or does not happen and what budget lines are ultimately influenced.

1118  
1119 Mr. Gauthier thanked Mr. Theberge.

1120  
1121 Mr. Gauthier added we will continue now with a look at the revenue. Food Service is a big  
1122 budget increase but offset by revenue and then working on that \$192,000 surplus from last year.  
1123 We will see additional federal, state and local aid and expect another \$780,000 in fund balance.  
1124 We anticipate returning just under \$400,000 to taxpayers based on this year's budget. The  
1125 overall revenue is expected to increase by roughly \$100,000 in next year's budget. Factoring in  
1126 the general fund minus revenue, adequacy aid and property taxes we expect an increase of  
1127 roughly 0.56 cents per thousand in valuation for the average home value of \$482,000. That is an  
1128 increase of just over \$270 to your yearly tax bill which is approximately \$22.50 per month.

1129  
1130 The Moderator recognized the Chair of the Ways and Means Committee, Mr. Peter Maresco, for  
1131 a report.

Mr. Peter Maresco, Ways and Means Chair, commented that the Ways and Means Committee unanimously supported this budget with a seven to zero vote. The process started in the September/October time frame when a member of the Ways and Means was part of each subcommittee meeting as the budget was being developed. We understood the details that were going into it. The general comment when everybody came back from those meetings was that everyone was impressed with the use of zero-based budgeting. We knew that made it the most efficient budget process, but it didn't stop there. We went through a number of iterations the budget and based on those meetings there were a number of detailed questions that were asked throughout the process, so we knew we were operating in the face of the warrant article that increased the salaries. We knew of the increased medical costs and minimizing the impact on the taxpayers. By reviewing the budget repeatedly, each iteration brought more compromises, things that eventually got it to the point where the committee was satisfied that it was the budget that gave the teachers the tools they needed, the administration was in place to keep everything coordinated and minimized the impact on the taxpayers. With that in mind, we strongly supported this budget. Thank you.

**Ms. Victoria Parisi, 3 Church Street, Amherst motioned to move article 13. Mr. Brian Coogan, 121 Mack Hill Road, Amherst to second the motion. A vote was taken by voters holding up their cards. Motion passed.**

The Moderator asked for comments.

Mr. Jeff Candito, 35 Buckridge Dr. Amherst, commented that I do not support this article because I feel like there is a lot of money in the default budget calculation that can more than cover the FY 25 proposed budget. For FY 23 there was \$1.4 million in UFB at the end of the year. Approximately \$700,000 went to offset the tax rate and \$675,000 went into the maintenance trust fund. You are saying that 75% of the budget was purchased even though they were in a default budget year. I am thinking that the same thing will happen in FY25. Also, when the assessed values change for the town that does not affect these calculations. It is inaccurate to say that it will change a lot.

Mr. Gauthier explained that they are not just building in \$1.4m into the budget.

Mr. Theberge added that school districts unlike towns cannot go back to the voters for more funds. \$340,000 is 1% of the budget at 5% of the budget you are at approximately \$1.7m. Those are slim margins and there can be potential changes.

Mr. Maresco commented that about the extra money that gets built in, that was one of the very questions that I asked. Why not just take that out and reduce the budget? The fiscally prudent thing to do is to build the budget that has room in there for some emergencies. There is some overestimate in there, but it is cushioned in case some unexpected items come up and that is why we still supported the budget. It sounded like the fiscally sound approach to take.

**The Moderator instructed the Clerk to place Warrant Article #13 on the Ballot as currently worded and thus, declared.**

**The Moderator took a motion to restrict consideration.**

1174 **Mr. Brian Coogan, 121 Mack Hill Road, Amherst NH, moved to restrict consideration. Ms.**  
 1175 **Lisa Eastland, 19 River Road, Amherst NH, seconded the motion. A vote was taken by**  
 1176 **voters holding up their cards. Motion passed the article is restricted.**

1177 The Moderator read article #14 Capital Reserve Expendable Trust Fund.

1178 *Article 14.*

1179 *Shall the Amherst School District raise and appropriate the sum of up to six hundred seventy*  
 1180 *five thousand dollars (\$675,000) to be added to the Amherst School District Capital Facilities*  
 1181 *Repair, Maintenance and Improvement Expendable Trust Fund, previously established in*  
 1182 *March 2003? This sum to come from the June 30, 2024 unassigned fund balance (surplus)*  
 1183 *available for transfer on July 1, 2024. No amount to be raised from new taxation. Majority*  
 1184 *vote required.*

1185 *Recommended by the Amherst School Board (5-0)*

1186 *Recommended by the Amherst School District Ways & Means (advisory budget committee) (7-*  
 1187 *0)*

1188 *Estimated new tax impact of passing this article is: \$0.00 per thousand.*

1189 *Estimated new tax impact of not passing this article is: -\$0.28 per thousand.*

1190 The Moderator recognized Amherst School Board Vice Chair, Mr. Jason White, to present this  
 1191 article.

1192 Mr. White commented regarding Article 14 Capital Reserve Expendable Trust Fund. As it was  
 1193 mentioned earlier this evening, we are taking \$1.7 million out to try to deal with a section of the  
 1194 AMS roof. This is going to significantly decrease this fund to \$300,000. The \$1.7 million isn't  
 1195 going to solve the whole roof we still have more projects that we need to do. This is this is not  
 1196 new taxation. We're using this money to maintain our facilities.

1197 Mr. White displayed the Capital Needs Assessment Funding Plan. I think it is important to note  
 1198 that there are going to be big items so in FY24 roof and unit ventilators. Again, not the entire  
 1199 roof it is a section of the roof. I want to highlight in FY 26 at Wilkins, boilers, HVAC, lighting,  
 1200 exterior walls, caulking trim, soffit, and some fascia board. If you look at FY28, you're talking  
 1201 about at Clark, interior walls, ceilings, and floors. At Wilkins, it is sealcoat, lighting, and radio.  
 1202 It's not a guarantee that we'll be able to be able to cover all those items through this fund. It's our  
 1203 hope and our plan if the Wilkins project doesn't pass. If article 12 passes, we continue to supply  
 1204 this fund with unassigned fund balance. We can attack the issues that we know are AMS. We  
 1205 don't want people to think that we're not aware, we're just trying to prioritize. We can allocate  
 1206 funds to get the building up to standard as well. We would have more latitude to be able to  
 1207 provide more for our students, educators, and our community by passing article 12.

1208 The Moderator asked Ways and Means Committee member, Ms. Caitlin Thompson, for a report.

1209 Ms. Thompson responded that the Ways and Means unanimously supports this warrant article  
 1210 with a 7 to 0 vote. As Mr. White had mentioned, the warrant article allows for the district to  
 1211 allocate up to \$675,000 of existing funds towards Capital Improvements identified by the

1212 Amherst School Board as necessary to maintain our schools. One of the items that we discussed  
 1213 with the board was that these funds would be used to continue the Amherst Middle School roof  
 1214 project that is already underway. The warrant article has a zero dollar and cent impact to the  
 1215 Amherst taxpayers and enables the board to continue to plan for needed updates and maintenance  
 1216 of the buildings. The Capital Reserve Fund is fiscally responsible and is in line with the goals of  
 1217 the board for Capital Improvements while not increasing taxes for the community. Thank you.

1218 The Moderator asked for a motion to move the warrant article.

1219 **Mr. Brian Coogan, 121 Mack Hill Road, Amherst motioned to move article 14. Mr. Tom**  
 1220 **Grella, 15 Manchester Road, Amherst to second the motion. A vote was taken by voters**  
 1221 **holding up their cards. Motion passed.**

1222  
 1223 The Moderator asked for public discussion.

1224 Mr. Candito thanked Ms. Facey for the presentation. It makes it easy to understand. Why are  
 1225 you risking funding these warrant articles with UFB which you may or may not have? You are  
 1226 guaranteeing that there will be fund balance. Especially for the maintenance.

1227 Mr. Gauthier responded that it stabilizes the budget and is proper and smart planning.

1228 Ms. Gascoyne commented we do have a facilities budget in the operating budget that that does  
 1229 cover preventative maintenance items. We're looking at a combination of a reserve fund which  
 1230 the town has been very successful to build up. I don't think the board is saying the only way  
 1231 we're going to fund our facilities is through this fund. This is a part of a myriad of ways of  
 1232 funding our facilities and maintenance needs.

1233 Ms. Amy Hanson, 12 Cricket Corner Road, Amherst applauded Mr. Roger Preston and his work  
 1234 with the SAU as well as the Amherst School Board and Ways and Means on these projects. He  
 1235 has a great vision for these things, looks long term and is knowledgeable. I've worked with him  
 1236 many times as the AEA Union President. I appreciate the way he attacks these things with the  
 1237 resources he has. I also appreciate that you are using these fund balances to do things before  
 1238 they become emergencies. When they become an emergency that's when they cost us a lot more  
 1239 money. I fully support this and thank you for your efforts.

1240 Mr. Candito commented that he would like to see all the UFB get returned to the taxpayer and  
 1241 fund these through new taxation.

1242 Ms. Behm mentioned that she has heard directly "use the money I gave you, then ask for more".  
 1243 They are looking at this to say that they have budgeted and planned for this appropriately. These  
 1244 warrant articles are in an order of priority.

1245 Mr. Matt Borden, 28 Buckridge Dr, Amherst, thanked the board for their work on the budget.  
 1246 The fact that the board has a plan to use money appropriately for specific things that we get to  
 1247 vote on is a responsible way for the board to use money that we have already given you.

1248 **The Moderator instructed the Clerk to place Warrant Article #14 on the Ballot as**  
 1249 **currently worded and thus, declared.**

1250 **The Moderator took a motion to restrict consideration.**

1251 **Ms. Lisa Eastland, 19 River Road, Amherst NH, moved to restrict consideration. Mr. Steve**  
 1252 **Coughlan, 11 Eaton Road, Amherst NH, seconded the motion. A vote was taken by voters**  
 1253 **holding up their cards. Motion passed.**

1254 The Moderator read article #15, Technology Expendable Trust Fund

1255 *Article 15.*

1256 *Shall the Amherst School District establish a Technology Expendable Trust Fund per RSA*  
 1257 *198:20-c, V for the purpose of purchasing, updating, maintaining, and replacing hardware,*  
 1258 *software, services, and technology infrastructure, and to raise and appropriate the sum of up*  
 1259 *to seventy five thousand dollars (\$75,000) to be placed in this fund? Further, to name the*  
 1260 *Amherst School Board as agents to expend from said fund. This sum to come from the June*  
 1261 *30, 2024 unassigned fund balance (surplus) available for transfer on July 1, 2024. No*  
 1262 *amount to be raised from new taxation. Majority vote required.*

1263 *Recommended by the Amherst School Board (5-0)*

1264 *Recommended by the Amherst School District Ways & Means (advisory budget committee) (7-*  
 1265 *0)*

1266 *Estimated new tax impact of passing this article is: \$0.00 per thousand.*

1267 *Estimated new tax impact of not passing this article is: -\$0.03 per thousand.*

1268 **Mr. Brian Coogan, 121 Mack Hill Road, Amherst motioned to move article 15. Ms. Marti**  
 1269 **Warren, 5 Carriage Road, Amherst to second the motion. A vote was taken by voters**  
 1270 **holding up their cards. Motion passed.**

1271

1272 The Moderator recognized Amherst School Board Vice Chair, Mr. Jason White, to present this  
 1273 warrant article.

1274 Mr. White commented that one of the cuts that they made, and it was in the proposed at the time  
 1275 was for our fifth grade to have one on one devices. They opted not to do that and went two to  
 1276 one for grade five. If there is unassigned fund balance it does a few things for us. Technology is  
 1277 constantly changing and needing updating. We're not keeping pace with that due to the fact  
 1278 that's one of the first things that we go to when we have to make decisions. It will increase  
 1279 safety for our students. This will allow for infrastructure, software updates or firewalls. It will  
 1280 allow us to do those things more readily if we have a reserve fund to tap into when we don't have  
 1281 a line item for it.

1282 The Moderator asked Ways and Means Committee member, Mr. Matt Borden, for a report.

1283 Mr. Borden responded the Ways and Means committee unanimously supports article 15 with a  
 1284 seven to zero vote. This article allows this district to allocate \$75,000 of existing funds towards  
 1285 maintaining and updating services and equipment related technology. Currently, the school  
 1286 district relies on various technological services and equipment to run not only the day-to-day

1287 operation of the district but also to maximize student outcomes and communicate with students,  
 1288 families, and staff. This article ensures our students, family, and staff can have consistent access  
 1289 to all their technological resources while also not increasing the tax burden to the citizens of  
 1290 Amherst. Thank you.

1291 The Moderator asked for public discussion.

1292 Ms. Lisa Eastland, 19 River Road, Amherst, commented that I think this should not even be a  
 1293 warrant article. This is the cost of doing business, it should be in the budget. We don't put a  
 1294 warrant article for books or for any other materials that we need. Technology is integral to the  
 1295 classroom as paper, pencils, and scissors.

1296 Mr. Theberge added they have budgeted for technology. What the trust fund allows you to do is  
 1297 level the budget.

1298 Ms. Caitlin Thomspson, 4 Madison Dr. Amherst, asked if the board could explain what happens if  
 1299 we go to a default budget?

1300 Mr. Theberge replied that it becomes the top line number. We are presenting a well-planned,  
 1301 thoughtful budget the default is the RSA saying that it is the last approved budget minus and plus  
 1302 all these things. We then meet with the administration; we try to figure out how we can afford  
 1303 what we want to do. There are negotiations. He displayed the proposed budget items at risk.  
 1304 The reality is that things will not get done and things will not be provided. This is zero based  
 1305 budgeting.

1306 Mr. Mark Bender, 20 Grater Dr. Amherst, inquired are we discussing article 15 or going back to  
 1307 article 13?

1308 Ms. Thompson asked if this is why you are asking for funds to be set aside specifically from the  
 1309 UFB so you can plan for these needs such as the technology and transportation.

1310 Mr. Gauthier replied that is part of the planning and to make the budget more stable.

1311 The Moderator asked for further public discussion.

1312 There were no additional comments or questions.

1313 **The Moderator instructed the Clerk to place Warrant Article #15 on the Ballot as**  
 1314 **currently worded and thus, declared.**

1315 **The Moderator took a motion to restrict consideration.**

1316 **Mr. Tom Grella, 15 Manchester Road, Amherst motioned to restrict reconsideration. Mr.**  
 1317 **Brian Coogan, 121 Mack Hill Road, Amherst to second the motion. A vote was taken by**  
 1318 **voters holding up their cards. Motion passed.**  
 1319

1320 The Moderator read article 16 Vehicle Expendable Trust Fund

1321 *Article 16.*

1322 *Shall the Amherst School District establish a Vehicle Expendable Trust Fund per RSA*  
 1323 *198:20-c, V for the purpose of purchasing new vehicles, replacing existing vehicles, and for*  
 1324 *vehicle repairs, and to raise and appropriate the sum of up to thirty thousand dollars (\$30,000)*  
 1325 *to be placed in this fund? Further, to name the Amherst School Board as agents to expend*  
 1326 *from said fund. This sum to come from the June 30, 2024 unassigned fund balance (surplus)*  
 1327 *available for transfer on July 1, 2024. No amount to be raised from new taxation. Majority*  
 1328 *vote required.*

1329 *Recommended by the Amherst School Board (5-0)*

1330 *Recommended by the Amherst School District Ways & Means (advisory budget committee) (7-*  
 1331 *0)*

1332 *Estimated new tax impact of passing this article is: \$0.00 per thousand.*

1333 *Estimated new tax impact of not passing this article is: -\$0.01 per thousand.*

1334 **Mr. Brian Coogan, 121 Mack Hill, Amherst motioned to move article 16. Ms. Victoria**  
 1335 **Parisi, 3 Church St. Amherst to second the motion. A vote was taken by voters holding up**  
 1336 **their cards. Motion passed.**

1337  
 1338 The Moderator recognized Amherst School Board Vice Chair, Mr. Jason White, to present this  
 1339 warrant article.

1340 Mr. White explained that this would be funded with unassigned fund balance if available. As it  
 1341 says in the in warrant to hopefully purchase a new van. The purpose of these vehicles is to  
 1342 reduce our reliance on the bus company. It's very difficult to get buses for some extracurricular  
 1343 activities. If we have some of these vans it makes it more affordable for us and makes it so we  
 1344 can expand some of the opportunities for our student athletes. There are some students who if  
 1345 they don't have a family member or can't carpool that limits their access to some of the  
 1346 programming. This would make it a more equitable experience for all our students regardless of  
 1347 their situation. In the long run, we believe it'll be more affordable because transportation is  
 1348 becoming more expensive.

1349 The Moderator asked Ways and Means Committee Chair, Mr. Caleb Baird, for a report.

1350 Mr. Baird responded the Ways and Means Committee unanimously supports article 16, 7 to 0.  
 1351 This article allows for the district to save money towards the purchase of a vehicle. Over the last  
 1352 three years this line has included in the budget at a cost of \$13,000 to \$22,000 in that range. This  
 1353 cost is driven mainly by the rental of buses and drivers. Owning vehicles would decrease costs in  
 1354 the future. The Souhegan School District previously purchased vehicles for the high school and  
 1355 realized a \$9,000 dollar savings in the first year after purchase. Given this warrant article has  
 1356 some savings impact and has no additional tax impact it makes logical and financial sense to  
 1357 support this. Thank you.

1358 The Moderator asked for public discussion.

1359 There were no additional comments or questions.

1360 **The Moderator instructed the Clerk to place Warrant Article #16 on the Ballot as**  
1361 **currently worded and thus, declared.**

1362 **The Moderator took a motion to restrict consideration.**

1363 **Mr. George Bower, 183 Mack Hill Road, Amherst moved to restrict reconsideration to .**  
1364 **Mr. Steve Coughlan, 121 Mack Hill Road, Amherst to second the motion. A vote was taken**  
1365 **by voters holding up their cards. Motion passed the article is restricted.**

1366  
1367 The Moderator noted that March 12, 2024 is district voting in the Souhegan High School  
1368 Gymnasium 6:00am- 8:00pm.

1369 **The Moderator adjourned the meeting at 9:02pm.**

1370 Respectfully submitted by  
1371 Tony Ortiz  
1372 3/23/2024