

1 **Amherst School Board Public Hearing**

2 January 14, 2015

3 **ATTENDANCE**

4
5 **Amherst School Board**

6 Lucienne Foulks, Amy Facey, James Manning, Peg Bennett, and Paul Prescott

7
8 **Administrative Team**

9 Peter Warburton, Betty Shankel, Gerry St. Amand, Porter Dodge, Nicole Heimarck, Meg
10 Beauchamp, Jim Miner, and Bruce Chakrin.

11
12 **Minute Taker**

13 Beth Penney

14 **PUBLIC HEARING**

15
16 Ms. Foulks opened the Public Hearing at 7:23pm.

17
18 Ms. Foulks and Mr. Warburton introduced the Board, Ways and Means Committee,
19 and the Administration.

20
21 Ms. Foulks discussed the commitments of the school board and examples to support
22 these commitments. These include the expansion of the I39 digital learning
23 management system, use of the Thoughtful Classroom evaluation tool, expansion of
24 co-curricular activities, the strategic plan, and more.

25
26 Ms. Foulks stated that the proposed FY16 budget is \$25,016,262 and the Default
27 Budget is \$24,644,072. This is an increase of \$306,454 or 1.24% over the FY15
28 voted budget. The proposed budget supports the alignment to the new standards
29 for Common Core, implementation of the SAU 39 Teacher Effectiveness program,
30 which includes the Thoughtful Classroom evaluation tool, instructional materials,
31 professional development time, collaborative work, and facility and maintenance
32 initiatives. She discussed the savings for the facilities by changing to natural gas The
33 use of natural gas has given savings and a reduction in fuel costs. She discussed the
34 facilities and maintenance initiatives for FY16 including updating the 4th grade boys
35 and girls bathrooms at Wilkins, which are still original. She also discussed gym
36 upgrades at AMS because of safety hazards.

37
38 Ms. Foulks discussed the budget drivers including year two of the teachers contract
39 at a cost of about \$180,000, NH Retirement increases which were passed from the
40 state to local government and will cost about \$110,000, Special Education increases
41 at a cost of about \$600,000. Students with IEPs are about 15% of students in the
42 State. In Amherst about 13% of students have IEPs. This is because of the hard
43 work done to intervene, which includes the use of the state recognized Response To
44 Intervention program. The IDEA grant is determined at a federal level and every
45 year the grant changes. The amount of reimbursement from this grant is never

46 close to the amount spent by the district to meet the standards required by the
47 federal and state government. Catastrophic Aide only reimburses the district after
48 spending is 3x the average cost per student. This grant also only reimburses a
49 percentage of the actual cost. There are many students dealing with significant
50 issues and there are great costs to meet needs of these students. The best response
51 to these increase costs would be for the community to contact government officials
52 to let them know that the unfunded mandates are unsustainable by the community
53 and the taxpayers. She discussed the transportation contract and bids. The new
54 contract is an increase of 27% and is with Butler Busing.

55
56 Ms. Foulks stated that the change to accounting practice for Special
57 Education (SPED) and Health Services has moved some of the line items. The best
58 way to compare these line items is to look at the reduction in SPED and the increase
59 in Health Services. Regular education has savings that are salary and benefit
60 related. The increased cost for the co-curricular activities is from savings from LGC.
61 The district returned over \$900,000 this past year to taxpayers. The Board used
62 some of that money to create extra co-curricular programming. The programs at
63 Clark/Wilkins includes STEAM activities, Summer writing workshop for 3rd and 4th
64 graders, 3-D art program, Read On program, and the First tee golf program. There is
65 a waiting list for all of these programs. At AMS the addition of co-curricular activities
66 includes the Mathematics Art Club, Cyber Science Club, a web based STEAM
67 competition and the list goes on. She discussed the excitement from the Board and
68 the students about the programs that teachers have created for the students. She
69 discussed other budget initiatives including the outdoor space at AMS and the Food
70 Service profits being down. All of these budget drivers and initiatives are behind the
71 1.24% increase for FY16.

72
73 Ms. Bennett discussed enrollments and staffing. The enrollment projections show
74 slight decline for FY16 and a net decrease of 12 students. She discussed increases
75 and decreases in staffing as in the presentation. There is an increase in support staff
76 to address the increase in special education needs. The decline in enrollment started
77 in 2007 and the school has kept pace in the amount of staff needed.

78
79 Ms. Bennett stated that the SAU budget is shared with the 3 districts in SAU 39. Each
80 district gets a portion of the budget as determined by attendance and equalized
81 value of each district. The SAU budget has a budget finance committee, which
82 scrutinized the budget and there was a public hearing for that budget in December.
83 One person in the SAU directs Special Education, Food Service, and Technology for
84 all of the buildings. This reduces the cost in all districts. The changes in enrollment
85 have had no impact on the SAU. The staffing needs of the SAU are assessed on an
86 annual basis. The SAU budget is an increase of 1.8% FY16. The budget drivers are
87 NH retirement, salary increases, market adjustments, and software enhancements.

88
89 Mr. Prescott discussed the FY16 revenue. He explained how property taxes are
90 calculated. Revenue is down \$365,000. The General fund expenditures are
91 \$306,454. He discussed how the Unreserved Fund Balance last year was an inflated

92 amount. \$715,077 needs to be raised from tax because of the lost revenue. 57% of
93 the tax rate increase is due to the decrease in revenue. The tax impact of the
94 proposed FY16 budget is \$0.38/\$1000 or \$125.40 for a \$330,00 home.
95

96 Mr. Manning explained the default budget, which is calculated by taking the
97 operating budget from the previous year and reducing or increasing the amount by
98 the contractual obligations and the state and federal mandates. The Default Budget
99 reduces the budget by one-time expenditures. He discussed the calculation for the
100 default budget. The Default Budget is \$24,644,072 for FY16. He discussed what is at
101 risk if the operating budget does not pass including System 44, which is a reading
102 intervention program at the 4th grade level to improve literacy. Other items at risk
103 include the purchase of new interactive classroom systems, new laptops, replacing
104 aging projectors, printers, and laptops, science equipment, novel and text purchases
105 to align with new standards, science technology, arts and math program supplies,
106 text to support the Read Aloud K-3 program, and money to support the expansion of
107 co-curricular activities including STEAM activities. The building and grounds
108 maintenance at risk is loom and seed for where the portables use to be at AMS, catch
109 basin replacement at Clark and the AMS driveway, repair of AMS entry and gym
110 walk ways, increased cost in trash removal and securities, and increases to support
111 the main router, spam, firewall, and internet monitoring. The Default Budget is
112 \$372,190 less than the proposed budget.
113

114 Ms. Grund stated that the Ways and Means Committee went through the budget line
115 by line and reviewed line items with the Board and Administration. The proposed
116 budget is only what is necessary. There were very few additions to the budget
117 including the driveways and sidewalks repairs, technology replacement, and
118 meeting the needs of the new standards. The Ways and Means Committee supports
119 the entire budget.
120

121 Mr. Manning thanked the Ways and Means Committee for their hard work. He
122 stated that the goal of the Board is fiscal responsibility and discipline. Many costs
123 are going up and the Board has very little control over them because these costs are
124 mandates by the federal government.
125

126 Maggie McCabe, 49 Governor Wentworth Rd., expressed her concerned about the
127 tax rate increases in Amherst and the largest portion of these increases is from the
128 schools. She is concerned about the tax rate impact on property values. She
129 wondered why the savings were used for programs and co-curricular programs.
130 The town is voting on the bottom line and expects adherence to budget lines. Now
131 they know that money saved is used for another purpose. The voters are not giving
132 the school discretionary funds that they did not think were being spent. She asked if
133 there are controls in place and if there is movement of money does public get to
134 know.
135

136 Ms. Shankel stated that with the SB2 law there is a bottom line responsibility. The
137 Board has discretion to move money in different areas. The returned savings is

138 from LGC in the form of health insurance holidays and the tuition from Mont Vernon
139 was larger than expected. The Amherst School District gave back \$990,347, which is
140 \$0.63/\$1000. For a \$330,000 the Amherst School District gave back \$207.90 this
141 year.

142

143 Ms. McCabe asked if the Board looks at the line items or if they only look at the
144 bottom line when forming the budget.

145

146 Ms. Shankel stated that the bottom line was reduced.

147

148 Ms. McCabe if the Board starts from scratch or if they take last years budget and
149 massage it.

150

151 Ms. Shankel stated that 75% of the budget is salaries and benefits. They determine
152 the projected enrollment, which grade levels are those students in, and what are the
153 staffing needs and that determines 75% of the budget. She stated that the
154 Deliberative packet will come out Feb. 2nd and the voters guide comes in the mail a
155 week before the voting date.

156

157 Ms. McCabe stated the enrollment numbers should be published at the public
158 hearing in future years. She discussed the current year budget and asked if the
159 budget is over under or on target.

160

161 Ms. Shankel stated that for the Unreserved Fund Balance they are forecasting 2%
162 budget savings this year. Surplus the district has must be returned to the taxpayers.

163

164 Ms. McCabe stated unless it is spent in discretion of the Board. The Board has the
165 discretionary ability to use those funds.

166

167 Brian Dillon, 5 Terrace Lane, asked if there was money set aside for the Bean Field
168 lights, which is an active project. The Board manages the project because of the
169 ownership of the fields and will need money from the budget for completion of the
170 project.

171

172 Ms. Foulks stated that the Board asked for a lighting study by an outside group and
173 the Board has heard nothing since that request.

174

175 Mr. Dillon stated that the cost per pupil is high. The Board always responds this is
176 the cost of educating. He appreciates the Boards effort, but would like the Board to
177 look at the cost per pupil of 8 comparable schools and get a number. He wondered if
178 the Board were to use a model stating "if cost per pupil is x", what does that mean
179 for the schools. He said he understands the unfunded mandates, but there needs to
180 be another way to look at that cost per pupil.

181

182 Ms. Foulks thanked the public for their comments. She stated that in the recent past
183 the schools have increased class sizes and reduced staff. It is always good practice to

184 examine how to fund the schools. The discretionary spending is not giving away the
185 store. The spending for the co-curricular programing came out of many meetings of
186 deliberation and research that students will benefit from.

187

188 Mr. Kuczewski from the Ways and Means Committee stated that when determining
189 the proposed budget they look at several years' budgets and the differences. They
190 do not just look at percentages, but why there are changes. They ask questions of
191 the administration and the principals.

192

193 Mr. Prescott stated that the line transfers are voted on at school board meetings and
194 they always have been. He encouraged the public to come and attend the meetings.

195

196 Ms. McCabe stated that she appreciates the comment that the Board is not giving
197 away the store and asked how the Board knows that they are not over budgeting.

198

199 Ms. Foulks stated that they would have money only when it is unanticipated. The
200 large surplus is from the LGC refunds and the Mont Vernon tuition.

201

202 Ms. Shankel stated that the last few years the districts have had large returns from
203 LGC and they have not given information about the amount of the return for the
204 employees versus the district. The other part of the surplus was due to revenue at a
205 larger rate from the Mont Vernon tuition agreement.

206

207 Ms. McCabe asked about pre-buying for the following year if there are savings.

208

209 Ms. Shankel stated that yes the Board did that this past year for security and
210 telephone upgrades.

211

212 Ms. McCabe stated that this is not ok without taxpayer approval.

213

214 Mr. Ballard stated that there are several levels of accountability for spending
215 including the Superintendent, the Finance Director, and the Board members. The
216 minutes for every meeting are public record and the meetings are televised. This is
217 a substantial amount of accountability.

218

219 Ms. Foulks discussed the Full Day Kindergarten proposal, which needs a majority
220 vote to pass. This proposal would be to provide all Amherst Kindergarten students
221 a full day program starting in the fall of 2015. The cost of this proposal is \$620,593.
222 The largest reasons for this proposal is to provide students with more time,
223 successfully meet the new education standards and better support the social and
224 emotional development of the students. 87 districts in NH and 82% of the nation
225 offer full day kindergarten. This proposal is not progressive. A majority of 5 year
226 olds have a full day program in the United States. The new educational standards
227 are based on full day program. Ours teachers are trying to meet these standards in a
228 three-hour day, essentially a full day curriculum in a half-day. Offering a full day
229 program will provide equity for all students. She discussed the research, which

230 states that Kindergarten is the new 1st grade. There is less focus on art, social, play,
231 and imagination. They are now focused on academics because there is not enough
232 time. The Kindergarten program today is very different form our experience and
233 even our kids experiences. The skills taught in Kindergarten provide the foundation
234 necessary for all skills. She discussed that staffing is driving the cost. They will need
235 to hire 3 teachers and support staff. The Board has thoroughly examined the cost of
236 the program and has reduced the original estimate by \$120,000 because of waiver
237 given by the state Department of Education. This program has a tax impact
238 \$0.39/\$1000 or \$128.70 for a \$330,000 home. It is a high priority of the Board to
239 provide a good education in this town and it is critical to start our children in the
240 best way. This program will improve property values and a revival of the town. The
241 Board has listened to experts and weighed the benefits and costs of this program.
242 The Board unanimously supports this proposal and believes it is the best decision
243 for all of us.

244

245 Mr. Kuczewski stated that the Ways and Means Committee is 4-3 in favor of the Full
246 Day Kindergarten Program. The three that do not support the proposed program
247 would like to see more metrics about the development of social skills and the
248 improvement in achievement for 1st-3rd grade.

249

250 Ms. Grund stated that the Ways and Means Committee has had hours of discussion
251 with the Board, as a committee, and with the administration. She discussed the time
252 constraints and the concern that there are no studies to indicate that a full day
253 program makes an impact for students past 3rd grade. If the school can put metrics
254 in place and then in 3-5 years review those metrics with the standards to determine
255 the consequences if they do not meet the metrics.

256

257 Ms. Bryson stated that the most compelling argument to support the full day
258 program was from the Kindergarten teachers because they feel they cannot do the
259 job they want to do with the time they have. She discussed how Kindergarten today
260 compared to even 5 years ago is different. Kids do not have time for play. The
261 largest intervention costs for the schools are for first grade students. If there is more
262 time given to Kindergarten there will be less interventions in first grade.

263

264 Ms. Foulks stated that there is a link on the SAU website to a video of the public
265 forum presentation about the Full Day Kindergarten Program proposal. She
266 encouraged the public to watch it and have their questions answered.

267

268 Frank Brown, 4 Middle St., asked about the projected enrollment for the full day
269 Kindergarten next fall.

270

271 Mr. St. Amand stated that there is usually a 15-24% increase in the number of first
272 graders compared to the number of kindergartners. This is because a number of
273 those families chose an alternate kindergarten program that is full day program. The
274 estimate is 95-105 children for the fall. This year there are 93 Kindergarteners.

275

276 David Chen asked if Mont Vernon has full day kindergarten and if not are they
277 implementing it for the fall.
278
279 Mr. Warburton stated that Mont Vernon would have a full day kindergarten
280 program starting this coming fall.
281
282 Mr. Chen asked about full day kindergarten in surrounding towns.
283
284 Mr. St. Amand stated that Milford and Merrimack have a half-day program. Bedford
285 has a full day program with a fee and they have a lottery to get in.
286
287 Chris (Public – did not sign sheet or state more information) thanked the Board for
288 their work and effort. He has no kids in school but has heard good things. He
289 wondered if there were increases in special education costs in the budget when
290 Kindergarten increases from a half day to full day program.
291
292 Mr. St. Amand stated that there is a 0.5 FTE increase in Special Education and
293 support staff. This is imbedded in the cost of the program.
294
295 Chris wondered about kindergarten transportation fees and assessing a share of the
296 expense with kindergarten parents.
297
298 Ms. Foulks stated that the Board discussed this question of having a tuition attached
299 to the full day program. The decided that by doing this it creates a sense of inequity
300 and they believe that will create gaps in student learning. The Board wants a
301 program all students can participate in.
302
303 Mr. Prescott discussed the impact of equity so the 1st grade curriculum can be
304 stronger.
305
306 Mr. Kuczewski stated that folks in Bedford think they have a full day, but the
307 academics are only in the morning. The afternoon is paid for by families and is really
308 a daycare. The afternoon does not comply with the Common Core standards.
309
310 Ms. Facey discussed the support staff collective bargaining agreement, which will
311 cost \$40,660 for FY16 and \$37,576 for FY17. The warrant article is to provide funds
312 for only FY16. She discussed some of the policy changes including a 2 year term,
313 wording changed for a hours based time clock, which is in compliance with the
314 Department of Labor, it eliminates pay outs in year 2, but amount of benefit is
315 unchanged, it added language to memorialize reduction of force, increase in 403B
316 match program, and there are language changes in professional development
317 funding. For Year 1, there is a 1.75% increase and step, which is to offset health
318 insurance premiums paid by employees. For Year 2, there is a 1.5% increase and
319 step, which is to offset health insurance premiums paid by employees.
320 The total cost of the agreement is \$78,236 for 2 years. The FY16 tax impact is
321 \$0.03/\$1000 or \$9.90 for a \$330,000 home.

322 Ms. Facey stated that Article 15 is to allow for a special meeting to be held if article
323 14 does not pass.
324
325 Mr. Kuczewski stated that the Ways and Means voted unanimously in support of
326 these two articles.
327
328 Mr. Brown asked why article 15 is necessary.
329
330 Ms. Shankel stated that this option is available for collective bargaining agreements.
331 After the meeting there would be another Deliberative session and a ballot vote.
332
333 Mr. Brown asked for an explanation for why article 15 is included.
334
335 Ms. Shankel stated that this was the advise from the districts attorney. If there was
336 a situation where the agreement did not pass this would allow for a chance to look
337 at the agreement again.
338
339 Mr. Ballard asked if there is a state law that speaks to the special meeting in article
340 15.
341
342 Ms. Shankel if the district did not have permission to hold the special meeting they
343 would petition the court and the court could grant the special meeting.
344
345 Mr. Ballard stated that this is something that the Amherst School district created.
346
347 Ms. Shankel stated that this is common practice with school boards.
348
349 Ms. Bennett stated that article 15 does not mean that the contract is more important
350 than kindergarten or the budget. It only goes along with the collective bargaining
351 warrant article.
352
353 Mr. Warburton stated that if the collective bargaining is voted down and if special
354 meeting is called then there are number of things that happen between the vote and
355 the second vote to benefit the staff and the town.
356
357 Ms. Bennett discussed article 16, which is to fund the capital reserve fund for
358 students with disabilities by adding \$50,000 from the Undesignated Fund Balance.
359 The Board asked for this last year for first time and the fund has \$50,000. Even
360 though the money comes from surplus there is still a tax impact because it is money
361 that will not be given back to the voters. The tax impact of this article is
362 \$0.03/\$1000 or \$9.90 for a \$330,000 home.
363
364 Mr. Kuczewski stated that the Ways and Means Committee voted unanimously to
365 support article 16.
366

367 Ms. Shankel stated that this fund was established in 2014 to help with unanticipated
368 costs for students that come in part way through year.

369
370 Ms. McCabe stated that the Board discussed the need to hold the government
371 accountable, but they are asking to put money aside to fund Special Education.

372
373 Mr. Prescott stated that this article adds to a fund to support a child or student that
374 comes in part way through year. It is mandated by law that the school supports this
375 student.

376
377 Ms. McCabe stated that there are special funds for everything in town and the
378 money is not being used. Money is just being added. She asked about the history for
379 the spending of this fund.

380
381 Mr. Manning stated that there have been declining enrollments and tax rate
382 increases. By not putting \$50,000 into this fund, will not send the government a
383 message. People need to call their government officials. The school is held by law to
384 support the special education students. In years past, the district has had students
385 come in that cost the district of over \$100,000. The Board members are residents
386 taxpayers, and volunteers in Amherst. He understands that people want to hold the
387 board accountable, but have the meetings are public and the Board is very up front
388 on how money is spent. The point is there are expenses the school has to that are
389 contractual, underfunded mandates, and transportation costs. The Board is doing
390 its best to control them, but it is being over run by these contractual costs. The way
391 the cost per pupil rate is calculated is comparing apples to oranges. Looking at cost
392 per pupil is not the best way to compare budgets. Balancing fiscal discipline and an
393 excellent education is hard to do and the Board tries very hard because they are all
394 taxpayers. He thanked the public for their questions.

395
396 Mr. Prescott stated that the target for this Special Education fund is \$200,000. This
397 was recommended by the special education team and voted on by the public last
398 year. The money drawn from this fund is voted on by the Board in front of the
399 public. He invited the public to the meetings, to read the minutes and can view the
400 calendar on the SAU website.

401
402 Ms. Foulks discussed the summary of the budget. The budget presented tonight was
403 worked on thoroughly and there was justification for every cost. She encourages
404 continued questions and justification for spending. This is a lean and responsible
405 budget. If the budget is not passed, the major factors driving this budget will still be
406 a cost. If the public has questions, please pursue the answers by contacting Board
407 members, administration, and watching the public forum on the SAU web site about
408 the full day Kindergarten proposal.

409
410 Ms. Foulks stated that the Deliberative Session is on February 3rd at 7pm.

411
412 Ms. Foulks closed the Public Hearing at 9:05pm

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Regular Meeting

(minutes taken by Betty Shankel)

Ms. Foulks called the meeting to order at 9:23pm.

Article 12

Paul Prescott made a motion to put Article 12 on the ASD warrant as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Amy Facey seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Peg Bennett made a motion to support Article 12 as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Amy Facey seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Article 13

Lucienne Foulks made a motion to put Article 13 on the ASD warrant as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Jim Manning seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Amy Facey made a motion to support Article 13 as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Paul Prescott seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Article 14

Paul Prescott made a motion to put Article 14 on the ASD warrant as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Amy Facey seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Jim Manning made a motion to support Article 14 as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Peg Bennett seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Article 15

Lucienne Foulks made a motion to put Article 15 on the ASD warrant as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Jim Manning seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Peg Bennett made a motion to support Article 15 as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Jim Manning seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

Article 16

Amy Facey made a motion to put Article 16 on the ASD warrant as presented at the ASD Public Hearing. Jim Manning seconded the motion and the vote was unanimous.

457 **Lucienne Foulks made a motion to support Article 16 as presented at the ASD**
458 **Public Hearing. Paul Prescott seconded the motion and the vote was**
459 **unanimous.**

460
461 The meeting adjourned at 9:31pm.