

**Amherst School Committee Meeting
Tuesday, August 1, 2017
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Phoebe Hazzard, Chair

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

Vira Douangmany Cage

Eric Nakajima

Anastasia Ordonez

Peter Demling

1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes

6:02p.m.

Ms. Hazzard called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

2. Announcements and Public Comment

6:02 p.m.

There were no public comments. Ms. Hazzard noted that item 3B should say “establish a Regional School District Planning Committee” rather than what was shown on the agenda (Regional School district Planning Board with Pelham). She also noted that Dr. Morris is out of town tonight, as was planned prior to the scheduling of this meeting.

3. New and Continuing Business

6:06 p.m.

A. Planning for Listening Session on August 8

At Ms. Hazzard’s request, members shared the efforts they have made in advertising the scheduled listening sessions, including coverage by the local newspapers and Amherst Media; emails to SETF, School PGOs and the ARPS Family Center; and posting flyers at the apartment complexes and on community bulletin boards. Mr. Nakajima reported on the work of the Listening Session Planning Subcommittee. He reported that their recommendation for the session is for the Chair to review the meeting’s purpose and ground rules; for Superintendent Morris to review recent events including the work of the Enrollment Working Group; and then to listen to community input. The recommendation of the subcommittee is to answer any factual questions that are posed by members of the public, while refraining from sharing any personal opinions. Ms. Ordonez noted that this is a time to capture any questions and to hear any good ideas that are brought forward. She reported that the subcommittee recommends setting the room up in a manner that feels more like a conversation, such as having the chairs in a circle. Discussion followed regarding the best structure for the conversation, including what kinds of questions/topics will be considered to ensure the School Committee gets the information they need. It was agreed that committee members will forward their suggested questions to Ms. Westmoreland by the end of the day tomorrow so that the subcommittee can finalize the questions for the meeting. Discussion turned to how the conversation will be facilitated after the initial presentation by Ms. Hazzard and Dr. Morris. It was agreed that each member will facilitate the discussion for a portion of the questions, divided evenly according to how many questions are submitted. Ms. Hazzard noted that the School Committee will discuss the information heard at the listening sessions at the September 19 meeting, and at the September 25 meeting the committee will vote on the composition of the Fort River Site Feasibility Study Committee.

B. Discussion of Potential Submission of Town Meeting Warrant to Establish a Regional School District Planning Committee

DOCUMENTS (HISTORICAL): Memo to Amherst Town Meeting Members from Maria Geryk and Irv Rhodes regarding Warrant Requesting Approval to Form a Regional School District Planning Committee dated October 20, 2011; Town Warrant, Article 1 Regional School District Planning Committee dated October 25, 2011

Ms. Hazzard explained that the deadline for submitting warrant articles for consideration at Town Meeting is September 18, which does not leave the School Committee much opportunity to discuss the possibility of exploring the idea of regionalizing with Pelham. Having an initial discussion tonight will allow the committee to vote on whether to submit a warrant article at the meeting next week and then to discuss the issue more in-depth with the Pelham School Committee. The warrant article could be moved forward at Town Meeting or the committee could ask that the warrant be removed, based on those discussions. Ms. Hazzard then gave background information provided by Pelham School Committee Chair Cara Castenson that outlined Pelham's reasons for wanting to explore potential regionalization with Amherst. She outlined the process that would be followed if the process were to move from the initial step of the Town Meetings establishing a planning committee through to regionalization. Ms. Douangmany Cage and Ms. Ordonez both expressed support for moving forward with requesting the warrant article so the process can begin and conversations can begin with the Pelham committee. Mr. Nakajima agreed and suggested that Ms. Hazzard, Ms. Castenson and Dr. Morris develop a presentation on the costs and guidance on how the more in-depth discussion can proceed. Mr. Demling expressed his support as well. After discussion, it was agreed that a one-item Amherst School Committee meeting will be posted at 6:15 on September 12 prior to the Regional School Committee meeting for this vote only. Ms. Hazzard opened the floor for public comment. Marylou Theilman, community member, noted that finance and governance are the first things that must be decided when attempting to regionalize. She suggested that the committee find out what the financial benefits will be for each town as one of the most important considerations. Barbara Jamate, Amherst resident, asked what the existing relationship is with Pelham. Ms. Hazzard explained that Pelham and Amherst are currently a Union which shares the same curriculum, teacher contracts and Central Offices.

5. Adjourn

7:04 p.m.

Mr. Nakajima moved to adjourn at 7:04 p.m. Mr. Demling seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland