

REGULAR MEETING OF THE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Tuesday, April 28, 2015

Library, Amherst Regional High School

IN ATTENDANCE:

Trevor Baptiste, Chair

Kathleen Traphagen, Vice-Chair

Dan Robb

Katherine Appy

Vira Douangmany Cage

Phoebe Hazzard

Sarah Dolven

Rick Hood

Stephen Sullivan

Josiah Vasquez, Student Representative

Maria Geryk, Superintendent

Sean Mangano, Finance Director

Sandy Pooler, Amherst Finance Director

Andy Steinberg, Amherst Select Board

Kip Fonsh, Leverett School Committee

John Trickey, Pelham Finance Committee

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

Public and Press

A. Welcome

6:49 PM

A. Call to Order and Agenda Review

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:49 p.m. He noted that there is only one agenda item tonight, which is an important continuation of the discussion of Regionalization.

B. Approve Minutes

Ms. Traphagen moved to approve the minutes of April 14, 2015. Ms. Dolven seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

2. Announcements and Public Comments

6:51 PM

Mr. Baptiste welcomed Josiah Vasquez, Junior, as the representative to the School Committee in attendance tonight in Mr. Olmstead's absence. Mr. Vasquez is slated to serve as the representative during the 2015-2016 school year.

3. New and Continuing Business

6:52 PM

A. Regionalization Discussion—Financial Impact

DOCUMENT: PK-12 Regionalization Financial Study—Round 3 dated April 2015

Mr. Mangano provided an overview of the financial impact of regionalization. The presentation included information on:

- Background of the financial analysis done during the regionalization study;
- The three regional scenarios studied and the two assessment methodologies reviewed for each scenario;
- The assumptions and estimates used in reviewing the financial impact of each scenario;
- The detailed analysis of the financial impact of regionalizing; and
- Takeaways about the potential financial impact of a PK-12 region.

Mr. Mangano answered clarifying questions about the data for School Committee members throughout the presentation. Mr. Baptiste allowed for public comment after the presentation and discussion. Janet McGowen, Town Meeting member and ARHS parent, asked if Medicaid money is currently used for the town or for the Region and whether regionalizing PK-12 would mean a loss for the Town. Sandy Pooler, Town of Amherst Finance Director, explained that funds in Amherst are not allocated separately for departments of the town. For Amherst, funds that typically come into the pot from Medicaid would be lost; however, those funds would benefit the Town because it would go toward the Regional school budget, thus lowering the Regional assessment. Mr. Pooler noted that these funds would not be a "make or break" for the Amherst Town Budget because the relative impact on the budget would be small. Larry Kelly, Town Meeting member, stated that the \$300,000 Medicaid reimbursement should be taken out of the figures because it already benefits Amherst. Ms. Traphagen noted that the figures under consideration are based on impact on all of the towns. Andy Steinberg, Chair of the RAWG

Committee, current Amherst Select Board member, and former Chair of the Amherst Finance Committee, spoke to the School Committee about the best-case and worst-case budget scenarios for FY17, which both indicate that a level of cuts will be required for the school budgets. He noted that all four of the towns are facing structural deficits that are growing each year and expanded on the issues faced by Amherst. Mr. Steinberg stated that Amherst has some advantage due to its size so it would be able to continue to support the elementary schools, noting that Shutesbury is in a similar position. However, Pelham and Leverett face a greater challenge due to their declining enrollments and reliance on school choice revenue. He stated that he is concerned about what may happen to our 7-12 schools if other member towns have to cut back on their joint effort to fund the secondary schools because they have to allocate more funding to support their elementary schools. Mr. Steinberg stated that regionalizing would make the system more sustainable for all of the towns, thus benefitting the entire system, including Amherst. He encouraged the Regional School Committee to look to the long-term, not just the first year or two of an expanded region. John Trickey, Pelham Finance Committee Chair, spoke about Pelham's position regarding regionalization. He explained that the school has been run by subsidizing it by school choice; however, choice revenue is now less than the expense to run the school. Mr. Trickey noted that the Town of Pelham is anxious to see what the School Committee develops with regard to potential savings based on expanding the region. Kip Fonsh, Leverett School Committee Chair and RAWG member, noted that Mr. Steinberg and Mr. Trickey hit the financial points that impact Leverett. He noted that all three concepts of regionalization—governance, finance and education—are inextricably linked. He noted that the costs of not regionalizing are considerable for Leverett because it is questionable whether the building can be kept open and operating at the current level without it. Mr. Fonsh noted that a budget cut of more than 8% may be required in Leverett due to a tax abatement issue in the town. Both Mr. Trickey and Mr. Fonsh noted that their towns do not have the growth capability to continue funding their schools at the current level. Mr. Fonsh noted that he would do everything in his power to convince his fellow community members in Leverett to approve regionalization. Mr. Hood noted that he is for regionalization even if there weren't any financial savings; however, he believes the \$300,000 of Medicaid should be shown in a separate column when talking about the topic. Mr. Baptiste asked for input on how to move forward with the next regionalization discussion. Ms. Dolven suggested having an opportunity for representatives of all of the elementary schools to present information to the towns about the individual schools in order to inform the citizenry about the good points of each of the schools.

4. School Committee Planning

9:15 PM

The next meeting to discuss a regionalization topic will be May 20 at 6:00 p.m. June 2 and 23 will also be scheduled for regionalization topics.

5. Adjournment

9:23 PM

Ms. Traphagen moved to adjourn at 9:23 p.m. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Debbie Westmoreland