

**Amherst School Committee Meeting  
Tuesday, September 12, 2017  
Library, Amherst Regional High School  
21 Mattoon Street  
Amherst, MA 01002**

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Phoebe Hazzard, Chair  
Peter Demling  
Eric Nakajima  
Anastasia Ordonez

Mike Morris, Interim Superintendent  
Sean Mangano, Finance Director  
Cara Castenson, Pelham School Committee Chair  
Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

**ABSENT:**

Vira Douangmany Cage

**1. Call to Order and Approve Minutes 6:15 p.m.**

Ms. Hazzard called the meeting to order at 6:15 p.m. She noted that Ms. Douangmany Cage cannot be in attendance tonight due to unanticipated circumstances.

**2. New and Continuing Business 7:51 p.m.**

**A. Submission of Town meeting Warrant to Establish a Regional School District Planning Board with Pelham (Vote)**

Ms. Hazzard noted that this potential warrant article to establish a Regional School District Planning Board with Pelham was discussed at length at the August Amherst School Committee. She provided a brief synopsis of the purpose of the warrant and the process for studying regionalization. Cara Castenson, Pelham School Committee Chair, noted that the Pelham School Committee has voted to submit the same warrant to the Pelham Town Meeting, which will vote in October. Mr. Nakajima moved to submit the warrant article titled Regional School District Planning Committee which reads:

*Shall the Town of Amherst form a Regional School District Planning Committee (RSDPC) consisting of three (3) members, one of whom must be a member of the school committee as per M.G.L. Chapter 71, Sections 14, 14A and 14B. The RSDPC may choose to join with a corresponding Committee(s) from another town(s) to form a Regional School District Planning Board (the Board). The purpose of the Board is to perform a detailed exploration of and recommendation as to forming a Regional School District for our K-6 school.*

Mr. Demling moved to amend the article to include the word “district” as the last word in the article. Mr. Nakajima seconded and the motion to amend was unanimously approved. The amended motion was then unanimously approved.

**B. Warrant Article at Amherst Town Meeting Opposing Expansion of Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School Enrollment (Vote)**

Ms. Hazzard noted that the committee discussed this item at the Amherst School Committee last night, with an opportunity for public comment. She recognized that there has not been a great deal of time for public comment; however, she feels comfortable moving forward because the committee has discussed this issue and made the position of the committee clear in prior meetings. Mr. Demling noted that the committee has discussed having the committee’s position statement as an agenda item at the October meeting, and public comment will be taken at that meeting. He also pointed out that the reason this is moving forward quickly is due to the deadline for submission of warrant articles for consideration at Town Meeting. Ms. Ordonez noted that it is important to stress that the vote tonight is to ask another body within the town to take this issue up as

an official matter. Mr. Demling moved to submit the article titled *Regarding the Expansion of the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School* including the text:

*To see if the Town will adopt the following resolution:*

- *WHEREAS: providing free and equal access to the highest quality education possible for every student in our public schools - regardless of income, language proficiency, disability or any other difference - is a foundational principle core to our democracy;*
- *WHEREAS: all schools funded by public tax dollars should be driven by this central mandate, recognizing that it is necessary but not sufficient for a public school to be financially stable, academically high-performing and an innovative model;*
- *WHEREAS: in the fulfillment of this primary civic responsibility, Amherst Public Schools choose to invest significant resources to meet the diverse needs of low-income students, English language learners and students with disabilities, including transportation, social support services and specialized programming;*
- *WHEREAS: the public data provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) shows that the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School (PVCICS) has historically been and currently remains far short of meeting this essential mandate, enrolling 5.9% of students with disabilities compared to 13.4% in sending districts, and 15.5% of low-income students compared to 39.9% in sending districts;*
- *WHEREAS: the charter tuition formula is fundamentally flawed, based on the spending level of the sending district, taken directly from the sending district's funding, and without consideration for the need level of the students sent;*
- *WHEREAS: The charter tuition formula creates a financial disincentive to retain special needs students in-district with robust specialized programs, further exacerbating the budgetary impact on districts that choose to invest in these important resources;*
- *WHEREAS: the state is supposed to reimburse districts for 100 percent of charter tuition costs for the first year and 25 percent for the following five years, but the state has only been reimbursing the first year since 2012;*
- *WHEREAS: in FY17 Amherst and Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools sent 122 students to PVCICS for a total payment of \$2,244,828, the amount of which would rise to \$4,937,668 (or the maximum 9% of net school spending) if our sending rate remains the same and PVCICS meets their requested enrollment maximum;*
- *WHEREAS: local accountability of public tax dollars is necessary to ensure that schools are responsible and responsive to the needs of the communities they serve, and this Charter's board has no direct accountability to our local voters, government or community;*
- *WHEREAS: in recognition of the inequities created by the systemic problems with Charter funding, 78% of Amherst voted against the 2016 Question 2 Charter expansion;*  
*WHEREAS: the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) just rejected this same expansion request from PVCICS on 02-27-17 by a vote of 7-2, and the DESE Charter School Office suggested that PVCICS wait two years before resubmitting;*

*THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Town of Amherst calls upon Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Jeff Wulfson and the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) to reject the PVCICS charter amendment to increase enrollment by 452 students to a maximum enrollment of 1036,*

*AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that upon passage the Amherst Town Clerk shall mail copies of the resolution and vote to Acting Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Jeff Wulfson, BESE, the state Joint Committee on Education, our elected state Senator Stan Rosenberg and our elected state Representative*

*Solomon Goldstein-Rose.*

Ms. Ordonez seconded and discussion followed. Mr. Mangano noted that there is a cap to the amount the state will charge for charter tuitions, which is at 9% of the total funding for the public schools. He noted that the committee may want to reconsider the reference to total amount of potential increases in the warrant. Mr. Nakajima moved to amend the motion to include the statement “or the maximum of 9% of the net school spending” after \$4,937,668 in the second line of Whereas number eight. Mr. Demling seconded and the motion to amend was unanimously approved. Mr. Nakajima noted that the revisions in the language after last night’s discussion focuses the conversation on the negative financial impact of the charter school formulas. The amended motion was then unanimously approved.

**3. Adjourn**

**6:43 p.m.**

Mr. Nakajima moved to adjourn at 6:43 p.m. Ms. Ordonez seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland

**MEETING DOCUMENTS:**

- *Proposed Town Meeting Article: Regional School District Planning Committee*
- *Proposed Town Meeting Article: Regarding the Expansion of the Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion Charter School*

*Approved September 19, 2017*