

## REGULAR MEETING OF THE REGIONAL SCHOOL COMMITTEE

Tuesday, May 12, 2015

Library, Amherst Regional High School

### IN ATTENDANCE:

Trevor Baptiste, Chair

Kathleen Traphagen, Vice-Chair

Stephen Sullivan

Katherine Appy

Vira Douagmany Cage

Phoebe Hazzard

Sarah Dolven

Rick Hood

Dan Robb (arrived at 6:56 p.m.)

Maria Geryk, Superintendent

Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent

Sean Mangano, Finance Director

Kathryn Mazur, Human Resources Director

Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal

Debbie Westmoreland, Recorder

Public and Press

### ABSENT:

Myles Olmstead, Student Representative

### A. Welcome

**6:06 PM**

#### **A. Call to Order and Agenda Review**

Mr. Baptiste called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m. and reviewed the agenda.

#### **B. Approve Minutes**

Ms. Dolven moved to approve the minutes of April 28, 2015. Mr. Dolven seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

### 2. Announcements and Public Comments

**6:08 PM**

Ms. Geryk reminded the School Committee that graduation is Friday, June 5 and they are all invited to attend and to sit on the stage. A reminder will be sent in the next couple of days and they will be asked to RSVP whether they are attending. Ms. Dolven noted that this is her last meeting as the Leverett representative to the Regional School Committee. Mr. Fonsh will be taking the role again due mainly to his work as the point person on RAWG and his knowledge of regionalization. Ms. Dolven expressed her appreciation for the honor of serving on the committee. Mr. Baptiste thanked Ms. Dolven for her service as did other members of the committee. Mr. Hood noted that at the Student Advisory Committee this week the students requested that he mention that next week is Consent Week at ARHS. He shared the website address for more information on this student-initiated week of events and encouraged the committee members to read more about it. There were no public comments.

### 3. New and Continuing Business

**6:12 PM**

#### **A. OPEB Trust and Board of Trustees**

***DOCUMENT: Other Post Employment Benefits: An Employer's Perspective presented by Brian Fox of Murphy, Hesse, Toomey & Lehane, L.L.P.; Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Other Post-Employment Benefits Liability Trust Fund Declaration of Trust (draft)***

Mr. Mangano introduced attorney Brian Fox of Murphy, Hesse, Toomey & Lehane who specializes in OPEB and contract law. Mr. Fox skyped into the meeting to provide information about OPEB. He reviewed background information about OPEB, how to establish an OPEB trust and how to maintain compliance for the trust. He particularly explained the requirements and expectations for the Trustees of the Trust Agreement who govern and manage the fund. He then answered questions from the School Committee. Mr. Hood asked if it would be a violation of the trust if funds were used during a time of financial crisis to pay retiree benefits that would normally come out of the general fund. Mr. Fox said it would not definitely be a violation, but it would have to be reviewed in light of all of the circumstances. An argument could be made for doing so in a financial crisis. Mr. Mangano asked a few questions provided by Marylou Theilman, community member and Amherst Finance Committee member. The first question was whether the OPEB trust set up now would remain in effect if the Regional Agreement is amended to include additional grades. Mr. Fox confirmed that it will. The second question noted that each of the towns have their own OPEB Trust Funds. She asked if anything will change with those funds if the agreement is amended.

Mr. Fox noted that the only change he would foresee is that the Regional schools' liability would go up and the towns' liability would go down. Ms. Douagmany Cage asked who would be on the board of trustees other than the district treasurer. Mr. Fox noted that the board would want to consider having members such as the Business manager, people in the towns with backgrounds in investing, school committee members and a retiree or retiree's representative if desired. Mr. Fox noted that the committee will want to keep control of the Board of Trustees so they would want to have representatives from the School Committee and/or the school administration. Mr. Hood noted that he has been opposed to OPEB funds for public entities because it ties up such significant amounts of money even when the likelihood of these entities going bankrupt is so low compared to private companies. Mr. Fox noted that it is good for the district's bond rating because the district shows it is reducing unfunded liabilities. He noted that he agrees it is less likely that a public entity will go bankrupt, but it can happen. Mr. Baptiste asked if the type of investments and where the investments are made is determined at the Trustee level. Mr. Fox confirmed that it is made at the trustee level but with the advice of the financial advisors. The district's investment policy will guide the investment decisions. Mr. Fox noted that the process is for the School Committee to appoint the Board of Trustees and for the Trustees to adopt the Trust Document as their first order of business. Discussion followed about the recommended make-up of the Board of Trustees. Mr. Fox noted that it is common to have a five member Board of Trustees. Ms. Douagmany Cage asked what the role of Mr. Fox's firm is with regard to the OPEB Trust. Mr. Fox noted that the bulk of their work is up front in preparing the trust document, but they are available for legal consultation as needed at any time. A vote to appoint the Board of Trustees will be on the next Regional School Committee agenda.

## **2. FY15 Third Quarter Budget Update**

***DOCUMENT: Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Fiscal Year 2015 Third Quarter Update; Capital Project Funds Update dated 5/12/15***

Mr. Mangano provided a brief overview of the highlights of the FY2015 Third Quarter update. He also provided an update on FY14 and FY15 capital projects as requested at a previous meeting. Mr. Mangano answered clarifying questions about the report. Mr. Baptiste asked for an update on how much is available in School Committee expense lines, and Ms. Geryk noted that the information can be provided.

## **3. Clerical/Media Award Approval**

***DOCUMENT: Memo from Debbie Westmoreland, Assistant to the Superintendent, to Regional School Committee regarding Clerical/Media Awards dated May 8, 2015***

Ms. Westmoreland reported that the Clerical/Media Award selection subcommittee met last week to review and select recipients of the annual awards. She noted that there were eight nominees with very strong recommendations; however, the four employees selected had particularly impressive recommendations. Ms. Appy moved that, in accordance with the Unit B employee contract, the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee approves clerical/media merit awards in the amount of \$500 each for Wendy Bloomenthal, Connie Cappelli, Louise Lavigne and Cathy Tracy. Ms. Dolven seconded and the motion was unanimously approved. Ms. Appy said that the awardees will be honored at the employee recognition awards, which Ms. Geryk noted is scheduled for June 17. All School Committee members are invited to attend.

## **4. Memo Regarding Consolidation of Grades 7-12 in One Building**

***DOCUMENT: Memo to the Regional School Committee from Kathryn Mazur regarding an Update on Exploration of Secondary Restructuring Options***

Ms. Geryk stated that this is a time, based on declining enrollments, to look at the potential to combine grades 7-12 in one building, and it is also time to look at ways to be innovative in education to best serve all of our students. She reported that she tasked Ms. Mazur with taking the lead in overseeing exploration of restructuring options. Ms. Mazur then distributed a memo and reviewed the highlights of the work to date, including:

- An informational meeting with Senate President Stan Rosenberg and Representative Ellen Story to update them on the financial challenges in the Region and opportunities that may grow out of those challenges;
- A partnership with Greenfield Community College (GCC) that can lead to in-district dual enrollment opportunities for students and adults, local workforce training and the possibility of offering credit bearing college courses during the Senior year at ARHS;

- Plans to actively engage the community in this process through community forums and a revisioning forum; and
- Development of three task forces for this work including an Oversight Committee, an Educational Impact Committee and a Vocational/Technical Programming Committee.

Ms. Geryk noted that it is important to hear from the community, students and recent graduates regarding what is needed to support our students in post-graduate life. Mr. Hood asked what the program will look like at each of the school buildings if the grades are combined. Ms. Geryk clarified that everything is still in the planning stages so nothing is determined yet. Mr. Baptiste noted that he wants to applaud Ms. Geryk for taking our conversations about the achievement gap and taking action on them. He stated that he is very much in support of these plans but cautioned that there are a lot of moving parts in the district right now. Ms. Appy agreed, noting that this is very excited and is also a very big undertaking. She asked if dual enrollment through the GCC partnership will be in-district. Ms. Mazur noted that it will be in-district with the possibility that, moving forward, even some of our graduates will be able to participate in courses. Ms. Hazzard noted that there is a lot to consider in putting middle school students in with high school students. Ms. Mazur agreed, saying that it is likely to be the greatest concern of our families. She said that potential concerns will be considered carefully throughout the planning process. Mr. Hood asked about the timeline for all of this to be in place. Ms. Geryk noted that the reasonable timeline is September 2018. Mr. Baptiste asked when the task forces will be established. Ms. Mazur noted that they should be in place by the end of June, and Ms. Geryk noted that there will be representation from each of the communities. Mr. Sullivan noted that in Shutesbury students begin discussing as early as fourth grade whether they will go to vocational schools, charter, choice or to the high school. He asked if such discussions happen at Pelham, Leverett and Amherst. Ms. Geryk noted that for vocational schools, students often apply but are not accepted. She said that numbers for charter, choice and private schools are much easier to predict. Mr. Morris noted that developmentally there are a lot of changes from age 10 to 14 so many students change their plans after having their middle school experience. Ms. Douagmany Cage asked what STEAM stands for compared to STEM. Ms. Mazur explained that it adds the art component to STEM. Ms. Douagmany Cage encouraged Ms. Geryk to utilize the participatory research model to gather input from the community about these potential changes and offerings as is being used by the SETF. Mr. Baptiste agreed, noting that the more we engage with the tax payers making the educational opportunities happen the more buy-in there will be.

#### **5. Accept Gifts**

*DOCUMENT: Memo to the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee from Mary Wallace, Treasurer, dated May 7, 2015*

Ms. Traphagen moved to accept \$250 from Shirley J. Musumeci for the Leo P. Vigneault Memorial Award; \$500 from Deborah A. Ritzer, \$500 from David A. Perry, \$500 from Stephen and Brille Cotsoradis, and \$500 from Regina and Daniel St. John for the Kingsley Perry Award; \$350 from Regina and Daniel St. John for the Kingsley Perry Award from the Class of 1962; \$600 from Amherst Leisure Services for the General Scholarship for 2015; \$500 from Peter Tripp for the Anson J. Tripp Memorial Scholarship; and \$500 from Jones Group Realtors for the General Scholarship for 2015. Mr. Robb seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

#### **4. School Committee Planning**

**7:54 PM**

Ms. Geryk distributed and reviewed the updated calendar for the remainder of the school year. In addition to the topics listed, Board of Trustees can be added to the May 20 meeting. Mr. Hood suggested that education be the regionalization topic for May 20 with governance as the topic on the June 2 meeting. It was agreed by consensus.

#### **5. Adjournment**

**7:59 PM**

Ms. Dolven moved to adjourn at 7:59 p.m. Ms. Appy seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Debbie Westmoreland