

**Regular Meeting of the Amherst School Committee
Wednesday, January 13, 2016
Library, Amherst Regional High School**

IN ATTENDANCE

Katherine Appy, Chair
Vira Douangmany-Cage
Rick Hood
Kathleen Traphagen

Maria Geryk, Superintendent
Mike Morris, Assistant Superintendent
Sean Mangano, Finance Director
Faye Brady, Student Services Director
Monica Hall, Equity & PD Director
Ron Bohonowicz, Facilities Director
Mark Jackson, ARHS Principal
Miki Gromacki, ARHS Assistant Principal
Jean Fay, APEA President
Nick Yaffe, Wildwood School Principal
Jim LaPosta, JCJ Architecture
Doug Roberts, JCJ Architecture
Tom Murphy, JLA Project Manager
Community & Press
Kimberly Stender, Recorder

ABSENT

Phoebe Hazzard

1. Call to Order & Welcome

6:32 p.m.

Ms. Appy called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m. She invited the public to attend the next Amherst School Committee meetings on Thursday, January 14, 2016 at 3:30 p.m. and on Tuesday, January 19, 2016 at 5:45 p.m. Mr. Morris welcomed the group to the community forum and reviewed the agenda. He stated that all reports will be available on the Amherst Elementary School Building Project Facebook page.

2. Amherst Elementary School Building Project Presentation

6:41 p.m.

DOCUMENT: Preliminary Design Option and Projected Costs

Mr. LaPosta reviewed the meeting schedule and reviewed several design options. He presented the projected costs associated with each design. He also addressed MSBA grade configuration options, reimbursement rates (50%-55%) and swing space.

3. Public Comment

7:22 p.m.

Mr. Morris invited community members to share their opinions. Ms. Geryk, Mr. LaPosta, Mr. Murphy, Mr. Roberts and Mr. Morris answered questions and provided clarifying information. Ludmilla Pavlova inquired about swing space and new construction options. Marla Ginate inquired about the methods used in long term population and enrollment forecasting. Bonnie McCracken asked if there were co-located schools within a 75 mile radius which community members could visit to view structure and design. Joya Dressa expressed concern for children of color in the larger common spaces of a new school. She also inquired about outcomes for children of color and if these will change over time. Michael Burkart, Town Meeting member, announced he was a proponent of community schools but did not think this particular project was a community school. He stated he would vote against this project during town meeting. Ms. Geryk announced her recommendation for grade configuration: Grades Pre-K, Kindergarten and Grade 1 would be housed in Crocker Farm Elementary School and Grades 2-6 would be housed in a new school building. She stated that the community and ARPS must address every child and equalize demographics and resources. She stressed the importance of equitable early childhood education as a way to close the achievement gap. Ms. Geryk also stated that re-districting would occur in

five years if the community does not agree to adopt the PreK-Grade 1 and Grade 2-6 models. Kurt Wise took issue with the Superintendent's comment regarding re-districting. He believes that "equal does not mean equity" and that the solution must be the best outcome. He added that the community could find funding to re-build both Fort River and Wildwood Schools as co-located schools are not always the best solution. He urged people to look at <https://saveamherstssmallschools.wordpress.com/> for more information. A Wildwood student spoke about the importance of keeping the Wildwood community intact as he wants ride the same bus and attend the same school with his siblings and friends. Kathleem Traphagen asked how a new school building would be divided up by grade. Ms. Geryk replied that ideally one wing would house Grades 2-6 (Fort River) and the other wing would house Grades 2-6 (Wildwood). Amilcar Shabazz inquired about the financials for design upgrades. He asked if all designs involving swing space be ruled out of the final decision. Len Lucien asked if both Wildwood and Fort River Schools could be gutted. Lumilla Pavlova explained the UMASS construction process and construction codes involving gutting process. Vince O'Connor cited flexible districting be an option and equity issues be addressed. He stated that schools should be the most important capital project in town and not the new fire station, public works building or library. Katie Ladowski stated that the main focus should be racial equity rather than speculations regarding barriers a design option may create. Russ Vernon-Jones believes that K-6 Grade schools make the most sense and stressed meeting the needs of every student to ensure their success. Jean Fay requested that the open responses of the educator/staff survey be made available to the public. Marylou Theilman (Amherst Finance Committee) read a statement taken from the draft minutes of their last meeting (a copy of the statement can be found at the end of this document. Vira Douangmany-Cage recalled two cases of mistaken identity at Crocker Farm School and stated her concerns regarding heightened security, surveillance calendars and police presence at a large school. Carleen Basler asked why parents/guardians of color were not more responsive on the survey or present at the community forum. Kurt Wise asked why the conversation is driven by financials and could Powerball provide the needed funding for school renovations.

4. Adjournment

8:39 p.m.

Ms. Appy called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Hood made a motion to adjourn at 8:39 p.m. Ms. Douangmany-Cage seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kimberly Stender

Theilman's comments for the Amherst Finance Committee taken from the draft minutes of their last meeting.

After an extensive discussion about such things as project costs, sequencing, affordability, effects on other town capital needs, potential trade-offs with the operating budget, and possible voter overrides, the Finance Committee concluded its role would best be served by emphasizing the following principles/processes:

- Oversight as to the relationship of all the projects as a whole, as opposed to the financial viability of each project on its own, will be a continued focus of the Finance Committee.
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- Based on the current assumptions as to project costs to-date, affordability is a key concern, especially as to whether or not the Town can meet its on-going capital and operational needs, and at the same time complete all four projects without introducing a significant debt-exclusion override.
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- Accordingly, the Finance Committee will request that each project proposal clearly include basic financial analyses relative to cost.
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- The Finance Committee will seek input into these projects, starting by sharing its thoughts at the upcoming meeting of the Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC).
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- To address these financial concerns, the Finance Committee may request that representatives of each project attend future committee meetings.
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- Finally, the Finance Committee will stress that, although these four projects are the most visible and known major capital projects to-date, the Town needs to keep in mind other potential needs as well, such as the long standing backlog of roads repair and the ongoing capital needs of Town departments.