

**AMESBURY SCHOOL COMMITTEE
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
AMESBURY HIGH SCHOOL
MARCH 15, 2011**

Present at 7:00 p.m. were Thatcher Kezer, Chair, Debra LaValley, Stanley Schwartz, Tom McGee, Gale Hanshaw, Bonnie Schultz, Ann Connolly King, David Jack, Superintendent of Schools and Courtney Ouellet, SAC Representative.

The Chair called the meeting to order. The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Mr. Schwartz.

II. COMMENTS BY VISITORS, DELEGATIONS

Jim Thivierge, 106 Friend Street had given the school committee a document that addresses the overall financing of the community and explained what the document contained.

III. PRESENTATIONS

A. Public Hearing on the FY12 Budget

Mayor Kezer turned the meeting over to Ms. LaValley as the chair of the finance/budget subcommittee. Ms. LaValley acknowledged Municipal Council members who were in attendance: Mr. Neale, Ms. Chatigny, Ms. Ferguson and Mr. Kimball.

Ms. LaValley then read School Committee Policy BDDH Public Participation at School Committee Meetings and called on the superintendent to present the current state of the FY12 school department budget. Mr. Jack made a PowerPoint presentation on the FY12 budget including budget goals, sources of revenue and revenue losses and the proposed cuts to the budget. He explained that this is just the beginning of the budget process and that the school committee won't know the final decisions on the budget for 2-3 months.

Ms. LaValley invited members of the community to come up to the microphones and ask questions about the budget cuts or just give their opinion. She asked each person to state their name and address.

Denise Kligerman, 4 Cote Street asked if moving from the Horace Mann to the high school took into account the cost of the move. She also expressed concern about time on learning with the addition of study halls at the middle school.

Lars Johannessen, 6 Kendrick's Court spoke of the benefit of music and the arts to a student's education and asked that they not be cut out of the budget.

Matt Einson, 64 Fern Avenue stated that if parents paid \$250 per student per year, it would close the gap in the budget.

Cindy Yetman, 31 Portsmouth Road, a teacher and the President of the AFT stated that she has not been approached by administration regarding a change in the insurance and that it was the teacher's union who were the first group to offer to make larger contributions for the insurance. The Mayor explained that the school department has been operating on the same bottom line budget and that they have done a great job in getting to the bottom line. However, the revenues falling are the problem. He said that Amesbury is close to the maximum tax allowed in proposition 2.5. Amesbury has experienced some new growth through the National Grid substation and new construction. The town will be able to plug the loss of aid from the federal and state governments with these new funds. He is trying to balance taxes versus services. The Municipal Council asks for more money to lower the taxes but the school department needs money to fulfill contractual obligations. The new funds are a total of \$1,100,000, \$900,000 of which the Mayor designated for the school department and the town will use \$200,000 for services. In the near future the Mayor will be meeting with all of the unions regarding health care design. MIIA is doing comparisons between our current insurance and the GIC, which is what the employees use.

Jean Gagnon, 32 Birchmeadow Road, asked if the cutting of lab installation involves computers. She asked if it would be possible to delay purchasing new materials for next year and use what we currently are using and make no new purchases.

Tim Angerhofer, teacher, thanked the superintendent for referring to the reduction in staff as "people". He asked if the cuts in staff would be equitable in terms of money and the number of positions. He also asked if an increase in insurance costs would close the additional gap of \$400,000.

Patty Hoyt, 33A Pleasant Valley Road, introduced herself as budget reduction #30. She stated how many English teachers have been cut in the last five years. The department has gone from 10 teachers to 6 including next year's cut. This increases class sizes which isn't good for students.

Gail Brown, 2 Woodlawn Street, reiterated that this would be the third year in a row that the school department will not be replacing retiring staff. She is disappointed with the cuts in the foreign language department. She also said that she would like to see the inclusion of transportation costs in the circuit breaker money.

Lars Johannessen, 6 Kendrick's Court expressed concern about not replacing Mr. Horan after he retires. How will the band program continue if this position is not replaced? Mr. Jack said that the plan to make it work has not been formalized as yet but will be discussed during the future budget workshops.

Barbara Catino, 27 Pleasant Valley Road asked if Horace Mann could be a revenue source? The Mayor answered that once the building is vacated it will be turned over to the town as surplus and will be sold. The Mayor would like to move all employees out of the old buildings in town and into safe places to work.

Andrew Ghezzi, 14 Unicorn Circle, stated that his wife's position is one of the positions that was eliminated. He asked if the Municipal Council would be distributing the money equally among other town departments. The Mayor stated that two years ago the state cut Chapter 70 money and the federal government gave us two years of surplus. He said that he didn't know what the needs of other departments in the town are as yet because the school department does their budget first.

Jennifer Freeman, 17 Old Tavern Lane, asked if there were more ways to increase the revenues such as eliminating transportation or reduce the number of school days or hours.

Ms. LaValley told her that we are required to bus our students in grades one through six. She said it was also a safety issue in not providing transportation when the sidewalks are covered in snow and kids have to walk in the street. She said we decided not to increase transportation fees for the upcoming school year and that we are required to have students in school for 180 days.

Gretchen, 12 Sanborn Terrace, she said that there is a large population of students with mental health issues and that music, art and physical education help these students so eliminating these programs would be detrimental to these students. She asked if local businesses were asked to donate money to the school department. She also asked if the school department has explored applying for grants. Telena Imel stated that we have 15-22% of students in the free and reduced lunch program and the grants require a need of 35-50%.

Karen Solstad, 6 Kendrick's Court, stated that art and music programs need to be in place to keep Amesbury a nice place to go to school.

Chris Ryan, 2 Mason Court, stated that since the elimination of the extra curricular programs at the elementary school only saves \$3,000, perhaps they could be reduced rather than eliminated.

Steve, 15 Ash Street, has a 5th grader who receives special education services. He said that the employees are great, however, over the years there have been less and less of them. His child's favorite thing is chorus and it is for other special education students.

Catherine Whittier, 15 Woodwell Circle, what are we doing to decrease choice out and increase choice in. Mr. Jack explained that there are no choice seats available in grades K-6, however, grades 7-11 do have openings. He said that the reputation of the Amesbury Public Schools has increased our choice in and has decreased our choice out.

Paul Jancewicz, 19 Whittier Avenue, teacher and parent, said that we are all in this together and that Amesbury is a great place to work and a great place to send your kids to schools.

Cynthia McKinley, 6 Warren Avenue, parent of a special education student and mental health clinician, stated that it was wise to move out of the Horace Mann School. She said there were no short cuts in special education.

J. Williamson, 186 Main Street, thanked the administration and the school committee for all of the work that has been done thus far but expressed concern with increasing class sizes.

Sarah, 17 Back River Road, she has gone through the Amesbury Public Schools and her younger sister is going to be starting at the high school. She would like to see that her sister has the same advantages she has had and would want retired teachers to be replaced.

Scott LaCava, 75 Lake Attitash Road, paraprofessional at the Amesbury Middle School, expressed concern about the proposal to eliminate library, art and music.

David Blackmun, 158 Haverhill Road, is concerned about eliminating foreign language at the elementary level. He travels with his job and in foreign countries, people all speak English and we need to learn their languages as well.

Motion by Stanley Schwartz, seconded by Bonnie Schultz to suspend the rules to conduct business after 9:00 p.m. Unanimous, Yes. Student Rep, Yes.

Eric Peirce, 30 Perkins Street, stated that he was considering sending his kids to another school system (Choice out). He said that kids in Africa speak 3-4 languages.

Ms. LaValley asked the school committee members if they had anything they wanted to say. Mr. Schwartz stated that he has been on the school committee for 11 years, the town has been well managed; the Mayor and the superintendent have done a good job. Since this is so, it would mean that everyone employed is needed. We can't afford to lose teachers and police or fire personnel. Now is the time to invest – not to cut. Increase taxes and fight the fight and all hang together or move out of town. Let's maintain as much as we can for the safety and well-being of all citizens.

Ms. Connolly King said that we are all in this together. It is not us against them; we are all looking for the same goal, a good education for our kids.

Courtney Ouellet asked if the students lose these programs that are proposed, when are they coming back? She has had a great experience through the Amesbury Public Schools and would want every student to have the same opportunities that she has had.

Ms. LaValley stated that she didn't want to see the school district go back to the conditions of 1990. Her advice to everyone in the audience was to write to the Commissioner of Education and our local and national legislators and tell them how you feel about budgets being cut and your students are suffering as a result. She said

to also ask them why new charter schools are getting approved. Talk about unfunded mandates. The vote on the budget will be April 5th. Ms. LaValley officially closed the public hearing at 9:15 p.m. and ordered a five minute recess before the committee reconvenes. The meeting was called back to order at 9:25 p.m.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTS

A. Business Administrator's Report

Mr. Bergeron handed out a list of transfers that the committee will have to vote approval on at the April 5th meeting.

B. Superintendent's Report

Mr. Jack handed out copies of the DESE Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan for special education. He told the committee that Dr. Bittel from Futures Health will be giving the superintendent information on special education services that Futures will be able to provide. They will be meeting again on March 23rd and discussions are ongoing.

Mr. Jack announced that Mr. Murray, Amesbury High School Principal, had written to the committee of his plans to retire from his position as of June 30, 2011. The superintendent thanked Mr. Murray for the wonderful job he has done over the past 10 years. The Mayor congratulated Mr. Murray as well.

ITEMS FOR APPROVAL OR EARLY CONSIDERATION

A. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Debra LaValley, seconded by Gale Hanshaw to approve the school committee minutes dated February 28, 2011. Vote: 5 Yes, 2 Abstain (Schultz and McGee,) Student Rep., Yes.

Motion by Stanley Schwartz, seconded by Tom McGee to approve the school committee minutes dated March 1, 2011. Vote: 6 Yes, 1 Abstain (Schultz), Student Rep., Yes.

C. WARRANT

Motion by Bonnie Schultz, seconded by Debra LaValley to approve the warrant dated March 10, 2011 in the amount of \$166,004.76. Unanimous, Yes.

VI. INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

A. Subcommittee Reports

1. Budget/Finance Subcommittee

Ms. LaValley stated that the next scheduled meeting is April 5, 2011 at 6:00 p.m. unless there is another budget meeting scheduled prior to that date.

2. Policy Subcommittee

Ms. Hanshaw reported that this subcommittee had met prior to this meeting and there will be some policies coming to the committee for a first reading on April 5th. The next policy meeting is April 8th at 2:00 p.m. in the superintendent's office.

3. Personnel Subcommittee

Mr. Schwartz stated that negotiations are ongoing.

B. COMMUNICATIONS

1. Student Advisory Council

Courtney reported that the council will be meeting next week.

VII. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

The Mayor read the future agenda items aloud and asked the committee if they had anything to add. He also stated that he needed to take care of the Whittier Representative Appointment. Ms. Schultz asked if the committee could review proposed changes to the student handbooks prior to the May 17th meeting.

1. Superintendent's Evaluation (5/11)
2. Whittier Representative Appointment
3. MASC Day on the Hill (3/29/11)
4. Vote on School Choice SY11-12 (4/5/11)
5. Student Handbooks (5/11)
6. Retiree Reception (6/7/11)

VIII. PRESS CONFERENCE

None.

Motion by Debra LaValley, seconded by Bonnie Schultz to adjourn the meeting at 9:40 p.m. Unanimous, Yes. Student Rep., Yes.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tom McGee, Secretary

Amesbury Public Schools Mission Statement

The Amesbury School District is unconditionally committed to every child, ensuring that all students experience success through the development of attitudes and skills necessary for lifelong learning by providing the highest quality staff, meaningful learning experiences, and a vitally involved community.