



**Town of Amherst
Special Joint Meeting of the Town Council and School Committee
Tuesday, April 14, 2020
6:00 p.m.
Virtual Meeting
Minutes**

Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/joint-amherst-town-councilamherst-school-committee-april-14-2020>

1. Call to Order

Councilors Participating Remotely: Councilors Bahl-Milne, Brewer, De Angelis, DuMont, Griesemer, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, Steinberg, and Swartz

Councilors Absent: None

School Committee Members Participating Remotely: Demling, Herrington, McDonald, Spitzer

School Committee Members Absent: None

Others Participating Remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, IT Director Sean Hannon, Clerk of the Council Athena O’Keeffe, and School Committee Candidates Gastón de los Reyes, Ryan Driscoll, Katie Lazdowski, and Heather Lord

After confirming that all participants can hear and be heard, President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum and called the Town Council meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

School Committee Chair Allison McDonald declared the presence of a quorum and called the School Committee meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

Note: Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, this joint meeting of the Town Council and School Committee was conducted via remote participation.

2. Announcements

President Griesemer announced that the joint meeting will be resumed on Thursday, April 16 at 6:00 pm if technical difficulties prevent the completion of interviews and vote to select a candidate.

3. Hearings - None

4. General Public Comment – None

5. Proclamations and Commemorations – None

6. Presentations and Discussion

a. School Committee Candidate Interviews and Written Statements

(1) School Committee Candidates

- a) **Gastón de los Reyes, Jr.**
- b) **Ryan P. Driscoll**
- c) **Katie Lazdowski**
- d) **Heather A. Lord**

(2) Candidate Interviews

President Griesemer summarized the process the Town Council and School Committee developed and steps taken to fill the school committee vacancy up to this point.

Candidates made brief opening statements, and then answered the following questions posed by President Griesemer and Chair McDonald.

1. Based upon your opening statement and the description of the responsibilities and expectations of School Committee members, is there anything else you would like to add that additionally describes your ability to fulfill these responsibilities and expectations.
2. Similarly, based upon your opening statement, is there anything else you would like to add to the reasons you are interested in serving on the Amherst and Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committees and why should we select you?
3. What is your past or present experience or connection with the Amherst Elementary or Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools?
4. What do you think is one strength and one area for improvement in Amherst Elementary and Amherst-Pelham Regional Public Schools?
5. The public often has a limited understanding of the role the School Committee plays in school or district decisions such as math curriculum, hiring of principals, or in addressing parent complaints about an individual teacher. What is your understanding of the role you as a School Committee member should play in these types of decisions?
6. The committee is expected to collaborate with and hold the Superintendent accountable at the same time. How would you approach this dual role to achieve the best outcomes for students?
7. How do you deal with differing views when engaging in a committee decision-making process?
 - Extra Question: Is there anything in your work, travel, or other plans that will keep you away from Amherst and so that you are not able to attend meetings in person regularly and fulfill other duties of the committee?
8. The school building project that was accepted by the MSBA in December is one-building for K through 5 or 6 that would replace Fort River and Wildwood schools, with the location of the project as yet to be determined. As a member of the School Committee, what will you contribute to the work of this project?
9. What challenges do you foresee in moving the school project forward? What are your ideas to meet those challenges?
10. What is one important issue you believe the Amherst Elementary School Committee will need to address over the next 21 months?
11. What is one important issue you believe the Amherst Regional School Committee will need to address over the next 21 months?
12. In what ways could the School Committee increase engagement and input from more residents and a more diverse mix of residents with important upcoming School Committee decisions?

Candidates made brief concluding remarks.

(3) Joint Town Council School Committee Discussion

At 7:33 p.m. the Town Council and School Committee took a 15 minute break, and reconvened at 7:45.

President Griesemer confirmed that Councilors and School Committee members can hear and be heard.

President Griesemer reminded the Council and School Committee members of the process for the discussion, including that discussion should focus on School Committee responsibilities and expectations and criteria for selection but not specific candidates or support or non-support for specific candidates.

Peter Demling thanked the candidates, and spoke about matching the candidates to the published description of the School Committee, and spoke in support of selecting Heather Lord.

Allison McDonald thanked the candidates.

Kerry Spitzer commented that the candidates are well-qualified and expressed hope that they remain engaged.

Ben Herrington thanked the candidates.

Councilor Pam commented about challenges regarding financial issues the schools will face.

Councilor Swartz commented that all the candidates appear very qualified, and stated that it was not ok that a school committee member spoke in favor of one candidate given the stated limits of the discussion period.

Councilor Schoen expressed hope that candidates that are not selected find a role to help in the coming financial challenges. Need for candidate to understand regional and elementary school budgets.

Councilor Bahl-Milne spoke about the importance of knowledge of the budget, community engagement skills, and about the importance of lived experience.

7. Action Items

a. Joint Town Council and School Committee Roll Call Vote

President Griesemer called on each Councilor and School Committee member to state the name of their preferred candidate.

Demling – Heather Lord; Herrington – Katie Lazdowski; McDonald – Heather Lord; Spitzer – Heather Lord; Bahl-Milne – Heather Lord; Brewer – Heather Lord; De Angelis – Katie Lazdowski; DuMont – Katie Lazdowski; Griesemer – Heather Lord; Hanneke – Gastón de los Reyes; Pam – Katie Lazdowski; Ross – Heather Lord; Ryan – Heather Lord; Schoen – Katie Lazdowski; Schreiber – Heather Lord; Steinberg – Heather Lord; Swartz – Katie Lazdowski

De Los Reyes – 1 vote, Ryan Driscoll – 0 votes, Katie Lazdowski – 6 votes, Heather Lord – 10 votes

b. Vote to Fill School Committee Vacancy - *Charter Sec. 4.1(c)*

Vote to fill School Committee Vacancy Charter Sec. 4.1(c)

MOVED: President Griesemer moved, second by Councilor Bahl-Milne, to select Heather A. Lord, a registered voter of the Town of Amherst to perform the duties of a member of the Amherst School Committee until newly elected members of the Amherst School Committee are sworn in on January 3, 2022.

VOTED: 16-0-1 by roll call (School Committee Members McDonald, Demling, Herrington, and Spitzer voted Yes, Councilors Bahl-Milne, Brewer, De Angelis, DuMont, Griesemer, Hanneke, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, Steinberg, and Swartz voted Yes; Councilor Pam Abstained) to select Heather A. Lord, a registered voter of the Town of Amherst to perform the duties of a member of the Amherst School

Committee until newly elected members of the Amherst School Committee are sworn in on January 3, 2022.

- 8. Appointments - None**
- 9. Committee Reports - None**
- 10. Approval of Minutes - None**
- 11. Town Manager Report - None**
- 12. Town Council Comments - None**
- 13. Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting**
- 14. Executive Session – None**
- 15. Adjourn**

President Griesemer declared the meeting of the Town Council adjourned at 8:11 p.m.
McDonald declared the meeting of the School Committee adjourned at 8:11 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Athena O'Keeffe
Clerk of the Council

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

- 04-14-2020 FINAL Special Joint Town Council School Committee Agenda
- Amherst School Committee-Description
- Final Vacancy notice
- Memo to Town Council School Committee and Candidates 4-8-2020
- Press Release - Four Residents Submit Statements of Interest to Fill Amherst School Committee Vacancy 4-3-20
- Statement of Interest - de los Reyes
- Statement of Interest - Driscoll
- Statement of Interest - Lazdowski
- Statement of interest - Lord
- Voter Registration Certificate - de los Reyes
- Voter Registration Certificate - Driscoll
- Voter Registration Certificate - Lazdowski
- Voter Registration Certificate - Lord