



**Town of Amherst
Special Joint Meeting of the Town Council and Finance Committee
Public Hearing Regarding the Regional School Budget**

**Monday, June 8, 2020
6:30 p.m.
Virtual meeting**

Minutes

Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-town-council-and-finance-committee-joint-public-budget-hearings-june-8-2020>

1. Call to Order

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

Councilors absent: Councilor Schreiber

Finance Committee Non-Voting Resident Members Participating Remotely: Robert Hegner, Sharon Povinelli, and Marylou Theilman

Others Participating Remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Regional School Committee Chair Allison McDonald, Superintendent of Schools Mike Morris, Regional Schools Finance Director Doug Slaughter, Finance Director Sean Mangano, Comptroller Sonia Aldrich, IT Applications Analyst Serge Fedorovsky, and Clerk of the Council Athena O’Keeffe

After confirming all participants could hear and be heard, President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum, called the Town Council meeting to order at 6:31 p.m. and announced audio and video recording of the meeting by Amherst Media.

Councilor Steinberg called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:31 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. Hearings – Public Hearing of the Finance Committee on the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Budget for Fiscal Year 2021 - Charter Sec. 5.5(a)**
- 3. Presentations and Discussion – Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Budget Assessment Method**

Superintendent Morris spoke about the proposed Regional School budget, which maintains staff and met Council budget guidelines. M. Morris spoke about reopening school in the fall; the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has not released guidelines for reopening yet.

Regional School Finance Director Doug Slaughter spoke about the following:

- The budget and assessment approval process

- Process to amend the budget
- Amherst assessments in the past four years
- Budget additions and reductions
- Changes to the Capital Plan

Councilor Steinberg opened the floor for questions.

Councilor Schoen asked if prepayments were due to budget excesses.

M. Morris responded that the budget was frozen as of March 13 to preserve staffing, excesses are not something you can count on each year.

Councilor Schoen asked about the status of CARES Act funding.

M. Morris spoke about pending legislation on the federal level.

Councilor Schoen asked about state aid.

D. Slaughter responded that the state typically gives about \$10M.

Councilor Schoen asked about increases of central and school administrative staffing.

M. Morris responded that the budget is based on level services, no new administrative cuts, not reducing sections or teacher load, and no program or course cuts.

Councilor Schoen asked about non-union staff cost of living (COLA) increase.

M. Morris responded that non-union staff received a 0% increase last fiscal year, a 2% COLA felt fair for the FY21.

Councilor Schoen noted that the substitute line was not higher.

M. Morris responded that we did not see a scenario where secondary students are at school each day, so did not feel the need to increase the substitute line.

Councilor Hanneke asked if the proposed budget is reasonable given known guidelines regarding COVID-19, and if the schools will need a mid-year increase to the budget.

M. Morris responded that the regional school committee could engage the towns if additional funding is needed, the regional schools have reserves, and there is also a school choice line. DESE guidance was regarding summer school. The challenge will be how to meet greater number of students' needs. No scenario where 950 students can be in the high schools at one time.

Councilor Pam asked about health coverage if teachers catch COVID-19.

D. Slaughter responded.

Councilor Hanneke asked about scenarios in which state aid decreases.

D. Slaughter responded; M. Morris added that if state aid drops by a significant amount, school would not be able to run next year.

There were no public comments or questions.

M. Theilman asked if guidelines would apply to the fall or the whole year.

M. Morris responded that the CDC has not released guidelines for the year yet, changes made in the fall are not as easy to undo once we have started that path. Some commitments that are made that are not completely reversible.

M. Theilman asked about the impact to extracurricular activities.

M. Morris responded that some sports can be played with distancing.

4. Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the President 48 Hours in Advance of the meeting -

5. Adjourn

Councilor Steinberg thanked all participants and called hearing to a close at 7:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Athena O'Keefe

Clerk of the Council

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

06-08-2020 Town Council Agenda One-Month Budget Hearing

06-08-2020 Town Council Agenda Regional School Budget Hearing

Budget - FY21 One-Month Budget 05-29-2020

Budget - FY21 Regional School District Budget 05-29-2020

Council - One Month Budget 6.8.20

FY21 Budget Guidelines Table 5.15.20

FY21ModifiedRegionalSchoolBudget_AmherstTC06082020

Town Council Revised Budget Policy Guidelines 05-18-2020