

Finance Sub-committee – Regional Assessment History, Saturday, March 6, 2021

Present: Susie Mosher, George Arvanitis, Ajay Khashu - Meeting convened at 9:30 am

Minutes of the Feb.20, 2021 meeting approved.

The Finance Committee heard that there will not be another four-town meeting this year. The Regional School Committee has a budget hearing coming up on 3/9/21 and will meet in two weeks to vote on the budget.

George heard that Andy Steinberg is prepared to go with an assessment formula of 55 statutory/45 rolling average enrollment; an increase of 10% statutory over FY 21.

Ajay noted that this fits in to what we heard at the February four-town meeting. It is within the Amherst 1.5% increase they felt was acceptable to their FY 22 budget plan. Leverett and Pelham both said they could consider 55/45. 55/45 is a significant increase (about 243k) for Amherst, (32K) for Pelham, and a decrease for Leverett (-19k) and Shutesbury (-50K), rounded off to the nearest thousand.

This budget continues the previous 3 years of budget cuts. In the FY22 proposed budget there are some programs being cut and the 16 FTE staff reductions are primarily tied to decreased student enrollment.

We discussed a formulation that would balance the two components of assessment in the Statutory method – minimum contribution and 5-year rolling average of enrollment. George generated the data that shows the percentages statutory/enrollment would produce a 50/50 balance of these two components at 87/13. We discussed language that would focus attention on equity and a balance of these components.

We agreed that 55/45 is progress on this goal and acceptable for FY 22. The administration is proposing another working group for the summer of 2021 to resolve the assessment formula. The information we have gathered, the possibility of a DESE presentation on the statutory method and a commitment to reach agreement, as per the 2019 Statement of Principles will hopefully close this issue. George suggested a three-year trial would be a helpful parameter to reach a solution. We would also find out if the agreement would be amended or rewritten entirely and what that process would look like.

We reviewed Ajay's timeline summary and made a few changes. We drew up 6 points of observation as a result of our research. Susie will draft them and once the two other members reviewed them, we agreed to send them out with the 2019 Statement of Principles and the timeline to the School Committee, Select Board and Finance Committee for our joint discussion on Tuesday, March 9.

Meeting adjourned at 11:00 am. Minutes respectfully submitted by Susie Mosher