

Vote NO on Article 29 (Sidewalks), YES on Article 28 (Fire Truck Fund)

To the editor:

Don't get me wrong, I think the proposed sidewalks would be a great addition to parts of this town. And I agree, it would help to improve the safety of those who walk on these roads. But I don't think the timing is right for the dollar amount proposed.

Warrant Article 29, as it was originally written, was to construct sidewalks covering parts of Jones Road, Mack Hill Road, Manchester Road, New Boston Road, and Boston Post Road, totaling 5,215 linear feet. The total cost of this project is \$328,100, but at the time the article was written, there was anticipation that the Town would receive 80% reimbursement from the Federal Transportation Alternative Program Grant. This meant that the Town would only have to raise \$65,620 through taxation. A no-brainer, right? Almost a mile of sidewalks for only \$65,620. What a deal!

Unfortunately, that grant fell through. As a result, if we still wanted the sidewalks, we would now have to pay the full amount of \$328,100. Because this didn't seem like such a sweet deal any more, the Board of Selectman (BoS) amended the article at the Town's Deliberative Session to state that the town would raise and appropriate \$1 (One Dollar) for the sidewalks, essentially making this article obsolete.

At the Town Deliberative Session, two members of the Safe Routes to School Committee spoke to amend the article back to the full amount of \$328,100. This amendment was approved by majority vote by those who

attended.

I believe (and agree) that the BoS and the Ways & Means Committee (W&M) felt that the full amount of \$328,100 was too much to ask the taxpayers to burden. Thus the reason for the initial amendment to \$1.

I also feel that Article 29 will be contending with other Articles that need our dire attention and that affect public safety just as much, if not more (such as Article 28 - Fire Truck Refurbish Capital Reserve Fund (which can also be used to purchase a fire truck)).

Yes, the Town has already received a grant to replace Engine 2. However, Engine 5 is also in need of replacement soon (it's 24 years old, and the average lifespan is about 25 years). If we don't start saving "annually" to replace one fire truck every six years or so (as outlined by the W&M over the past 3 years), it will become more expensive when we have to replace more than one truck in the same year. (Just like it's easier to stagger car payments if you own two cars: pay off the first one, before you purchase a replacement for the second.)

I hope this helps people make an informed decision on March 10th. Please vote!

*Sincerely,
Bob Brewster
Amherst*

Amherst's Proposed FY16 Operational Plan and Budget

To the editor:

Strategic Thinking the Basis for Decision Making

This year, Town Government continued to build on strategic plans and initiatives established last year to provide more cost-effective thinking, management, operations, and accountability across all town operations.

All department heads updated the strategic plans they developed last year, not only to advance the vision, but to aid us in identifying strategic initiatives that deserved funding in the upcoming budget cycle. These initiatives were carefully considered by the Board of Selectmen, discussed publicly at many meetings, and shared with the Ways and Means Committee for analysis and comment. Because effective town governance can only occur with a clear vision of where Amherst is today and where residents want it to be in the years ahead, we view this planning process as essential to good governance.

As Selectmen, we also felt that town commissions, committees, and boards – along with town residents – should be invited to engage in shaping the future direction of the town. So, we launched a Village Strategic Planning process to engage people in thinking strategically together about a town-wide resource that truly differentiates Amherst from other communities and should be maintained as a vital town asset. That work will culminate in a presentation to BOS in early June 2015.

Management and Leadership: A Division of Labor

With each passing year, we see the demand for services increase in all town departments – Fire, EMS, Police, DPW, Recreation, Community Development, Library and Town Administration. This year was no different.

We have also continued to support a division of labor and delegation of authority and responsibilities. The Town Administrator is responsible for the smooth and effective running of the day-to-day operations across town government. Department heads have full responsibility for running their departments and meeting demand for services. As Selectmen, we focus on ensuring that, collectively, town government is effectively addressing seven quality-of-life categories: 1.) Public Safety, 2.) Infrastructure/Built Environment, 3.) Environment/Landscapes, 4.) Historic Heritage, 5.) Economic Development, 6.) Recreation, and 7.) Education programs offered through Fire, Police, Library and Recreation. These varied perspectives have informed the proposed FY16 plan and budget.

FY16 Overview

Our goal has been to develop a 2015-16 plan and budget that ensures all facets of the town receive timely, balanced attention while also addressing areas where we have fallen behind. It also funds rebuilding and maintaining our roads and rebuilding the Manchester Road bridge.

The municipal portion of your total Amherst tax bill is under 20%. In fact, Amherst has the sixth lowest municipal tax rate of the 31 towns in Hillsborough County. That said, we believe judicious, targeted funding will help balance all facets of town life, even as the major investment in roads and bridges brings this crucial infrastructure back in line.

FY16 Plan Overview: The plan continues to improve the services to residents and businesses while also:

- **Creating new road design standards that all new roads must meet prior to being accepted by the Town.** These new standards will replace the current standard that was developed in 1971.
- **Developing an economic vision statement for the Town, which will lead to the establishment of an economic development committee in FY17.**
- **Revising the site plan regulations and developing commercial and indus-**

ASD Ways & Means Endorses Proposed Amherst School Budget

To the editor:

We, the undersigned members of the Amherst School District Ways & Means Committee, strongly urge voters in the March 10th Amherst Town election to cast their votes in favor of the proposed Amherst School District budget (Warrant article 12). We wish to assure Amherst taxpayers that every line item in this budget has been reviewed and analyzed by our committee. We have discussed each section of the budget line by line with Amherst School Board members and with the Principals, Directors, Department heads, and SAU Staff who crafted the budget. We believe this budget is fiscally responsible and impacts the taxpayer no more than necessary while still maintaining the high quality education that we have all come to expect from Amherst Schools. The budget reflects an increase of 1.24% from the current FY15 budget. Overall staffing levels are remaining steady with some reductions due to continuing decrease in enrollment but also some increases to handle special education needs. Our special education budget is driven primarily by federal mandates which should carry with them adequate federal funding. This funding has never met the required levels and once again we see the impact of this unfunded mandate on property taxpayers. The FY16 proposed budget supports the district and SAU goal to align with the College and Career Readiness Standards. It also includes investments in additional classroom technology as well as facilities maintenance. The budget reflects a continuing commitment to previously signed collective bargaining agreements and maintenance of appropriate teacher-student ratios.

Ways & Means is divided on the issue of full day kindergarten (Warrant Article 13) with 4 in favor and 3 opposed. The views of each side may appear in separate letters to the editor supporting each position.

The Ways & Means Committee unanimously supports Warrant Article 14, a 2 year collective bargaining agreement with the Amherst Support Staff Association. The agreement contains reasonable cost of living increases of 1.75% in FY16 and 1.5% in FY17. As part of the agreement, ASSA members will pay an additional 1% of their health insurance premium. We believe this agreement is a fair deal for both ASSA members and taxpayers. We also support Article 15 which creates a capital reserve fund to aid in the management of unexpected special education expenditures.

We thank the Administration and the Amherst School Board for their high level of cooperation and professionalism during the budget review process. Their prompt and detailed responses to questions raised by the committee enabled us to complete our analysis in an efficient and timely manner. Please vote on March 10 and support the Amherst School District budget, the ASSA Collective Bargaining Agreement, and the Capital Reserve Fund for Educating Students with Disabilities.

*Sincerely,
The Amherst School District Ways
& Means Committee
Mark Vincent, Chair
Tedd Landon, Fred Iannelli
Donni Hodgkins, Claire Bryson
Gene Kuczewski, Stephanie Grund*

trial design guidelines.

- **Increasing the amount of annually budgeted funds to maintain and repair our roads – this year adding \$100,000 more to the maintenance budget. We have also increased by \$50,000 the amount budgeted to replace aging DPW vehicles and equipment.**
- **Rebalancing selective salary and pay levels to keep Amherst competitive with other towns. The goal is to attract and retain excellent employees and hold them accountable for delivering excellent and cost effective services.**
- **Completing a DPW operations review to ensure we have the optimum structure, processes, resources, and people deployed to provide the best value to residents.**
- **Implementing more stringent performance goals, reviews, and accountability among all town employees.**
- **Promoting increased teamwork among town departments and with the schools.**
- **Making proactive repair/replacement plans for other town bridges.**
- **Continuing to roll out the new financial software system and related operations.**

FY16 Budget Overview: The proposed plan, which continues the road bond initiative, invests in pay scales that are somewhat more competitive with other towns, and keeps the quality of other town services in balance, will require an annual operating budget of \$12,427,814.

This represents a 5.2% increase over the FY15 voter-approved budget. Major drivers to this increase include:

- **1.88% for the road bond work performed in FY15,**
- **0.89% to adjust the Fire and EMS wages, (an initiative launched in FY14), and**
- **0.40% for year two of the Police Collective Bargaining Agreement.**

The remaining 2.06% increase has been used to fund all other Town initiatives.

The operating budget increase (along with projected increased revenues that will somewhat offset higher taxes) would represent a tax increase of \$40 on a \$330,000 home. All town warrants, including the operating budget warrant, if approved, would add \$90 in town taxes to a \$330,000 home.

We believe this investment will be highly beneficial to Amherst residents by ensuring that all aspects of Amherst's quality of life can be maintained in reasonably good balance.

Final Thoughts

The BOS has worked to provide a level of management, leadership, and vision that will serve the town well – today and tomorrow. We have different backgrounds and don't always see things the same way, but we consider this a collective strength that has helped us shape a plan and budget we all believe makes sense for the town.

We hope you agree and that you choose to support this plan and budget on March 10th. As always, we welcome your engagement, your ideas, and your support.

*Respectfully submitted,
Dwight Brew (Chair), Mike Akillian
(Vice Chair), John D'Angelo (Clerk),
Tom Grella, Brad Galinson*

David Chen An Excellent Addition To Souhegan School Board

To the editor:

David is certainly qualified. David has been an Amherst resident since 1980. He was a member of the SHS start up committees for curriculum and co-curricular activities. He has been a 3 year member of the Town of Amherst Ways & Means committee. He has two children who attended the Amherst schools. He was a 3 year member of the Souhegan Advisory Finance Committee. He is a retired executive with a 44 year career in high tech & business operations. He spent the last 25 years of his career in management working on optimizing the efficient use of capital. These are just a few examples of David's devotion to Amherst.

David is passionate about the value of education. David believes that the citizens and tax payers of Amherst have an obligation to provide a quality education for our students. He believes that a quality education directly empowers students to become well-educated adults by performing well in college, their chosen careers, and contributing to society. A quality school system benefits the Amherst and Mont Vernon home owners by enticing buyers to our market and increasing our property values.

David understands that we need to consider alternative, more affordable educational models that won't compromise quality. Excessively high property taxes erodes our property values, decreases interest in people moving to Amherst, and restricts residents from using tax dollars to improve other areas of their lives. David believes that we can balance a quality high school education against the long term effects of high property taxes.

I served with David on the Souhegan Advisory Finance Committee last year. He brought a different voice to the conversation and requested data so fact-based decisions could be made. He suggested new ideas on saving costs, but never on diminishing the education of the students. David has never suggested that blindly making draconian cuts is a responsible approach. His first two years on the SAFC, David voted in favor of the SHS school board budget. The board, in turn, recognized the need to reduce operating expenses and promised they would work on reducing costs in the next year. This year, when operating cost reductions were not addressed, David voted no on the budget.

David brings a new voice to the school board. I've noticed that current SHS school board members are endorsing David's opponent. They all have the same point of view when it comes to SHS, and funding it. Their minds are closed to new ideas and are uncomfortable when the status quo is challenged. Wouldn't it be better to have another point of view at the table asking if we can do better? Perhaps new and innovative ideas will bring new solutions. He believes we should consider scaling the budget to adjust to changing demographics and enrollment levels. Asking why budgets have continued to increase as enrollment has decreased is not irresponsible. We citizens and taxpayers should want the question asked and answered.

David wants to deliver the best value for our tax dollars in educating our students. He wants to balance the current belief system with some fact-based decision making. David's platform is level headed, responsible, and based on common sense. It hardly sounds Draconian. Enable new ideas to be brought to the Souhegan school board, vote for David Chen.

*Stacie and Bill Kiczuk
Amherst*

Did You Know?...

Funding Methods for Amherst

Another in a series of articles about Amherst by the Ways and Means Committee

New Hampshire Law requires annual voter approval of all proposed expenditures by their local governments.

For those expenses in the operation of a town department that can be estimated accurately from year to year, a budget line item is the simplest way to arrange funding. Some examples are electricity, heat, office supplies, salaries, etc. Since these items don't typically change much, except for inevitable inflation, they become part of the basic budget and are approved by the voters in a single "Operating Budget" warrant article.

Also by law, any money not spent from any year's budget must go back into the general fund and cannot be "carried" forward into the next fiscal year. This limitation creates the need for alternative methods to fund "big ticket" items, like roads, schools and large vehicles. Common methods of alternative funding, all of which require voter approval through separate Warrant Articles, are:

- **Capital Reserve Fund Contributions**
- **Stand alone, or One Time warrant articles**
- **Bonds**

Capital Reserve Fund contributions:

Some items or projects are just too large to fairly charge to any one year's taxpayers. For example: A new ambulance costs over a quarter of a million dollars, but it will last about ten years. A taxpayer who lives here only one year should not be expected to make 10 years worth of payments.

Amherst operates two ambulances, so it should have to replace one (on average) every 5 years or so. If the purchase were simply made when a vehicle failed, the required budget (taxes) for the year of purchase would have to increase by \$250K. By using the capital reserve fund to methodically accumulate funds during the life of the current vehicle, the town can afford, when it needs one, to purchase a new ambulance.

Capital Reserve funds are town savings accounts that can only be spent on the items that they were established for. Like all savings accounts, they have indefinite life spans. Unlike savings accounts, the funds can ONLY be spent for the purpose for which the fund was established. Funds from the Ambulance fund cannot be transferred to the Communications Center fund and vice versa, without voter approval. Most Capital Reserve warrants require a simple voter majority to pass.

One Time Warrant Article (Stand Alone):

This type of warrant article is used to complete a one time activity or purchase. Some examples are the recent Warrant to fix the roof on the town hall and the one on this year's ballot to build sidewalks in town.

Unlike a Capital Reserve Fund, any unused money that is raised by these articles must be returned to the taxpayers at the conclusion of the project for which they were created for.

One time warrants require a simple majority to pass.

Bonds:

A bond is an authorization to borrow money for a very specific project. They are commonly used to build a very large building, like a school or maintenance facility, or for a road or bridge project. An example is the Bridge replacement bond that is on this year's ballot. By approving this bond, the Town will establishing a source of funding for those bridge replacements and qualify those bridges for State reimbursement.

Bonds provide flexibility because they enable the town to borrow money when, and if they need it so that projects can be efficiently managed to conclusion.

Unlike Capital Reserve funds, bonds usually have a time limit and, at the end of that limit, any unused portion "lapses". Any funds that are not needed are simply not borrowed.

Bonds require a 60% voter majority to pass.

Pros:

Funds are available as they are needed throughout the project. The payments on the bond can be managed so that the payback is predictable

Cons:

Borrowing money generates interest expense that will eventually result either in higher taxes or a reduction in services.

*Voting Day is March 10,
Amherst Ways and Means
Committee*

POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT

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Please join us in supporting David Chen Souhegan Cooperative High School Board

Carol Akillian	Daryl Johnson
Michael Akillian	Gilda Keefe
Francis Thomas Bell	Joseph Keefe
(Tom)	Timothy Kerrigan
Christy Belvin	Roger C. Kierstead
William S. Belvin	Susan S. Kierstead
Nancy D. Belvin	Gail Mora Lammers
Victor L. Bennison	Keith A. Lammers
Corky Benson	Tedd Landon
Carole P. Birse	Paul Martin
Ken A. Birse	David McConville
Joanne Boswell	Ellen J. McCray
Fredric Boswell	Robert C. McCray
Bruce M. Bowler	Dr. Kathie F. Nunley
Mark Boynton	Jacqueline O'Dowd
Sandy Bradbury	Sandy Elizabeth Overholt
David Bregger	William Overholt
Nancy Bregger	Dianna K. Owen
Robert Brewster	Givin McLaren Owen
June Bridgewater	David Paquin
Kenneth Bridgewater	Sue Regan
Francis P. Brown	Donna M. Richey
Nancy M. Brown	Deirdre Rogusky
Dawn Burke	Regina Rogusky
Nick Calvetti	Susan Rohleder
David B. Clark	Marilyn Sanfacon
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Desmond T. Coffee	Christopher F. Shenk
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Deborah G. Dell Orfano	Frances J. Slattery
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Russell G. Demarest	Donald E. Smallwood
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Cassie Devine	Susan Spiess
Frances G. diCicco	Sheila Steele
Peter S. diCicco	Joan M. Stone
Peter Eiche	Oliver Stone
Dorothy Farrar	Mary Thomson
Deborah A. Ferrelli	Peter Thomson
David Ferrelli	Richard Verrill
Mary Anne Flood	Sharon Verrill
Donald P. Gates	Mike White
Elizabeth A. Gates	Paula Whittier
Pat Harrison	Kenneth Whittier
Robert M. Heaton	Ann Willis
Susan Y. Heaton	James Willis
Robin Lynn Hefflefinger	
Daphne L. Jackson	
Dean E. Jackson	

David Chen, Fiscal Agent