

AMITY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 5 BOARD OF EDUCATION
MAY 4, 2020 ANNUAL MEETING MINUTES
5:30 P.M.
VIRTUAL MEETING

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Vice Chairperson Patricia Cardozo, Robyn Berke, Christopher Browe, Shannan Carlson, Carla Eichler, George Howard, Andrea Hubbard, Sheila McCreven, Dr. Jennifer Turner

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT

Chairperson John Belfonti, Paul Davis, Steven DeMaio, Patrick Reed

STAFF MEMBERS PRESENT

Dr. Jennifer Byars, Theresa Lumas, Shaun DeRosa

Vice Chairperson Cardozo opened the meeting at 5:34 p.m.

MOTION by Christopher Browe, SECOND by Dr. Turner, to nominate Patricia Cardozo Chairperson of Annual Meeting

MOTION by Christopher Browe, SECOND by Robyn Berke, to close nominations for Chairperson of Annual Meeting

VOTES IN FAVOR, 9 (unanimous) to close nominations for Chairperson of Annual Meeting

MOTION CARRIED to close nominations for Chairperson of Annual Meeting

VOTES IN FAVOR, 9 (unanimous) to nominate Patricia Cardozo Chairperson of Annual Meeting

MOTION CARRIED to nominate Patricia Cardozo Chairperson of Annual Meeting

MOTION by Christopher Browe, SECOND by Shannan Carlson, to nominate Carla Eichler Secretary of Annual Meeting

MOTION by Christopher Browe, SECOND by Robyn Berke, to close nominations for Secretary of Annual Meeting

VOTES IN FAVOR, 9 (unanimous), to close nominations for Secretary of Annual Meeting

MOTION CARRIED to close nominations for Secretary of Annual Meeting

VOTES IN FAVOR, 9 (unanimous), to nominate Carla Eichler Secretary of Annual Meeting

MOTION CARRIED to nominate Carla Eichler Secretary of Annual Meeting

Chairperson Cardozo called the meeting to order at 5:39 p.m.

Dr. Byars presented the 2020-2021 Amity Board of Education proposed budget.

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Chairperson Cardozo acknowledged public comments received via Google Docs as of noon on Monday, May 4, 2020. Members of the public did participate in public comment through the Google Forms provided.

Secretary Eichler reviewed and summarized the public comments received.

Chairperson Cardozo announced that the Board of Education would vote at a Special Meeting immediately following the May 4, 2020 Annual District Meeting.

MOTION by Shannan Carlson, SECOND by Christopher Browe, to adjourn meeting
VOTES IN FAVOR, 9 (unanimous)
MOTION CARRIED

Meeting adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Pamela Pero
Pamela Pero
Recording Secretary

Margaret Ardwin
920 Baldwin Road, Woodbridge

I am the full-time science interventionist at Amity High School. Students come to me for extra help with biology, chemistry, etc. Amity also has math interventionist and reading/writing interventionist. During the remote teaching, we have been contacting our students to alert them to our availability. From 3/25 to today 3/29, I have had 44 1/2 hour visits with students. Amity interventionists offer a unique service - a one-to-one meeting with a student to offer support and information. Our service is just one facet of how well Amity students succeed. Please support the budget.

Elena Serapiglia
210 Peck Hill Rd., Woodbridge, CT 06525

As a resident of Woodbridge (whose children will be in the Amity system in a few years), and also as an educator in the Amity Regional school system, my only feedback is to keep all existing programs (and approve the funding for those programs). My decision to live in this school district is based on the amazing programs that are offered to students, and funding is needed for these programs to continue to exist. In addition, I realize that my property values are tied to the excellence of this school system. Any cuts in budget will have a negative effect on property values. I strongly believe in investing financially in our children's futures through a wide variety of programming alongside qualified and dedicated professionals in up-to-date facilities.

Patricia Nevolis
97 Green Hill Road Orange, CT 06477

Please pass the budget without any cuts. Thank you.

Hongji Li
22 Peck Hill Road, Woodbridge CT 06525

Chinese language program at Amity school district has been proved to be one of the best. As a resident of Woodbridge for over 20 years, my family and myself want the board support this wonderful program.

Rick Bourdeau
75 Maple Vale Dr.; Woodbridge CT 06565

I get it -- only a 2.49% increase, and the amounts set for each budgetary line item is probably the best possible result given the COVID pandemic. I also know that post-COVID budgetary pressures will change the landscape moving forward. However, I still stand by my public comments at the 2/24/20 ABOE Finance Meeting. I can provide them upon request -- I do not think they were entered into the public record. To summarize, if you want to identify an organization's priorities (or an individual's for that matter), look at how funds are allocated. My sense is that the priorities of too many BOW residents, and too many town administrators to a certain extent (as a reflection of the people that elected them), have shifted away from education. This is indication that I now live in a three-town community that does not value it as much as it did in the past. This disturbs me.

Austerity has trumped sound educational spending recently, with the towns chanting the mantra "the economy is still recovering from 2008 so Amity has to defer some of their wants." I strongly believe that

after the 17-failed-budgets debacle of the early 2000s, the Amity Central Office has done a great job running the district, leaving no rock unturned in the search for cost savings. Given that mindset, you can be assured Amity's budget requests are not wants, they are needs. Moving forward, I hope that even in a post-COVID world, with the expected post-COVID economic downturn (I refuse to type the "D" word from the 1930s, but I wouldn't be surprised if it's appropriate) that we stop "kicking the can" on things that should be funded right then and there. Education should always be the highest of priorities in the BOW. The schools are what draws most people to settle here. We can not lose that.

Given that, I do agree with some "bottom-line" hawks that there are cost savings to be realized. However, it is not low-hanging fruit -- Amity Administration has done a good job with that. These ideas would mean a paradigm shift for everyone in the BOW, from town government to the taxpayers. First, can we PLEASE stop giving back money to the towns every year, and instead trust that the professionals know how to run things? If we have a surplus, we should reinvest it in educational priorities or sock it away in a rainy day fund. Kickbacks from Amity should not be an annual and relied upon cash cow for the towns. Second, Amity needs to be a K-12 district. Financially, there are too many administrative redundancies. Pedagogically, there is too much curriculum misalignment between the town's elementary districts and Amity.

Yes, this pandemic has been horrible. However, I hope operating in the post-COVID world will be the push that finally has us reflect deeply, renew the townspeople's dedication to making necessary investments in quality education, and make hard decisions that are well overdue.

Sue Torgerson
19 Park Lane Woodbridge, CT 06525

I have many questions. First, I wonder if a new budget is actually needed due to this pandemic which is creating a new norm for education via online classes.

- Why are you planning a budget for transportation?
- How much was saved (specifically) on transportation for the last 2 months?
- Why hire security if school may remain as remote?
- Why is another social worker needed?
- How many are in place now in each school?
- Is there no special Ed coordinator now? What happened to him/her?
- What is the 1:1 mobile device program? Who does it benefit?
- What specifically are dues & fees?

Can you please answer these questions, so that if I have any more, I can submit them by May 4th. I only received the explanatory text today, May 1, 2020.

Thank you,
Sue

Pua Ford
8 Valley Road, Bethany, CT 06524

If there were a referendum, I would vote yes. But I have to wonder how the economy in the near future is going to let things go back to "normal" and what plans are being made in case of a second wave of this coronavirus comes along after fall semester. Thanks for the opportunity to comment. You all have to make the hard decisions so good luck to you.

Stephen Whitaker
597 Ridge Rd Orange Ct

In light of the current COVID-19: 1) How did you think taking the voters right away was an acceptable idea when other less drastic options were possible. This should have been done by ballot to the resident address. A postponement of 30 to 60 days and a ballot would have preserved the voters rights on this issue. 2) How is an increase of \$444,360 in transportation costs or any transportation cost justified by any standard with the schools closed (the safer mitigation strategy if the school opens will be for a parent to drop off and NOT a bus system without social distancing and cleaning). 3) If school reopens under COVID-19 certain positions and job titles should be reassessed (the generic areas of gym and sports and music are all impossible under the mitigation strategies currently in place). 4) the potential number of students attending under the current COVID-19 is probably inaccurate as a guess at best. (how are you going to account for the number of parents who are forced to home school and or choose to home school to avoid the COVID-19.

Georgia Chavent and Jim Morgan
23 North Pease Road, Woodbridge, CT

Dear Amity Board of Education,
i tried entering the link you included on the yellow mailing and it did not work. Just letting you know:
<https://forms.gle/Rug39nFANVpszGiC7>

My husband and I sent a message to the Town of Woodbridge hearing related to the town budget and the general impression we received from the Board of Selectmen of Woodbridge is that the the town budget is very limited in what can be adjusted due to the Amity Board of Education and the Woodbridge Board of Education (Beecher Road School).

Our response is this: Do either of your Boards have any idea of what is happening in the world around you? I am a tenured college professor, my college has canceled all retirement donations for all full time faculty and staff and our entire university, faculty and staff have taken a pay cut and our President has told us there will be not pay increases, COLA, etc. for the coming year. Faculty will be let go, academic programs will be closed. My Administrative Assistant was furloughed as have many of our staff members. I had to convert my undergraduate classes to an online format with a ONE day notice and my graduate students were pulled from their health care rotations and I must devised simulation activities to help the finish their training in the coming weeks. My husband is a practicing pediatrician and his had to reduce his staff. So why are our town leaders and Boards of Education continuing to function as if nothing is happening? This is the worse health and financial crisis any of us has ever faced and you continue to request pay increases and additional staff members? What about the cost savings that have accrued since mid March when school was closed? We suggest an across the board reduction in all expenses of at least 10% which is minimal compared with the salary reductions many of your towns' taxpayers are facing and the lack of services/educational experience the students received from Mid March-June. Our children were educated via the Amity system; we appreciate our town and the education our sons received but to move on without any form of cost savings is irresponsible. Where is your leadership at time when we need your wisdom and leadership the most.

Kevin Lu
17 Woodside Drive

The current budget is too high. Especially in light of the recent crisis, it has become apparent that the administrative departments take up too large a portion of the pecuniary spending when compared to the entire school budget. We should cut some of the administrative staff (with due compensation given of course) in order to be better prepared for future crises such as this one, and to reduce the burdens on a taxpayer base which currently is under economic strain.

Email received from First Selectman Jim Zeoli of Orange

To the Amity Board of Education members, Superintendent Byars, Finance Director Lumas,

I write this after receiving a budgetary letter from the Amity School System. I stood before you several months ago and requested consideration of no more than a 2% increase to the proposed Amity budget for fy '20-'21, this was wiggled and massaged to a number over 2.7% and then down to 2.49%. Much has changed in the landscape since then and I would really hope that the ABOE will consider items that were put into the 2.49% final budget. The Town of Orange is reducing positions by 5 as part of this economic downturn, Amity is looking to add positions, one being \$130k plus benefits. Please don't try to speak of savings without a view of what is really going on out there. Yes while people know of our education system and want to be here that does not come without expense. If you look at where Orange is currently with people out of work and many of them hoping to collect unemployment or possibly a package of some of some sort from an employer or the government.

The Town of Orange has signed on for one of the two taxpayer options pushed by the State of Connecticut to allow for extending the time to pay taxes. This may help some, but puts a big delay on the towns revenue. The State of Connecticut is looking at a billion dollar budget shortfall at the moment and that continues to climb ! Do all of you not think that the State will need to take some action to help balance this. They may cut money to your District and to the three towns that make up your district. The group that will be the hardest hit are the working people between 30 – 60 that may not be working now, and receiving no compensation, may not have jobs to go back to or may take time and hopefully be able to get their lives back on track ! Maybe the 2% could be too much with what unknown is coming at us.

Much has changed since this budget was created and new consideration is needed !

Thank you,

Jim Zeoli



Town of Orange

Board of Finance

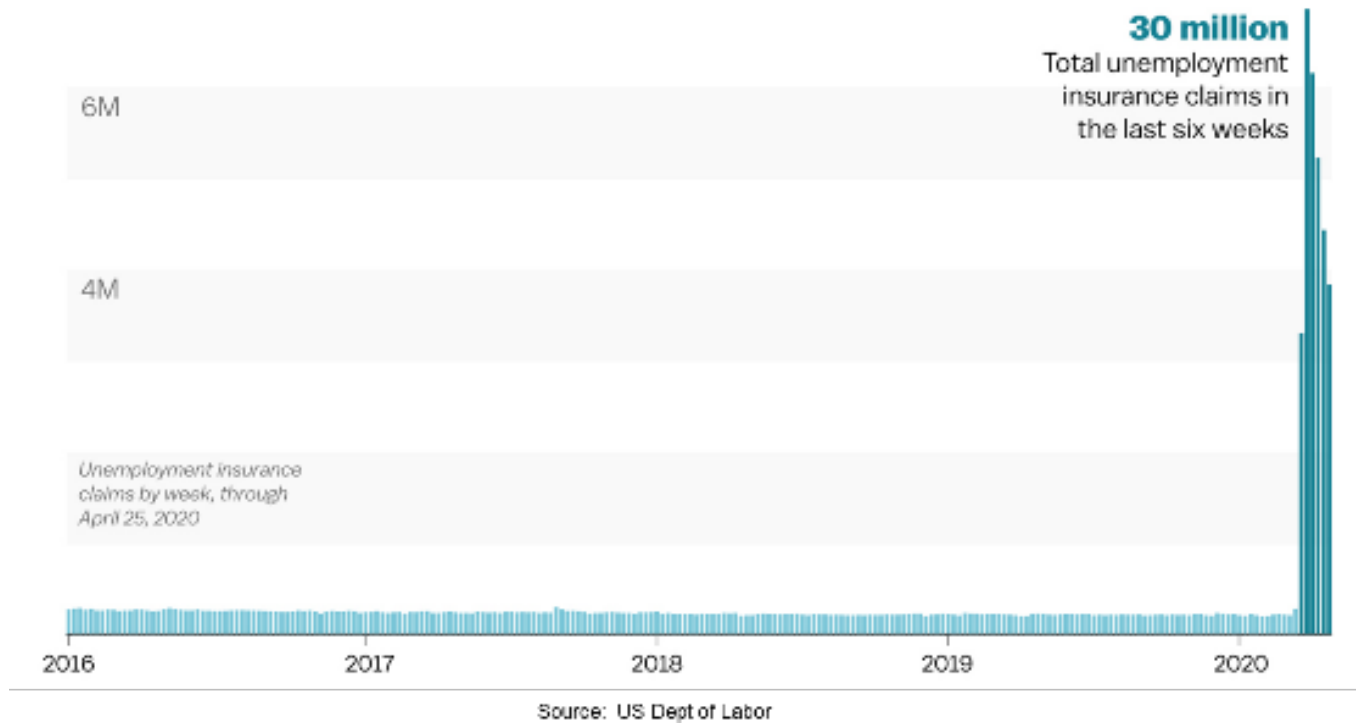
I. Perspective on the Need for Proactive Educational Leadership

In 2016 at the Town Budget Hearing, the Orange Board of Finance presented to the Superintendents of Amity and the Orange BOE as well as the Orange First Selectman its perspective on all Government Services, including Education. We developed these perspectives through conversations with Amity & Orange BOE members & Town of Orange Leaders.

- A. Government is making structural changes: we simply can't afford government services as we have known them in the past.
- B. We need to leverage new educational concepts and approaches.
- C. We are in danger of losing public support & voters.
- D. We need to bend the curve in the cost of education.
- E. We need to have administrations that can find efficiencies to institute practical, effective responses to this challenge.
- F. Adults should role model the real reality of our current societal situation & lead by example: *work with the resources that you have and still do an excellent job.*
- G. Working with more modest budgets will make our Educational system stronger and a leader, accepting the governmental challenge while maintaining educational excellence.

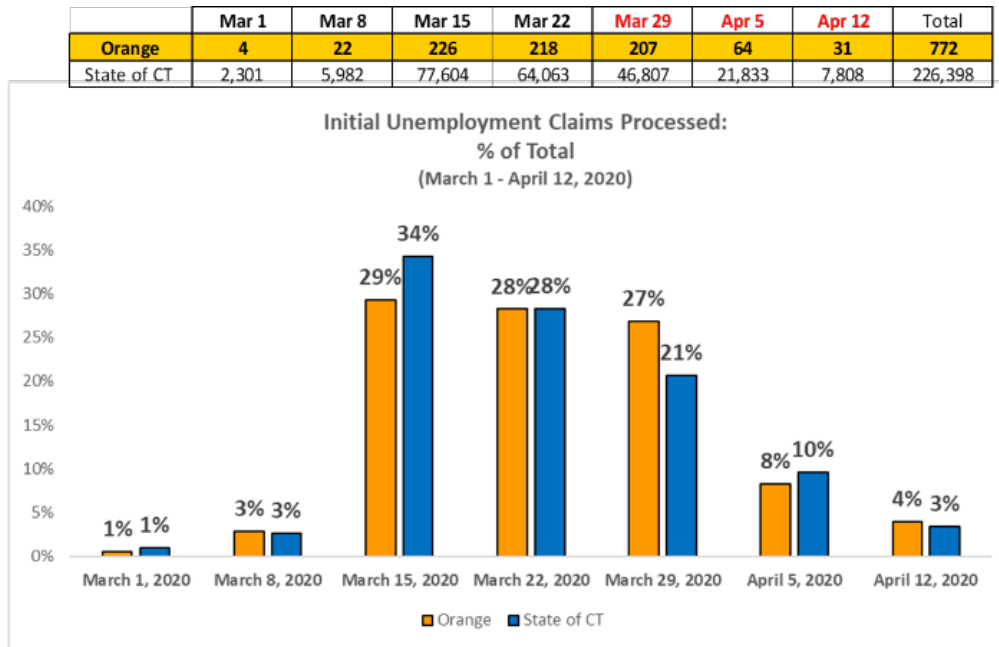
II. Perspective on Amity FY 20-21 Budget

1. The 2.49% increase is the same Increase discussed back in late February/early March, prior to the effects of the Economic Shutdown
2. After the effects of the Economic Shutdown, in early April the Amity Administration proposed to RAISE the budget increase to 2.73%.
3. Since the Economic Shutdown started in mid-March, the Town of Orange CUT more \$740,000 MORE from its budget that was previously reduced 2 times in February.
4. Since the Economic Shutdown started in mid-March, the Orange BOE's budget was REDUCED by \$950,000 from what was presented on March 5th.
5. Since the Economic shutdown started in mid-March, 30+ Million Americans have filed for unemployment



6. Since early March and through April 20th, 226,398 Residents of CT have filed for unemployment, "initial claims processed" – data incomplete after March 22 which means the actual figures will be higher.

7. Since early March and through April 20th, 772 Residents of Orange have filed for unemployment, “initial claims processed” – data incomplete after March 22 which means the actual figures will be higher.



Orange & the State of CT have highly similar Profiles.

8. This data means that -- since early March and through April 20th -- over 16% of households in Orange have filed for unemployment, that equates to 1 out of every 6 households.
9. Since the Economic Shutdown started in mid-March, educational institutions have implemented across-the-board PAY CUTS of 5-10% on salaried staff.

III. Perspective on Specifics

While it is not the job of the Orange Board of Finance to identify specific Amity budget reductions, here is a short list of items that might raise the eyebrows of Economic Shutdown weary Taxpayers:

- Adding new staff; particularly new Senior administrative staff position.
- Timing of an \$1,500,000 investment in New Technology
- Utilizing the FY 19-20 surplus & not returning that Surplus to the taxpayers of the Towns.
- Utilizing the FY 19-20 surplus for items that would have been required to be budgeted, and thus would have raised the current 2.49% budget. Examples:
 1. Down payments on new technology (\$300,000);
 2. Textbooks/visual aids (\$100K+)

IV. Questions about Amity FY 19-20 Budget & the Future

1. Where's the savings from having the schools closed?
2. What has been purchased/encumbered and unused this year and can be applied/used in the 20-21 budget year?
3. What goods and services were not purchased or used that result in savings?
4. What can be deferred from 20-21 budgeted expenses based upon lack of use this spring (less wear")?
5. What have we learned from the closing that impacts future budgets?
6. What is the anticipated \$ amount that has been saved, and where is it going?
7. Shouldn't Amity look to rebidding that new Technology investment and other pending contracts. And look toward renegotiating existing contracts. I am sure that there are vendors who are very hungry at present and who would come in with much lower prices.
8. Can we defer or re-visit all or part of the bonding passed last December (parking lot \$600K for example)?
9. Next year's budget could be one filled with layoffs, pay freezes, furloughs etc. Should these things be communicated to all departments as we prepare for what may be on the horizon?