

Letters & Opinion

Chen Stands for Accountability

To the editor:

I'm voting for David Chen for Souhegan School Board and here is why. Per pupil cost at Souhegan is over \$19,000 which buys us a NECAP proficiency of 58%. Bedford has a per pupil cost of \$11,200 and a 70% proficiency rating. David Chen will stand with the taxpayers and students demanding accountability for the money spent and the knowledge learned. Join me in electing David Chen for Souhegan School Board.

Tedd Landon
Amherst

Amherst Residents and Taxpayers Best Served By Open Dialog

To the editor:

Pleased to see the Letter to the Editor regarding the Village Survey in the latest *Amherst Citizen*. Amherst residents and taxpayers are best served by open dialog. Akin to the "old fashion" town meetings is how I would portray it.

I certainly applaud the efforts of the town in planning for the future and apparently mistakenly thought I had made that quite clear in my initial post. I apologize for the unintended misunderstanding.

With respect to what my preference was on the Town Hall issue - regardless of its location? Restore and preserve the exterior of the existing building clearly it deserves a place in our town landscape. Treat it as we do the "Wigwam". Build a new modern building, with the appropriate exterior appearance of course, saving 2 to 4 million dollars including the admittedly unforeseeable "roof" issues thereby obtaining energy efficiency, reduced traffic in the village, providing more and safer parking, clearly better and less costly accommodations for the handicapped, enormous maintenance cost reductions, and a more efficient environment for our employees in addition to the large cost savings.

With respect to the non specific cost comments in the letter and by any government function for that matter I offer the following quote which to ignore may well be considered myopic.

"History is a vast warning system."

— Norman Cousins

Peter Hansen
Amherst

Vote NO On Article 13 Entitled Full Day Kindergarten

To the editor:

I am writing to encourage March voters to vote NO on Article 13 entitled Full Day Kindergarten. As a retired senior citizen, on fixed income and resident of Amherst for 34 years, I view warrant article 13 to be "Taxpayer Funded Day Care". If passed, this article will require the appropriation of \$620,593 in FY16 and an estimated recurring tax of \$550,000 per year thereafter.

In the Amherst Voter's Guide to the February 3rd Deliberative Session of the Amherst School District, the Ways and Means committee supported this article by a vote of 4-3. However, the minority report pointed out six (6) reasons of disagreement. The disagreement issues in the minority report are restated in-part below:

1. The New Hampshire Board of Education does not require full day kindergarten.
2. A minority of school districts statewide have a full day program. The committee could find no full day kindergartens in the local area that are solely taxpayer funded.
3. Allowing additional classroom time for emotional and social development has been proposed as one of the benefits. The minority report questions the assertion that the home environment is insufficient to provide for this development.
4. The assertions made that five (5) year olds are ready for an academically rigorous full day kindergarten are questionable.
5. The Amherst "Readiness Program" was discontinued by the State of New Hampshire because it could not be shown to be effective.
6. Lastly, the lack of a method to evaluate this program is considered "disturbing". There are not metrics in place to determine if this new curriculum will have a positive impact on our children.

My disagreement is simple. I do not want to pay any additional school tax. We pay enough school tax in Amherst already. Please consider voting NO on this article.

Ken Miller
Amherst

Letters To the editor:

The Amherst Citizen is eager to serve as a community forum. We welcome your letters, opinions, and commentaries and make every effort to run them in their entirety. We do reserve the right to edit. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the position of the staff of *The Amherst Citizen*.

Please direct your letters, views and commentary to the Editor, *The Amherst Citizen*, P.O. Box 291, Amherst, NH 03031-0291, or e-mail your submission to: news@amherstcitizen.com. We will attempt to run your letter as submitted (space permitting) providing it is signed and phone number is included.

Incumbent & Candidate Lori Mix Seeks Re-Election as Trustee of the Trust Funds

To the editor:

My name is Lori Mix. I am currently a Trustee of the Trust Fund up for re-election and look forward to the opportunity and privilege of serving another term.

In 2013, I was asked to consider applying for a vacant position of Trustee of the Trust Funds based upon my expertise, experience and dedication along with my objectivity and fact-based decision making approach. My experience includes the design, implementation and management of financial processes and procedures. I have developed budget and financial planning processes and tools to protect capital reserve funds, enable a steady income stream, and ensure sound financial management. In addition, I have substantial regulatory interpretation, policy analysis, strategic planning, and operations and organizational realignment experience for Federal, State and local governments.

Since July 2013, my co-trustee and I, under the direction of the Chair, Peter Bergin, have worked to bring a higher standard of governance, and more formalized processes and procedures to the role along with improved openness and communication.

We have and are working on:

- An accurate inventory/accounting of all trusts based on current available data which will be routinely updated and posted to the town website;
- Formalized policies and procedures which will be posted to our website in the coming months;
- Secured file space at Town Hall to improve access to Trust Fund materials not posted online; and
- In 2015 we will more proactively work with other boards of trustees (library, cemetery, schools, etc.) to expend available funds as intended and ensure maximum return on investment.

My husband Allen, and I, along with our children, moved to Amherst in 2008 and my parents soon followed. We chose to make Amherst our home in particular for the quality of life. We take advantage of a great deal that this community has to offer, and in return we are happy to provide assistance and do our part to continue making Amherst a truly wonderful place to live.

Please consider voting for me as a Trustee of the Trust Funds in the upcoming town election on March 10, 2015.

Lori Mix, Trustee of the Trust Fund
Amherst

Vote NO On Warrant Article 39 and Save Amherst Aquifer and Residential Area

To the editor:

Warrant Article 39 is innocuously worded so as to hide its true impact. As it is said "the devil is in the details". This article proposes to add an additional undeveloped 15 acres currently zoned Rural/Residential to what is 150+ undeveloped acres of existing Industrial land on top of the Amherst Aquifer! Clearly Amherst does not need more empty Industrial acres encroaching on our existing and growing residential community. This parcel if rezoned has the potential of being used for industries such as a gas fired electrical power plant (should the proposed natural gas pipeline be installed) on top of what is already becoming an over developed aquifer. There is a reason that as the article proposer said this rezoning was planned to be proposed before never done. Stop the expansion of unused industrial land into our residential areas. After all that was one of the purposes and why zoning was established in the first place.

Kenneth Bury
Amherst

Absentee Ballots

Town Meeting voting day is March 10, 2015. The polls will be open from 6AM to 8PM at Souhegan High School.

Absentee ballots are available to registered voters of the town. NH law requires that you vote in person at the polls unless you declare one of the following absences:

- 1) You plan to be absent on election day from the town where you are domiciled.
- 2) You cannot appear in public because of observance of a religious commitment.
- 3) You are unable to vote due to a disability.
- 4) You cannot appear at any time during polling hours at the polling place because an employment obligation requires you to remain physically at work or to be in transit to or from work from the time the polls open until the time the polls close.

Any person who votes or attempts to vote using an absentee ballot who is not entitled to vote by absentee ballot shall be guilty of a misdemeanor. RSA 657:24

Absentee ballots may be requested in person at the town clerk's office from 9AM to 3PM, Monday through Friday and Tuesday night from 4:30 to 6:30 and up to 5PM on Monday, March 9. They must be returned by 5PM on Monday, March 9 if returned in person or by 5PM on Election Day if received by mail. No absentee ballots will be accepted in hand at the polls. Absentee ballots may be requested by mail by submitting a request in writing with the signature of the requestor.

Paul Prescott Brings Professional Experience to the Table

To the editor:

Town elections are coming up on March 10th and I recommend that voters support the re-election of Paul Prescott to the Amherst School Board. As Chair of Ways & Means for Amherst School District I have had the pleasure of working with Paul while he was also a member of the committee and for the last few years as he served on the School Board. In both roles he has applied a methodical, detail oriented, and collaborative approach to the challenge of maintaining high quality education for Amherst students while minimizing the impact on taxpayers. He has done so in part by insisting on long term planning when it comes to technology purchases, school improvements, or deployment of new programs. Paul asks the questions that need to be asked and insists that expenditures of tax dollars be sufficiently justified in terms of educational impact. He takes a thoughtful approach to his role as a School Board member and has been a key contributor particularly in the technology area bringing his professional experience to the table. I am certainly glad Paul has chosen to seek a second term.

Please join me in supporting Paul Prescott for Amherst School Board on March 10th.

Mark Vincent
Chairman, Amherst School District
Ways & Means Committee

Support for Purvis

To the editor:

Many people know that my family moved to Amherst from Merrimack in 2010. I would like to explain why. Spoiler alert—we came for the schools.

Our older daughter was in the nearby Merrimack school system from K-12. At first, I was a young single mother and didn't know enough to speak up effectively when my quiet daughter was overlooked or poorly placed within the system. She became very ill during middle and high school and I had to fight, hard, for every appropriate accommodation. We were stressed enough trying to get her diagnosed and healthy. When she was able to attend school, the faculty was neither uniformly professional nor entirely supportive. We only stayed to give her some consistency and allow her to graduate with her friends (a minor miracle in itself).

During our time in the district, we watched school budgets fail at annual votes. Good teachers left and never came back. A much-needed middle school was finally built, but the high school was crowded. Beyond our personal issues, a very good district by most accounts was losing its reputation. For us, the final straw was a friend's outgoing kindergarten child having debilitating panic attacks about school. She was reading, but not reading fast enough for their testing. In kindergarten! We sold our home at a loss and moved before our younger daughter started school.

We seriously considered all of the surrounding options. Merrimack is a commuter town, and we craved a stronger sense of community. We were tempted by Bedford's shiny new schools, but their new schools are working out the kinks. We decided to go with Amherst's proven track record and reputation for working hard to bring out the best in each student.

When my younger daughter had trouble reading and came home frustrated in first grade, Clark School recommended she work with a reading specialist. She went from struggling to reading above grade level within the year. Her class was small enough that her outstanding teacher was able to help my quiet child thrive. She is currently at Wilkins and excelling academically. I fear she would have fallen through the cracks of our previous district. Instead, she is an avid reader and eager learner.

Sometimes you get what you pay for. We believe the sense of community in both our citizens and our schools is priceless. That said, we have active volunteers and professionals who together work hard to keep our school budgets in line. Schools should not get a blank check with no oversight, but much of our budget can be attributed to federal mandates, staff salary, and other costs that are not a simple per student equation with easy cuts to be found.

Our teachers are expensive. They come to Amherst and tend to stay. Seasoned, experienced faculty cost more. They are worth it. As a PTA board member, I've had the good fortune to work closely with the staff at our elementary and middle schools. They are passionate about their jobs and our kids. They keep their skills up to date and are always looking for ways to improve the learning environment.

Our high school has always had a unique learning model. It is very hard to argue with the results. Consistent graduation rates of 99-100%. 92% of our graduates go on to college. College readiness scores are much higher than any surrounding towns. No, they don't stress some standardized tests. Rather than "teaching to the test", SHS teaches students critical thinking and "soft skills" that prepare our young people for further learning and real life. I'll take that trade off.


Please vote for our school budgets to enable our schools to best serve our students and help us stand out. We live in a state with no income or sales tax. A large burden falls on real estate and local taxes. Money has to come from someplace. If you want your home to stay valuable, keep our schools strong and support full-day kindergarten. If we attract young families, they will stay and pay taxes longer as their kids move through the school system.

I have seen what happens when budgets don't get passed. I have experienced a school district that appeared to value test results more than individual students. I understand the desire to see short-term tax relief, but we must take a long-term approach to investing in our schools and our town!

If I still have your attention, I'd also like to recommend Dwayne Purvis for the open Souhegan School Board seat. I believe he has a balanced approach to keeping a sane budget and will help ensure the high standards we've come to expect from our schools. Dave Chen is also a great guy and very active in the community, but I've yet to hear how he thinks budgets can be further adjusted without losing important resources for our students. We should always be looking for efficiencies, but cutting now based on a forecast for later is not responsible. A contingency plan should only become primary if needed, and we don't need it yet.

Thank you for your time and attention,

Terri Behm
Amherst




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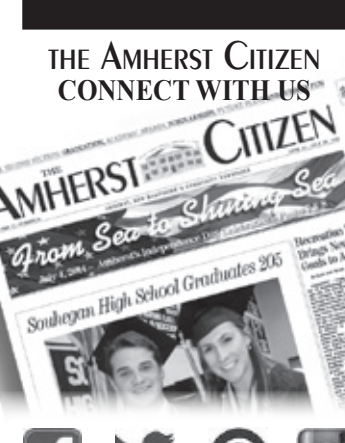
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