

**ARTICLE 17- Buildings & Facilities**  
**JCPC Minority Report Regarding Planning Department Studies**

By Carol Gray

As a member of the spring 2012 Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC), I am writing to offer a minority opinion regarding article 17 which includes funding for Planning Department projects totaling \$90,000, primarily for studies: one for a \$40,000 study for 'Gateway / town Center Rezoning'<sup>i</sup> and the other is for \$50,000 for North Amherst studies & improvements.<sup>ii</sup>

- 1) Such a large financial investment is **premature and/or contrary to public opinion**. Considering the concerns of residents in the areas at issue for the North Amherst Rezoning and the Gateway projects, it is not clear that there is sufficient Town Meeting support to pass rezoning in these areas, therefore spending tens of thousands on studies that presume a rezoning will occur is unwise.
- 2) It is **illogical** that the Planning Department is seeking to **do the rezoning of North Amherst at the same time as the study about the rezoning**, a study the Planning Department proposal estimates will not be completed until June 2014.
- 3) During the Planning Department JCPC presentation, I asked Mr. Tucker what funds remained unspent from existing Planning Department projects. He did not know such specifics off-hand. I requested that such information be provided to JCPC but never received it. Mr. Tucker said there were some funds set aside for village center projects; he indicated there was **probably \$10,000-\$20,000 left over** from that pool of funds **and some of that could go toward the Gateway study if necessary**. To my knowledge, left-over Planning Department funds have not been applied to these requests for \$90,000.
- 4) These **studies** are included in an article about capital expenditures for "Buildings and Facilities", but they **are neither buildings nor facilities**. In addition, I question whether they fit the definition of capital expenses (i.e., costing more than \$5,000 and having an estimated useful life of more than 5 years). Considering zoning proposals related to the North Amherst study have already been voted down by Town Meeting, I do not think such studies will lead to projects that have a useful life of more than 5 years, rather, **they may lead to nothing at all**.
- 5) These Planning Department proposals account for almost 25% of the \$368,396 of the "Buildings and Facilities" JCPC article. **The choice to fund these studies stands alongside the decision that other JCPC proposals could not afford to be funded:**

e.g., \$11,000 in **insulation** for the North Amherst Library which has virtually no insulation and is heated with oil, and \$15,000 in insulation for the Jones Library. If the Jones Library were fully insulated, energy audit statistics indicate **there would be a savings of \$2,478 annually in energy costs.**

6) These studies are within a context of **numerous other Planning Department Studies** such as the FY2010 **\$50,000** appropriation for “Comprehensive Code Revision” (see JCPC’s April 2009 report) as well as the FY2011 **\$40,000** appropriated for the Planning Board’s Housing Market Study (see article 5 from 2011 Town Meeting; the vote was 90-67).

In my view, we, as a community, should step back and relook at the random survey of residents that was done as part of the Master Plan process. The opening summary of that survey stated, **“Overall, these random survey results indicate citizen satisfaction with the town the way it is.”** (See random survey results found at this link: <http://amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/1648>) Continuing to spend tens of thousands on Planning Department studies about how the zoning of our town could be overhauled flies in the face of the people’s preferences captured in the random survey.

The \$90,000 for Planning Department projects, primarily studies, is not a good use of funds.

---

<sup>i</sup> The Planning Department’s description of this project states “In implementation of action steps recommended in the final report of the Gateway Corridor Project and the Amherst Master Plan, this funding request seeks funds to complete visioning and the development of new form-based zoning for the Gateway Corridor area and the rest of the Town Center as a continuous center. The figure of \$40,000 is based on the recent experience of consultant costs for visioning and rezoning the village centers at North Amherst and Atkins Corners.”

<sup>ii</sup> The Planning Department’s project description for this item states: “In conjunction with the village center rezoning plan, water improvement planning and pending private and public development projects in North Amherst, these funds are requested to: 1) conduct a traffic engineering study of the adjacent intersections of North Pleasant/Pine/Meadow Streets and North Pleasant Street/Sunderland/Montague Roads, and to develop preliminary plans and designs for redesign/relocation of that intersection at its current location or elsewhere nearby, and; 2) to fund public streetscape improvements and other public infrastructure improvements encouraging or needed in association with potential near-term private and public development projects.” The project cost summary says that \$30,000 would go toward “Design – Engineering” and \$20,000 would go toward “Site Improvements”.