



Amherst Council Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes Tuesday May 14, 2019
Town Hall, 2 PM

Members present: Bahl-Milne, Griesemer, Pam, Schoen, Steinberg

Members absent: None

Other Councilors present: Mandi Jo Hanneke

Other town staff present: Bockelman, Aldrich (Finance), D. Ziomek (Conservation), M. Nartowicz (Town Clerk), C. Brestrup (Planning director), Sean Hannon (IT), R. Morra (Planning and Inspections), and multiple staff of town finance and support departments.

Amherst Media recorded and posted a video of the full meeting.

Steinberg called to order 2:05 PM and announced short term rental discussion would follow the budget discussion. Asked general question about licensure revenues. The meeting began with review of proposed FY20 Budget for various scheduled municipal departments.

1. Budget Discussion/Review: General Services and Finance

A. Finance, Town Manager, General Services: Bockelman, Aldrich. Sonia presenting:

Aldrich remarked that it has been a challenge getting to point of presenting a budget and supporting the new Town Council. Hours reorganizing, staff, reconfiguring the room, IT, staff support. Staff is proud of success in keeping the Town running despite extra hours devoted to new government and tight timelines.

She added that Finance staff will be reduced by one person - Maria Racca – who will be greatly missed and contributed intense efforts to produce the proposed budget document. Aldrich gave her appreciation for all the staff that contributed to the budget document

Town Council:(P16). This is the first time in Town Budget. FY20 includes expenses related to MMA conference and stipends for Councilors. The budget does not attempt to allocate staff time/costs for support of the Council. This expense is in other general government budgets.

Town Manager p.18:

There has been increase workload with Council: additional work taken on Community Participation Officers. Daily with Town Clerk has a lot more to do than with Town Meeting and Town Manager time. Currently, the Council is supported by existing staff. This includes over-time hours and compensatory time.

Will not know until next budget year whether workable solution.



FINANCE Department: The department has skeletal staffing. Down 2 major people in Finance Department. Staff have been stretched to prepare the budget and adjust to the extra time to for the Council.

Finance Dept p. 22 and 26.

The Finance department also lost ½ funding for position when move to fully insured. Self-Insured fund had supported from health insurance

Contract out ambulance billing. Operating expense instead of salary line, explains why large increase (p.26). Too early to know if will be saving. The shift started in March.

Other expenses: P117. Includes OPEB. Helped by lower increase in health insurance.

General government: if run a surplus can transfer. Snow and ice may transfer to DPW. There was a shortfall in what was budgeted. Should be done before June 30

The Committee discussed whether will be able to transfer funds with vote on full budget, or decision to vote on separate orders. In past was on warrant to transfer. The Charter indicates may not need a separate hearing if transfer.

Human Resources: p.30. FTE funding changed from health trust fund (support) to HR.

The Committee asked if this calculated in the gain from transfer to fully insured? Answer yes, can calculate. The person is still performing all the same functions (enrollment, fees and other) related to health insurance

Facilities p.45: Shared position with Library and Town (George). Combined 2 positions. Oversee maintenance staff in town and library. Town helped library with day to day cleaning. Some savings in budget due to staff turnover. Increase cost from energy costs.

B. Town Clerk: Town Clerk Margaret Nartowicz Presenting

In addition to Council, ongoing Clerk responsibilities. Elections, vital records, registration, Census, Charter required issues such as ranked-choice voting commission; 3 people

Margaret noted substantial clerk over-time and compensatory time to staff/support the Council. She is keeping a track of hours. It has been challenging and rewarding having been appointed Clerk of the Council.

However, it is has become clear level of support Council needs can not be supported by 1 person who is also Clerk of the Town. Team of 3 is stressed. Future challenges include:

- Voting machine not able to handle ranked choice voting. Fall November 2021 potential
- Polling locations are problematic. Ongoing discussion. Districts and precincts
- US Census will require substantial time

C. **Information Technology p. 35:** Sean Hannon



IT staff consolidated, shift of personnel lines. This includes an application manager funding by Water/Sewer. The Committee discussion include asking whether planned broad band town-wide would require negotiation with Eversource and Verizon. Sean responded that this would change relationship if were to become a service provider. Can replace I-Net as a right.

Future goals include: maximizing the Town's ability to provide services online, streamlining permit and license systems, and maximizing staff and other use of existing systems. IT staff now also support Councilors.

2. Planning, Conservation, and Inspections (p.84, 88 97): Ziomek, Brestrup, Morra

Planning: Brestrup

Planning continues to review, regulate, oversee, and work on town projects. Hold community forums to get input.

Next steps in the coming year: review Master plan, re-write zoning/revise; exploration of other grants, collaborate with DPW, update Housing production plan (current year flood plain mapping).

Planning intends to engage a consultant for North Amherst to review street scape, sidewalks, potential future development. Various landowners have expressed interest in development

An upcoming TAC meeting will feature North Amherst intersection on May 22. This will include the CDG Smith engineering study done for DPW

The Committee asked why and when use consultant? Brestrup answered that consultant experiences and perceived neutrality are assets.

Inspection Services (p.90): Rob Morra

Rob explained that core program efforts include permitting and licenses and code enforcement including rentals. Licensing inspection: moved to work with Board of licensing

Amherst inspects large projects before these open: Beacon, 1 EP, University Drive, Aspen Heights

Housing: respond to complaints. Will respond to Air BB; although not licensed. He noted that there may be a rationale to license. Might want to include in bylaw for short term rentals. Potential community impact fee.

Committee asked if revisiting what charging now in rental permit fees? Potential to charge more if frequent complaints. Use to fund targeted inspections. Morra responded that they update the fee schedule every year. There is an annual review.



Rental bylaws: recommendation for how to deal with repeat offenders. Seeing more calls from tenants, families not just the visual drive-by. This includes seeing more cars than likely if compliant with number of residents.

Permitting: The Committee asked about plans to expedite and streamline? Morra noted that there is also a new health code this year. Created a position called “permitting administrator.” Effort to clarify and help navigate, guide. Dave Ziomek added that they are looking for ways to improve. Are there ways to automate? Online? Coordinate with health, fire, police, DPW, Inspection and improve efforts to communicate.

Conservation (p. 84): Ziomek

Works with other departments. By having group coordinated able to confer. Co-located has been a benefit to multiple department staff working together. He described main areas of focus that include:

- Sustainability, wetlands management, maintenance/conservation of town-owned areas (5,000 acres): 3 main areas
- Need for more staff: Look to grant to support additional staff time. Robert Frost Trail example and trail systems around town. Some “bikeable” if bushes/thorns, etc. cleared.
- Groff: dog park task group

Recreation/Open space plan: Conservation and the Town have been working on a priority list of what might want to acquire. Likely to see a shift from acquisition to maintenance. Land with recreation has maintenance costs – people use. Will likely see more requests to CPAC and JCPC to maintain. Only recent that Town could use CPAC funds to maintain recreational space. Can only use on land that was purchased with CPAC funds.

The Committee briefly discussed potential of organized volunteer efforts: residents help maintain and clean up trash

3. Short Term Rentals: Air B&B: Consider whether to recommend that the Council Accept a Local Option Community Impact Fee on Short-term Rentals in accordance with General Laws Chapter 64G, § 3D, and if so the rate and rental units to which it should apply

Chair announced Councilor Bahl-Milne will leave before discussion due to teaching a class. She will submit a link to a paper assessing the benefits and costs of operation Air B&B. The paper supports the need for a community impact fee. Committee agreed that this will be appended to the minutes and posted along with the minutes <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-economic-costs-and-benefits-of-airbnb-no-reason-for-local-policymakers-to-let-airbnb-bypass-tax-or-regulatory-obligations>

Bockelman presented background charts and description of the State room occupancy excise tax provisions. He noted that Amherst has already accepted Local option 64G:3A. Occupancy



excise tax. Amherst has new option for short-term to expand to Air B&B under Chapter 64G Section 3D. (see handout for details).

Towns have option of adopting a community impact fee: maximum 3%

- First option applies to 1 or 2 units, not owner occupied.
- Second option apply also to 2 to 3 family dwelling that includes owner residence
- Must allocate at least 35% of revenue to affordable housing or municipal infrastructure.

Bockelman said the impetus for this option came from Cape Cod where major impact.

Committee discussed the options and voted to recommend to the Council that Amherst take three actions related to the local option. The vote on each of the following 3 motions was unanimous among the 4 Committee members present (1 absent).

1. MOVED: To accept the provisions of MGL Chapter 64G, Section 3D to impose a local option community impact fee at the rate of 3%, effective July 1, 2019 and applying to transfers of occupancy of:
 - a. “Professionally-managed units” (one of two or more short-term rental units in the same city/town operated by the same operator (owner) and not located within a single- or two- or three-family dwelling that includes the operator’s primary residence.
2. MOVED: To accept the provisions of MGL Chapter 64G, Section 3D to impose a local option community impact fee at the rate of 3%, effective July 1, 2019 and applying to transfers of occupancy of:
 - a. Short-term rental units located in a two- or three-family dwelling that includes the operator’s primary residence.
3. MOVED: That 35% of the community impact fee collected under MGL Chapter 64G, Section 3D be dedicated to affordable housing or local infrastructure projects and the balance of the funds be a general fund revenue of the Town of Amherst that may be appropriated for any municipal purpose.

The Committee discussed that the third motion specified that 35% of the fee be dedicated to affordable housing or local infrastructure projects in effect limited the amount designated for a specific use. This enables flexibility for the Town to allocate revenues as needed within guidelines of the statute.

Vote on each or the three motions: 4 yes. 0 against. 1 Absent.

4. Budget updates if any: None

5. **Public Comment:** None

6. **Minutes of previous meetings:** Schoen authorized to review and approve. April 30 complete and will mark approved to submit to Aldrich to post. Bahl-Milne will complete draft of May 9. Schoen took minutes of May 14 meeting.

7. **Matters not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours before the meeting:** None

Moved to adjourn at 4:50 PM.

Next meeting Thursday May 16 at 2 PM.

Respectfully submitted: Cathy Schoen

Documents reviewed at meeting:

- Proposed FY20 Budget
- Chart Presentation on Local Option to Adopt Community Impact Fee on AirB&B
- Document to be appended to minutes: Article on AirB&B.

Minutes approved 5.29.2019.