



---

**Town Council Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**Tuesday, September 24, 2019 2:30 to 4:30pm**  
**First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**  
**MINUTES**

**1. Call to Order - 2:32pm**

Committee Members Present: Councilors Steinberg, Schoen (by phone), Bahl-Milne, Griesemer, Pam; Resident members: Hegner, Povinelli, and Theilman

Committee members absent: None

Staff present: Sean Mangano (Schools), Paul Bockelman (Town Manager), Sonia Aldrich (Comptroller),

Chair Steinberg announced that Cathy Schoen would be participating by phone. The group confirmed that Schoen could hear and others could hear her responses.

Amherst Media video is available of the meeting.

•

**2. Logistical discussion**

- Inquired about absences at next scheduled meeting, October 8, due to Yom Kippur beginning at sunset - Some councilors will not be present. The meeting will end by 4:00pm due to holiday.
- Since Schoen is participating by phone, all votes will need to be taken by roll call.

**3. Centennial Water Treatment plant borrowing, recommendation**

Presentation made by Comptroller Sonia Aldrich using PowerPoint chart set. This included a recommendation for Centennial Water treatment plant plan. Reviewed existing state of finances and projected changes and impacts on rates resulting from proposal, and took clarifying questions from Councilors. Aldrich noted that she had not done the calculation regarding future rate increases for the full construction. This would need to be explained by Guilford Mooring who was not able to attend this meeting.

Questions that will need to be resolved by Mooring include Schoen question about projected water rate increases with the \$11 million construction project. The table in the presentation looks low – compared to the estimated impact of the \$700,000 study to prepare for the plan. Would like a full explanation of projected price increase and reserves. The projected rate



increases over time should be part of the budget and project projections. This builds on earlier request for more clarification on accuracy and detail of the project.

The group also discussed Comparison between Amherst and Northampton for water rates. Referenced earlier memo

1. Greenfield, Easthampton, Montague have cheaper rates
2. All other towns (including Northampton, & other towns above us)
3. Our rates are currently competitive

Steinberg recommended that proposal should be approved to proceed with further engineering planning. Need to consider the full project not just the initial survey

- Vote is about the proposed order for borrowing up to \$692,000 for the first step of engineering work, does finance committee recommend.
- Hegner: Griesemer and Pam all encourage us to move forward because of long term sustainability, resilience, and environmental concerns.
- Discussion over whether the new plant will be energy efficient in the long-run. Equipment will be more efficient. Should we put in solar-panels to offset energy use for plant? Would like more information on if company retained has the skills to make proper assessments or if there will need to be a subcontractor.
- Chair Steinberg - Will ask Mooring to include questions in the feasibility study by the engineering firm who will design/permit the new facilities.
- Councilor Bahl-Milne - Requests more information on potential subcontractors.

**Motion to Vote.** Councilor Griesemer moved to vote on the proposed purchase authorization (presented at the meeting) and read the order. (See attachment). Bahl-Milne seconded the motion. Motion passed 5-0 on a roll call vote: Roll Call Vote: Schoen – YES; Steinberg (Chair) – YES; Bahl-Milne – YES; Griesemer – YES; Pam - YES .

This will be brought to October 7th council meeting.

#### **4. Financial Planning tool. Follow-up discussion on process to consider major building projects following combined meeting with JCPC**

Agenda order adjusted to accommodate Sean Mangano. Mangano provided an update on the tool that he has been working on, incorporating some feedback, waiting to hear more specific feedback on other concerns before update final version. Discussion of adjustment to Library lines - should we err lower, or higher, since it's a project? Probably err higher.

Group discussed whether it might be possible to bring in new revenue stream for capital projects. This includes sale of assets (Fort River, downtown fire station, etc.).

Plan to have the tool available for use by early November.

- Councilor Bahl-Milne remarked that when presenting the tool to others as being about overall bigger picture, not exactly precise figures.
- Purpose of the tool is to help voters figure out /understand realistic timelines for the budget, and engage with choices. Tool helps voters look at the impact of the choices on property tax and prioritize various scenarios.
- Robert Hegner – right now historically good rate for borrowing money, should think about how that impacts long-term planning.

## **5. Hickory Ridge recommendation**

Councilor Steinberg - Will not be heard at the next council meeting, therefore the Committee does not need to make a decision today. Will need to take up at the next meeting after this. Which is the thing that mandates we have a meeting.

Hickory Ridge: Will send out materials to committee members who are not members of the council to review and prepare questions in advance, since did not hear presentation. Councilor Steinberg will accumulate all questions and send it to the staff people best equipped to answer, and then report back answers at next discussion. Also prepare questions for discussion at the Finance Committee meeting

Discussion of possible dates for meeting if need to reschedule October 8.

## **6. Amherst Housing Policy**

- Councilor Steinberg - Don't need to meet the initial deadline for a final recommendation, but do need to make a report.
- Suggestion from Councilor Cathy Schoen to collect all questions to be addressed and answered later.

## **7. Percent for Arts Bylaw Ad Hoc Committee**

- Councilor Steinberg First meeting was yesterday (9/23) ad-hoc committee, includes 3 people from council and two people from the public arts commission.
- Initial discussion to start working to develop a new Percent for Arts proposal. As the group identifies issues or provisions the group will explore, Finance committee members on Ad Hoc Committee (Schoen and Steinberg, Schoen chair) will come back to the Finance Committee to cost out and think about the financial impact of each proposal.



- Bahl-Milne recommended discussion of how the Percent for Arts can be an investment in other goals, such as environmental education, and other similar projects, etc.

**8. Public comment**

- No Comment

**9. Master schedule for FY 21 budget process**

- Discussion led by Sonia Aldrich. Reviewed items on calendar. Various councilors sought or gave clarification of calendar items. Adjustments will be made to updated version of calendar.

**10. Matters not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours prior to the meeting: None**

**11. Adjourn at 4:35:**

Motion to Adjourn by councilor Steinberg, seconded by Griesemer. 4:35

Roll Call vote unanimous (5 voting Council members). Schoen Yes, Steinberg Yes, Griesemer Yes, Bahl-Milne Yes, Pam Yes.

Documents referenced

- Centennial Water Treatment plant PowerPoint
- Copy of Building Project Financial Planning Tool
- Town of Amherst - FY2021 Draft Budget Development Calendar

Draft minutes prepared by Megan Lieff, 9.25.19.

Edited and Approved by Cathy Schoen, Vice Chair Finance Committee with revisions 10.22.19 and 11.1.19