



**Finance Committee Meeting
November 19, 2019 at 2:30 p.m.
Town Room
Amherst Town Hall**

Minutes

Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-finance-committee>

1. Call to order and declaration of a quorum

Chair Steinberg declared the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 2:35 p.m.

Committee Members present: Andrew Steinberg, Chair; Cathy Schoen, Vice Chair; Lynn Griesemer; Dorothy Pam; Robert Hegner (non-voting resident); and Sharon Povinelli (non-voting resident)

Committee members absent: Shalini Bahl-Milne and Marylou Theilman (non-voting resident).

Others present: Sonia Aldrich, Town Comptroller; David Ziomek, Assistant Town Manager; Nathaniel Malloy, Senior Planner; and Nate Budington, Chair of the Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC.) Minutes taken by Martha Marteney.

2. Kendrick Park

Budington noted that CPAC will be bringing a full set of proposals in the Spring of 2020. This project for \$259,000 of CPAC funding is coming early because the Town received notification that the entire project needed to be approved by end of December 2019 because of State PARC grant requirements. Therefore, CPA is coming to Town to authorize the full amount now although CPAC and the PARC grant will provide the full funding for the project. Budington overviewed the proposal for funding of Kendrick Park, specifically that the full cost of the playground in Kendrick park (\$659,000) be borrowed until the CPAC grant is formulated and CPAC funds become available. The goal of this project is to bring families into the center of town. He stated that the proposed project has the support of CPAC – noting that they see the project as very exciting.

Ziomek thanked Malloy for securing the Parklands Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Program grant on behalf of the town. Summarizing various slides, Ziomek outlined that this project is based on the 2011 Process, which identified Kendrick Park as the best location in the downtown area for a play area. The town was awarded the maximum grant amount of \$400,000 toward the estimated total cost of the playground. The grant award is for 70% of the total and requires the Town to pay 30% of the total. This amounts to an estimated \$259,000, including final design and installation costs. The State has informed the Town that the project must have full approval by the Town Council no later than 2019-12-31; a completed design by 2020-06-01; and construction completed by 2021-06-01.

The concept design submitted with the grant shows the play-ground area in the middle of the park and incorporates full accessibility around the play area. It includes walkways providing access into the park.

Malloy further described the grant as a two-year grant project, which requires full funding allocation before the grant funds are provided. The first year would be for design (\$50,000). Total estimated project cost is \$659,000 – that is the ceiling. The town share is \$269,000 once the PARC grant reimburses the town for the \$400,000. The State has a rigorous schedule with design by mid-May and construction to start July 1, 2020 and be completed the following year to receive the grant in full. Later he noted this is a reimbursement grant – the Town spends, and the State then awards the grant up to the ceiling and 70% of the project costs.

Schoen asked for clarification on the funding broken down by fiscal year. Malloy explained that in this fiscal year, the town would fund \$50,000 for the design phase before July. Malloy answered that the authorization would be for this fiscal year. Aldrich confirmed that this will be short-term borrowing in this fiscal year.

Pam asked about the location of the playground on the map and whether there would be additional parking. Ziomek said parking is not proposed as part of this plan, given that there is an on-going discussion about parking and this location is within walking distance of ample parking. Malloy observed that there is already parking along the park on one side of the street.

Ziomek added that the Planning Department did consider the North Common as a possible location, but for numerous factors none of the proposals worked. Other locations were also considered, but Kendrick Park came as the logical location for a playground.

Hegner asked how restrictive the grant is in terms of the design and any limitations on the funding if the full project is not completed by the deadline. Malloy said once the final plan is generated, the overall plans will not change. The state will reimburse only the 70% of what the town actually spends up to \$400,000, and the reimbursement should be remitted within 45 days of the town's submission to the state.

Hegner followed up with question on what happens if not finished on time. Does the town lose the entire amount? Malloy answered would be reimbursed for 70% of what had spent. But clearly an incentive to get the project completed to get the full award.

Griesemer asked for clarification on potential use of other areas and the specific location. She referenced conversations with the BID about a performance area. She asked for confirmation that this project will not preclude a performance area, as discussed with BID. Ziomek said the northern part of the park is the larger section, which will remain untouched with this PARC grant project. There would ample room for performance area and other uses. Malloy noted that there is a proposed (or potential) amphitheater – would still be possible. The area where the playground would be has trees and is shaded. The other areas are more open.

Steinberg asked if still possible for Boy Scouts to sell Xmas trees – again referencing the map. The answer was yes that space still open and not affected by the play area.

Schoen followed up asking about places to sit – the Park does not have much now other than ground. Ziomek answered there will be picnic tables and benches in the new play area. And the walkways will open up access into the Park. Malloy added there is budget line for tables and benches. Schoen suggested in the design they look at Amherst College new outdoor area with large rocks or boulders that were put in place to provide seats at low maintenance costs.

Steinberg turned to the decision before the Committee and pointed out the authorization includes transfer of ownership to LSSE and other sections that describe the funding. He asked about the implications for care, custody and control if transferred to LSSE. Ziomek replied that Part A is required by the State – transfer and make this a park in perpetuity. LSSE is Commission with oversight of parks and recreation areas for the Town.

Gabrielle Gould, Executive Director of the Amherst Business Improvement District (BID) joined the meeting at 3:16 p.m. and noted that the BID and the Hitchcock Center are looking forward to participating the design of the play space. She went on to describe the opportunities in Amherst for multiple green spaces – used in different ways. A playground is an excellent idea for enlivening the town and bringing people downtown. Further, the BID will be presenting in 2020 to the Town Council the creation of a performing arts shell but on the Commons – not Kendrick. She also noted that BID will be exploring liquor licensing on the Common and therefore would like this located further away from area with small children such as the Kendrick play area.

Pam asked about a bathroom at Kendrick Park. Malloy responded that it is not part of the PARC project, and there are already public bathrooms in the downtown. Restrooms would be a much bigger and expensive project.

Schoen asked how this project impacts the CPAC monies. For example, will the community fields be requesting a substantial amount from CPA funding. Ziomek said this would be debt financed and therefore about \$30,000 per year. Thus, not preclude other high priorities. He said

are no other major projects from Conservation anticipated that would need to be considered at this time, other than possible proposal some field improvements at the schools.

3. Draft Council Order 20-45 to Authorize Kendrick Park Playground

ORDER #20-45FY2020AN ORDER AUTHORIZING THE DEDICATION OF KENDRICK PARK FOR PARK AND ACTIVE RECREATION PURPOSES AND APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR THE REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION THEREOF

Steinberg summarized the draft order pending approval by the Town Council relating to the PARC grant project discussed above. Ziomek further explained that transferring the custody of Kendrick Park from the Town Manager to the Leisure and Supplemental Education (LSSE) Commission is a formality that the State typically requires to better secure the functionality of the property long-term as protected park space. The care of the park would still fall primarily under the Department of Public Works.

Griesemer motioned approval of the order; seconded by Pam.

Prior voting on the order, Steinberg committee members for any questions or comments. Hegner asked if we should put a date into the Order. Aldrich replied not necessary.

Malloy noted could add wording about the Town Manager transfer to LSSE in “role of Parks Commission” to clarify. Steinberg ask if additional wording is necessary since later could change the name of authority as needed. Ziomek replied that if a new entity would go through bylaws to change the name. Believes the order as written is sufficient.

Discussion about the wording made it clear that part A of the order makes it clear that this property is a Park. Currently, designated as municipal land – this wording in the Order is necessary for a PARC grant. The wording about “active” recreation makes it clear that the area is welcome and open to use by the public.

Malloy explained that the PARC grant has certain language that is included in the order, which was then adapted by the town attorney. This included specifically designating it as an active public park rather than simply town property.

Povinelli asked about rental of Kendrick Park, to which Ziomek said it can be rented, similar to other park areas in town.

Pam asked if there would be further requests for funds for other changes in the park beyond the playground. Ziomek replied no – this would be the only change and investment in Kendrick at this time.

Steinberg called for the vote: approved unanimously by the 4 Councilors (voting members of the Committee Schoen, Steinberg, Griesemer, Pam). with one Councilor absent.

Griesemer note that the order will go on the agenda for the Council on December 16.

Ziomek, Malloy, Budington, and Gould left the meeting at 3:38 p.m.

4. 4th Quarter Yearend FY19 Budget Update

Schoen asked for further detail on quarterly vs annual budgets. She also requested that in the future there be a summary of amount in reserves – just an additional page showing the year end results. Aldrich confirmed that budgeted funds in operating budgets do not carryover fiscal year. She also explained that the fourth quarter is included in the total spending end of year, the reporting is cumulative quarters – the Town does not regularly compare fourth quarter to the previous year fourth quarter. She further remarked that reserves are not yet certified so do not report at year end until later once certified.

Steinberg explained that in the past, the Finance Committee would forward the report to the legislative body with an explanatory memo. He suggested this practice should be continued and forward to the Town Council. Aldrich noted that the report does include a memo that this is a budget report, not a report showing free cash that would be added to the balance of available funds. The health claims refund is reflected this year which is way a larger transfer to free cash this year.

Povinelli asked about the public transportation expenses being significantly lower than budgeted. Aldrich attributed this to additional funds added by Town Meeting that were not yet spent; Steinberg referenced the support of keeping summer bus schedule. This may require additional review.

The Finance Committee agreed to forward this to the Town Council as is.

5. FY 21 Preliminary Budget Guidelines

Steinberg overviewed the Select Board and Finance Committee's historical role in the budget process in setting guidelines. He referenced two documents that had been shared with the Committee from earlier years. He discussed the purpose of financial guidelines. He noted that the memos also included guiding policies. This year Finance will be adopting and combining both into one document to propose to the Council, pending discussions with the Town Manager.

Schoen noted that this is the first year for the guidelines under the new town government structure. She questioned the process by which the Finance Committee could highlight to the Town Manager certain areas of the budget that the Finance Committee feels needs additional study and/or funding. She gave as an example issues that came up during the Public Forum on the budget regarding the fire department. The question is whether there will need to be special attention to staffing in this Department. Whether there is a need for a study and analysis to update a 2017 report of what has happened since Hadley left. The question is could the memo highlight a specific area. For Schoen, that would include funding for the Fire Department.

Steinberg suggested having the Fire Chief meet with the Finance Committee; Schoen noted that part of such a review include the University supporting the student training program or the actions relative to covering the costs of assisted living facilities supporting the calls to pick up their residents who have fallen – “lift and assist” – could we charge the facilities?

Povinelli asked whether the question is whether the Finance committee should suggest spending more? Schoen responded more asking for a study and reporting back. Steinberg noted that the Select Board in the past would ask such questions – and thus the now appropriate for Finance to include although ultimately Manager decision to propose.

Steinberg will outline a draft for the budget guidelines for the Finance Committee’s next meeting. And this will be for review at the next meeting.

Griesemer noted that she and others are working on goals for the Town Manager TM, such as a study of the fire staffing or personnel at the library. The plan is to bring these to the Town Council on December 16. It has yet to be determined how such goals merge with the budget process and guidelines. She asked at what point TM goals and budget guideline inform each other.

Steinberg responded that in now in first year of a new government and figuring out. In the past, the Select Board would develop the goals for the TM in advance of financial guidelines. The calendar process not yet in sync. Timing this year is difficult. However, under the new form of government the Manager has more time to propose the next fiscal year budget.

Aldrich described that in the past, once the Town Manager made the presentation of forecasts of the next year in the Fall these became the specifics in the Finance Committee memo. She noted that the 2.5% increase on the operating budgets must also cover any salary and health insurance increases. If there is available funding in the budget after those costs are covered and the year progresses, then departments can seek to include those in their budgets.

6. Scheduling Next Meeting

It was noted that the Capital Projects Listening Session starts at 3:30 on December 3, which presents a conflict for both Griesemer and Schoen. Therefore, there will not be a Finance Committee meeting on December 3. Steinberg will coordinate to find a date for the next meeting for December 4 or December 5, at 2:30 p.m.

The Finance Committee is also scheduled to meet on December 17, in order to discuss Proposed Amherst Affordable Housing Priorities Policy and the financial implications of proposed Percent for Arts Bylaw. Pam offered to start earlier if needed. Start time left to be determined.

7. Update on the preparation and schedule for the Major Capital Investments Listening Sessions

Griesemer noted that preparations are in process, with the Listening Sessions starting on December 3. Many people are being very dedicated to preparing for these sessions.

8. FY 21 budget process and Finance Committee schedule for 2020

Steinberg summarized the past process with meeting twice a month, and then in May likely meet weekly and probably twice per week in May to have time to meet with the departments. Schoen recalled that there was a request to do a longer meeting on the enterprise funds, and when that might be scheduled. Steinberg mentioned that there was also a request for additional information on water and sewer rates.

Schoen questioned the November 21 capital plan forum as noted on the calendar. Aldrich clarified that this is for the Amherst-Pelham Regional School (APRS) District.

9. Letter from APRS on Recharacterization of Funds

In reviewing the letter of 11-13-19, Steinberg noted there is a 60-day limit for action, whether to take action. Aldrich clarified that no action is required; this is a house-keeping item, given that the approval has already been granted, the projects are done, and the debt service is already in place.

Griesemer left meeting at 4:30.

10. Adjourn at 4:31

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

4th qtr June 30 2019 YTD Budget Report to FINCOM

CPAC Special Report FY20 Kendrick Park Recommendation – Final

FY2021 Municipal Budget Development Calendar DRAFT 10.7.19

Kendrick Park Information packet

Kendrick Park proposed order: **ORDER #20-45FY2020: AN ORDER AUTHORIZING THE DEDICATION OF KENDRICK PARK FOR PARK AND ACTIVE RECREATION PURPOSES AND APPROPRIATE FUNDS FOR THE REHABILITATION AND PRESERVATION THEREOF**

Regional School District Letter 11-13-19

Draft minutes by Martha Marteney during the meeting. Edited by Schoen based on video.
Approved 11.26.19