



TOWN OF AMHERST
Special joint meeting of the Town Council and the Finance Committee

Tuesday, July 7, 2020
2:30 p.m.

Meeting took place via Zoom: <https://amherstma.zoom.us/j/98604501462>

Video of this meeting:
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCnjhMYHUcZMCfGbukz05DhA/videos>

Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting

1. Call to Order

Finance Committee voting members present: Andy Steinberg (Chair), Lynn Griesemer, Pat DeAngelis, Dorothy Pam, Cathy Schoen. Non-Voting Members present: Robert Hegner, Marylou Thielman, Sharon Povinelli

Town Council Members: Mandi Jo Hanneke, George Ryan

Others: Paul Bockelman (Town Manager), Guilford Mooring (Superintendent of Public Works), Amy Rusiecki (Assistant Superintendent of Public Works), Sean Mangano (Finance Director for the Town of Amherst), Athena O’Keeffe (Clerk of the Council), Angela Mills (Minute taker), Toni Cunningham

Steinberg called the Finance Committee to order at 2:30 p.m. Steinberg reviewed the agenda. Steinberg did a sound and video check for each member of the Finance Committee.

Griesemer called the Town Council to order (seven Councilors present) at 2:33 p.m.

2. FY21 budget: Public Works and Enterprise Funds

Presentation by Mooring and Rusiecki. Mooring answered the questions submitted by members of the Finance Committee and he explained the snow and ice budget.

Mooring invited questions from the Finance Committee members. Schoen and Hegner both asked questions on behalf of the Finance Committee, building on questions sent in advance of the meeting.

Schoen asked about Full Time Employee (FTE) head count for DPW and whether that number has gone up or down in the past few years. And how people were counted across functions.

Schoen asked about the number of vehicles. Mooring answered with discussion of the different classification of machinery and trailers and referred to the spreadsheet provided to the Committee.

Hegner asked questions about employees shared between departments and how DPW allocated their time to arrive at budgets. Mooring answered that people were assigned to tasks and the accounting roughly tracked their workweeks over time.

Phase II storm water program. Hegner asked about upgrades and replacements to the system amidst a pandemic and decrease in overall Town revenues. Mooring estimated that the needed expenditures start at \$1 Million and could go up from there.

Hanneke asked about reimbursement from schools for the Town's upkeep of community field and surrounding recreation areas. Mooring addressed the crossover of shared facilities, memorandums of understandings (MOUs), and various agreements.

Hanneke asked about snow and ice schedules for DPW employees.

Schoen asked about pothole repairs and any specialized equipment designed for holes. Mooring responded with the equipment DPW uses for potholes and explained this required two vehicles and teams for the asphalt..

Griesemer asked about "citizen work requests" mentioned in the budget book. Mooring responded with the explanation of "See, Click, Fix" online reporting system and how it works online and in the app on peoples' phones. Mooring further explained that often people are reporting issues that are already part of a larger work order or project.

Griesemer asked about how DPW worked with Eversource and other utility businesses/services. Mooring explained how they triage emergency issues and how they share responsibility.

Griesemer asked about DPW headquarters and what modifications and repairs needed to be made to keep it functioning. Mooring described the areas of severe deterioration.

Ryan asked about cemeteries. Steinberg followed with a question about whether the Town of Amherst needed to be in the cemetery business. He noted that the most recent report mentioned only five years of space left in the existing public cemeteries.

Hanneke asked about paving budget and the projected projects list, noting we do not seem to plan on many miles per year of road repair. . Mooring responded that it costs \$1 Million to pave a mile of road. Mooring mentioned that DPW started sealing cracks in roads again.

Griesemer asked about DPW headquarters. Mooring responded that there are leaks in the roof that need to be mended immediately.

De Angelis asked about legacy private roads. She asked if property owners actually understand that they are now responsible for their own plowing.

Steinberg asked about sewer funds. Mooring explained growing pains and aging infrastructure. Mooring mentioned the gravity belt thickener and how it has to be replaced soon. Re-use water turned into revenue resource. Mooring would like to look at water and sewer as one topic. Mooring answered questions about sewer line expansion and ratepayers and how people connect to the system and begin payments.

Hanneke asked about why a mower was purchased with water funds. Mooring explained how and why the mower was purchased out of water funds. Water and Wastewater both have one mower each and are responsible for mowing at their sub-stations. Rusiecki mentioned the twenty-one pump stations and wells with land that need to stay mowed.

Steinberg turned to the water fund part of the budget. Schoen asked about list beyond Centennial Plant and how that would be funded. Questions were asked about Centennial Plant and whether solar power had been investigated. Mooring replied this would come later, but was in the work request for the technical study.

Solid Waste was the next topic for discussion. Mooring noted that if you contract out for solid waste services, then, the Town loses another source of revenue. Schoen asked about the new front loader and where it is reflected in the budget. Mooring discussed the price structure increases set by the State of MA. The grant is included in the budget – there was a one-time reduction in the reserve fund for the Town share of the purchase. This Fund has the smallest margin and low reserves.

3. Budget review and recommendation process

Transportation Fund discussion was started by Steinberg. Aldrich answered that on the revenue side we are \$200,000 in deficit. Reallocated transportation workers to COVID related responses. Mangano added that the transferred employees might be paid out of CARES Act funding.

Steinberg asked about PVTA funding and if the Colleges and the University will pitch in to help close the gap. Aldrich noted that ridership has gone down and will impact the PVTA funding. Bockelman noted that CARES funding has helped PVTA recently.

Schoen asked about OPEG contributions and increases in parking permit fees. Mangano responded and focused upon indirect costs and parking fees. Mangano also noted that he and staff plan a review of fees in the Fall. Bockelman spoke to the questions regarding the potential for building a parking garage downtown behind CVS.

Mangano and Bockelman answered the Council members' questions regarding the staffing of Puffer's Pond.

Steinberg thanks Mooring and Rusiecki for their time and expertise.

Steinberg reviewed the upcoming budget discussions.

Five-minute break. Steinberg checked to make sure that they had a quorum.

Griesemer adjourned the meeting of the Town Council at 4:32 p.m.

Schoen asked about Parking Enforcement workers and from which fund they are paid. Bockelman responded this staff appears in the Police budget.

Finance Committee members discussed changes to the funding of the Police Department. Conversation referenced the Special Town Council Meeting on Public Safety held on July 6, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. via Zoom platform. Members agreed that all stakeholders needed to be asked for their input before making changes to the funding of the Police Department. Steinberg asked members to direct their questions to him and he will submit a list of questions to the Town Manager.

Steinberg thanked Theilman for doing the work on the School section of the budget completed for the Finance Committee. Steinberg promised to share other models of budget reports with the members of the Finance Committee.

Each Finance Committee member volunteered to do a different segment of the budget report. Drafts will be shared amongst Committee members.

Mangano asked members to submit their questions in advance of the Thursday's upcoming meeting since the agenda is packed.

Hegner asked about the timesheets and time clock system for DPW. Aldrich and Mangano responded. Snow and ice funds and staffing schedules during snow and ice emergencies were discussed. Theilman asked follow-up questions regarding the overtime pay for staff.

4. General Public Comment – None.

5. Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance – None.

6. Meeting adjourned 4:57 p.m.

LIST OF DOCUMENTS AVAILABLE IN THE ONLINE PACKET AT THE TIME OF THE MEETING:

2020-07-07 Finance Committee agenda

Questions submitted in advance and Staff answers were provided to the Committee during the meeting. These will be posted for the next meeting

Draft Minutes prepared by Angela Mills, July 20.

Final approved minutes August 24, 2020