



TOWN OF AMHERST
Finance Committee
Tuesday, July 16, 2020
2:30 p.m.

Meeting took place via Zoom: <https://amherstma.zoom.us/j/98865882386>

Video of this meeting: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-finance-committee>

Minutes of the Finance Committee Meeting

Finance Committee members present: P. De Angelis, L. Griesemer, D. Pam, C. Schoen, A. Steinberg (Chair); Non-Voting Members present: R. Hegner, S. Povinelli, M. Thielman

Committee members absent: none

Others: P. Bockelman (Town Manager), S. Aldrich (Comptroller, Staff Liaison to Finance Committee), S. Mangano (Finance Director for the Town of Amherst), A. Mills (Minute Taker)

1. Call to order

Recognizing a quorum, Steinberg called the meeting to order at 2:34 p.m. Steinberg did a sound and video check for each member of the Finance Committee.

2. FY21 budget; Review and finalize report, review and recommend order

Steinberg acknowledged the draft order that had recently been added to the packet online for this meeting. 04B initial motion that the committee recommends FY21 04B as drafted in the Finance Committee packet. Steinberg asked a member to make the motion.

Schoen asked a question about parliamentary procedure and proposal of the amendment.

MOVED: Griesemer moved to adopt the Town Manager's budget FY21 04B. Seconded by De Angelis.

Steinberg asked Bockelman about the proposal made at yesterday's Finance Committee (July 15) meeting to freeze the hiring of two positions within the Amherst Police Department. (Schoen had initially proposed cutting two positions but was advised this would not allow funding for a shift in hiring if this was the goal. A freeze was suggested as a path to allow time to address staffing.)

Bockelman summarized what was discussed at the Finance Committee meeting. In summary, there was a movement towards an amendment made to put a hold on filling two upcoming vacancies until a full review of police services could be completed in the near future.

Schoen asked follow-up questions and noted this to allow time and financial support for potential alternative staffing. The wording of the motion was revised to include this intention. De Angelis supported the amendment with a deadline for Council action of January 21, 2021.

Steinberg asked Schoen if the motion should be voted upon before voting upon the budget as a whole.

De Angelis noted that the motion would reduce the Police Budget by two full FTE police officer positions. De Angelis wanted to see the motion voted upon as a symbolic act – a beginning of a shift in the composition of public safety staffing. Steinberg asked if there was a way not to reduce the budget but to direct those funds into a reserve so that the monies remain available. If the budget was reduced that, in turn, reduces taxation. Pam noted that unfilled positions are not new and often happens in budgets. Pam supported holding the two Police positions in abeyance – with funding for potential alternative staffing..

Griesemer stated that the Charter intended for the Council to be specific about the program for the budget.

Aldrich noted that this motion, or amendment, needed to be separate from a vote to approve the FY21 budget as written.

Mangano asked if it was a recommendation to the budget. The Finance Committee can recommend a budget but cannot be voting upon conditional budgeting. The constructing of an alternative motion continued.

Pam noted that the report should reflect that this motion would not impinge individuals who are already in the hiring pipeline for the Police force.

Povinelli noted that “the Town” is too vague a part of the motion. Committee members worked on changing the wording of the motion to address concerns.

Aldrich asked why this has to happen from the Police Department budget. Schoen asked if the police budget could only cover police officers.

Pam stated that the Finance Committee never asked the Police Department how many hours were spent on mental health calls.

Aldrich spoke as a resident; she expressed that in her opinion as a Town resident, that the Finance Committee was holding the Police budget hostage with this hiring freeze. Theilman responded that this motion could be seen as targeting the Police Department.

De Angelis stated that she wanted to target the Police and not because they are unprofessional. De Angelis wanted to examine the Police and the treatment of people of color. De Angelis noted that she was listening to the voices of the community of color.

3:35pm De Angelis took a break from the meeting.

3:42pm De Angelis returned to the meeting.

Povinelli noted that the budget decisions should remain financial. Povinelli stated that political statements should not be part of the budget process.

Pam expressed that a budget is, in fact, a political statement about the values of a community.

Steinberg asked the non-voting resident members to vote. Non-voting members: Hegner would vote YES if he could vote. Thielman would vote yes. Povinelli expressed confusion at the idea of a non-voting member voting. She chose to abstain. Steinberg noted that Residents have suggested that non-voting members should give their opinion because they put in equal time as Councilors. Theilman recommended an expression of support by non-voting members instead of actually voting.

MOVED: Griesemer moved to remove current motion from floor. Seconded by De Angelis.

MOVED: Schoen moved to recommend to the Town Council that the approval of the budget be made with the explicit understanding with the Town Manager that two upcoming anticipated vacant positions in the Police Department's budget not be filled until the Town Manager, in consultation with the Town Council, and the Residents of Amherst, has fully explored alternative options of providing services and presented the results to the Town Council no later than January 31, 2021. De Angelis seconded.

VOTED: (5-0) De Angelis voted yes. Griesemer voted yes. Pam voted yes. Schoen voted yes. Steinberg voted yes. Unanimous vote.

Input from resident non-voting members: Hegner said yes. Theilman said no, has nothing to do with community-wide discussion. Theilman expressed her reservations with the decision to tie-up the vacancies. Povinelli abstained.

MOVED: Griesemer moved to recommend that the Town Council approve the FY21 Operating Budget as recommended by the Town Manager according to Order 21-04B. Seconded by Schoen.

VOTED: (5-0) Schoen voted yes. Pam voted yes. Griesemer voted yes. De Angelis voted yes. Steinberg voted yes. Unanimous vote.

Non-voting members' statement of support: Theilman said yes. Hegner said yes. Povinelli said yes.

MOVED: Schoen moved to recommend that the Town Council rescind the 1-month budget for July 2020 as approved by the Town Council on June 15, 2020. Seconded by Griesemer.

VOTED: (5-0) Pam voted yes. Griesemer voted yes. De Angelis voted yes. Schoen voted yes. Steinberg voted yes. Unanimous vote.

Non-voting members' statement of support: Hegner said yes. Povinelli said yes. Theilman said yes.

Water Fund Order – Borrowing bond authorization that would require 2/3 vote of Town Council. Superintendent Mooring provided memos to explain in depth the debt service and the borrowing required for funding of capital projects. Finance Committee members asked questions. Questions included the timing of the borrowing and the timing of authorization.

Theilman asked about gravity belt thickener. Mooring noted that the memo asked for funding to construct and install.

Steinberg asked questions regarding the Centennial water plant. Solar energy was discussed as part of the plan. Mooring stated solar was not part of the amount being requested. Griesemer noted that Centennial is not located in Amherst and therefore is not subject to zero energy bylaw specifications.

MOVED: Griesemer made motion to approve borrowing as detailed in FY21-09. Seconded by De Angelis.

VOTED: (5-0) Griesemer voted yes, De Angelis voted yes. Schoen voted yes. Pam voted yes. Steinberg voted yes. Unanimous vote.

Non-voting support: Hegner said yes. Theilman said yes. Povinelli said yes.

MOVED: Schoen made the motion FY21-11 optional tax exemptions. Griesemer seconded.

VOTED: (5-0) Schoen voted yes. Griesemer voted yes. Pam voted yes. De Angelis voted yes. Steinberg voted yes. Unanimous vote.

Non-voting members' statement of support: Hegner said yes. Theilman said yes. Povinelli said yes.

Steinberg spoke to Finance Committee about the draft report to the Town Council. He asked for feedback and input for the final report.

3. Public comment – None.

4. Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance

Schoen asked for clarification on the appendices. Schoen asked for direct links to the longer document to the budgets on the website as part of the Town Council packet.

Steinberg mentioned that this had been an extraordinary budget year. Steinberg thanked all members of the Finance Committee for their hard work. Griesemer particularly thanked the resident non-voting members for setting a precedent on service to the Town of Amherst residents. She thanked Marylou Theilman for teaching the Councilors what to do.

Pam thanked Steinberg for the leadership as Chair of the Finance Committee. Pam thanked Schoen as Vice Chair.

Steinberg noted that he would schedule another Finance Committee meeting after the end of year report had been received from Aldrich.

Review of the procedure would follow the year-end support.

De Angelis left the meeting.

Schoen mentioned the idea of changing the way to set water rates for future Finance agenda discussion.

5. Meeting adjourned at 4:37 p.m.

List of documents available in the online packet at the time of the meeting:

2020-07-16 Finance Committee agenda

2020 July Centennial WTP borrowing Memo DPW

2020 July GBT borrowing Memo DPW

2020 July Reuse water borrowing Memo DPW

2020 July Well number 4 borrowing Memo DPW

CO FY21 – 04B Full Operating Budget 20201

CO FY21 – 09 CAPITAL PROGRAM BORROWING AUTHORIZATIONS

CO FY21 – 11 Acceptance of Optional Tax Exemption

Finance Committee report 7.20.20 DRAFT3

REVISED 1) FY2021 GRID FOR BUDGET WITH FINCOM (VOTES) TO TOWN COUNCIL

(working copy)

Draft minutes: Angela Mills, July 20, 2020

Revised and final approved. August 24, 2020.