



Finance Committee

May 13, 2021 1:20 p.m.

Virtual Meeting

Minutes

For Recording Finance May 13, 2021: [Amherst Media - YouTube:](#)

Pursuant to Governor Baker's March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, this meeting of the Finance Committee is being conducted via remote participation.

Members participating remotely: De Angelis, Griesemer, Pam, Schoen, Steinberg, non-voting members Hegner, Kubiak, and Sheffler

Members absent: None

Others participating remotely: Finance Director Sean Mangano, Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Comptroller Sonia Aldrich, Recreation Director Barbara Bilz, Recreational Department Assistant Donna Woods, Fire Chief Tim Nelson, Police Chief Scott Livingstone, Emergency Dispatcher Michael Curtin, Police Captain Jeff Olmstead, Assistant Fire Chief Lindsay Stromgren, Police Captain Ronald Young, Police Captain Gabriel Ting, Library Director Sharon Sharry, Clerk of the Council Athena O'Keeffe, and Minute Taker Scott Belden

1. Call to order

Steinberg apologized for the delay.

Steinberg declared the presence of a quorum, called the meeting at 1:25 PM, confirmed all participants could hear and be heard, and announced audio and visual recording.

2. Budget Review

Recreation

Mangano introduced Recreation Director Barbara Bilz and Customer Assistant Donna Woods.

Bilz spoke about the department's accomplishments during the year despite the pandemic. She expressed thanks to her staff and the commission for their help in continuing that success. She spoke about efforts to increase the social media presence, and meeting the virtual and in-person programming needs of the community. Bilz noted the rebranding as Amherst Recreation, which she noted is a positive move for identification in the community.

Steinberg asked about the transition out of COVID restrictions, the ability to get part time staff, community outreach, and about steps and challenges looking ahead.

Bilz spoke about the challenges of finding part-time staff and outreach to UMASS and former employees as potential applicant pools.

Members asked about the following

- Summer camps and hesitancy of families to sign up
- Use of American Rescue Act funds
- Hiring summer interns
- Fee subsidy accounts
- Enrollment on track for summer camps
- Pool schedule for the summer
- Golf courses
- Wading pool will be open this year

Schoen praised Bilz responsiveness, willing to devote extra time, and leadership. Reflecting the fact that Bilz will be retiring, Griesemer expressed gratitude to Bilz for her work for the Town over the years.

Library

Sharon Sharry, Library Director, spoke about the FY2022 Library budget. She expressed gratitude to all donors and noted increased budgeting for reliance on fundraising for recreational events.

Steinberg noted his wife works for the Library and consulted with the ethics community to determine that he can continue to participate in the discussion, unless a decision by the Town Council would affect his wife's wages.

Griesemer asked about the Personnel Board's updated wage scale; Bockelman responded that the Town has been working over the past several years to incrementally increase the lowest wages to reach \$15/hour that will be statewide minimum soon.

Griesemer asked about part-time employees; Sharry responded that the library is decreasing reliance on part-time staff.

Schoen asked how many non-benefited employees there are and how that affects health insurance costs. Sharry acknowledged that those working fewer than 20 hours do not receive health insurance nor employer paid pension benefits.

Schoen asked about fundraising goals and if the library would be open all year. Sharry answered there was a proposal to re-open June 14th, but that the process will be slow. She did not provide details.

Pam asked Bockelman about buying back time to improve pension benefits. Bockelman replied they could only if they were eligible, and that those pension benefits are controlled by the state. Bockelman noted this would not apply to part time employees.

Schoen asked if all library employees are covered by Social Security or paying into Medicare. Mangano responded that they and the Town as employer are paying into Medicare but not Social Security.

Police, Animal Control, and Dispatch

Steinberg stated the meeting was part of routine budget review procedure, and did not have to do with the Community Safety Working Proposal, and that a future meeting would address that issue on May 27. He reiterated this is specifically about the Police Department budget.

Dispatch/Communication Center

Livingstone spoke about state grants for dispatch training.

Curtin mentioned losing funds for the hazmat dispatch, which was used previously to buy equipment.

Livingstone mentioned personnel changeover at the dispatch center and the difficulties in filling openings and spoke about a backup dispatch center.

Mangano posed a question about CRESS (Community Response for Equity, Safety, & Service) cooperation in the future, but agreed to discuss it at a later time. Griesemer and Steinberg agreed.

De Angelis brought up the issue of BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) feeling limited in engagement with police, and how this would impact the communication center. Livingstone replied that they are trained to filter specific calls, but that police do not often know whether a situation is a mental crisis type call. Curtin stated they do receive specialized training for mental health crisis type calls.

Schoen asked if an increase in calls and a new workforce would affect dispatch calls and the resources needed by the department. Curtin replied that the dispatch has a flow chart to address the various different kinds of calls. He also noted that dispatchers are often on the phone for lengthy conversations with residents seeking help – sometimes just to talk and relieve concerns. If there were an alternative service for referral, this could free up time for emergency and urgent calls. Thus, the existing staff might be able to handle a higher volume of calls.

Hegner asked about calls from Hampshire College and whether that has increased costs for the Town, and if Hampshire College was providing any sort of reimbursement. Curtin replied that many of the issues had been addressed, and that impact from the calls has been minimal. Livingstone reiterated that the impact has indeed been minimal.

Griesemer asked about UMass emergency calls. Curtin responded that many of the calls directly went to them, and transferred them to UMass as necessary. He mentioned a great working relationship between the APD and the UMass police department. There has also been a decrease during COVID.

Animal Welfare

Livingstone provided a brief overview of the Animal Welfare budget, noting this is staffed by one long-time person, dedicated to her work.. He spoke about a drop in dog licensing due to COVID, enforcement of leash laws at the recreational areas in town, and the possibility of an internship program.

Schoen asked a question about leashing laws and what constitutes a violation in different contexts, and whether there could be a better way to raise awareness of the specifics of the law to the public. Livingstone responded that this issue was being discussed, and that different solutions have been proposed.

Police

Livingstone spoke about department accomplishments in the past year and future projects, the COVID ambassador program and how to best respond to citizen's concerns regarding COVID questions, spoke about the Restorative Justice Program, which aims to keep individuals out of the prison system, working with various local crisis programs and Craig's Doors. He spoke about goals towards diversity and community engagement.

Livingstone spoke about the CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) approach, wanting to expand on that group to address quality of life issues throughout the town. He provided an

example of working with land-lords to provide for bushes and other natural dividers to prevent larger outdoor gatherings and parties in neighborhoods.

Schoen asked about overtime percentages. Livingstone said have been at the “usual” level – around 10%. Mangano responded that he and Aldrich would address that question in the Question/Answer document prepared for the Finance meeting. Schoen asked a follow up about next year’s projection with a smaller staff. Mangano replied there was a bit of uncertainty about what next year will look like.

Pam asked a question about overtime getting out of control and if the vacancies in the police department will result in more overtime once life returns to normal. Livingstone replied that it might result in more overtime, and that he anticipates the upcoming fall to be very busy.

Hegner spoke about active shooter training for Town staff.

Public Comment: Russ Vernon-Jones commended Livingstone on their collaboration, and provided some figures on what percentages of calls responded by community safety groups.

Public Comment: Owen expressed that the purpose of community safety programs is to ultimately provide an alternative to policing.

Fire/EMS

Nelson spoke about the department, which has risen to the challenges of the past year and continued to provide good service to the town of Amherst.

Nelson and Stromgren spoke about ambulance and CARES Act funds, equipment maintenance, paramedicine, OSHA regulations, an increase in fire calls, repair and maintenance of the North Fire Station, staffing, and the student force.

Schoen asked about staffing stress and whether reduced during COVID with fewer calls. Nelson replied, yes somewhat relieved but still “up to chin” rather than completely under-water.

Pam disconnected at 4:16 PM and reconnected at 4:17 PM.

Social Services

No Action Taken

Public Comment: Fire EMS

Matthew Sposito made comments regarding the necessity of increasing staff at the Fire Department, stressing the need for additional staffing. Staff working double shifts and overtime/injuries..

Lynnie Penza, Amherst resident, echoed concerns regarding staffing at the Fire Department and aging equipment.

The Fire chief noted the ladder truck is aging, with no current plans to replace because of the costs. He observed that with the Town permitting taller buildings in downtown, the ladder truck would be needed in the event of a fire. The Truck is not useful for UMass where fire in the large buildings would be more likely fought from inside.

4. Topics Not Anticipated 48 Hours Before the Meeting

None

5. Adjourn: Steinberg declared the meeting adjourned at 4:57 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Belden

Record of agenda packet materials and documents presented

Finance Committee Agenda 05.13.2021

Amherst Library System FY22 Budget Request Presentation 5-13-21

Links to FY22 elementary school and library budgets, Jones library questions and answers

Police and Fire Budget QandA 5.14.21

Minutes reviewed, edited and approved Schoen: 6/30/2021