



Special Joint Meeting of the Finance Committee, and the Town Council

May 27, 2021, 5:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting for meeting recording: [Amherst Media - YouTube](#)

Minutes

Council and Finance Committee Members Participating Remotely: Bahl-Milne, Brewer, De Angelis, DuMont, Griesemer, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, Steinberg, Swartz

Non-Voting Finance Committee Members Participating Remotely: Robert Hegner, Bernard Kubiak, and Jane Sheffler

Finance Members Absent: None

Others Participating Remotely: Comptroller Sonia Aldrich, Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Mike Curtin, Chief of Police Scott Livingstone, Finance Director Sean Mangano, Fire Chief Tim Nelson, Mary Beth Ogulewicz, Clerk of the Council Athena O’Keeffe, Minute-Taker Emily Reardon, Gabe Ting, Ron Young

CSWG Members Participating Remotely: Tashina Bowman, Darius Cage, Debora Ferreira, Pat Ononibaku, Brianna Owen (Co-Chair), Russ Vernon-Jones, Elisha Walker (Co-Chair),

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 Governance, Organization, and Legislation Committee was conducted via remote participation

1. Call to Order

Steinberg declared the presence of a quorum, called the Special Finance Committee meeting to order at 5:31 PM, and confirmed all members can hear and be heard

Griesemer declared the presence of a Council quorum, called the Special Town Council meeting to order at 5:31 PM, and confirmed all members can hear and be heard

2. Budget Review: Community Services: Social Services, Community Responder Program

Town Manager Bockelman presented the proposed budget for an expanded community responder program. :

- United in the goal of “the right response at the right time – reimagining community safety in Amherst

- New department – unarmed community responders for designated calls
- The relevance of adding a new department in this particular time – grant opportunities, community support, etc.
- Considerations for Community Responder Program – sustainable, adequate staffing
- Working assumptions for the program
- Timeline of program

Mangano presented on the program budget for FY22:

- Year one total \$475,000
- Staffing:
 - Part-year funding for 4 responders, assumed hire after February 2022, with health insurance benefits.
 - Full year for a director. This position would shift funds out of an economic director position to this program
- \$250,000 funds from ARPA and other source for training and vehicles
- Mangano noted the FY23 does not have sufficient funding yet to support this staffing level. He estimated it is \$300,000 to \$350,000 short.

Bockelman continued presenting on the following:

- Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP) role in the program to analyze call data and days of week/times of day by types of call. \
- Town applying to join Harvard Community of Practice, supported by the Kennedy School of Government Performance Lab which would begin in August 2021 focused on emerging community and crisis responder alternatives to traditional police.
- Challenges of the program – urgency for change, long term budget challenges, etc.
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion for the program
- Youth Empowerment Center plan – partnering with Amherst Regional School District’s Family Center
- Resident oversight board plan

Brewer disliked calling this “social services” because this program benefits the entire community, not just some residents.

Schoen said next year will be transitional and the Police Department is under budget for the third quarter with vacancies. She asked if they can dedicate that amount that is under budget for the Police Department to the program and suggested that it could go into reserves and come out as funding for the new program. Schoen also asked if they could use Cannabis Funds for this program.

Mangano said they could potentially use the Police Department money, but they are proposing to look at grant options before dipping into that money. He said some of the cannabis money could go to support this program as well as other mental health programs and substance abuse

education at the schools. Mangano also spoke about ARPA Revenue Replacement as a potential resource.

Schreiber asked about what the boundaries are with what community responders can do. He also spoke about the possibility of cross-training (a cop responding to a fire and vice-versa).

Ogulewicz said these positions would be centered around mental health responses, expertise with social work rather than law enforcement. She said responders are behaviorally based and would not act as law enforcement.

Livingstone said the mandates and licensing for police officers is extensive for Massachusetts, therefore it would be very difficult to cross-train. Nelson agreed, adding that compared to the South and Southwest, this state is a lot stricter with training.

Bahl-Milne said LEAP's website has 2 categories of calls, behavioral health and quality of life. She asked if they are doing both categories at the same time and if there is a sense of how much staff is needed. Bahl-Milne said racism is systemic and they cannot separate policing from racism in the community. She said investing in an Economic Development Director is important.

Livingstone said he sent LEAP all of their call volumes and they are currently looking through the calls to see what Amherst calls entail. He said it looks like 4 or 5 categories of calls with some that could be diverted to the Community Responder Program.

Hanneke asked why there are the 2 police position reductions for Community Responder positions only equating to about \$130K and not closer to \$200K. She asked if there are four open positions, would it be possible to move two salaries over to get closer to \$400K. She also asked if given the Community Safety Working Group's proposal of two 2-person teams per shift, is the plan to only have 1 shift per day.

Hanneke asked Livingstone what the minimum number is for people (police) needed for a 24-hour response. Curtin said right now there are up to 12, but they are supposed to have 15. He added that they could make it work with 9 people. Bockelman said the pilot program would be 2 people on at a time, with the possibility of part time employees to support weekend work.

Mangano said the \$130K is based on entry wages for police rather than more senior staff. Bockelman spoke about the typical salary scale for police/responders.

Ryan said he likes the collaborative approach of looking to other communities. He shared concern about a loss of the Economic Development Director. Ryan asked what educational incentives mean. Mangano said they were originally overbudgeted so that \$40K is not a loss.

Ross said he understands the need for a DEI director, but is not in favor of losing the Economic Development Director position. He said as Amherst looks at economic recovery, they need the Economic Development Director and it seems that the budget is already stretched to capacity.

Griesemer said a committee has already formed the thinking about community responders with possible 2 state funding opportunities they know of. She said grant funding is risky but gives the opportunity to build this program faster than the timeline. She added that she also does not support losing the Economic Development Director.

De Angelis said replacing that Economic Development position with a position that can heal the community seems more important right now. She said they need to address racism and that has much more value than anything else. She said waiting another year to get an Economic Development Director to get this program off the ground seems to be the most important investment they can make.

Pam disagreed that the budget is stretched and said she accepts this proposal with faith and confidence.

DuMont agreed with De Angelis about the Economic Development Director. She said Amherst is one of the very few communities that has a BID and Chamber and they provide economic development services. DuMont also suggested Ithaca for community safety/reparations because they have a new plan around that. She asked what the projected FY23 budget would be for this and how would it differ from the Community Safety Working Group budget.

Mangano said to maintain all the Community Responder positions, they would have to add \$300-350K to the budget. He said the pension cost is not anticipated in FY22, so the budget is higher in FY23.

Schoen said they potentially have 3 police vacancies going into FY22 and asked if it is possible to hold one of those positions for a year to see what the workload is and if there is potential for Amherst College to give some pilot money. She said there is no proof of concept for one person Economic Development Director, it is usually a collaborative effort. Schoen said she is in favor of redirecting the funds. A one-person position is not likely to be effective. Other town/cities rely on more team approach.

Bockelman said the surrounding colleges will walk down a similar path, noting that lots of calls from responders might be students which is something they could track and then go to the colleges with. He said for staffing, they must look at the timing and volume of the calls.

Bockelman spoke about the logistics of the DEI Director role, which would be someone already on the town staff.

Swartz said from what they have heard from people, there are some that do not feel comfortable calling the police. She asked when they can start looking at calls that just want responders and not cops and how quickly can the town take this information and start shifting things around to meet those needs.

Bockelman said the Community Safety Working Group wants a separate line, but he is not sure how that would be managed.

Brewer commented that they cannot depend on the colleges, and the Economic Development Director and Community Responder positions should not have been pitted against each other. She said the town has a very poor history of diversity initiatives and a standard job description will not get them what they want.

Hanneke asked for FY23, 24, and 25 where would they get additional funding. She also asked if there has been an analysis of where the surplus is allocated each year as there usually is a surplus in the budget.

Mangano said they are not predicting the number of positions, that number is estimated but not set. He said 2 to 3 percent is not a lot in an \$80 million budget. Aldrich said they budget all revenues very conservatively and try to constantly bid out things and get savings, but they can't have a budget deficit.

CWSG members joined to meeting after the initial 1.5 hour Town presentation/discussion:

Brianna Owen called the Community Safety Working Group (CSWG) meeting to order at 7:18 pm.

Walker said the impression of the CSWG was that they would be able to make a presentation and recommendation at the outset of the meeting. She said was very disrespectful to not include them in the initial meeting and unable to join the discussion.

Owen presented on the CSWG charge and purpose including (see presentation charts):

- Recommendation goals
- Historical context of white supremacy
- Red lining in Amherst
- Breakdown of police calls
- Town Manager Goals
- CSWG recommendations
- How CRESS was developed
- Continuing work of the CSWG
- CRESS budget compared to other town budgets

Ferreira said she is happy for the support by councilors, but it is strange that they were not in the room for the conversation and they are here to make full recommendations. She said they need to make the members of the community feel valued, and the Town Manager did not go far enough with his proposal. Ferreira said they need to be able to contact CRESS directly because people do not trust contacting the police. She commented that there also needs to be education and marketing money. She said this program needs to be 24/7, and only 5 staff members is not enough. She said there is currently no space that feels safe for BIPOC communities/families in Amherst.

Bockelman said they need the separate number out there as a special number to call through a trusted network. He said he is suggesting the pilot program and then assess what the need is from there which is where he differs from the CSWG.

Ononibaku said she really opposed the Economic Development Director position because it only benefits the BID and Chamber. She said the Economic Development Director in the past has not benefited the BIPOC community and she is still not satisfied with the Town Manager's proposal. Ononibaku added that a pilot program will set up CRESS for failure. She commented that CRESS is not a mental health treatment program and she has heard lots of excuses, but ultimately the CSWG was disrespected by being excluded from the meeting earlier. She said other resources are not working, it is a white space.

Bowman said the exclusion of the CSWG from the beginning of this meeting was racist and Amherst tries to be diverse but is not. She said diversity in health care is lacking. Bowman also spoke about past racial experiences in town and shared anecdotes of racial events that have happened to her in town. She said not having a seat at the table and having white people interpret their work is unacceptable. Bowman added that Amherst is failing the community of color.

Vernon-Russ said he did not hear a sense of urgency from the Council that many BIPOC people do not feel safe and will not call the police when in trouble. He said the Police Department has been functioning with 44 officers for the whole fiscal year and the Town Manager did not mention that he will be adding 2 positions to the police if the vacancies are funded. Vernon-Russ said they need more Community Responder positions for more time and the money is sitting in the police budget. He said CRESS responders can get working much quicker.

Owen asked if the CSWG is staying together past September. Bockelman said the CSWG charge will be expired when they deliver their next report, but he would invite members of the CSWG to work on the development of the program.

Owen asked why they are not utilizing Cahoots. Bockelman said Cahoots is a different, contracted model and the CSWG recommended an employee model rather than a contract model.

Owen asked what markers will be used to determine the success of CRESS. Bockelman said CRESS cannot be totally evaluated in year one and they don't know what the markers are yet.

Demetria Shabazz commented that the research the CSWG is pulling from looked at 2020 Center for American Progress reports. She said these reports look at LEAP and the Cahoots program. Shabazz recommended that the Finance Committee and the rest of the Council look at that report. She agreed with statements about the Economic Development Director, and that funding for this position can be shifted to support the DEI Director. She said diverse people bring in the special kinds of skills needed for a position like this and spoke about the role of the DEI Director, which can include economic development. Shabazz said research shows that reducing the need for police saves the town millions of dollars and the town should meaningfully involve the community in this program. She stated that the CSWG needs to remain to engage residents.

3. Public Comment

Noalanii Karakashian – Karakashian said these issue matters as someone who is a past resident and it was disrespectful to not invite the CSWG to this meeting. She said the Council is not diverse and Councilors are speaking on things that they do not know. Karakashian said the Council is inaccurately citing the work that the CSWG has done. She added that it is very hurtful to consider raising the police budget when police positions need to be decreased.

Amara Donovan – Donovan urged the Town Council and Finance Committee to adopt the full recommendations of the CSWG. She said the CRESS program will revolutionize BIPOC experiences in town for the better and it would begin the work of restoration. Donovan said the CSWG was disrespected by Councilors when they were unable to be a part of the safety portion of the budget presentation. She urged the Council to defund the police and invest in the BIPOC community. Donovan commented that the constant questioning of the CSWG research is a white supremacist tactic.

Allegra Clark – Clark said they need to do better as a town. She said they are not listening to BIPOC stories or given them the space to be heard. Clark said vacancies in police need to be transitioned over to the CRESS program. Clark shared research on the early impacts of racism, beginning in utero. She also shared research on the impacts of racially-charged police violence on education.

Zoe Crabtree – Crabtree said she noticed that the CSWG is not mentioned at all after August in the timeline of the Town Manager’s presentation and that is very concerning. She added that she does not trust that next year they will look at CRESS/pilot program and double that budget. Crabtree said there has been no mention of any other police positions frozen which is still an unanswered question.

Meg Gage – Gage urged everyone to be gentle and try to find some level of trust that everyone is doing their best. She said as a white person, her experience in Amherst is not the same as experiences of people of color in town. She said they must be patient and try to care about each other as human beings. Gage added that they need to support the recommendations of the CSWG and LEAP is a real opportunity for Amherst to move forward.

Ben Herrington – Herrington said on behalf of the Human Rights Commission, they are in full support of the CSWG recommendations. He said he was speaking personally as a resident, he commends the CSWG for their hard work and their courage to speak truth to power as BIPOC residents.

Marcie Sclove – Sclove said she is moved by this process. She said initially she was excited about how enthusiastic the Town Manager was at beginning of meeting, but when the CSWG entered the meeting she realized 2 hours went by without them being a part of this. She said as a white person, she is always learning the ways that intentions are good but that does not always lead to doing the right thing. Sclove commented that she appreciates Greisemer’s comments about grants and she agreed with Meg Gage that white residents have so much to learn.

Nadine – Nadine said the CSWG work is appreciated. She said from a legal perspective, when looking at budgeting it will cost more if the town of Amherst finds itself in a predicament like

Minneapolis. Nadine added that they have to look at the cross-benefit analysis and be proactive, not reactive.

Steinberg lost connection

Ash Hartwell – Hartwell acknowledged the impressive research and work by the CSWG and said they should recognize that there is a certain level of optimism that things will change, but they have to do it together. He said it is clear that there needs to be involvement with the BIPOC community. Hartwell said the goal must be to establish trust and consensus on how to move forward and it will take work on both sides.

Steinberg reconnected

Vira Douangmany Cage – Cage spoke in support of the CSWG proposal and funding the proposal 100%. She read a portion of the Town Council's resolution in the death of George Floyd and spoke about her son's experience as a member of the CSWG and in the Amherst community.

Walker asked about the budget allocation, stating it is insufficient. She said the implementation team, set by CSWG does not match the Town Manager's proposal and the CSWG is left out of the implementation team. Walker said research is available and stating that more research is needed when research has been done is confusing. Walker asked about the \$80,000 for antiracism. She said that all recommendations are equally important and is concerned about the implementation of the recommendations especially if the group is not involved in the process.

Ferreira spoke about not wanting to end the meeting because it is critically important. She asked why they aren't using Cahoots as a place to look at, has been in place over 30 years. She said CSWG has to be part of putting these recommendations into place and they must be involved every step of the way. Ferreira said if Cress is successful, there should be less funding to police. She asked the Town Manager to respond to the question of if CRESS is deemed successful, will it receive more funding.

Bockelman responded that they can learn from Cahoots. He said the mission of the CSWG was to provide advice to the Town Manager, then the Town Manager provides the budget to the Town Council. He said the Town Council will decide to approve the budget or not and the charge goes to September 1. He said it was never the intention for the CSWG to continue past 9/1, the time limit on the charge was purposeful. He said he understands the concern about fully funding the CRESS program and the ability to evaluate as a pilot program. Bockelman stated that all community responder programs have continued and have not been terminated, and he believes it will be successful in Amherst. He said they need to be looking objectively with statistics, so they are building the right model for Amherst.

Steinberg said the Finance Committee is required by the charter to make a recommendation on the budget to the Council and the Council decision is limited by the charter and by state statute to

all cities in the commonwealth. He said the Council can approve or reduce but cannot add to a funding line per state law and when the Council acts before June 30 it has to act within those limitations.

Owen reminded the Council that part of the CSWG charge was to engage the community. She said there is a clear lack of trust of government from BIPOC residents. She said the meeting is dragging out because the CSWG was left in the audience.

Walker clarified that the charge was specifically to make recommendations to alternative safety services and one of the recommendations was to continue the CSWG. She said it was intentional that the request is for it to not end and does not understand the intention of ending the CSWG. Walker said the CSWG members are the experts and they do not believe that a pilot will be successful. She said she is frustrated that the CSWG is being silenced and limited and reduced.

Ononibaku spoke about the process that the CSWG was invited to present the budget as a budget hearing. She said Steinberg never asked anyone to ask the CSWG questions about the budget. She said they have a Finance Director in this town advising on the CRESS program. She asked how four responders are going to work, adding that they are set up for failure. She said the Finance Director is a white man, and his job is protected. Ononibaku added that funding for special education is going to attorneys and \$100,000 is provided for golf course for white people. She spoke about comments about the Economic Development Director and said that Amherst is not a welcoming community. She said the management team should have done better to find BIPOC people in the field and the Finance Director is making a lot of money and giving bad service.

Vernon-Jones said he is well aware that the Town Council cannot increase a line item, but the Town Council can request a revised proposal from the Town Manager. He said he is asking the Finance Committee to request that the Town Council request the Town Manager to provide more funding and there are other ways to make this happen.

Bowman said the Town Council has the ability to not approve portions of the money. She said the Council has the ability to make change, it depends on if they actually want to. She said she doesn't last this long in CSGW meetings because there is a house full of children who haven't had dinner but is still here because this is important. Bowman said she is tired of not holding white counterparts accountable for lack of motivation and support and considers Vernon-Jones a co-conspirator to the BIPOC community because he holds his own community accountable. She said Vernon-Jones said he needs to work with other white people about addressing racism and hold them accountable.

Steinberg concluded by apologizing that the choices made about process were not right but made in good faith. He said they tried to start by having the CSWG presentation at the Council meeting and then asking the Town Manager to present his recommendation. He said if that was a bad choice I will take responsibility but thought it was a reasonable approach.

Walker said this is a very good example of the way the intention versus impact works. She said the intentions do not matter, what matters is the impact they have on the community. Walker added that it is problematic that the Amherst Police Department and Amherst Fire Department was brought into the meeting first.

Owen said it is helpful for leadership to be in the room when discussing the CSWG recommendations.

4. Items Not Anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in Advance

No Action

5. Adjourn

Owen moved, second by Ononibaku to adjourn.

Griesemer declared the Council meeting adjourned at 9:45 pm

Steinberg declared the Finance Committee meeting adjourned at 9:46 pm

*To join the Council meeting via Zoom teleconferencing: Go to <https://amherstma.zoom.us/j/99279237103>. To indicate you wish to make a comment click "raise hand". To join the meeting via telephone: Call (646) 876-9923 or (301) 715-8592; Enter webinar ID when prompted: 992 7923 7103. When prompted to enter your participant number press #; To indicate you wish to make a comment, press *9 on your telephone. During the public comment period, the Chair will recognize members of the public. When called on, please identify yourself by stating your full name and address.*

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented:

05-27-2021 CSWG, Council and Finance Committee Agenda

05-27-2021 Finance Committee Agenda

7.a. CRESS Budget Proposal – Salaries and operating costs only

7.a. CRESS details-8

7.a. CSWG Budget Committee-Cress Program Estimate of Cost- Final 4-21-2021 (1)

7.a. CSWG Final Report Part A

BUDGET PROPOSAL FOR CRESS DEPARTMENT

Budget Proposal For Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Department

Community Responder Program Budget Presentation 05-27-2021 FINAL

COMPARISON OF SALARIES

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