

MINUTES

CALL TO ORDER

Meeting called to order by Mr. Weiss at 6:31 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

Present: Gerry Weiss, Stephanie O’Keeffe, Diana Stein, Anne Awad, Alisa Brewer (6:39)

Absent: (none)

Town Manager Larry Shaffer

Water Resources Director Robert Pariseau, Finance Director John Musante

Paul Koss

OPENING REMARKS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Mr. Weiss offered condolences to Amherst Police Officer Ricky Arocho and his family for the recent death of his two-year old daughter.

Ms. O’Keeffe announced the Planning Board’s Zoning Subcommittee forum to be held Wednesday, June 18th at Town Hall and the Human Rights Commission’s annual community picnic on June 21st at Mill River.

Ms. Awad announced that the PVRTA Board had voted to raise fares from \$1 to \$1.25 for bus service and from \$1.50 to \$2.50 for paratransit service, to address rising fuel costs, and said there would be no service cuts.

Mr. Weiss requested donations for downtown flowerpots, and thanked *Promoting Downtown Amherst* for its \$500 contribution; and announced that the Taste of Amherst runs Thursday, June 19th to Sunday June 22 on the Town Common.

Ms. Brewer announced the construction work and detour planned to begin Wednesday, June 18th, on North Pleasant Street between Triangle Street and Massachusetts Avenue; and cited the web site RealClout.org as a resource for groups mobilizing to oppose the November ballot initiative to repeal the State income tax.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There was no public comment.

SELECT BOARD’S ACTION

Approval of Minutes

VOTED 3 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstaining, 1 absent (O’Keeffe, Stein, Awad supporting; Weiss abstaining; Brewer absent) to approve the minutes of the June 11th meeting without amendment.

Committee Reappointments

VOTED 4 in favor, 1 absent (Weiss, O’Keeffe, Stein, Awad supporting; Brewer absent) to reappoint Vincent O’Connor to the Community Preservation Act Committee for a term to expire June 30, 2011.

VOTED 4 in favor, 1 absent (Weiss, O’Keeffe, Stein, Awad supporting; Brewer absent) to reappoint Peter Jessop to the Community Preservation Act Committee for a term to expire June 30, 2011. It was noted that this would be his third term, and that his knowledge and experience would help to guide a committee with much new membership.

VOTED 4 in favor, 1 absent (Weiss, O’Keeffe, Stein, Awad supporting; Brewer absent) to reappoint Frank Wells to the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee for a term to expire June 30, 2011.

Water and Sewer Rate Increases

Discussion occurred about proposed new rates (20 cent increase for water; 10 cent increase for sewer,) and about the Town’s decision to read the water meter on June 30th of any resident concerned about being charged new rates for preceding days that would otherwise be included in the July 1st billing cycle. Mr. Shaffer noted that the Town had considered automated meter reading systems allowing all meters to be read the same day, but determined that the small benefit did not justify the million dollar expense. Resident Paul Koss reiterated concerns he raised last year about the billing system’s fairness, and asked that the rate increase be delayed so residents could learn more about it. Mr. Pariseau said that the cost difference between a meter read on June 30th versus an earlier day in the billing cycle would be from zero to \$9 for the average bill. It was noted that: water conservation by UMass increases Town water capacity but does not reduce system costs; and that the savings to UMass for the amount of the effluent water used in FY08 was expected to be about \$37,000, consistent with assumptions in last year’s Strategic Partnership Agreement. Ms. Awad asked for Town Counsel opinion on the legality of charging new rates for usage occurring prior to the effective rate change date.

VOTED unanimously to set the water rate at \$3.20 per 100 cubic feet and the sewer rate at \$3.10 per 100 cubic feet, effective July 1, 2008.

Sign Notes – Short Term Borrowing

Mr. Musante explained details of the \$855,000 Bond Anticipation Notes (BANs) covering \$340,000 of rollover debt for the Plum Brook Recreation Area and \$515,000 for exterior improvements to Town Hall; and the \$427,000 State Aid Anticipation Notes (SAANs) for the Haskins View conservation land purchase, which will be reimbursed by a State grant. Select Board signatures were needed on both. Ms. Awad declined to sign the BANs that included borrowing for Plum Brook, stating that she did not support that project, and Mr. Musante said that only a majority of signatures were needed.

SIGNED the short-term borrowing notes, with four signatures on the BANs (Awad abstaining) and five signatures on the SANs.

Ambulance Rate Increases

Mr. Shaffer explained rate increases proposed by Fire Chief Keith Hoyle, raising Basic Life Support service for Amherst residents from \$420 to \$455, and for out-of-town patients from \$455 to \$490; and for Advanced Life Support service for Amherst residents from \$520 to \$555, and for out-of-town patients from \$555 to \$590; and increasing the mileage charge from \$13 to \$15. He said the Amherst rates apply to Amherst residents regardless of where they are picked up, and likewise, the out-of-town rates apply to out-of-towners whether they are picked up in Amherst or in another town. He said the new rates are expected to yield approximately \$90,000 in additional General Fund revenue, and along with increased reimbursements from UMass, Amherst College and surrounding towns, help approach the goal of increasing ambulance revenue to 60% - 65% of expenses, up from 40%. Ms. Brewer suggested that the rates could be higher and that collecting as much as possible from insurance companies was appropriate and desirable. There was discussion of collection rates, write-offs and how both might be affected by larger increases. Mr. Shaffer said he would look into fee ceilings.

VOTED unanimously to adopt the new fee schedule for emergency medical services, effective July 1, 2008.

Town Meeting Wrap-Up Discussion

Ms. O’Keeffe suggested examining the Select Board’s portion of the Town Meeting process to identify areas for improvement in the future. She sought clarification on the role of Town Counsel in examining warrant articles; said some complex articles didn’t receive adequate consideration during short pre-Town Meeting Select Board sessions, and suggested that those lacking time-sensitivity might be required to meet specific preparation criteria for placement on the warrant or might be recommended for referral in order to benefit from a more comprehensive consideration process; that articles with “friendly” motions to refer might be handled more quickly by the Select Board; and that the approved budget be posted on the Town web site.

Ms. Stein said the false alarm bylaw might have a bigger deterrent effect with higher fines, and asked that its results be tracked; and said it would be helpful for Select Board members to receive each session’s Town Meeting script prior to arriving in the auditorium, allowing errors to be corrected.

Ms. Brewer said Town Meeting members and others assume the Select Board examines articles in greater detail than is sometimes the case.

Ms. Awad suggested that the Select Board receive quarterly budget updates.

Mr. Weiss suggested examining the budget process to see how it might be improved.

No action taken.

Summer Agenda Process

It was agreed that each Select Board member would create a list of four or five summer agenda priorities and submit the list to Kate by noon Thursday, June 19th, for inclusion in the packets. The lists will be discussed and prioritized at the next meeting.

No action taken.

Liaison Reports

Ms. Awad spoke of the “Young Hero” awards to be presented at the Human Rights Commission’s community picnic on June 21st. She said more than a dozen students from kindergarten through 12th grade will be recognized for actions including exhibiting extreme kindness or bravery, and willingness to confront bad behavior.

Ms. Stein said she has been attending Energy Task Force meetings as an unofficial liaison, and said the group will hold an energy fair on the Common to promote “going green,” and to highlight the Town’s progress in implementing the Climate Action Plan.

Mr. Weiss reported on the Committee on Homelessness seeking to partner with local agencies for an SRO study, and noted that the committee needs more members. He also said that as an attendee at *Promoting Downtown Amherst* meetings, he suggested that businesses create lists detailing contributions they make to the community which might go unnoticed, and that he would read those at Select Board meetings. He read one from PeoplesBank, which talked about having donated \$277,000 to Amherst organizations in the five years since the bank branch opened, and said the bank has long-term commitments for an additional \$110,000, and that more than 60 organization have received support to date.

Ms. Brewer said that the 250th Anniversary Celebration Committee would be raising money by selling items including t-shirts and tote bags at the Taste of Amherst. She also said the Chamber of Commerce would be having its new member welcome reception on Wednesday, June 18th, and suggested that the Town might provide informational materials for those new members.

No Action Taken

Liaison Assignments

The following assignments were made:

Weiss: Budget Coordinating Group, Committee on Homelessness, Community Development Committee, Council on Aging, Disability Access Advisory Committee, Economic Development Working Group, Personnel Board, Promoting Downtown Amherst

Awad: Cherry Hill Advisory Committee, Human Rights Commission, Kanegasaki Sister City Committee, LaPaz Centro Sister City Committee, Nyeri Sister City Committee, PVRTA, Public Art Commission

Brewer: 250th Anniversary Celebration Committee, Comprehensive Planning Committee, Economic Development and Industrial Corporation, Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee, LSSE Commission

O'Keefe: Campus Community Coalition, Conservation Commission, Economic Development Working Group, Joint Capital Planning Committee, Public Transportation Committee, Public Works Committee, Town Commercial Relations Committee, and Amherst Housing Authority, if that body will accept a liaison

Stein: Agricultural Commission, Board of Health, Community Preservation Act Committee, Design Review Board, and Amherst Redevelopment Authority, if that body will accept a liaison

Further consideration will be given to other committees, including the Planning Board's Zoning Subcommittee and the Parking Task Force, at another time. Mr. Weiss recommended primarily having only single liaisons to committees.

No action taken.

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

ICLEI Meeting

Mr. Shaffer talked about an ICLEI local sustainability meeting he had attended in Hartford regarding railroad utilization and the New Haven to Montreal line which runs through Amherst. He talked about the importance of keeping the local stop and of advocating for Amherst's interests in discussions of change and improvement to that line.

Feasibility Study Update

Mr. Shaffer gave an update on the feasibility studies for new space for the Amherst Survival Center and for a possible single-room occupancy (SRO) facility in town. Per the Survival Center, he said requests for proposals (RFPs) had been issued, responses had been received, and interviews were pending. Per the SRO, he said the Committee on Homelessness is seeking a local agency for the Town to partner with on the study and the project. He said that the unspent FY08 funds for both would remain available in FY09.

Street Issues

Mr. Shaffer gave an update on street issues, including the Lincoln Avenue neighborhood, Cottage and Taylor Streets, and Strong Street. He said that proposals for each area are being considered by the Public Works Committee, and other relevant boards where appropriate, and that recommendations would come to the Select Board. He said the report of the Lincoln Ave. speed cushion project was late but pending, and when finished, the neighborhood would be apprised of the findings and input would be sought for desired next steps. To address traffic volume, he said the Town is looking into banning commercial traffic in that neighborhood, and disallowing left turns from Route 9 eastbound on the Blue Hills Road, Dana Street and Lincoln Avenue. Ms. Brewer noted the difficulty of getting committees to meet in the summer, and requested that some action occur before school begins in the fall.

Bicycles on Downtown Sidewalks

Mr. Shaffer said he would report on policies for enforcing rules prohibiting bikes on downtown sidewalks at the next meeting. Ms. O’Keeffe suggested the issue be referred to the Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee for consideration and recommendations. Ms. Awad suggested including skateboards in such considerations. Ms. Brewer suggested also looking at the danger of bicyclists on the wrong side of the road, often riding in pairs with bicyclists on the correct side.

Inspections Department Update

Ms. O’Keeffe asked about the status of the new permitting software, and the effectiveness of closing the Inspections department to the public on Thursdays. Mr. Shaffer said the software system would be in place July 1st and that staff training is going well. He said that moving the department would occur in July or August, using portable offices and not the expensive reconstruction recommended by an architect. He said the Thursday office closure has been successful, allowing all inspectors to meet and review pending projects, and said that the new fire codes are creating challenges. Ms. O’Keeffe suggested soliciting feedback from the business community, or people with recent or pending permits, for opinions of the improvement efforts to date.

Mileage Reimbursement Increase

Ms. Brewer asked about mileage reimbursement rates for employees and volunteers who use personal vehicles in service of the Town. Mr. Shaffer said the current Town rate is 36 cents per mile; that research is being collected on rates used by local communities and the Federal government; and that he expects to make a determination on an appropriate increased rate and to implement that for July 1st.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:34 p.m.