



Finance Committee and Town Council

May 26, 2022, 9:00 AM

Virtual Meeting

Minutes

Pursuant to Chapter 20 of the Acts of 2021, this meeting was conducted via remote means.

1. Call to order, Review Agenda

Members participating remotely: Steinberg; Griesemer; Schoen; Walker; Miller; non-voting members: Hegner; Holloway; Kubiak

Members absent: none

Others participating remotely: Town Councilor Ana Devlin Gauthier; Town Councilor Jennifer Taub; Town Councilor Dorothy Pam; Building Commissioner Rob Morra; Facilities Manager Jeremiah Laplante; Planning Director Chris Brestrup; Health Director Jennifer Brown; Director of Senior Services Haley Bolton; Director of Veteran's Services Steve Connor; Town Manager Paul Bockelman; Assistant Town Manager Dave Ziomek; Finance Director Sean Mangano; Comptroller Sonia Aldrich; Clerk of the Council Athena O'Keeffe; Minute Taker W. Kaizen

Steinberg declared the presence of a quorum, called the meeting to order at 9:00 am, then confirmed all participants can hear and be heard, and announced audio and video recording

Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum of the Town Council, called the meeting to order at 9:04 am, and confirmed Councilors can hear and be heard.

2. FY23 Budget Review: Overall Budget Review

Steinberg briefly reviewed the budget review process

3. FY23 Budget Review: General Government and Public Safety

Jeremiah Laplante reviewed General Facilities; he said not much has changed since last year; there's been a decrease in the Police Department's electric bill; at Bangs there's been a water usage increase because the Musante Health Center has been much more active, which is good; the North Fire Station garage bay doors have been upgraded; various building access controls have been updated; they will soon repoint Town Hall; Bangs is being made more accessible; the 3rd floor of Bangs has been developed for CRESS; the big thing for FY23 will be HVAC improvements at various buildings

In response to member's submitted questions, he said:

- there is a plan to update the facilities report
- regarding deferred maintenance, they're focusing on larger projects
- he's always thinking about the town's climate goals and working directly with Stephanie Ciccarello
- a big disability access challenge is prioritizing needs, for both usage and finances; he's always looking for greatest need and the biggest bang for the buck

Griesemer asked about "abandoned" (unused) buildings owned by the town and said that we need a policy regarding whether or not we're willing to accept them and how to deal with them; Laplante said he's been trying to maintain the major utilities systems in these buildings as best he can; Bockelman said that most of these buildings were from the school system and we already owned them, along with the old Hitchcock Center and the clubhouse at Hickory Ridge; Ziomek said staff could do a better job communicating their vision for the future of these buildings, and that the decisions to mothball these buildings was deliberate, to save money; the land that they sit on is very valuable; Ziomek reviewed the history of the Hitchcock Center's relation to the town; Kubiak said we shouldn't be afraid to bulldoze old buildings; Walker asked if there was a property dispossession committee and Ziomek said that there is an informal staff committee, and that they will report to the council in the coming year

Schoen asked about the Musante Health Center paying rent to town (they do), the North Amherst Library's maintenance and utilities (it's paid by the library); Bockelman discussed the past and present use of various spaces at the Bangs Center.

Griesemer asked about replacing the roof on the Police Department and putting solar on it; Mangano and Laplante responded that this will happen next year, and that the solar assessment is taking place now

4. **FY23 Budget Review: Community Services**

Brown reviewed the Health Department's activities; she would like the town to continue its vaccine clinics, to continue its rapid antigen tests and would like to hire and train a public health nurse

Griesemer asked about having a full-time nurse; Brown said a full time nurse can do more outreach; Mangano said that there is money for a full time position through FY24 because of APRA funds

Hegner asked about declining childhood vaccination rates? Brown said that they have previously run a clinic working with the schools for new parents to the country and their kids, and she wants to bring it back

Bolton and members discussed the Senior Center's activities, including:

- transportation for seniors
- how ARPA funds will be spent
- managing medication to prevent nursing home admissions
- collaborating with Amherst Neighbors

- CRESS and seniors
- drug take-back programs
- keeping safe during COVID
- meals on wheels

Connor reviewed Veteran's Services and discussed with members:

- that the number of senior vets is going down but their needs are going way up
- working with CRESS
- the profile of vets in Amherst
- the difficulty of keeping track of vets in Amherst

5. **FY23 Budget Review: Inspections**

Morra reviewed Inspection Services and discussed in response to members questions:

- charging the colleges and university higher building inspection fees; Morra said if there's a price break, non-profits typically pay less
- how closely Inspections has been working with the CRC

6. **Overall Budget Recommendation and Report Process**

Mangano responded to a series of questions submitted by Town Councilor Mandi Jo Hanneke, and addressed the following:

- how making hard budget decisions means not adding needed funds to Facilities, IT, Recreation, Public Works and the schools
- "friends of" groups and their fundraising
- the money allocated for "additional programs" in the budget
- how leftover funds are allocated as part of the budgeting process
- the property tax levy this year
- reserve funds
- the impact fee from Marijuana and other fees
- supplemental taxes
- the UMass partnership agreement
- property tax vs. other taxes and their collection rates
- the regional school budget

Kubiak said we need an APRA spending plan and Mangano showed a document detailing where ARPA funds were spent

Schoen said that we need to figure out the cost of paramedicine training and if the possible savings that will come from this

Griesemer commented on the need to move ARPA funded positions to the operating budget as early as next year; she wants to use ARPA money for the schools and the new elementary school building project; Mangano agreed

Miller asked about how the town's use of ARPA funds fit with the state's mandated categories? Mangano said that there is flexibility, and that they've tried to focus on economic

recovery and other pandemic related issues; they weigh the impact of these funds before allocating them

Members discussed what items would be on the agenda and the order of the FC's next meeting, which will be their final FY23 budget discussion, as well as the general process for reporting on the budget to the full Town Council

7. Public Comment

Toni Cunningham, Owen Drive: spoke to formalizing the building disposition committee

8. Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in advance

None

9. Announcements and next agenda preview

Next meeting: 5/31/22

10. Adjourn

Steinberg declared the meeting adjourned at 11:57 am

Minutes prepared by W. Kaizen

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented:

05-26-2022 Town Council and Finance Committee Agenda