

Budget Coordinating Group
Amended Minutes
September 29, 2008

Location: First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

Attendance: Andy Churchill, Rob Detweiler, Patricia Holland, Chris Hoffman, Bonnie Isman, Brian Morton (co-chair), John Musante, Stephanie O'Keefe, Catherine Sanderson, Larry Shaffer, Andy Steinberg, Gerald Weiss (co-chair)

Others present: Martha Hanner, Bob Saul, Walter Wolnik

Agenda:

1. Public Comment
2. Brief Review of Committee Charge
3. Facilitation of Community Choices Committee Progress Report
4. FY 10 Draft Budget Calendar
5. News Affecting Budget
6. Member Reports from Home Committee/Board
7. Review Minutes
8. Date for next meeting

The meeting convened at 12:05 pm and was chaired by Gerry Weiss.

Weiss asked whether there was any public comment. Wolnik requested a report on the status and work of the Blue Ribbon Committee. Musante and Shaffer reported about the committee's progress. Its report should be ready by the end of the year. The competing demands on staff time have been the major impediment to completing it more quickly. Weiss pointed out that the committee serves two purposes. We hope that it will find ways to be more efficient and that it will assure the town that we are being efficient.

Weiss asked members to introduce themselves since there are two new members and several guests present. The committee charge for the Budget Coordinating Group was reviewed. It was agreed that the chair of the Regional School Committee should be deleted as a member since the two Amherst School Committee representatives are also members of the Regional School Committee. No other changes to the charge are needed.

Hanner and Saul reported about the work of the Community Voices/Budget Choices Facilitation Committee. They are the co-chairs of the Facilitation Committee. They explained that while the committee was presented with five budget scenarios by the schools, library, and town, the committee is presenting three budget scenarios to the public. Saul and Hanner described the committee as being informed and united, and described its plan to present the committee's analysis and the options it has initially identified to the public. They also described the process to obtain public comment by a questionnaire after presentations, at the public display at the Jones Library, and at the committee's web site, www.amherstchoices.org. Steinberg, the BCG liaison to the Facilitation Committee, commended the staff at the schools, library, and town for their efforts to provide information and options for the committee. He also pointed out that the report will not be available from the committee until December 1, which is later than

specified in the Committee Charge adopted by the Select Board. Morton asked whether there is consensus in the BCG to ask the Select Board to amend the charge to specify the new date and clarify that the committee has 10 members. The original plan had been that the Facilitation Committee would have 9 members. There was agreement to request that the Select Board make those changes.

The BCG discussed the mechanism, sequence and timing of the committee's report. It was agreed that the Committee will report to the BCG at noon on Monday, December 1 and the Select Board that evening. A question was asked whether the committee anticipated that there will be a consensus report or a majority and one or more minority reports. Saul responded that the committee is striving for consensus. O'Keefe, the Select Board liaison to the Facilitation Committee, said that she has been impressed by the dynamic way that the committee is working. Shaffer asked how the committee will use a nonvalidated survey. O'Keefe said that the survey is part of the education process and it will provide a measure of the community's "pulse." Churchill said that he reviewed the Power Point presentation the committee developed for forums and observed that it does not provide information about the burden on Amherst taxpayers relative to other communities nationally. Saul said that they could not include everything in the presentation, but included this in the Frequently Asked Question section of its web site.

Musante presented a proposed calendar for the municipal budget process for the FY 10 budget, beginning with a four board meeting on October 6, 2008. It incorporates input from the Select Board and the Finance Committee. Detweiler presented the proposed calendar for the regional and elementary school budgets. Steinberg and Morton said that final School Committee adoption on April 14 will not enable the Finance Committee to prepare its budget report for Town Meeting so that it is available to be reviewed during two weekends prior to the start of Town Meeting. Churchill said that they could possibly combine the budget hearings and the meeting to approve the executive budgets proposed by the Acting Superintendents. Detweiler will review and revise the schedule.

Steinberg asked whether we will have sufficient information from the legislature regarding the state budget to meet the proposed schedule. Musante suggested that we assume that the legislature will act in a timely manner for cities and towns to prepare their budgets, and that we see what the Governor proposes. Isman said that the library has not established a schedule for the 2010 budget process but that it will be similar to last year. They will want to include a lot of community engagement.

There was no news to report affecting the budget. There were also no reports from committees and boards. Musante reported that there will be three budget amendments at the fall town meeting relating to salary reserve transfers to operating budgets, from the transportation enterprise fund balance to the budget to support the bus outreach routes, and from the solid waste enterprise fund balance to pay for a settlement of litigation. He also reported on the certified 2008 balance in free cash and that the Finance Committee will move to transfer \$460,000 from free cash to the stabilization fund pursuant to the current fiscal policy. The Finance Committee will consult with elected boards and committees before proposing any change to the policy.

The next Budget Coordinating Group meeting will be on December 1, 2008.

Respectfully submitted,
Andy Steinberg, Finance Committee