

Amherst Finance Committee Minutes

April 8, 2010

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 p.m. in the first-floor meeting room, Town Hall.

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE

Andy Steinberg, Chair; Kay Moran, Vice-Chair, Marilyn Blaustein, Philip Jackson, Douglas Slaughter, Marylou Theilman, Bob Saul

STAFF IN ATTENDANCE

John Musante, Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Walter Wolnik, Daniel Melick

AGENDA

1. Article 26. Petition – Zoning Amendment – Four Unrelated Persons Definition, voted 7-0-0 to take no position

Melick presented Article 26, a petition to amend the Four Unrelated Persons Definition in the Zoning by-law to remove the language “not to exceed four,” thereby making the number of people unlimited except by the current zoning bylaws which define safe levels of occupancy. Melick argued that the current law is unjust, inconvenient, irrelevant, and ineffective. Moran asked if Mr. Tucker supported the amendment. Mr. Melick indicated that he was the most prominent person to support this amendment. Jackson asked if there were financial implications to the Town. Melick answered that it should create a more efficient system since Inspection and Health Department resources would not be spent to enforce the law. Mr. Wolnik made the point that the amendment might encourage more complaints, and also, that it is up to Mr. Melick to make the motion at Town Meeting. Ms. Moran motioned to take no position on this article. She stated that it is unclear whether there are financial implications.

2. Article 1 Reports of Boards and Committees – **voted 7-0 to recommend.**
3. Article 2 Transfer of Funds – Unpaid Bills **Voted 7-0-0 to defer until Town Meeting to determine if there are any unpaid bills.**
4. Article 3 Optional Tax Exemptions Voted **7-0-0 to recommend based on committee’s support for similar article in FY10.**
5. Article 4 Authorization of Compensating Balances – voted **7-0-0 to recommend based on committee’s support for similar article in FY10.**

6. Article 5 – FY 2010 Budget Amendments **Voted 7-0-0 to defer entire article until Town Meeting to determine if any transfers are necessary to balance the FY10 budget.**

Musante indicated that for Part A the only anticipated transfer is to public safety budget area in order to fund AFD contract. Finance Department is preparing Q3 budget-to-actual report. There was an unplanned special election for US Senate. A supplemental bill is working its way through the state legislature which would offset these costs. They are also looking at legal expenses for funding any shortfalls. The DPW budget is good due to a mild winter; Community Services may have a shortfall in veterans benefits, which may require a Finance Committee reserve fund transfer. For Part B, it is likely we will be able to move to dismiss based on forecasts and available funds.

7. Article 6 – Retirement Assessment **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend.**
8. Article 7 – Regional Lockup Assessment **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend.**

The town has not received a bill yet; however, the Hampshire County Sheriff indicates the assessment will be the same as the last two year (\$31,323).

9. Article 8 – Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Assessment Method **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend.**

At the recent Four Towns Meeting, all four towns agreed with continuing the agreed-upon assessment calculation.

10. Article 9 – Conservation and Development **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$745,073.**
11. Article 9 – Public Works **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$1,941,540/**

Saul asked about the 27% increase in Trees line item; per the notes in the Town Manager's budget, this is due to transfer of resources between departments. It was noted that the committee should explain all of the personnel changes being affected due to the retirement of Mr. Pariseau and departmental restructuring.

12. Article 9 – Public Safety **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$8,394,386.**
13. Article 9 – Community Services **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$1,474,725.**
14. Article 9 – General Government **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$6,037,195.**
15. Article 9 – General Fund Indebtedness **Postponed to next meeting (4/15).**
16. Article 9 – Library Services **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$1,541,736 in town tax support.**

This is a change from historical precedent. Since the total budget is at discretion of the library trustees, the committee felt it was more appropriate to only speak to the portion of the library budget that is funded by taxation. While Town Meeting traditionally votes the full amount, the committee felt it was appropriate that its motion only include the town's share, since the remainder comes from other sources and is not appropriated by town.

17. Article 9- Amherst Elementary Schools **Voted 6-0-1 to recommend an appropriation of \$20,407,534** (Slaughter abstains due to employment by ARPS.)
18. Article 9 – Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools **Voted 6-0-1 to recommend an appropriation of \$13,112,795 for Amherst’s share of the regional assessment and a total budget of \$27,962,907.** (Slaughter abstains due to employment by ARPS.)

The amounts voted are reduced amounts from previous amounts due to changes, e.g., teacher salary givebacks. A straw poll at the Four Towns meeting indicated that all four towns supported these reduced amounts. The regional school committee will vote next week on these new numbers.

19. Article 9 – Water Fund **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$3,791,975.**

There is \$411,616 in indirect costs appropriated in the General Fund. This enterprise fund is changing due to retirement of Mr. Pariseau and a reorganization of the DPW., xfer w/in DPW; unfilled and unfunded positions (reference Town Manager memo from last week); Steinberg emailed Musante – Musante answered that the point was to beef up the junior positions to distribute Bob’s positions. Bob’s retirement prompted discussion about succession planning. Using saving from Bob’s position allowed more resources for junior people to receive compensation for new responsibilities.

20. Article 9 – Sewer Fund **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$3,425,726.**
21. Article 9 – Solid Waste Fund Recommend **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$532,274.**

There was discussion whether long-term expense and revenue projections warrant maintaining this enterprise fund; implications of the eventual closing of the Northampton landfill.

22. Article 9 – Transportation Fund **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend an appropriation of \$874,051.**
23. Article 15. Acceptance of MGL 43D **Postponed until next meeting (4/15).**

Jackson, Blaustein and Saul were absent from meeting where this article was discussed and therefore would need to abstain. Theilman requests that a vote be postponed to afford them opportunity to review materials. Slaughter commented on the merits of the project and the financial implications of the article.

24. Article 16. Patterson Property – Option Agreement **Postponed until next meeting (4/15).**

Jackson, Blaustein and Saul were absent from meeting where this article was discussed and therefore would need to abstain. Theilman requests that a vote be postponed to afford them opportunity to review materials.

25. Article 17. Community Preservation Act

Part A Voted 7-0-0 to recommend \$284,100 for community preservation as listed in the warrant as an appropriate use of funds.

discussion regarding appropriateness of borrowing;

Part B – Recommend 7-0-0 \$500,000 to purchase Hawthorne property by borrowing; town meeting cannot amend CPAC recommendation (can only reduce, change or reject) ; requires 2/3 vote because of borrowing; appropriate use of funds;

Part C – Recommend 7-0-0 \$350,000 by borrowing for community housing;

Part D – Recommend 7-0-0 \$18,000 open space as an appropriate use; existing statute says that any obligation for debt can still be collected even if CPA is done away with; \$; state match, CDBG, timing of acquiring debt now; no payments until 2012.

26. Article 18. Olympia Drive – Disposition of Property **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend.**

It was noted that Town Meeting has voted many times to pursue affordable housing on this site; issue of conformance w/intended uses; authorizes SB to lease/convey to developer; danger of falling below 10% stock; investment of staff time

27. Article 19. Petition – Hire Energy Facilitation Outreach Worker **Voted 7-0-0 to not recommend.**

timing in light of other cuts; lots of resources on energy savings from the utility companies, web, etc.; energy fair on common; no lack of info; net zero as any improvements to homes wouldn't be new construction

28. Article 20. Free Cash – **Voted 7-0-0 to defer until Town Meeting.**

29. Article 21. Stabilization Fund – **Voted 7-0-0 to defer until Town Meeting**

30. Article 22. Accept Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40U, Collection of Unpaid Municipal Fees **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend.**

This article allows for a process to collect various unpaid/delinquent bills. Amherst doesn't have a big problem in this area. This allows for a non-criminal hearing process.

31. Article 23. Zoning Amendment – Master Plan Compliance. **Postponed until next meeting (4/15).**

32. Article 24. Zoning Amendment – Non-Profit Uses. **Postponed until next meeting (4/15).**

33.

34. Article 25. Zoning Amendment – University Drive Rezoning. **Posponed until next meeting (4/15).**

35. Article 27. Public Transportation and Bicycle Committee (Charge Amendment) **Voted to take no position.**

36. Article 28. General Bylaw Amendment – Open Containers **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend.**

37. Article 29 General Bylaw Amendment – Unlawful Noise **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend.**
38. Article 30. General Bylaw Amendment – Keg Licensing **Voted 7-0-0 to recommend.**
39. Article 31. Authorize the Select Board to Accept Right of Way on University Drive
Postponed until next meeting (4/15).
40. Next meeting and agenda – **There was no discussion.**
41. Minutes of March 4 and April 3 – Postponed until next meeting.
42. Miscellaneous – **There was no discussion.**

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Submitted by Philip Jackson, Acting Clerk