

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes**  
**February 17, 2011**

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. in the first-floor meeting room at Town Hall.

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Kay Moran (vice-chair), Doug Slaughter, Andy Steinberg (chair), Marylou Theilman. Absent: Phil Jackson, Bob Saul

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: John Musante, Town Manager; Sanford Pooler, Finance Director; Julie Federman, Health Director; Nancy Pagano, Senior Center Director; Maura Plante, Senior Center program director/services; Steve Connor, director, Central Hampshire Veteran Services; Linda Chalfant, director of Leisure Services and Supplemental Education; Barbara Bilz, assistant LSSE director; Janice Ratner

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION:

1. News affecting budget – nothing new

2. Fiscal Year 2012 budget development

Steinberg said Musante and Pooler will bring an updated projection of available FY 12 revenue to the March 3 meetings of the Budget Coordinating Group and the Finance Committee. At that point we may want to rethink our November budget guidelines. Steinberg said we should be prepared to look forward to FY 13 and beyond.

3. Community Services

Health

Federman said Amherst is one of 15-20 area communities getting ready to apply for a state planning grant to form a regional health district. Once that's done, they'll apply for implementation money. Pooling resources could improve services, for instance expanding immunization clinics. The state grant would require community assessments. A second effort is underway to maintain and improve rental housing stock, in cooperation with Inspection Services and the University of Massachusetts. Steinberg asked whether there've been problems with doing timely housing health inspections. Federman said they're keeping up pretty well, but she's now filling in for the loss of one inspection position in last year's budget cuts, which takes her away from other duties. One initiative might be educating new renters about being responsible renters. A code enforcement officer, a new position that's at the top of the Town Manager's list of budget restorations, would be very helpful in this effort. Slaughter asks about the proposed reduction in recommended appropriation for health supplies. Federman said she had to cut somewhere and wants to preserve staff; vaccines are provided by the state. Steinberg asked about the decrease in fines from smoking violations; Federman said fines for FY 11 are actually

zero; in FY 12, \$500 is estimated because Amherst will be rejoining a tobacco control coalition, which plans more compliance checks. She sees tobacco as a real threat to public health. There has been increased collaboration with other departments, most recently on housing initiatives with police, fire, inspections, and assessors. In the process, all are learning more about what other departments do and how they might collaborate in other areas.

### Senior Center

Pagano distributed the latest Senior Center newsletter, Senior Center brochure, and a packet of information about Senior Center services and funding. Her biggest concern is preserving a staff of at least three, one of which is an administrative assistant paid half by a state grant (\$20,874 in FY 11). For FY 12, the Governor proposed level-funding for elder services, which would mean decreased per capita funding to communities due to an increase in the number of seniors. She sees a need for elder day care, and for space for an elder fitness center. She's working on a parking proposal to make it easier for seniors to park downtown. She said Highland Valley Elder Services does not receive enough state and federal money to meet the growing demand for its home-delivered meal service. Its case workers are reassessing recipients to see if they still meet the criteria, which is concerning to Senior Center staff. The separate UMass meals-on-wheels is not affected, though it's a challenge to recruit volunteers to deliver meals to elders in their homes. Last year's reorganization has fostered increased communication and cooperation among department heads and other employees. The Bangs Community Center, where they're housed, has HVAC problems. Musante praised Senior Center staff for providing good services despite previous budget cuts. Staff members coordinate the senior tax write-off program for up to 30 eligible seniors who work in town offices. The tax abatement for eligible seniors has been increased from \$750 to \$1,000. Plante said the School Department is identifying opportunities for seniors to volunteer in the schools, some of which could be tax-work-off jobs. Musante thanked the Friends of the Senior Center for fundraising to support Center programs, agreeing to donate \$4,020 so that Center budget for FY 12 is level-funded. He intends this to be only a temporary solution and hopes eventually to replace it with town funding. Pagano said Amherst College and its students have also helped out a lot. The Elder Service Team, established in 2008, involves police, fire representatives who alert Senior Center and Health Department if they become aware of a senior in jeopardy.

### Veterans Services / Town Commemorations

Musante said this is a great example of regionalizing services, with eight towns from Worthington to Pelham participating in Central Hampshire Veteran Services. Connor said it's working. Each of the three veteran services officers has particular knowledge, skills and strengths. Outreach to returning soldiers is a challenge, since there's no direct way to find out who they are. He's connected with area social services coalitions, which aid in finding housing for homeless veterans. The aim is to identify needs "before things get out of control," he said. Central Hampshire Veteran Services has a Facebook page and a web site. His office is working on improving Memorial Day and Veterans Day commemorations, with more participants. Steinberg asked how Connor estimates the amount needed to provide services to veterans in the coming year. Connor

looks at what was spent in previous quarters. He pointed out that the state reimburses 75% of the Town's payments to veterans, a year and a half after it was spent. Musante has budgeted \$175,000 for veterans, but he expects it will be about \$25,000 more. Musante said assessments to the Central Hampshire Veteran Services are determined according to the town's population, minus college students (for whom there are separate veterans' programs).

### LSSE

Chalfant said LSSE serves about 42,000 people, both youth and adults. After-school programs provide a safe place to be and an alternative to crime. Special events promote tourism. In the current year they're looking again at whether to increase program fees and are seeking more business sponsors. LSSE is working with the School Department on a joint after-school program. There's currently a joint program with the school Nordic ski team. Musante said he and new School Supt. Maria Geryk share a vision of the schools as community centers. LSSE seeks grant funding. For FY 12, the loss of a position (which has been vacant for a year) will require more dependence on volunteers, Chalfant said. They will have 6.45 FTEs, close to the level of 6.7 in 1990, when far fewer people were being served. Chalfant said that staff cuts mean they will have to retrain volunteers more often – a loss of efficiency; also, it will mean somewhat less fee revenue. Theilman asked whether residents of other towns pay higher fees than Amherst residents; Chalfant said they do. Steinberg noted that figures in Appendix C to the manager's budget show enrollment in youth programs holding steady despite a decline in Amherst's school-age population. Moran asked about the note in the manager's budget, page 107, of a new citizen committee to explore options for Community Field and the now-closed War Memorial Pool; Musante said he is assembling a committee.

### LSSE – Municipal Pools

War Memorial Pool wasn't in operation last summer, and 91 children were placed on waiting list for swimming lessons, Bilz said. Cutting the pools budget by 2% for FY 12 will mean some reduction in part-time staff and equipment maintenance. There were no fee increases during FY 11. Indoor swimming lessons are now being offered at Totman Gym at UMass; which costs LSSE less (paid from the revolving fund) than the Amherst Regional Middle School pool did.

### LSSE – Cherry Hill Golf Course

LSSE took over golf course management in FY 07. In FY 11, revenue initiatives include several golf tournaments, and improvements are being made to the course. This year LSSE got a grant for a groomer to create cross-country ski trails. Revenues for FY 11 are behind projections, which Bilz attributes to the recession, competition, and last summer's high temperatures. Still, she's projecting a surplus for FY 11. FY 12 shows the entire salary of the golf course superintendent, whereas previously 30% of that salary was in LSSE. This makes the total budget increase by 3.7%, though everything else is decreasing. Winter programs will expand and other new programs are planned to bring in additional revenue. Musante said Cherry Hill continues to bring in sufficient revenue to cover all expenses, including benefits (except capital). About 1,500 people attended Winterfest last Saturday.

4. Government

Select Board/Town Manager

Musante noted that the entire staff of the Town Manager/Selectboard office (including him as manager) is new since last year.

Town Meeting/Finance Committee

No changes from FY 11. This budget does not include all the costs of Town Meeting, which are dispersed in other budgets.

General Services – postpones to a later meeting

Legal

The current litigation load is remarkably light, Musante said. Moran noted that Town Counsel services used by the library come out of this line in the Town budget, not from the library budget.

5. Member reports – liaisons and committees

Theilman said the Amherst-Pelham Regional School Committee last night received the Superintendent's budget. Leverett and Pelham are both concerned about funding their assessment. The four-towns meeting March 4 will be in Leverett.

Steinberg said the Amherst School Committee is considering a budget \$705,000 above the level-funding budget we requested, based on local aid figures in the Governor's budget. He said that at this point, we have no idea whether the Legislature will propose aid figures that high.

6. Minutes of previous meeting – none

7. Next meeting and agenda – The next meeting will be March 3.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 9:42 p.m.

Kay Moran, acting clerk

DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING

Town of Amherst Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2012 (“manager’s budget”)  
Senior Center newsletter (“Senior Spirit”) dated 2/1/2011  
Senior Center “welcome” brochure, dated 3/2011 (sic)  
Undated packet of information about Senior Center services and funding  
Chart showing Cherry Hill revenues FY 06-FY 10

