

Approved 3/1/12

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes
Thursday, February 16, 2012 7:00 P.M.
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

ATTENDANCE:

Andrew Steinberg (Chair), Kay Moran (Vice-Chair), Janice Ratner, Bob Saul, Douglas Slaughter, Marylou Theilman Absent: Anurag Sharma

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; Julie Federman, Public Health Director; Nancy Pagano, Senior Center Director; Linda Chalfant, Leisure Service and Supplemental (LSSE) Director; Barbara Bilz, Assistant LSSE Director; Amherst Media.

Meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION:

1. COMMUNITY SERVICES

Health (pp. 100-102 in Budget) - Director Julie Federman discussed some of the accomplishments of the Public Health Department. The Safe and Healthy Neighborhoods initiative is an interdepartmental program which looks at neighborhoods to make them safer. An example would be to educate residents about the danger of storing upholstered furniture which can catch fire on porches and block people from getting out in case of fire. They are incorporating housing inspection into the MUNIS system database so that various departments can share information on a common platform. They are working with other departments regarding policy for the homeless shelter and are trying to respond to trash complaints in a more timely manner. They have talked with other towns about regionalizing public health nursing services, similar to the current sharing of an inspector position with Northampton. They are also looking at fees charged by other towns. They are trying to develop a database of elders who can be checked in emergencies. Working with other departments and towns is more efficient and effective.

In the budget, there is a restoration of \$2700. The budget was reduced last year and grant funding was used for supplies. This funding is no longer available. There is funding for 15 hours per week for a public health nurse. The department would like to increase this position by 4-5 hours. This nurse tracks communicable diseases, such as salmonella and tuberculosis, and runs the flu clinic. UMass has its own public health nurse. It looks like the Cambodian grant will continue for another year.

Sandy explained how shared positions with another town function. In the case of the inspector shared with Northampton, Amherst hires the inspector and Northampton is assessed for part of the salary plus 40% of the salary to cover benefits.

Senior Center (pp. 103-105 in Budget) - Director Nancy Pagano said that level services will be maintained with the help of fees and donations to the Friends of the Senior Center. The parking sticker program for elders distributed about 100 stickers @\$25. Several grants have been successful. The annual formula grant from the state has increased due to a 34% increase in

the number of elders in Amherst based on the 2010 census. The amount per elder, however, decreased from \$7.00 to \$6.25 because of the total amount of money available for these grants. This grant pays for personnel. Highland Valley grants help pay for a social worker. Highland Valley also manages the food delivery for shut-ins and determines who gets meal deliveries based on certain criteria. There is a limit on what can be spent on each elder for health and nutrition. Some elders may not be able to get home delivered meals.

An information packet includes information from Friends fundraising. The Friends have raised \$24,464.48 to support the Senior Center. One couple has contributed \$10,000 annually for the past 10 years or so to support a nurse position. Self addressed envelopes were sent with the Census forms this year as a way to raise money for the Center. Grants are included in Appendix A..

Veteran's Services (pp. 107-109) Not discussed. Director was not in attendance.

LSSE (pp. 110-113) - Director Linda Chalfant said that the goals for next year are to maintain quality services while keeping expenses and tax support at a minimum. They will look for grants and step up fund-raising opportunities with the help of Friends of Amherst Recreation. Chalfant mentioned creating an endowment. The Community Development Block Grant that helped with fee subsidies last year is no longer available so they will try to find other ways to support low income participants. The criteria for LSSE programs (see handout) give highest priority to programs for children and families and programs that serve the greatest numbers.

The increase in the budget from taxation is due to salary and benefit increases. The CDBG funding was used for the after school program. Other ways of providing this program are being explored. The relationship of the revolving funds (in Appendix C), the amount from taxation, and the LSSE budget were discussed and should be explained to Town Meeting.

LSSE - Municipal Pools (pp. 114-115) - Assistant Director Barbara Bilz said that the aquatics program was successful, even with one pool operating. The capacity for lessons was increased and the wait list was reduced from 91 to 26. The Totman pool at UMass was used for indoor lessons because the fee was minimal and less than what the schools would charge.

The budget is increasing to \$189,358 for FY13 due to the addition of the War Memorial Pool. Revenues are budgeted at \$64,955 which is probably a conservative estimate. Tax support will be \$124,363. Non residents pay higher fees to use the pools.

LSSE - Cherry Hill Golf Course (pp. 116-117) - Bilz said that the golf course provides a high quality experience for residents and non residents. Here, also, non residents pay higher fees. They are trying to make improvements to the course, add more year-round programs, and attract more users. A grant was received for grooming cross country trails. Cherry Hill has returned about \$150,000 back to the General Fund over the last several years.

Revenues are budgeted to be \$268,000 for the next year but this number may need to be adjusted down. The 2nd quarter report from the Finance Department shows revenues for FY12 lower than expected. This is due to extraordinary circumstances, weather-wise. Hopefully, the golf course can open earlier this spring.

2. GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Select Board/Town Manager (pp. 17-19) - Finance Director Sandy Pooler mentioned some of the accomplishments and objectives found in the Budget book. The personnel services increase is due to step increases and to the 7.6% increase in the Town Manager's salary. The decrease in employee benefits is due to changes in benefits used.

Town Meeting/Finance Committee (pp. 20-21) - This budget remains at \$800.

Legal (pp. 26-27) - Pooler said that this budget of \$110,000 pays for retaining the legal

services of Kopelman and Paige. This budget often runs over but is usually funded by turn backs from other General Government departments. Outside counsel is sometimes used. FY13 shouldn't be a litigious year. Expenses for the solar litigation should end in FY12. Collective bargaining should begin again in FY13. The cost of litigation is usually \$2000- \$5000 per month. Electronic legal resources may be used for some tasks such as requesting deeds. Regional dispatch negotiations are ongoing.

3. New information affecting budget, review financial projections

4. Fiscal Year 2013 budget development

At the Four Town Meeting, Rob Detweiler announced a health savings of about \$70,000 for Amherst in the Regional budget. The Regional School Committee has not voted its budget yet. This health savings could be used to reduce the budget gap at the elementary level. The Superintendent wants to use this and other savings to reduce assessments to the towns in FY13.

Choice was discussed. There is a lag time for receipts of \$5000 per choice student. These receipts come in three times during the course of the year and are based on the number of days a student is enrolled in the school. Should reserves be used to support the budget until the choice money is received? Special education students could be among the choice students who are chosen by lottery. There could be additional costs to educate these students but there is also additional state money to support these students. Questions remain about the savings from closing Marks Meadow School. The Superintendent and the Director of Finance have been asked to provide the year end budget figures for the elementary schools that include the year before Marks Meadow was closed through FY11. New housing in town could increase the number of students. The schools do take new housing into consideration in planning for the school year. Sandy and Rob should discuss options, including dealing with the budget gap and school choice. The schools need to have a balanced budget. If there is no additional state money, there will be deficits in the schools and town budgets.

5. FY12 Second Quarter Revenue and Expense Report, municipal budget

There were no questions. Sandy and Sonia Aldrich were thanked for this report.

6. Member reports - liaisons and committees

Marylou Theilman distributed a page from a previous school committee meeting showing Budget Additions/Reductions in the Amherst Public Schools. There is a gap of \$218,200 to reach budget support of 2.8%.

Nothing further on libraries or Budget Coordinating Group.

Joint Capital Planning had a request from the Libraries for \$150,000 for generators.

Restrictions on using Community Preservation Act money for historical buildings, such as the central fire station, or conservation was discussed briefly. Restrictions last in perpetuity but a building can be sold as long the outside is not changed.

7. Minutes of previous meetings

Minutes of the February 11 meeting were accepted by a vote of 5-0-1 absent. (Doug moved acceptance; Janice seconded)

8. Next meeting and Agenda

The next meeting will be Thursday, March 1, in the First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall. The preliminary Agenda includes several departments under GENERAL GOVERNMENT (Information Technology, Town Clerk/Elections, General Services, Finance Department,

Facilities Maintenance, Human Resources/Human Rights, Employee Benefits, Retirement) and ENTERPRISE FUNDS (Transportation) There is NO meeting next week, February 23.

9. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the chair 48 hours in advance of meeting.

Sandy announced that the final audit is complete and available online. Bob will be on the Audit Committee.

Andy announced that a public forum on school regionalization sponsored by the Regional District Planning Committee will be held on February 29 at 7 pm in the Town Room, Town Hall. Material should be available online ahead of the forum, which will be broadcast live on Amherst Media and streamed.

Sandy announced that Standard and Poor's will call next week notifying the town of its bond rating. This will affect borrowing for upcoming projects: Centennial Water Plant, sewer extensions in Amherst Woods and Harkness Road (design), and retiring BANS for modular classrooms, roof, and other South Amherst school repairs.

Meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Janice Ratner, acting clerk

DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING

Town of Amherst Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2013

FY 12 Municipal Budget/Actual Reports for Quarter and Fiscal Year Ending December 31, 2011

Senior Center handouts: "Growth in Number of Elders 60+ in Amherst" packet

Understanding Grants Used for Personnel in FY12

LSSE handouts: LSSE Program Plan Summary

LSSE Development

Amherst Public Schools FY13 Budget Additions/Reductions