

## **Amherst Finance Committee**

**March 1, 2012 7 P.M.**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

In attendance: Ms. Moran (Vice Chairman), Mr. Saul (sec'y protem), Mr. Steinberg (Chairman), Mr. Slaughter, Ms. Ratner, Ms. Theilman (8:00 pm), and Mr. Sharma (8:02 pm)

Others in attendance: Sanford Pooler, finance director; Kris Pacunas, IT director; Sandra Burgess, Town clerk; Sonia Aldrich, Town accountant; Claire McGinnis, treasurer/collector; David Burgess, assessor; Ron Bohonowicz, facilities director; Eunice Torres, director of Human Rights/Human Resources; Kay Zlogar, director of the Health Claims Trust Fund;

Mr. Steinberg called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm

#### **1. GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

Information Technology-Kris Pacunas, Director of Information Technology, highlighted some of the department's accomplishments including the new capability to submit board and meeting agendas through the website, moving the Town's email services into the "cloud," and initiating the new "Open Government to the Max," program and philosophy. Website user numbers are up by 25% to 1500 per day. Future priorities include, billing residents electronically and moving the Town toward paperless offices. The Department is asking for \$20,000 to scan and consolidate documents currently spread around town, and put them into a single database. Ms. Moran asked about MUNIS9. Mr. Pacunas said it allowed MUNIS, the Town's software package, to be modified for free. The IT Department has identified five big modifications to improve the software, and participation in the MUNIS9 project will allow these software modifications at no charge. Mr. Steinberg noted that IT has increased efficiency across all departments, but Mr. Pacunas indicated that no official measurement of productivity gains has been developed. Website traffic is tracked through Google and only

geographic information is available in this tracking process. Mr. Pacunas also reminded residents that the Website has an email notification link for reminders when tax payments are due.

Town Clerk / Elections-The Town Clerk, Sandra Burgess, described FY2012's accomplishments including implementation of changes in state regulations for passport processing, a new method for cataloging vital records, death certificates etc. using a paperless model that instantly transfers the vital document, on line, to the Clerk's office for review; and finally, with help from the IT department and GIS system, the Town Clerk's office successfully redistricted Amherst after the 2010 census. There will be four elections this calendar year, and although the Staff is strained, efficiencies created by IT innovations have helped. Ms. Moran asked whether we need more election workers. The Town Clerk said it was generally not an issue, but for this primary in March staffing will be a little more difficult. Ms. Moran also asked about the volatility of Town Clerk receipts, and the Town Clerk explained that passport hours have been constrained and consequently receipts are down.

Finance Department-Mr. Pooler presented the accounting, collector and assessor office budgets. He stated that all three are willing to adopt new technology to make services more efficient and customer friendly. Sonia Aldrich, the Town Accountant, emphasized the importance of maintaining the integrity of the financial reports as well as keeping insurance costs down by prudent risk assessment. She noted that the IT department is exceptional, and has its "fingers in every pie of personnel, payroll, and insurance."

Assessor/Collector-Mr. David Burgess presented the Assessors Budget and again, praised the IT department and the GIS system. Field computers would help the assessing process, he noted. Last year, the Assessor's office accomplished a complete residential revaluation which is generally harder in a year when values go down. Values are down 6% over the three year period, but there were only 77 residential abatement applications which is about normal so these applications did not spike as they often do when values move down.

Collector-Claire McGinnis, Treasurer and Collector, presented the Collector's budget

describing first, the skills of a staff that continuously utilizes IT tools to maximize efficiency. The department began e-billing, beginning with utility billing, on line. Mr. Steinberg asked about credit card acceptance for payment, and Ms. McGinnis explained that LSSE uses credit cards, but because of the fees charged by banks to process these payments, it is a substantial reduction in revenue. Ms. McGinnis also explained that it is hard to make much money on the \$16 to \$18 million of free cash because interest rates are so low.

On the topic of our bond sale and bond rating, Mr. Pooler noted that the rating agencies specifically stated that if we addressed OPEB, we might get a higher rating. They were glad to know that we have the OPEB account in place. And, it was noted that even a better rating, won't crunch down the interest rate much further, instead, it's more of a symbol of good pro-active management.

Mr. Pooler ended the discussion by expressing his desire to teach these departments to research their own information using some of the canned MUNIS reports, etc. MUNIS, for example, should be able to track much of the data required to estimate our OPEB obligation.

General Services-Sonia Aldrich described this department as a hodgepodge of services including the audit, consolidated buying programs, telephone, and property and casualty insurance. The IT Department is making this department more efficient. The audit costs are down, but new GASB requirements are starting to push them up again.

Facilities Maintenance-Ron Bohonowicz listed some of the facilities accomplishments including two projects at the Bangs Center, the front walk and the renovation of the third floor. The third floor has now been rented to two groups. East Street School will be maintained by the Town, not the schools, so new money is included in the Town budget. The department is trying to implement energy savings, 20% over the next five years, but it is a challenge since the Town has already implemented many conservation measures. This year, the Town had to open Emergency Command Center three times, and this created some unanticipated, extra expenses. The department is also working to figure out where to back up power during power outages. Conversion to natural gas at several boilers is also underway.

The new natural gas boilers are 20% more efficient, and the town receives \$30K per boiler upgrade from Berkshire Gas.

Mr. Slaughter wondered if the Library Trustees had talked to Ron about emergency planning. Ron gave them all the information necessary to make the necessary decisions and Mr. Slaughter explained that the JCPC has discussed whether town officials are looking at the best places to provide shelter for people in an emergency like the October snowstorm. Bohonowicz said contributing town resources to a regional shelter for people is best; the town should focus on maintaining assets, using generators to keep sprinkler pipes from freezing, keeping IT functioning, etc. Ron is also working to replace the Middle School windows.

Police Station-At the Police Station, interior work, HVAC rework, and soon roof-work and new carpets etc. will be necessary in the coming years. The Maintenance Department is doing away with overtime, and getting a part time, permanent person with training to deal with weekend chores, for instance the clean-up of body fluids, a problem that is getting worse at the Police Station. This should be a cost effective personnel addition.

Human Resources / Human Rights –Ms. Torres said the Human Rights Commissioners recently met with Northampton human rights commissioners to collaborate on an event regarding Haiti. She received seven complaints on human rights, the majority from community members. Her department also implemented the on-line payroll system and works on the collective bargaining contracts.

Employee Benefits-Kay Zlogar presented this item. The trust fund is a joint health care purchase agreement owned by the employees of the school, town, and library. No rate increase is expected and the budget anticipates a decrease in claims. Recently, it was determined that the Group Insurance Commission, the pooled risk for the state and municipalities, is not a good deal for Amherst. The balance in Amherst's trust fund keeps going up. The department is continually educating employees about the tradeoffs between rates and plan design changes.

Retirement-Assessment has been estimated, and the final number will be higher than FY

2012 by about \$60K.

## 2. ENTERPRISE FUNDS

Transportation-Mr. Steinberg asked how the Business Improvement District work fits into this fund. Mr. Pooler replied that the Town is checking the specifics of the rules regarding this Enterprise fund to make sure using these funds to fund the BID is allowed.

3. New information affecting budget, review financial projections. Assessor has confirmed that new growth number is higher, \$6 million, for WMECO so \$425,000 in the budget for new growth is the adjusted number.
4. Fiscal Year 2013 School budget development The Regional Budget has been completed but the Elementary budget has issues. Mr. Pooler will present some ideas soon on how to adjust this budget.
5. Member reports – liaisons and committees None
6. Minutes of previous meetings. Minutes of January 13<sup>th</sup>, motion to approve by Ms. Theilman, seconded by Ms. Moran, the motion was approved 7-0.  
Minutes of January 19<sup>th</sup>, Ms. Moran moved approval, Ms. Theilman seconded, the motion passed, 7-0.  
Minutes of February 9, Ms. Ratner moved approval as amended, Mr. Slaughter seconded. The motion passed, 7-0.  
Minutes of February 16, Ms. Theilman moved approval as amended, Ms. Moran seconded. The motion passed 6-0 with one abstention.

## 7. Next Meeting and Agenda

The meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.m.

Bob Saul, acting clerk

## DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING

Town of Amherst Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2013

Draft Finance Committee minutes of Jan. 13 and 19, February 9 and 16