

Approved 7/12/12

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes  
October 13, 2011**

CALL TO ORDER: The meeting was called to order at 7:10 p.m. in the Town Room at Town Hall.

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

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: John Musante, Town Manager; Sanford Pooler, Finance Director; David Ziomek; Director of Conservation and Development; Jonathan Tucker, Planning Director; Sharon Sharry, Jones Library Director; Guilford Mooring, Superintendent of Public Works; Maria Geryk, Superintendent of Schools; Rob Detweiler, Schools Director of Finance and Operations; Irv Rhodes, Chair Amherst School Committee; Amherst Select Board; Jones Library Trustees; members of the Public; Amherst Media; members of the Press.

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION:

1. Town Financial Indicators Report

Pooler reviewed the Financial Trend Monitoring Report highlighting the most prominent features in each of the charts. In recapping FY11 he stated that the \$1.1 million surplus was due to roughly \$600,000 in revenue above expectations and nearly \$500,000 in unspent appropriations. Property Tax collections remained strong at greater than 98% and local option taxes generated over \$151,000 more than in FY10. Even with a fourth straight year of cuts to state aid (\$500,000 in FY11) the Town has maintained its bond rating of "AA with a stable outlook" and the Town's reserves have grown to \$5.6 million.

2. Financial Projections for Fiscal Year 2013

Pooler stated that with the modest growth of the state's economy and the Town's other revenue sources remaining relatively steady, but not improving much, the outlook for revenue for FY13 would be an increase of 2.7%. He then delineated the assumptions for expenditures for a level services budget which results in an overall increase of \$1.7 million or 2.6%. Thus the Town should be able to maintain level services without the use of reserves. Saul asked whether the Town should seek to issue another bond for continued road work especially given the low cost of borrowing. Pooler replied that there are ongoing discussions with the head of Public Works regarding this issue.

3. News affecting budget

None.

4. Discussion of November Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles; presentations by Town staff, petitioners, and others about Warrant articles; and determination whether there is a financial impact to each article and, if so, whether the committee will support the Article

Mooring covered the components of Article 2 of the Fall Town Meeting. The \$100,000 adjustment to the budget allows for the acceleration of an ongoing upgrade project to water meters in Town. He stated that the reduction in the Water Fund's Free Cash balance would not lower it to an unhealthy level.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 2 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Mooring explained the watershed land acquisitions in Article 9 and 10. He stated that the Town has had a practice of acquiring land in the watershed of our water supply reservoirs and that these acquisitions fit with that plan and help to preserve the safety and quality of our water supply. Steinberg asked whether a water rate increase would be necessary in order to replenish the reserves given the expenditures in Articles 2, 9, and 10. Mooring replied that he did not believe that a rate increase would be necessary due to some long term debt that will be retired in FY12 thus reducing the overall expenditures for the water fund.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Articles 9 and 10 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Mooring stated that the Select Board may recommend two Sewer extension projects in the near future and that Article 11 would authorize the funding necessary to complete the projects. He explained that aspects of the projects had been proposed in 1991 but the Select Board had not acted on them at that time. The current proposals are recommendations of our greatest need from a recent study of the Sewer system. Pooler explained the various funding mechanisms, such as betterment fees, and the Select Board is considering which option is best for the projects. He also stated that the Article does not require the use of betterments but that it would allow them.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to defer until Town Meeting its recommendation on Article 11 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Mooring explained the easements being sought under Article 12. He expects the easements to be given as a gift and thus no cost to the Town. Saul stated that having the easements allows us to leverage State money for the project and allows the work to proceed quickly.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 12 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Mooring explained the easements being sought under Article 13 which will allow for the replacement of the Rail Trail bridge over Snell Street. He expects the easements to be given as a gift and thus no cost to the Town.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 13 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Mooring explained the easements being sought under Article 14. These 6 easements involve 4 owners around the Atkins Corner road realignment project. Hampshire College is the entity granting the largest easements and since it wants to preserve certain trees near the entrance of its campus it will grant the easements at no cost. He expects the other easements also to be given as gifts resulting in no cost to the

Town.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 14 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Mooring explained the easements being released and sought under Article 15. The costs associated with these easements are to be covered by the developer.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 15 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Tucker explained the purpose and scope of the housing study to be funded via Article 5. He stated that this would be a next step in the Gateway Project, however, because it will be a whole community survey, the full housing market will be explored. Thus, it will give us Town-wide information filling in gaps of the Community Development Block Grant survey which was focused only on affordable housing. Steinberg asked how this survey will aid smart growth. Tucker stated that survey will aid the development of changes to zoning and planning that accommodates and supports the market and our community at large.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 5 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Tucker explained the request for the Select Board to accept an Affordable Housing restriction on Olympia Drive in Article 7. Accepting this restriction will keep the project moving and aide the eligibility for some of the proposed funding.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 7 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Tucker explained the conversion of the official zoning map of the Town proposed in Article 16. The change of the official zoning map from the current paper map to the electronic GIS system would allow for greater accuracy and ease of use than the current system. Steinberg asked if there would be any new costs or savings with the change. Tucker stated that there would be no new costs but some savings due to ease of use and greater accuracy.

**The Finance Committee voted 7-0 to recommend Article 16 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.**

Tucker presented the components of the zoning changes proposed in Article 17. He stated that the form based zoning would add a layer of form and design regulation on top of the existing zoning thus articulating more clearly the resulting development the community desires. Saul asked if the changes are designed to craft specific kinds of economic development. Tucker replied that the intent of the changes is to shape the kind and types of development and also to create predictability in the development process, which is lacking currently. Sharma asked if the additional regulation would slow down development. Tucker responded that the clearer rules would actually lead to faster project development which is appealing to developers. Moran and Ratner stated that they were unsure of whether the Finance Committee should take a position on the article since the financial impact to the Town is unclear. Steinberg stated that he felt the article enhances smart growth which the committee has supported in its previous work.

**The Finance Committee voted 3-4 to take no position Article 17 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.** (Motion defeated.)

**The Finance Committee voted 4-3 to recommend Article 17 of the November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2012 Special Town Meeting.** (Motion passed.)

5. Discussion of Financial Projections for FY 13 and initial discussion of Preliminary Budget Guidelines  
Postponed to next meeting.
6. Member reports – liaisons and committees  
Ratner reported that the new Jones Library Director is on the job and eager to work with the Finance Committee.
7. Minutes of previous meetings  
None.
8. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the chair 48 hours in advance of meeting  
None.

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.

Douglas Slaughter, acting clerk

#### DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING

- October 2011 Financial Trend Monitoring Report
- Slides from Preliminary Financial Projections for FY13 Budget Planning presentation with supplemental Financial Data
- Memo from Guilford Mooring to the Finance Committee and Town Meeting Members regarding Information for DPW Articles 2,12,13,14, and 15 of the Fall 2011 Special Town Meeting
- Letter from K. Teagno to Public Works and the Select Board regarding possible sewer extensions in the Amherst Woods neighborhood
- Sewer Fund Debt Service and Sewer Rate Impact calculations
- Gateway Project Next Steps document
- Form Based Zoning Q & A document from the Planning Department
- Fall Special Town Meeting Article 17 information document from the Planning Department
- Form-Based Zoning Amendment Outline document created by The Cecil Group