

AMHERST FINANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES

Meeting of January 31, 2013 at 7:00pm
First Floor Meeting Room of Town Hall

Attendance:

Kay Moran (Vice-Chair); Janice Ratner; Anurag Sharma; Bob Saul, absent; Doug Slaughter; Andrew Steinberg (Chair); Marylou Theilman

Others Present:

Sandy Pooler, Town Finance Director; Sharon Sharry, Library Director; Robert Pam, Library Trustee; W. "Tim" Nelson, Fire Chief; Lindsay Stromgren, Assist. Fire Chief; David Ziomek, Assist. Town Manager/Director of Conservation and Development; Jonathon Tucker, Planning Director; Robert Morra, Building Commissioner; Fred Vanderbeck, Pelham Finance Committee; Amherst Media

Agenda:

Fiscal Year 2014 Budget Development

Library Services Budget Overview (Handouts: (1) Proposed Fiscal Year 2014 Town Library Budget, (2) Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners – Public Library Construction Grant Information)

Sharry presented the proposed FY14 Town Library Budget of \$2,299,758 with a Town appropriation of \$1,741,513, and noted that it met the Finance Committee guideline of a 3% increase in Town appropriation.

In addition to the extensive FY Budget Summary found on pages 9 and 10, the Budget provides vision and mission statements, long range goals, key objectives, accomplishments, challenges, comparisons, an organizational chart, the limitations and impact of a 3% increase in Town appropriation, budget concerns, and relationships to other town departments.

Major accomplishments this year included the hiring of the new Director, in addition to a new Head of Collections, a Technical Services Assistant, and a Circulation Assistant. The Head of Programming and Outreach position was upgraded.

Although the exterior of the building is beautiful, the interior needs a new vision and is one of the current challenges. The present space is not used efficiently or well. There are a number of places that require higher levels of safety and security. Cameras recently have been installed, but have not been turned on. In some areas there is a need for more space. Signage needs to be improved. Most of the carpeting needs to be replaced. In addition to these issues, Sharry lists additional items in the Budget Proposal on pages 5 and 6. In order to meet some of the building needs, Sharry stated that the Board plans to apply for a highly competitive Planning and Design Massachusetts Public Library Construction Grant for \$40,000, which would require a local match of \$20,000 which could come from activities of the Trustees and Friends, as well as, the Town. Moran stated that there are many worthy items on the Capital Plan also competing for limited capital funds at this time. Pam noted that the timing of their planning is due to the state's multi-year library grant application.

Although funding for the operating budget is not a concern this year, it will be in the future as the Endowment is shrinking, as well as State Aid. State Aid to the Library includes a nonresident offset. Sharry estimates that visits to the Library average 1000 people per day and the nonresident offset only is calculated based on the sign out of books.

Steinberg asked Sharry if she would compile information relating to the social services the Library provides. As noted, many other aspects of Town and Town Government address the social needs of some in our community by providing services that are in addition to the Block Grant.

The present library endowment is valued at about \$7,000,000, down from approximately \$9,000,000 on hand prior to the market crash. The Board has taken a proactive approach and now employs New England Capital as its advisor. Presently the expenditure rate from the endowment is higher than the Board would like. In addition, the level of contributions has not been as high as they would like either. The Board is planning a major fund drive and working toward a withdrawal rate from the endowment that does not exceed its income. Additional Library monies are restricted and cannot be used for other expenses.

On page 7 of the Budget Proposal, Sharry outlines the estimated value of services, programs and materials provided in FY12 by The Jones Library, Inc. The amount exceeds \$7,755,000 compared to the Town's appropriation of \$1,644,736. The website <http://www.joneslibrary.org/budget/libraryvalue.html> provides more detailed information.

Sharry stated that some of the figures used in the present Budget Proposal were estimates from the fall. It was requested that she update the figures to reflect the current numbers.

Public Safety - Fire/EMS (Information from the Town of Amherst Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2014, pages 56-60)

The overall proposed budget for the department is \$4,114,252 for a 3.2% increase over FY13.

Nelson presented an overview of the recent accomplishments and current challenges. In FY12 there was only a slight increase of 1.5% in total calls for emergency service over FY11 as a result of a 5.7% decrease in fire responses, but a 3.8% increase in EMS responses or the equivalent of 4,322 EMS calls. EMS calls continue to increase, while fire responses decrease. The department continues to have the highest number of calls per firefighter per capita in Massachusetts. Total staffing is 14 personnel below the national standard. Present staffing does not allow the department to offer transport services.

Stromgren reported that the federally mandated communications upgrade has been completed. Using the Assistance to Firefighters Grant, the department, enhanced, expanded and improved the department's communication capabilities beyond the mandated level. He further reported that the Federal Safer grant for \$179,450 for a training program for Call and Volunteer firefighters was successful and allowed for greater integration of the three forces into a more cohesive unit. Grant funding for the SAFE program is \$17,500 and not \$13,000 as stated on page 56 of the budget. The grant money allows firefighters to conduct various fire safety presentations to all segments of the community.

An unprecedented number of the department members have attended a variety of training opportunities ranging from upper level management, incident management, and EMS management courses, in addition to others.

The department continues to be part of and provides data for the Tufts Medical Center Stroke Study. The collaboration has been a successful model and patients are beginning to receive definitive stroke care quicker.

FY14 Objectives, among others, state that the department will continue to use increased shift staffing to meet the needs of periods of increased activity. The increased staffing in the fall reduced the number of Mutual Aid requests on the weekends. The department also will give Command Staff greater responsibility, authority, and latitude for operations decision-making. Partnering with UMass/EMS, and pursuing and developing a cooperative strategy on alternatives to mandatory transport to Cooley Dickinson Hospital for non-critical patients would reduce ambulance travel time and the length of time the ambulances are not in service to the Town, but will take time to achieve.

Vehicle maintenance is now tracked and has been online for a year. Maintenance expense for last year was \$180,000 which included ambulances and fire trucks. In-house maintenance logged 278 hours of which 214 hours were done by on-duty firefighters for a savings of \$21,000. Overtime maintenance amounted to 64 hours. In-house maintenance saves time and out-of-town personnel and travel costs. However, all major work, such as brake work, is done by licensed mechanics.

Mutual Aid is provided to other towns, however, the number of times Amherst requests Mutual Aid from them is significantly less.

The department is responsible for the School Safe Program and does inspections required by the State Law. It coordinates inspections with the Town's Inspections Director, as necessary.

Conservation and Development Department Budget Review ((Information from the Town of Amherst Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2014, pages 83-92 and Handout: Conservation & Development – Project Milestones and Funding Opportunities – Summary of Grant Funding – October 2008 – January 2013)

The Organizational Chart for Conservation and Development is on page 84 of the Budget. The overall proposed budget for the entire department is \$955,927 for a 3.1% increase over FY13.

The **Conservation** functional area provides funds to plan and manage conservation areas. The proposed budget for FY14 is \$272,432, up 3.8% from FY13.

Ziomek reported that there continues to be ongoing projects which includes grant funded ones. He distributed a summary of grants that were awarded, under review/pending and not awarded since October 2008 to the present. To date \$4,938,918 has been awarded and \$820,000 is pending. Generally, grant proposals respond to initiatives seeking funding. Some grants require matching funds, and most grants do not support staffing and/or administration. Grants are not typically built into the budget, but are found for FY14 in the Appendices on pages 178 and 179. Presently, 1.75 staff work in conservation, as well as, in

the watershed forest in conjunction with DPW.

The **Planning** functional area creates and implements appropriate planning initiatives and regulatory mechanisms. The proposed budget for FY14 is \$283,098 for a 1.1% increase over the previous fiscal year.

The Traffic Study involving UMass is essentially done. Terms for doing the Housing Market Study are still being negotiated with the contractor.

The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) for \$800,000 will no longer automatically come to Amherst, as the updated census puts Amherst on the cusp for the mini entitlement grant. The Town will have to compete for the competitive grants with applications due February 15. Although competitive, Ziomek believes that the Town will get no less than \$400,000.

The Town will be able to finish the capital projects funded by CDBG as the projects are on the fiscal year calendar for FY14. Administrative overhead is set at 18% of the grant, and that money will get the Town through next year. Losing funding puts many things at risk including affordable housing, Social Services, and capital projects. There are no easy solutions. As a fallback, Town Manager John Musante is proposing an Article for Town Meeting that would request an amount that could be used for Social Services if CDBG money doesn't materialize. The Finance Committee's (FC) policy recommends that all budget Articles be incorporated into the proposed budget and not come from reserves. The guidelines also include language that reserves could be used for a temporary one-time situation, not ongoing expenses. The question is whether such an Article goes beyond the policy in what is an unusual year. Musante presented his rationale for the Article at the FC meeting on January 17, 2013.

The **Inspections** functional area administers the General Laws and Regulations of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the Town of Amherst By-laws as they relate to buildings and structures. The proposed budget for FY14 is \$400,397, up 4.0%.

Morra reported that at the present time the electrical inspector is a subcontractor paid on a per inspection basis. The budget includes a change to a full-time benefited position which would provide more coordination with the department. The FY14 budget also would create a permanent non-benefited part-time gas inspector position for the same reason.

There are many upcoming projects requiring inspections including electrical inspections at UMass projects, as well as, all building inspections at Amherst College. Periodic inspections include institutions, restaurants, and large housing projects. Focus has been on large multi-unit residential properties. There are approximately 100 smaller multi-unit residential properties, but up to now, have not been inspected regularly. Some inspections are split with the Health Department and some are done in coordination with the Fire Department.

Code enforcement has increased with the addition this year of a code enforcement officer in the department, and thus far 100 calls have been brought to the department for resolution.

Weights and Measures is involved with the approximately 60 taxis in Town to ensure that the meters represent exact numbers.

Construction is about to begin on the Amherst College Campus and new sheet metal

permitting requirements will add to the department's work.

Community Development

Postponed

Public Works Department Budget Review – General Fund
Postponed until February 7, 2013 Finance Committee meeting

Enterprise Funds Budget Review

Conservation

Water

Sewer

Solid Waste

Postponed until February 7, 2013 Finance Committee meeting

New Information affecting budget, review financial projections (Handout: Town of Amherst FY14 Cherry Sheets Local Aid Estimates)

Pooler distributed the Cherry Sheet estimates for Amherst and reported on the Governor's budget. The current estimate shows the Net State Aid Change from what was projected last fall when formulating the FC guidelines is a decrease of \$59,595 in revenue, which is not of significance to change the guidelines.

The Governor's budget proposes to fix transportation funding, which includes money for transportation throughout the state, although the major problem is the "T". There also is more funding for Chapter 90, road work. Education receives more funding with formula changes for Chapter 70, which may be major. In addition, the Governor is proposing a change in the state tax structure, which appears to be a more serious discussion this year.

More definitive financial information will come in the spring. In the meantime, both the Select Board and School Committee are considering how to speak out for more aid.

Member reports – liaisons and committees

Slaughter reported that the Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC) has met and begun their process. At this point, departmental requests total about \$275,000 more than available funds using 7% of the tax levy.

Steinberg reported that the Regional School District Planning Board (RSDPB) Forum will be on Saturday, February 2 in the Regional Middle School Auditorium from 1-3pm. The Educational and Financial consultants will present their findings.

Minutes:

The minutes of September 13, 2012 were approved as amended. Vote: 6-1 Absent

Next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Finance Committee will be February 7 at which time the Committee will discuss the following:

Schools – Elementary and Secondary

Public Safety

Police

Animal Welfare

Communications Center

Regional Lockup Assessment
Public Works
Public Works - General Fund
Enterprise Funds
Conservation
Water
Sewer
Solid Waste
Community Development

Adjourned:

The meeting adjourned at 10:00pm.

Submitted by:

Marylou Theilman, Acting Clerk

Information used for Public Safety and Conservation and Development:

Town of Amherst Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2014 – July 1, 2013 – June 30, 2014
online at www.amherstma.gov

Handouts Distributed at the Meeting:

Proposed Fiscal Year 2014 Town Library Budget

Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners – Public Library Construction Grant
Information

Conservation & Development – Project Milestones and Funding Opportunities –
Summary of Grant Funding – October 2008 – January 2013

Town of Amherst - FY14 Cherry Sheets Local Aid Estimates