

Approved 4/11/14

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes
Thursday, March 28, 2013 7:00 PM
1st Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

ATTENDANCE:

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

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; Peter Jessop, Chair, Community Preservation Act Committee; Helen Berg, petition article representative; Amherst Media.

Meeting was called to order at 7:15 p.m.

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION:

1. Fiscal Year 2014 budget development

a. Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC) - Capital Plan Handout 3/28/13

Slaughter reported that the JCPC voted this morning to recommend a capital spending plan that uses 7% of the levy for capital projects. Requests were close to available funds this year because some amounts were reduced and some projects are being funded with other money. If state aid is more than expected, a \$12,000 mower could be added back. If it is lower than expected, \$6,000 will be cut from streetlight replacements. A couple of items - a pumper for the fire department (\$400,000) and a sander for the Public Works Department (\$170,000) - will be moved up a year to take advantage of the current borrowing rates.

A new headquarters for the fire department is in the FY15-FY16 Capital Plan. This would probably happen through a debt exclusion override. Information about purpose, specific cost, and location would need to be available to voters before a vote is considered.

Motions will be developed for capital spending. The Finance Committee will vote on these items at the April 11 meeting, after there is information about the House Ways and Means budget expected to be released on April 10.

b. Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) - Peter Jessop, Chair of this committee distributed the document CPAC FY2014 Recommendations to Town Meeting and discussed several of the items which were voted earlier by CPAC including: rehabilitation of Ann Whalen housing (Amherst Housing Authority), conservation of Emily Dickinson dress and storage (Amherst Historical Society), archiving of Town's historic recordings (Amherst Media), restoration of Tiffany window (Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst), roof repair (Jones Library), improvements at Mill River Recreation Area (LSSE), Brunelle property on Potwine Lane, and amounts for open space and administration. CPAC is recommending borrowing for the Rock Farm property on Southeast Street and a \$15,000 emergency fund for tenants displaced from Echo Village (Family Outreach). Spending comes under the following categories: affordable housing, historic preservation, open space, recreation, and administration. The total amount recommended is \$602,483.

The Finance Committee voted 5-0 with 2 absent to recommend this article because these are appropriate uses of preservation funds.

2. Citizen Petition - PVTA Funding Petition

Helen Berg explained the petitioners' desire to have the PVTA extend the Sunderland PVTA bus route so that it would stop at the new Survival Center location rather than the old location which is about 1/3 mile away from the current location. This would cost approximately \$28,000 for 4 stops per day. Funding would come from the Transportation Enterprise Fund. Neither the director or board of the Survival Center nor the Transportation Committee have taken a position on this petition article. Steinberg explained the Finance Committee's process and will follow up with the Transportation Committee, the director of the Survival Center, and John Musante who also chairs the PVTA Board to get more financial and ridership information.

3. New information affecting Budget, review financial projections

Steinberg reported that the Budget Coordinating Committee met this morning and discussed possible local aid amounts. If we get more than enough to support the proposed budget, all agreed to close the nearly \$60,000 gap and not to add new spending. If we get less and we do have a gap, previous and proposed capital expenditures could be looked at.

Other Post Employee Benefits (OPEB) was discussed. Some felt that money should not be diverted from the operating budgets to fund OPEB. The actuary who did the latest report on the Town's OPEB liability can meet with those interested on April 25 at 7 pm.

4. Member reports - liaisons and committees

Slaughter served on the Audit Committee in place of Saul and met with the auditors on March 27. The audit showed no significant deficiencies or material weaknesses. Our fund balances and reserves numbers are good. Our 98% rate of property tax collection is exceptional and our process for unpaid taxes (liens, etc.) is good.

Auditors don't look at every penny but do look at different areas such as internal controls and separation of duties. They also try to translate town financials to a business model. (Government accounting is set up differently from business accounting.) The auditors analyze particular departments each year. Perhaps next year they will be asked to look at the strengths and weaknesses of the new revolving fund for the afterschool program and make recommendations.

The OPEB liability is starting to show up and has an impact. The audit can be found on the Town website.

5. Minutes of previous meetings - The minutes of the March 7, 2013 meeting were approved 5-0 with 2 absent.

6. Next Meeting and Agenda - Thursday, April 4. Agenda to be determined. We will probably need to have a supplemental report for the later Warrant articles to be distributed at the first night of Town Meeting.

Amherst-Pelham Regional School District Assessment Method (Article 9 on 3/20/13 Preliminary List of Articles)

A motion was made and **voted 5-0** with 2 absent to **RECOMMEND** the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District alternate assessment formula which needs to be voted each

year. This formula uses a 5 year rolling average.

7. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance of the meeting - none.

The meeting adjourned at 9.35 p.m.

Janice Ratner, acting clerk

Handouts and Documents used at the meeting

May 6, 2013 Annual Town Meeting, Preliminary List of Articles, 3/20/13

Joint Capital Planning Committee General Fund Five Year Capital Plan, Fiscal Years 2014-2018

Revised 3/28/13

CPAC FY2014 Recommendations to Town Meeting, March 28, 2013

"New Amherst Survival Center Opens," Daily Hampshire Gazette, December 4, 2012