

**AMHERST FINANCE COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Meeting of February 28, 2013
**First Floor Meeting Room
Town Hall**

The meeting called to order at 7:07 p.m.

ATTENDANCE

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

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; Kris Pacunas, Director of Information Technology; Ron Bohonowicz, Facilities Director; Sandra Burgess, Town Clerk; David Burgess, Assessor; Claire McGinnis, Treasurer/Collector; Deborah Radway, Director of Human Resources/Human Rights; Amherst Media

DOCUMENTS USED AT THE MEETING: Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY2014

General Government

Information Technology (IT)

Overview provided by Kris Pacunas, Director of Information Technology. The department provides IT services for 13 buildings, projectors, door security, all computers, and the Town's award-winning web site. The departments served include the library, police, fire, public works, but don't include the schools; share resources with the schools and work very closely together, especially, share the financial software system, MUNIS. The operating aim of the IT department is always to consolidate and standardize equipment and software. Introduced this year are systems for paperless billing for water and sewer charges and paperless work and purchase orders and personnel transactions.

The department upgraded the downtown wireless network at less than the estimated cost—one of the best rollouts in the country. The schools have their own IT department, though the Town and schools share the same internet connection and the Town's MUNIS financial software package. Many functions and work across the departments will be folded into MUNIS.

In the coming year the town IT department will add MUNIS modules, for example one to keep track of vehicle maintenance. Eventually they would like to add a MUNIS specialist to the department of 4 full-time workers.

The key challenge for this department is ongoing maintenance. Recently formed Western Mass IT Directors association...20 communities involved and regionalization

efforts coming out of it. Amherst seen as a leader in the region and there may be some fee-for-service opportunities.

Most of IT service levels up compared with last year.

Facilities

Overview provided by Ron Bohonowicz, Facilities Director. His role is mostly (75 percent) schools and the rest (25 percent) in town. On the town side: Bangs Center and Town Hall. Energy savings is a top priority. The town is in good shape on natural gas; not much consumption of oil. This past year, maintenance of the East Street school was incorporated into town budget; it is no longer under the schools.

The town obtained free light bulbs from the state worth \$25K. Fluorescent lights are 28 watts versus 32 watts—replaced 7,000 bulbs, each bulb a saving of about 12 percent in energy consumption. The town is trying to be more “Green,” but there are no green disinfectants.

Maintaining the parking garage clean and in good order is a challenge—graffiti etc.—as it needs constantly cleaning up. Elevator has been vandalized; emergency phone ripped off. Cameras are installed and more are being installed. Also taking other steps: Lighting is good. Yet, monitoring/review of the footage is done only when there is an incident.

More discussion followed, especially pertaining to use of spaces such as the Bangs Center being rented out for activities and meetings. Energy efficiency of buildings was also discussed: try to keep it between 68 and 72 degrees. Friday night go down to 55 degrees. Energy conservation is a high priority and the Director continues to strive for the 20 percent savings in a five year plan. Several projects in the police station, including cleaning up cells and doing interior/exterior work—but it's 22 years-old and is beginning to show wear.

Town Clerk

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Town Clerk

Overview by Sandra Burgess, Town Clerk: processed 7,000+ new voter registrations for the Nov. 6 election, increased voter registration by a third. Sixty nine percent turnout in presidential elections. Also do recording and maintaining of vital records. New method of creating birth records. Big improvement over manual method. Now working on the

“death” module...much more complex because a lot more people involved. Continue to maintain older vital records...continued six year project. As per the US Department of State, the town can now have only one passport officer in the office but service levels are unaffected: FY12: 517 passports; 276 applications in 2013 so far. Stopped doing fish and game licenses.

Next year will be busy: annual town election and special state primary as well special elections.

This remains a 3-person office. The staff work very well together. Everybody is very good at what they do.

Kay asked whether the state will reimburse the town for costs of the special elections to fill the U.S. Senate seat. Burgess said the state announced that we will be reimbursed.

Assessing

Overview by David Burgess, Assessor. Busy year last year. Visiting all the properties and updating the data...on top of visits to new construction. Expect more building permits this year. Just received a grant to regionalize with Pelham. Goal is to bring Pelham's records to the same level as we have in Amherst...Have a very good staff...knowledgeable and collaborative. Forty abatement applications this year. Tax rate jumped from 19.74 percent to 20.39 percent. Some data: of the 7,320 real estate parcels, about 6,800 are taxable; there were about 266 personal property assessments.

We have to have money available for abatements and exemptions...required by state to set up an overlay...Amherst sets aside 1 percent of tax levy. If the account grows larger than necessary, the assessor declares a surplus...it then becomes free cash. Town Meeting can vote to appropriate it for some purpose.

Finance

Overview by Claire McGinnis, Treasurer/Collector. The town went to market (“today”) with \$6.8 million bond issues (for road improvements, sewer extensions communications police, renovations for fire, DPW truck, and tree plantings) at annual interest cost of 1.8 percent. Recently, S&P confirmed AA stable outlook for the town.

Town folk will soon see a flyer about getting the bill by email versus paper. The town has implemented a new module in MUNIS so that people may pay bills from home. Pooler added that the Accounting department has taken a very important role in some of the electronic improvements...e.g., create purchase order and move it down the line electronically. Just got FY12 audit back...had a good clean audit.

Other issues discussed were related to the Transportation Fund (some revenue weakness because the lots and the meters were undergoing repairs/trials etc.): Unitarian Church lot (the town will no longer be paying to lease the church's lot because of their construction project), PVTA (Reduction in assessment). So, the town had to draw down the fund a bit for that. It was pointed out that the PVTA is the second largest,

after the MBTA, transportation system in the state.

Human Resources Human Rights

A short discussion was led by Deborah Radway, Director of Human Resources/Human Rights.

Additional discussion on OPEB, particularly highlighting the specific note about the OPEB liabilities in the S&P report

Adjourned 10:25

Acting Clerk Anurag Sharma