

Budget Coordinating Group Minutes

Date: January 31, 2013
Location: First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall
Start time: 8:35 a.m.
End time: 9:35 a.m.

Attendance:

Stephanie O'Keeffe, Select Board - Co-Chair
Andy Steinberg, Finance Committee - Co-Chair
Rick Hood, School Committee
Kip Fonsh, Regional School Committee
Maria Geryk, Superintendent of Schools
Rob Detweiler, Director of Finance and Operations (Regional and Amherst schools)
Katherine Appy, School Committee
Alisa Brewer, Select Board
Sandy Pooler, Finance Director
John Musante, Town Manager
Robert Pam, Library Trustee
Austin Sarat, Library Trustee
Sharon Sharry, Library Director

Documents and other exhibits used at meeting:

1. FY 2014 Cherry Sheet estimates (Governors Budget)
2. Finance Director's analysis comparing Cherry Sheet estimates to October projections
3. Information about Community Development Block Grant
4. Library budget
5. Initial Amherst and Regional School budgets

Summary of Discussion on each subject:

1. Pooler distributed and explained the Cherry Sheets from the Governor's proposed budget and his analysis comparing that recommendation to his October estimates, which the Finance Committee used to establish Preliminary Budget Guidelines. The amount to expect in local government aid depends in part on the formula for allocation to cities and towns. The Governor proposed a new approach.
2. Detweiler cautioned that the Cherry Sheets for the schools, town and region, are different from projections for Chapter 70 and Transportation Assistance.
3. Musante expressed caution about how the legislature will respond to the Governor's recommendations regarding transportation funding and the revenue proposal attached to that recommendation. The proposal includes new taxes which may be a challenge for the legislature to enact due to political considerations.
4. Musante summarized his budget recommendation that meets the 3% Finance Committee Guideline. He will ask for additional funding, up to \$90,000, on a one time basis to allow for a transition of social services funding from the Community Development Block Grant.

5. The school budget, when compared to “level services” from the present year, will require a gap of \$737,000 to be closed. Choice revenue is expected to be \$145,000, less than the \$200,000 originally projected.
6. The library budget is balanced for FY 2014 but Sharry expressed concern for future years.

Decisions made/actions taken:

The minutes of October 18, 2012 were approved by agreement. Other decisions and actions are set forth in the Summary Points from the meeting.

Amherst Budget Coordinating Group Summary Points – January 31, 2013

At our January 31st meeting, the members of the Budget Coordinating Group agreed that the following points would be conveyed to our home boards and committees:

- 1) That the Governor’s budget plan roughly aligns with initial State aid projections, creating no major concerns at this stage and no need to deviate from our budget planning assumptions. The big news is the Governor’s ambitious proposal for new tax revenue, which could yield significant additions, primarily for transportation and education.
 - a) The transportation proposal includes projects across all regions of the State, such as critical investment in local Chapter 90 funds, the PVTa system, and the I-91 corridor. The education proposal details and the formula for distributing those funds to different communities are less clear at this point, but have positive potential. Additional clarity on both the transportation and education elements will help determine the scope of possible benefit to Amherst and the Region.
 - b) Raising taxes is not popular, so if the proposals are deemed beneficial to us, effective advocacy in support of these measures will be critical, both to the legislature and the community. We will keep each other apprised of our assessment of the proposals and our efforts to support them.
- 2) Town, School and Library budget proposals are all available and undergoing review by their respective boards and committees.
 - a) All conform to the Finance Committee’s 3% budget guidelines (2% for Elementary Schools) with the potential need for the Town budget to request up to \$90,000 from free cash to cover the transition of human service agency contributions from Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to a new funding model for FY15 and beyond.
 - b) All are encouraged to check out the budget proposal information online:

Town: www.amherstma.gov/budget

Schools: www.arps.org/budget

Libraries: www.joneslibrary.org/budget

3) The next BCG meeting will be held March 7th at 8:30 a.m.

Member preparing minutes: Andy Steinberg