

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes
Thursday, March 20, 2014 7 PM
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

ATTENDANCE:

Andrew Steinberg (Chair), Kay Moran (Vice-Chair), Janice Ratner, Anurag Sharma, Douglas Slaughter, Sarah Swartz, Marylou Theilman.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; Steve Connor, Veterans Services Director; Frank Gatti, petitioner; Eleanor Manire-Gatti, Paul Voss, Amherst Media

Meeting was called to order at 7 pm.

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION

1. **Fiscal Year 2015 budget development**

a. **COMMUNITY SERVICES - Veterans Services/Town Commemorations**

Steve Connor, Veterans Services Director, said that this is a transition year for Veterans Services. With the help of a state grant, they added the towns of Hadley and Middlefield to their service area. There are now ten towns served. Staffing will change from one director and two part-time employees to two full-time positions in addition to a fulltime administrative assistant. There is also an additional 10 hours of administrative help and help from students.

The state reimburses the town 75% for benefits, only, in the following year. For homeless veterans, the reimbursement rate is 100%. With the larger area to be served, the number of veterans receiving benefits may increase, but the amount received may be less than the current amount. Two more costly cases are no longer needing to receive benefits locally. So, the budgeted amounts should cover expenses for FY15. Connor wants to improve outreach to senior veterans and surviving spouses in the next year.

b. **Regional Lock-up Assessment**

This assessment pays the county for short-term lock up services. The amount per capita has increased from 92 cents to 95 cents, resulting in an assessment of \$35,928 for Amherst.

c. **JCPC Report**

The Joint Capital Planning Committee General Fund Five Year Capital Plan, Fiscal Years 2015 - 2019 draft dated 3/20/2014 was distributed. Kay reported that the JCPC voted 8-0, unanimously, to recommend this plan for FY15. It uses 7.5% of the tax levy for capital. Kay mentioned several of the items listed for FY15: an electric vehicle with two charging stations, 3 cruisers, a fingerprint scanner system, an ambulance and power loaders for ambulances, equipment for a pumper to be used in emergencies, trucks and a replacement mower (borrowing), a pickup truck and trailer for LSSE, a snow blower and a security system for the library, security cameras for school buses and vans that we own and a special education van,

bathroom improvement in the Bangs Center, bringing the North Amherst school building up to code so that it can be rented, bringing the East Street school building up to code and replace roof, replace underground gasoline tanks at North Fire Station, remove the underground gasoline tank at the police station and do some interior and exterior repairs, library planning and design grant, and a feasibility study for renovating or replacing Wildwood and Fort River Schools. Last year, Town Meeting authorized borrowing \$400,000 to replace the boilers at Wildwood School. This borrowing would be rescinded and the boilers would become part of the larger project if it goes forward.

According to the JCPC draft, the percentage of the tax levy increases yearly from 7.5% in FY15 to 9.5% in FY19.

The library and school projects are eligible for state reimbursement. There is no such mechanism for the town to help with projects such as a new fire station. Other unfunded projects such as a liner for the Mill River pool may be supported with CPA or grant funding.

A motion was made to recommend using 7.5% of the tax levy for capital in FY15 and that we recommend the capital plan as recommended by the JCPC. The Finance Committee voted unanimously, 7-0, to recommend this capital plan for FY15.

d. Other matters contained within Town Manager budget - none.

2. Annual Town Meeting Petition Articles, discussion and consideration of process

Drone petition article - Frank Gatti spoke about the drone petition article he is bringing to Annual Town Meeting, copies of which he handed out. This resolution, revised slightly from the original petition, describes possible uses for drones locally and requests that they not be used for surveillance, delivery, or other purposes and that they honor the 500 foot space above private property. Paul Voss, a Smith College professor, spoke about unmanned flying aircraft and the control of airspace. Five communities, including Northampton, have passed similar resolutions. Public informational programs will be held by the petitioner before Town Meeting begins.

Discussion included the possible use of drone technology for crowd control or firefighting in the future.

The Finance Committee agreed to postpone consideration of this petition article to a later date after getting more information from counsel and from town departments regarding financial implications.

Process was considered regarding petition articles. Committee members who have questions on an article that they were not assigned can submit them. The Echo Village article may not go forward.

3. New information affecting budget, review financial projections

The consensus local aid resolution out of the Legislature allows for more certainty about the state numbers this year.

4. Member reports - liaisons, committees

Theilman reported that the Amherst School Committee approved the budget as presented on March 18. On the Regional level, three people from each town will be appointed to discuss the default funding formula if one of the towns objects to using the alternate funding formula. For Amherst, the people are: Sandy Pooler, Alisa Brewer and Marylou Theilman.

Ratner reported that the Audit Committee met this morning and that the audit was clean and there were no significant findings. The auditor gave a good and understandable presentation. For next year, the auditors will look into public safety, particularly the use of overtime and detail. This does not mean that there are problems in these areas. Every year, the audit looks at a particular segment in more detail.

The JCPC already reported. See above,

The Regionalization Committee continues on, according to Steinberg.

5 Minutes of previous meetings - The minutes of March 13, 2014 were approved by a vote of 5-0-2. The 2 abstentions were from the two committee members who were absent for this meeting.

6. Next Meeting and Agenda - The agenda for the meeting next week will include Peter Jessop of CPAC and Jonathan Tucker who will discuss five zoning articles. There will be a 5 minute time limit for presentations. Although the schools and libraries are on the original agenda, they may not need to come to the meeting as their budgets are already voted, unlike in previous years. They may come if they choose to do so.

7. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the chair 48 hours in advance of meeting - None.

The meeting adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Janice Ratner, acting clerk

Documents used:

Town of Amherst Proposed Budget, Fiscal Year 2015

Joint Capital Planning Committee General Fund Five Year Capital Plan, Fiscal Years
2015 - 2019 draft dated 3/20/2014

Drone petition from Frank Gatti

Resolution on Drone Aircraft, City of Northampton, amended July 11, 2013

Packet from Paul Voss on unmanned aircraft

Letter from the Hampshire Sheriff's Office regarding the updated Regional Lockup
Assessment for Amherst