

## Budget Coordinating Group Minutes

Date: January 27, 2014  
Location: First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall  
Start time: 8:40 a.m.  
End time: 9:40 a.m.

### Attendance:

Stephanie O'Keeffe, Select Board - Co-Chair  
Andy Steinberg, Finance Committee - Co-Chair  
Rick Hood, School Committee  
Katherine Appy, School Committee  
Sean Mangano, Assistant Business Director, Regional and Amherst schools  
Alisa Brewer, Select Board  
Sandy Pooler, Finance Director  
John Musante, Town Manager  
Robert Pam, Library Trustee  
Sharon Sharry, Library Director

### Documents and other exhibits used at meeting:

1. FY 2015 Cherry Sheet (1/22/14) with comparison to Town Manager estimate
2. FY 15 consolidated budget development calendar, current version
3. Jones Library proposed FY 15 budget

### Summary of Discussion on each subject:

1. The meeting was chaired by Steinberg. Musante and Pooler presented information regarding the Governor's proposed budget, Speaker DeLeo's remarks to the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) annual conference, and the MMA legislative advocacy approach. Pooler reviewed the first FY 15 Cherry Sheet and compared it to the projections he presented in October, which the Finance Committee used to develop Preliminary Budget Guidelines. The significant differences were in Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA), which is funded at the FY 14 level in the Governor's budget, and the offset for Charter School sending tuition, which is substantially larger than projected. Musante urged advocacy with the Legislature for increased UGGA funding, noting that lottery revenues have increased. Pooler and Mangano will review the Charter School sending tuition amount with DESE and DOR.
2. The Town Manager and Library Director summarized their budget proposals. There was discussion about adjustments to the municipal budget with the change in CDBG status. The town will file a grant that cannot exceed \$800,000. These grants are highly competitive. The award will likely be announced in June. Musante will consider other steps to fund essential services such as the homeless shelter if the CDBG grant is not awarded, including an additional funding request to Town Meeting that could be in a separate Article. Sharry described the Library building needs and the Planning and Design grant application that was filed with the Board of Library Commissioners. It will require a \$25,000 match, a request that has been presented to JCPC. The schools are developing budgets consistent with the Finance Committees Preliminary Budget

Guidelines.

3. There was discussion about the budget calendar. Pooler distributed the most recent revision. Brewer sought confirmation of the next Four Town Meeting date. The School administration is considering whether it will need to be postponed so the date was noted as tentative.

Steinberg explained that the dates for the Finance Committee vote on a budget to submit to Town Meeting and to mail the budget portion of the committee's report are uncertain. If there is no information on the House proposal for local aid until the Ways & Means budget, and it is released on the Wednesday before Patriot's Day as is the House traditional schedule, there would be no additional guidance on local aid until April 16. It may make sense to not consider the budget until later in the Town Meeting Warrant and to provide the committee report in two parts, as was last done in 2009. It was agreed to adhere to the schedule as provided and consider the budgets proposed in accordance with the November Preliminary Budget Guidelines. This can be reviewed at the next BCG meeting.

4. There was discussion of next meeting and the Summary Points for this meeting.

Decisions made/actions taken:

**Amherst Budget Coordinating Group  
Summary Points – January 27, 2014**

At our January 27<sup>th</sup> meeting, the members of the Budget Coordinating Group agreed that the following points would be conveyed to our home boards and committees:

1. That key elements of the FY15 State budget process thus far are:
  - a) The Governor's budget proposal would result in \$292,182 less in net local aid for Amherst than original projections. It recommended no increase for State Aid and a substantial increase in Charter School assessments, which staff are reviewing and hope to reduce. House Speaker Robert DeLeo has said that the House budget would propose more local aid than the Governor's budget. The Massachusetts Municipal Association is pushing for the House to provide a local aid resolution in March to help communities plan accordingly.
  - b) Based on the formulas used for determining each community's share of the different aid categories, Amherst would benefit most from an increase in Unrestricted General Government Aid (UGGA,) and that is where our focus with local representatives and other Beacon Hill budget officials should be.
2. That key elements of the FY15 local budget process thus far are:
  - a) The Town's budget proposal meets the Finance Committee's 2.7% budget guidelines and utilizes new recurring revenue sources to cover implementation of the new Rental Permitting Bylaw and increases fire/ambulance staffing. The status of the Town's funding request under the Community Development Block Grant program, and if and

how to address a shortfall in CDBG funds for social service agencies, remains an uncertainty. The budget proposal is available on the budget section of the Town web site.

- b) The Library's budget proposal meets the Finance Committee's 2.7% budget guidelines. A major fiscal consideration is future renovation and expansion of the Jones Library, for which a preliminary planning and design grant is being sought in FY15. If successful, this will launch a multi-year effort financing effort to for the eventual construction. The full budget proposal is available on the budget section of the Library web site, and the Library Director is available to anyone who wants more information on the grant application.
  - c) The Regional Schools' budget proposal is being presented to the Regional School Committee on Jan. 28<sup>th</sup>; the elementary schools' budget is being presented to the Amherst School Committee on Feb 4<sup>th</sup>. Both will then be made available on the Schools' web site.
  - d) Uncertainty about State aid and the late timing of the House budget proposal suggests that it may be necessary to schedule consideration of the Town Meeting budget articles after the zoning articles, to allow for as much information as possible to be known and incorporated in to the Finance Committee's Report to Town Meeting.
3. Calendar: The next Four Towns meeting is tentatively scheduled for Saturday, February 8<sup>th</sup>. Confirmation or a new date will be circulated by the Superintendent soon. The next BCG meeting will be Thursday, February 27<sup>th</sup> at 8:15 a.m.

Member preparing minutes: Andy Steinberg