

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes  
Thursday, February 5, 2015  
Town Room, Town Hall**

**ATTENDANCE:** Kay Moran (Chair), Marylou Theilman (Vice-Chair), Stephen Braun, Bernard Kubiak, Janice Ratner, Anurag Sharma, Douglas Slaughter.

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; Amherst Media; Scott Livingstone, Chief of Police; Jennifer Gundersen, Captain, Amherst PD; Walter “Tim” Nelson, Fire Chief; Donald McKay, Assistant Fire Chief, Lindsay Stromgren, Assistant Fire Chief; Larry Kelly.

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm.

**AGENDA AND DISCUSSION**

**1. News affecting budget**

Second quarter results (Pooler): report distributed by Pooler, 54% of revenue collected. Fines and forfeitures are down (collected only about 30%) will need to keep an eye on this. Lags in interest income. Property tax collections are on target. Enterprise funds – lag in water/sewer funds, some bills got paid late. Solid waste fund running ahead, transportation fund is on target.

52.5% of budget is spent. Our cost for insurance appears way over budget but that’s due to the fact that the comptroller’s office hasn’t appropriated costs to schools. Nothing stands out as problematic.

Snow and ice budget reflects salt/sand purchases, encumbrances will work things out as the winter goes on.

Revenue estimates: property taxes are the easiest to do. Permits can vary a lot year to year, have to look at each category of permit.

Looking to schedule budget coordinating committee to discuss governor’s budget.

A question was raised about the Massachusetts Municipal Association sending bulletins, Beacon newsletter, and other notices to the all the committee members.

Committee members do have mailboxes in town hall, and need to check them.

**2. Budget Presentations**

**Fire Department:**

Chief Nelson notes that the Department continues to live within its budget, he welcomes questions.

Moran asks about the impact of mandatory transition to national registry for emergency medical technicians. Nelson explains that it’s an unfunded mandate, began positioning to provide transition classes a while ago. Transition is to become paramedics, expands level of skill on the

national level (as opposed to EMT/paramedic), 24 hour class. Intermediates are moving to advanced EMT, 80 hour, with testing at the end of the courses. Some confusion exists, in terms of state regulations, on what level of care they will be allowed to administer. \$37,950 is the cost for transitioning the intermediates. \$30,250 to transition the paramedics, based on \$40/hour overtime rate. Planned for 10 firefighter/EMTs this fiscal year, looking at the rest in the next fiscal year. Tried to work this in with required recertification.

Aligning staffing with call analysis is being done by the department, keeping stats on call volume since 2002. In the fall of 2012, developed a model for when to increase staff based on data, has been able to address the call volume using that staffing pattern. UMass is funding periods of high activity related to the academic year. Activity is increasing during other periods unrelated to the UMass calendar. Chief Nelson provided, reviewed, cross tabulation on activity over time. Based on the data the Department knows that things will be busy over certain time periods, but doesn't know precisely when within the time frames, so it remains a challenge. Certain events can trigger calls and the department does staff up but there are no guarantees as to when call volume will peak. Minimum staffing is 7 or 8 during school year, may go to 11 or 13 if needed. There is a call force for additional support. 80% of calls are EMS calls. Adding staff does address needs, it is a labor intensive operation. Data can be used to predict ranges but can't predict which day and extent of need.

Theilman finds the figures interesting, helpful. Stromgren notes that the data distributed (ambulance use) contains information for Amherst and Hadley, there is a question as to how many people are over the age of 65. It's difficult to determine that number, as the numbers shown are ages from patient contact, other population numbers are estimates. Information needs additional work, gives some idea of the trends. Slaughter suggests looking at duration of calls in addition to use, total time people are out. Kubiak asks about payee mix, rate of refusals to calls. Data that could be generated, don't have it on hand, but the Chief feels there's a minimal impact on the Department's collections.

Asst. Chief Stromgren: Department does keep data on the duration of calls, how many resources are tied up on any given day. Staff call backs, call force, mutual aid are tracked. Question is how many times of the year when call volume cannot be met. If needed a "Box call" notifies all off duty, call, and student staff to report to duty.

Theilman asks if there are extra costs due to the central station. Fire vehicles are custom made due to limits of the station; ambulances have gotten bigger but don't have to be custom made. The Department does keep a stash of spare mirrors, however. Kubiak questions impact the existing station arrangements have on response time. No impact at present but the Department would redeploy equipment if there was a better designed facility other than the central station. Ladder trucks cannot be kept in the central station, for example.

Capital outlay versus capital appropriations: line items within the operating budget that are capital items, capital appropriations are requests from Joint Capital Planning Committee. Capital outlay for FY 12, 13, 14 represent actual expenditures; FY 15, 16 are what's budgeted.

Department has the ability to move money between accounts. Capital plans are five year projections, capital appropriations are in the capital budget.

### **Police Department**

Chief Livingstone presents the animal welfare budget, notes that there are no significant changes. In discussion with Northampton on using our pound, may be negotiating with Hadley as well, may be shaping up as a regional dog pound. Northampton willing to pay for renovations, will look to student interns to assist with expanded kennel.

Communications: again, no significant changes. 12 full time dispatchers, two new due to turnover, 60 hours of training for new staff, 16 hour refresher for regular staff. Over 80,000 calls answered over the course of the year, including the business line calls. Question from Slaughter regarding the regional dispatch. Amherst, Hadley, Pelham – contracted with Collins Center to develop more precise cost information for the town of Hadley. No movement expected until we get the Collins information. Amherst wants to provide a regional service but without some incentives from the state toward regionalization, may not be able to get any movement. Handle all Hadley's medical calls now.

Theilman asks about ambulance receipts versus funds decreasing in the police budget. \$15,000 is the EMD payment from Hadley but there are no interdepartmental charges. Why aren't some of the funds from fines, other receipts, going to pay for dispatch? Police receipts go into the general fund, operating revenue is appropriated from there.

Police Budget: Moran asked what the two new officers will allow the Department to do. Chief Livingstone responds that about 5 or 6 positions were lost as vacancies were not filled, but staffing is moving back up. The Department moved to a community policing/problem oriented/sector based model based on assignments to six sectors within town. Officers are held accountable for managing and solving problems with their sector.

Oversight by lieutenants and sergeants but a good deal of leeway is granted the officers. One officer will be working with downtown businesses, BID, and others. The other two sectors, not covered 24 hours, will receive additional staffing. The Chief wants to re-establish a traffic division as well.

Ratner asks about the \$300,000 grant and staffing dealing with domestic violence. Grant has been reduced, still have the civilian advocates but not the police officer funded through the grant.

Theilman asks about the K9, "Dash." The Stanton Foundation is supplying a \$25,000, 3 year grant to pay for startup costs for the program. Will likely start a gift fund to help offset costs of the program. The dog came from the Netherlands, so the dog commands are in Dutch. Dog will do drug detection, firearms, search primarily. Officer is on call 24/7, major commitment on his part. The department may look for a secondary officer in the future.

The Davis report, Safer Community Recommendations: Chief Livingstone believes a majority of the recommendations will be difficult to implement without funding for them, lots of recommendations for cross training with UMass and State police. Cost of department operations is \$1,200 an hour, looking at 24 to 36 hours of training each year. Looking for funds from State EOPS for annual trainings. Partnerships, community oriented/problem oriented policing are already being accomplished, level of effort was understated in the Davis report. Constant outreach to fraternities, sororities, apartment complexes and the like. 30% reduction in noise complaints is due to outreach, contact with problem sites. Increase staffing is difficult to achieve, looking at grants to try to fund officers, criteria for manpower grants are difficult to compete for when Amherst is healthy in economic and other terms. Looking at developing a crisis intervention team through a grant, optimistic about the prospects. Getting on board with the Western Massachusetts Mutual aid pact, most Hampden/Hampshire communities are part of the agreement.

Sharma asks about receipt of military equipment, property seizures and Livingstone responds that Amherst does not formally participate in military equipment program, most of it is not useful to begin with. Specialty tactics or equipment used rarely, do a lot of training. Not a lot of property seizures, have an officer assigned to the District Attorney's office, so do get some funds, approximately \$3,000 to \$4,000 a year, which can only be used for specific purposes.

Pooler: General Government, Select Board/Town Manager – changes because there is funding for economic development director position, as recommended by town/gown study committee. Concerns about reduction in state funding may affect the grant application for subsidizing the position.

Kubiak raises question regarding the compensation of the Select Board members, suggested that the amount is insufficient. Brief discussion among the committee members regarding the appropriateness of the Finance Committee taking a position on the matter, no action taken.

Pooler: doesn't see that any of the 9C cuts will have an impact on the town or schools. March 4<sup>th</sup> is the release date for the Governor's budget, hoping that local aid will be level funded. Town meeting/finance Committee budget: no changes, continue to provide funds for dependent care charges for town meeting members.

Legal budget: level funded at \$110,000. Retainer agreement, excludes litigation costs. Does not include money for labor counsel, which is in the Human Services budget. No need seen at this point to increase the amount.

No votes were taken on any matter presented to the Committee.

### **3. Liaison and representative reports**

Slaughter: Joint Capital Planning Committee met with Library, Department of Public Works. No surprises, no large requests have shown up. Capital budget for road improvements is down a bit, due to equipment purchase.

#### **4. Minutes of previous meetings**

Minutes of January 29, 2015: Kubiak moves approval, Sharma seconds, and carries 6-0, with one abstention.

Slaughter – sent out drafts of past minutes, will send them again.

#### **5. Next meeting and agenda**

Elementary and Secondary schools in Superintendent’s Conference Room at Middle School, 7:00 PM. Budget is on the school’s website but Pooler will ask for summaries.

#### **6. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the chair 48 hours in advance of meeting**

None

Slaughter moves, Ratner seconds adjournment. Carries unanimously, adjourned at 9:42 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Bernard Kubiak

Related documents: FY 16 budget submissions for public safety and general government, for departments cited in the minutes.

Accepted by the Committee March 5, 2015.