

Approved 3/12/2015

**Amherst Finance Committee Meeting
March 5, 7:00 p.m.
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Attendance: Steve Braun, Bernie Kubiak, Kay Moran (Chair), Anurag Sharma, Douglas Slaughter, Marylou Theilman (Vice Chair) Absent: Janice Ratner

Others Attending: Sandy Pooler, Amherst Finance Director; Sean Hannon, Information Technology Interim Director; Julie Federman, Health Director; Nancy Pagano, Senior Center Director; Linda Chalfant, Leisure Services and Supplemental Education Director (LSSE); Barb Bilz, LSSE/Development; and Amherst Media

News Affecting Budget:

FY16 Cherry Sheets

Pooler presented the Town of Amherst FY16 Cherry Sheets for Local Aid Estimates and State Assessments based on the Governor's budget. He noted that the overall impact was manageable.

Local Aid Estimates are reduced by State Assessments and Charges. Pooler said he and Sean Mangano, Finance Director for the schools, estimate that after reviewing the numbers and correcting for what Mangano believes is an error in the state estimate for Charter School assessments, the Cherry Sheets Local Aid Estimates are \$145,591 less than estimated in the Town Manager's budget. The elementary school budget came in \$100,000 less than the Finance Committee guidelines, which could be used to offset the \$145,591, leaving a \$45,591 gap between the Cherry Sheets and the Manager's estimate for state aid in his budget. The major item affecting the assessment is in Charter School Sending Tuition which is \$241,899 more than anticipated and based on a formula used by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) which is used during this time frame, but revised in April when final numbers are available for Amherst children attending Charter Schools.

Budget Presentations

Information Technology – Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY16-- page 35

Hannon noted that the department is in transition with the departure of the former Director. Presently, it is in the process of reorganizing, with roles and responsibilities shifting and final reorganization expected sometime in June. The FY16 includes 4 full time staff with a total department cost of \$943,736. The personnel budget has been reduced by \$1126.

The department received the top Municipal Excellence in Technology Award at the 2014 Boston Digital Summit, and received first place in the 2014 Massachusetts Municipal Association Website award for the Amherst population range. In addition, the department participated in the Massachusetts Community Innovation Challenge (CIC) grant and was awarded approximately \$250,000. This grant was used as seed money for equipment to provide service to other communities through the Hampshire County of Governments (HCOG). Northampton also will participate. The intent is to generate enough revenue to cover costs of providing regional services and to be self-sustaining in the future.

Recent accomplishments reviewed by Hannon included launching an all new Town website; implementing “go green” with paperless bills, direct deposits, W2’s; upgrading the Amherst Maps on the Town website to a fully mobile device supported platform; and continuing significant growth in online payment transaction on the Town website. In addition, the department is completing the transition to the new Town-wide/regional data center in the Police Station.

Community Services-- Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY16-- page 95

Community Services includes Public Health, Senior Center, Veterans’ Services, Social Services, Leisure Services and Supplemental Education, Pools and the Golf Course. For FY16 the Manager is proposing a budget of \$1,724,276 from appropriation, which is \$179,473 or 9.4% less than in FY15, as two Health Department staff and some services will be transferred to the Inspections Department in Town Hall. Federman will be the Director of Community Services when all changes take effect in July 2015.

Public Health-- Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY16--page 96

Federman reported that the major initiative in Public Health is participating in the planning activities with the Hilltown Community Health Center, Cooley Dickenson Hospital and other stakeholders to develop the Amherst Community Health Center at the Bangs Community Center. The intention of the Center goes beyond Amherst; and it will function as an independent Center with its own employees. Amherst will be the host/landlord and will receive rent for use of the Bangs. It is envisioned as providing regional services in partnership with other communities. A feasibility study is in process to evaluate the need for services.

In response to a question, Federman stated that the role of the Board of Health continues to be one of developing policy and regulations.

Federman noted that the department continues to develop efficiencies between the Health, Fire, Planning, Public Works and Inspection Services Departments for projects and inspections. It is an area that partners with all departments.

Senior Center--Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY16-- page 99

Pagano gave an overview of the changes in services from 1972, when the Senior Center was established and provided recreation and education. As it evolved, services were added and today counseling, care-giving support, meals on and off site, along with education and recreation.

Pagano distributed a handout showing the Department of Elder Affairs grant formula and the amount of money Amherst has received from FY05 to projected FY16, which will be \$32,000. The money can be used for anything, and Pagano has used it for staffing. The administrative assistant, who was on the grant, is transitioning to the Town budget. Money from the formula grant now will go toward a social worker whose benefits will be paid by the Town, with the ultimate goal of being fully funded by the Town. A small amount, \$750, from the grant is used for rides to medical appointments

No-cost nursing clinics are offered through a generous \$10,000 yearly gift by a donor since 2000, along with a \$2000 gift from the Amherst Club for outreach clinics. Thirty five eligible seniors

over 60 years of age participated in the tax work-off program for which they will receive a \$1000 abatement on their property taxes per fiscal year. This year the Center Director networked with the Town Assessor and Treasurer/Collector to brainstorm ways to assist older residents with financial matters using a variety of Town and community resources. In addition, this winter there was a need to help some seniors with snow removal, and Pagano enlisted the help of some sports teams from Amherst College who “adopted” senior homes and have helped those residents throughout the winter with snow removal.

Other money for the Center comes from appropriation, as well as grants and fund raising by the Friends of the Amherst Senior Center, which this year will present its fifth Amherst Follies. Donations also come from residents who receive Senior Center Donation envelopes in the yearly Town Census request forms.

Medical equipment is readily available for loan, as people contribute wheelchairs, crutches, commodes, etc. and the Senior Center loan closet is overflowing. Even with the services provided by the Amherst Senior Center, Pagano said that there still are significant unmet needs in the senior population.

In response to a question, Pagano stated that 20% of the seniors served by the Center live in other towns. Asked about partnerships with other towns, she said that although at one time Amherst had one with Pelham supported by a grant, when the grant ran out, social services no longer were provided.

The Center is staffed with the Director, Administrative Assistant (office manager) and Program Director (social worker) whose salaries come from appropriation.

Social Services-- Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY16--page 106

Pooler stated that the Social Services budget is reduced by \$105,000, because in FY16 \$165,000 for social services will come from the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. This represents an overall increase in social services funding. The \$20,000 in the operating budget for Social Services will be used for the Emergency Funds Program which helps Amherst residents who are facing a financial emergency and are without funds to assist in rental arrears, utility bills, transportation or medical expenses. The \$20,000 cannot be funded by CDBG, as it has been locally funded in the past, and CDBG does not allow using its funding to supplant local program funding.

Leisure Services and Supplemental Education (LSSE)-- Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY16 -- page 108

Chalfant said that next year LSSE will be moving to the renovated East Street School. The location will provide more space and ample parking. The staff is positive about the move, and is considering ways to utilize the space for activities, although some activities also may take place in the Bangs Center.

Through grants, foundations and sponsorships, \$13,450 was raised to extend the fee subsidy for additional children to participate in programs. However, the department continues to struggle to stretch the limited dollars. The adult program has had its fee adjusted. Adjustment for other fees is being evaluated.

The Town is now running two afterschool programs, one at Crocker Farm and the other opened this year at Wildwood. There are two other private afterschool programs, one at Wildwood and one at Fort River. Enrollment for LSSE youth programs has been declining. The staff is talking with staff from recreation programs in other towns for additional ideas. The goal is to provide high quality and cost effective programs.

Municipal Pools-- Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY16-- page 111

Bilz passed out a handout covering the accomplishments, revenue and expenses for the outdoor pools, which she discussed with the committee. The goal of the department is to provide an opportunity to enhance the physical and social development of every participant by providing safe, fun, organized, accessible, and well managed aquatic programs and facilities.

A public review and evaluation of current operating hours, fee structure, and programming resulted in an improved approach to programming and operations at all of the Town's swimming facilities for the upcoming season. To improve the Mill River Pool, a state grant and CPAC monies were used to make much needed improvements.

The revenue goal for FY16 has been set at \$90,000. Strategies that will be implemented include: Saturday swim lessons, marketing in social media and print, discount promotions, and changes based on citizen input. Spray parks at Community Field and Groff Park, and a climbing wall are other ideas being considered.

Golf Course-- Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY16-- page 119

A handout covering the accomplishments, revenue and expenses for the golf course was distributed and presented by Bilz. The goal of the department is to provide high quality and affordable golf experiences for golfers and year round recreational experiences for the community.

Significant course improvements have been made and continue. Staff continues to strive to expand programs on the property. Some scheduled events included a disc golf tournament, WinterFest, and grooming the Nordic ski trails for public use and for the ARHS Nordic Ski Team.

The revenue target for FY16 was set at \$262,000. Some strategies to achieve this target include: special discounts, Monday Madness, Surf and Turf Sundays, "Two seniors and a cart" specials, twilight specials, sponsorship signage on tee makers, and short term memberships.

Sharma questioned whether the Town should continue its efforts to maintain the golf course, as the number of golfers is declining. Moran gave an overview of the history as to how and why the Town acquired the land, including the restriction on the grant that helped purchase the property requiring its use for active recreation. A study was done a number of years ago to measure the dollar benefit to the Town. The study possibly may be found in the Town achieves or from a member of the study committee. It was suggested that Brian Morton, who served on the committee, might have a copy or know where it may be archived.

Member Reports - Liaison and Representative Reports

Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC)

Slaughter reported that Ron Bohonowicz, Director of Maintenance and Facilities, presented the needs for facility improvement at the last JCPC meeting. Slaughter said that the JCPC continues to look at the requests for capital needs whose costs are greater than the money available. He commented that there will be tough choices to be made.

Announcement:

Write-ups for the Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting are due no later than the morning of April 10 or sooner, by email, to Moran and Pooler. The Finance Committee Report will be mailed to Town Meeting members April 16. (See next page for assignments and sections.)

Governor Baker will deliver the keynote remarks at “The 2015 Hampshire & Franklin Municipal Conference” sponsored by Senator Stan Rosenberg on 3/21/15, at the Clarion Hotel and Conference Center in Northampton where the Governor will present his plans for FY16. The Plenary Session: “A Discussion of the State’s Open Meeting Law” will feature Attorney General Maura Healey as speaker.

Minutes of Previous Meetings:

Minutes of February 5, 2015, Voted to approve: 6-0, 1 absent

Minutes of February 28, 2015 (Part 1), Voted to approve: 3-0, 3 abstaining, 1 absent

Minutes of February 28, 2015 (Part 2), Voted to approve: 3-0, 3 abstaining, 1 absent

Next Meetings and Agendas:

March 12

Continued Budget presentations

 Veterans’ Services Veteran’s Services/Town Commemorations

 Conservation and Development

 Conservation

 Planning

 Inspections

Non-Financial and Petition Articles

Topics not reasonably anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance of Meeting:

None

Handouts and Documents used at the Meeting:

*Town of Amherst FY16 Cherry Sheets Local Aid Estimates

*Town of Amherst FY16 Cherry Sheets State Assessments

*Town of Amherst Proposed Budget, Fiscal Year 2016 by the Town Manager

*Amherst Senior Center Annual Report FY14

*Dept. of Elder Affairs Formula Grants to Amherst

*The Senior Spirit

*Amherst Follies Information

*Outdoor Pools – Narrative Budget Summary – FY16

*Cherry Hill Golf Course – Narrative Budget Summary – FY16

Adjourned:

The meeting adjourned at 10:10pm

Submitted by:
Marylou Theilman, Acting Clerk

**Finance Committee Assignment for the Budget Sections
of the FY16 Finance Committee Report**

Finance Committee Report for Town Meeting--- Assignments Spring 2015

Ratner	Library Services
Braun	Conservation and Development
Braun	Public Works
Moran	Public Safety Fire/EMS Police Animal Welfare Communications Center Regional Lockup Assessment
Kubiak	General Government Select Board/Town Manager Town Meeting/Finance Committee Legal Information Technology Town Clerk/Elections General Services Finance Department Facilities Maintenance Human Resources/Human Rights Employee Benefits Retirement
Slaughter	Enterprise Funds Water Sewer Solid Waste Transportation
Kubiak	Community Services Health Senior Center Veterans' Services/Town Commemorations LSSE LSSE-Municipal Pools LSSE-Cherry Hill Golf Course
Sharma	Debt Service
Theilman	Schools Amherst Elementary Amherst Regional
Braun & Slaughter	Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC)

*Other sections/Articles will be discussed and assigned later.

*Reports due no later than the morning of April 10 or sooner to Moran and Pooler.

