

Approved 6/12/15

Amherst Finance Committee
March 19, 2015, 7 p.m.
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

Kay Moran, Janice Ratner, Marylou Theilman, Steve Braun, Bernie Kubiak Sandy Pooler,
Amherst Media, Michael Alpert

1. News affecting budget

Governor released road repair funds, approximately \$126,000 will be sent as a grant to Amherst. No news affecting the FY '16 budget.

2. Budget presentations

Non-Financial and Petition Articles

Article 24: Michael Alpert, Petitioner – requests a zone change from R-N to R-G, consisting of four parcels on Butterfield Terrance. Alpert provided copies of a handout that will be distributed to town meeting. Alpert and neighbors believe that the University's development plan will not be beneficial to them. They would like the R-G zone to be extended up the street to these properties to allow them to increase the density of housing on their properties. Anticipating the passage of the inclusionary zoning article, the properties will conform to the requirements of the new bylaw. Zoning subcommittee of the Planning Board recommended the change, the Planning Board voted 5-1 to endorse the change. A special permit would be needed for additional development. Vote on the matter deferred until a report from the Planning Board is received.

Article 28: Resolution towards a human rights culture, race amity day articles: Theilman moves to take no position, Ratner seconds. Vote is 5-0-2 in favor of the motion.

Article 30: Petition to oppose pipeline construction: will this have a financial effect on the town? Kubiak offers opinion that it doesn't have an impact as it's a non-binding expression of the opinion of town meeting. Braun asks as to precedence, as it may have an impact on the town in the future if the pipeline project fails. Theilman prefers that the committee not take a position, that this is a largely a political issue. Braun feels it's a complicated question, does agree that we not take a position but should be ready to answer why if asked at town meeting. Ratner suggests we have an explanation to go along with the non-recommendation. Braun will write a paragraph as to why the committee is not endorsing the article. Braun moves that the committee not take a position, Theilman seconds, vote in favor 5-0-2.

Article 26: Paid sick leave: Pooler talked with Sarah McKee, one of the petitioners. She and Pooler will talk on Monday to see if the petitioners will actually go forward with the article.

Zoning petition articles: not clear if the Planning Board has issued a final report on the zoning articles or the inclusionary zoning article. Braun asked if the application of the bylaw to by right development constitutes a taking, Kubiak notes that there are offsets in the proposed bylaw so there is no taking.

Article 11 Debt Service -- Pooler distributes the town's general fund debt schedule that will appear in the Finance Committee's report. All the numbers are set except the Wildwood Feasibility Study as it is yet to be determined as to how much of those funds will be expended and what the cash flow will be. The intent is to have an exact number for the warrant for Monday Select Board meeting but it may show on the warrant as a "sum of money." Issue under discussion at the JCPC, is to fund additional capital purchases should all the projected funds not be used for Wildwood. The CPA number is a firm one, will appear in the warrant. JCPC spreadsheets will be available for the next committee meeting.

Other expenditures and assessments

Article 1: to hear reports, Braun move, Theilman second, vote 5-0-2

Article 6: Paying retirement system assessment, \$4,528,702 Theilman moves, Braun, second, approved 5-0-2.

Article 7: Regional Lockup assessment, \$35,928. Theilman moves approval, Ratner second, approved 5-0-2.

Article 8, OPEB trust fund, \$200,000. Theilman moves approval, Ratner seconds. Vote in favor, 5-0-2

Article 10: Regional School Assessment, school committee voted alternative method, Theilman moves to approve, Braun seconds. Approved, 5-0-2

Article 27: Bridge reopening petition article: Kubiak asks about the costs involved in developing a plan and cost estimate. Braun voices concern about the cost and environmental impact of replacing the bridge. Pooler: the town meeting can request but can't order the DPW director to submit a plan. For the town to attempt to open an unsafe bridge would likely incur a significant liability. Question as to whether the Public Works committee has offered an opinion. Theilman suggests that the committee recommend against the article, so moved, Kubiak second. Vote 5-0-2. Ratner volunteers to write a paragraph for the town meeting report.

Article 4: Authorization for compensating balances article, committee endorsed this last year, likely to be on the consent calendar. Theilman moves approval, Braun seconds, vote: 5-0-2.

Article 12: Reserve fund - \$100,000 for FY '16, Theilman moves, Ratner seconds, approved 5-0-2. A brief discussion regarding use of reserve funds, moving money between accounts at the end of the fiscal year followed. Unlikely that adjustments will have to be made

Municipal Budget Update

Bottom line of budget will remain unchanged. Pooler anticipates a 5% increase in PPO health insurance rate, 3% decrease in the HMO rates to reflect expenditures. The change in rates might prompt a move for additional subscribers to the HMO plan. Rate adjustments will result in savings to the town. With those savings and a review of salary costs, there will be enough money to fully fund economic development position without increasing the budget's bottom line. Credit goes to Marie Rocca for her work on the budget as financial analyst. Theilman asks if there's enough savings to cover the shortfall (\$45,000) from the cherry sheet estimates. That appears likely.

3. Member reports – liaison and representative reports

Braun reports that JCPC met, approved the final list of capital requests. Some adjustments made, most department requests were met, prioritized set of requests that were pushed to FY 17 should the Wildwood feasibility study require less funding. Pooler did a presentation on the "Big 4" capital projects and debt service that would likely occur for those, the impact on JCPC budget and results from making those a debt exclusion. Pooler conducted a demonstration of the spreadsheet

he developed for projecting the financial impacts. The spreadsheet contains rough estimates at present but will be updated as better estimates are received and will be a valuable tool for projecting financial impact under various scenarios.

Theilman asks if land is being identified for the construction of a fire station, Pooler answered in the affirmative.

Pooler presents a plan for a home rule petition regarding incentives for inclusionary zoning. Warrant article will be to authorize the Documents referred to:

Handout regarding Article 23, to be distributed at town meeting, prepared by petitioner.

General fund debt schedule

Petition article to reopen Mill Street Bridge

Draft articles for annual town meeting and budget book

Select Board to file for a special act of the legislature but not the exact wording of the tax incentive proposal itself. Additional time will be necessary to refine the wording. Pooler suggests that the timing of the incentives needs to correspond with the implementation of inclusionary zoning.

Theilman reports that the feasibility study for Wildwood is on track, will begin to look for a designer. Community input will be sought, look to present findings to the fall 2016 town meeting. Several subcommittees will be working on portions of the project, based on the recommendations of the Owners Project Manager. Both school committees have approved their budgets.

4. Minutes of previous meetings

None.

5. Next meeting and agenda

Paid sick leave article may be heard next week

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

Braun move to adjourn, Theilman seconds, motion carried 5-0-2.

Respectfully submitted,

Bernie Kubiak

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