

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes
Thursday, March 26, 2015, 7 PM
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

ATTENDANCE:

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

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sandy Pooler, Finance Director; Mary Streeter, Chair, Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC); Tony Butterfield, Chair, Personnel Board; Deborah Radway, Human Resources Director; Sonia Aldrich, Comptroller; Sarah McKee, Petitioner; Mary Wentworth; Amherst Media.

Meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm.

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION

1. News affecting budget - None.

2. Budget presentations -Non-Financial and Petition Articles (continued)

Article 26. Earned Sick Leave. Sarah McKee distributed a handout and spoke about this petition article which asks for earned sick leave to be applied to all part-time employees rather than only for those working 10 to 20 hours/week, year-round, as the Personnel Board has recommended. Tony Butterfield gave the Personnel Board's perspective and Deborah Radway distributed a chart comparing the two sick leave plans. It would be difficult to apply this proposed plan to some municipal workers such as election workers, substitute teachers, and seasonal workers. Hours worked for all workers would have to be carried on the records until termination. The Earned Sick Leave Law does not translate well to municipalities. For FY16, the Personnel Board's plan could cost the town \$26,000 while the expanded plan could cost about \$41,000 for town, school, and library employees, not including administrative costs for tracking. The Petitioner doesn't know yet what the motion for this article will be.

Article 17. Community Preservation Act Committee. Mary Streeter, CPAC Chair, distributed a draft of the Community Preservation Act Committee Report to Annual Town Meeting 2015 Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2016 which has been approved by CPAC. The Committee has more money available this year due to the surcharge increase to 3%. Also, some projects have returned funding that was not needed. The state match may be lower, perhaps 18%, because there is less in the state CPA fund. Streeter went through the list of recommended projects on page 7 and explained each one. Projects funded by Debt Service are included on this chart in yellow (\$321,537). CPAC is required to spend at least 10% on housing, historic preservation, and open space. CPAC is recommending spending a total of \$846,633 for FY16 to Town Meeting.

The Hall Property acquisition, \$105,995, would preserve two parcels of land, consisting of approximately 31 acres, adjacent to the Wentworth property. The town has received a Local Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) grant for \$235,655 towards the purchase of these properties. The grant would have to be returned if this land is not purchased.

Article 17. The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to RECOMMEND this article as it is an appropriate use of CPA funds

Articles 13-16. Joint Capital Planning Committee. Doug Slaughter, Chair, Joint Capital Planning Committee, and Sandy Pooler distributed the Committee's General Fund Five Year Capital Plan, Fiscal Years 2016-2020 and discussed the plan. For FY16, the amount available from 7.5% of the levy is \$3,491,190, of which \$2,139,494 is set aside for current and future debt and \$1,351,761 is available to spend on capital items.

Article 13. The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to RECOMMEND \$1,198,024 for capital equipment.

Article 14. The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to RECOMMEND \$684,550 to repair and/improve buildings and facilities.

Article 15a). The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to RECOMMEND \$306,000 to purchase breathing apparatus for the Fire Department.

Article 15b). The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to RECOMMEND \$110,000 to purchase radio equipment for the Communications Center.

Article 16. The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to RECOMMEND that the unexpended amount, \$17,878.98, previously appropriated for the Wildwood boiler be repurposed for the replacement of the Fort River School Barn roof project.

3. Vote recommendations

Article 2. Transfer of Funds - Unpaid Bills. Delay until Town Meeting. No bills currently.

Article 3. Acceptance of Optional Tax Exemptions. From handout, exemptions are available for surviving spouses, veterans, blind, and elderly. For FY15, there was a base exemption amount of \$68,840.83, an optional exemption of \$27,880.76, and a state reimbursement of \$35,293.

Article 3. The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to RECOMMEND acceptance of optional tax exemptions.

Article 20. Change in Composition and Name of PTBC (Public Transportation, Pedestrian, Bicycle Committee). The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to take NO POSITION on this article as it does not have financial implications.

Article 5. FY15 Budget Amendments.

5A. Delay until Town Meeting, first night, when more information will be available. This involves moving money in town departments to fund salary settlements.

5B. The Finance Committee voted 6-0-1 absent to RECOMMEND transferring overlay surplus funds to the Reserve Fund.

Article 11. Elementary Schools. The Finance Committee voted 5-0-1 absent, 1 abstention to RECOMMEND approval of the elementary school budget of \$21,869,835. Slaughter abstained because he is an employee of the School Department.

Article 11. Regional Schools. The Finance Committee voted 5-0-1 absent, 1 abstention to RECOMMEND approval of the Regional Assessment of \$14,825,506 and a total budget of \$30,022,840. Slaughter abstained because he is an employee of the Regional Schools.

4. Member reports – liaison and representative reports - Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC) report was included above in the Budget Presentation section.

Slaughter was recognized for his service on the Finance Committee over many years. He will be serving on the Select Board after the election on March 31.

Theilman reported on Sen. Stan Rosenberg's Municipal Conference held March 21, 2015 and provided two handouts from this conference. (See Documents section). She also mentioned the relationship and agreement between the town and the University regarding Marks Meadow School, which we are no longer using, and the educating of students living in nontaxable University housing. It is unclear whether there is a current Agreement. There are approximately 50 students being educated at a cost of about \$20,000 per student plus the cost of those students in ELL programs, charter, or vocational schools. Theilman will follow up on this issue.

Braun reported that he had a conversation with the Attorney General's Office regarding the way the Finance Committee does minutes and they approved.

5. Minutes of previous meetings - The minutes of the March 12, 2015 meeting were approved: by a vote of 4-0-2 absent.

6. Next Meeting and Agenda - The next Finance Committee meeting will be Thursday, April 2, 2015. Agenda items include voting recommendations.

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

The meeting adjourned at 9:55 pm.

Janice Ratner, acting clerk

Documents used:

Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) Report to Annual Town Meeting April 2015, Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2016 Draft

Joint Capital Planning Committee General Fund Five Year Capital Plan, Fiscal Years 2016-2012

Assignment Sheet FY2016, 3/26/2015

Additional Optional Exemption FY2015 memo, March 20, 2015

Warrant Article, Hourly Employee's Sick Leave, 26 March 2015, from Sarah McKee
Sick Leave Plans Comparison, prepared by Deborah Radway, 3/26/2015

Handouts from Municipal Conference, March 21, 2015:

At A Glance Report for Amherst (MA)

Municipal Budget Development Seminar presentation

