

Approved: 03/03/2016

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes
Thursday, March 3, 2016, 7 PM
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

ATTENDANCE:

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

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Sonia Aldrich, Comptroller and co-Finance Director; Linda Chalfant, Leisure Services and Supplemental Education (LSSE) Director; Barbara Bilz, Assistant LSSE Director, Pools and Golf Course; Julie Federman, Public Health and Community Services Director; Nancy Pagano, Senior Center Director; Steve Connor, Veterans' Services Director; Larry Kelly; Amherst Media.

Meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm.

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION

1. Budget presentations - COMMUNITY SERVICES (*See also Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY 2017, pages 97-116*)

LSSE - Municipal Pools - Barbara Bilz, Assistant LSSE Director, responsible for the Pools and Golf Course, discussed both of these budgets. The pools are doing better in terms of increased usage by the public.. The personnel budget is increased due to the increase in minimum wage to \$10/hour this year. (It will rise to \$11/hr in 2017 as a result of state-mandates). About \$140,000 of this budget is for about 50-60 seasonal, part-time workers, not included in the FTE number. The remaining \$20,000 is for portions of permanent, full time positions (.2 FTE). The Operating expense line has been reduced by \$4,250.

LSSE - Golf Course - This budget is level funded. Operational costs are increasing so staff time may have to be cut to make up the difference. Golf courses, in general, had difficult seasons last summer following the hard winter. LSSE is trying to increase the recreational opportunities throughout the year. Discussion of the Golf Course included: the cost to the town; the fact that the town acquired this land using a state grant which requires it to be used for recreational purposes; that there would be a cost to maintain the land even if there was not a golf course on it; and, that it should be considered like other recreational areas in town, i.e., soccer fields, tennis courts, etc. for which there is no charge to use, but there is a cost to maintain.

LSSE - Linda Chalfant, LSSE Director, said that there are more children registering for programs and that subsidies will continue in the FY17 budget at the increased amount voted at the 2015 Annual Town Meeting. Fee subsidies or discount coupons are available for families with multiple children and for those with children on the free or reduced fee school lunch program. About 200-250 families are receiving subsidies. Information about LSSE Revolving Funds (revenues, expenditures, tax support, etc.) can be found in Appendix C in the Proposed Budget. Fees do not cover all full-time staff salaries and subsidies. The LSSE Department will be moving to the Amherst Pelham Regional Middle School on March 23.

Public Health - Julie Federman, Health and Community Services Director, oversees the Bangs Center as well as the Department of Health. In July, the health inspectors moved to Inspection Services. Federman discussed recent accomplishments of the Department (page 98, Proposed Budget) including the John P. Musante Community Health Center expected to start

leasing space in the Bangs Center April 1 and open next spring, development of good nutrition and fitness programs, and the receipt of two five-year, \$500,000 grants (along with several other communities) to prevent drug abuse and underage drinking.

Senior Center - Nancy Pagano, Senior Center Director, said that the senior population in Amherst (60 and older) is growing with the number of seniors in 2020 expected to reach 5345. She spoke about the increase in town funding which would change the part-time social worker position to full-time and would fully fund a staff person currently supported in part by a grant. The Senior Center receives several grants including an Executive Office of Elder Affairs Formula grant based on the number of seniors, currently \$35,740, and some support from the Friends of the Senior Center. Programs include help for caregivers, providing meals and delivering them, rides to medical appointments, and a tax work-off plan. Providing services for other towns, such as Pelham, was discussed.

Veterans' Services - Steve Connor, Veterans' Services Director, said that there are not many changes in this budget. Amherst is part of a district consisting of 11 communities with the addition of Chester in 2015. Each community pays an assessment based on population. Veterans' benefits are paid out by each town and towns are reimbursed by the state at a rate of 75% for regular veterans and 100% for homeless veterans. There is a one year lag time for reimbursement. Veterans' benefits seem to be leveling off and stabilizing. A new state law requires that Veterans' Services Officers receive training and pass an exam. The Director and staff all did so, even though it was not required of the staff.

Social Services budget of \$20,000 provides funding for the Emergency Funds program which helps Amherst citizens who are facing a financial emergency, such as paying rent, utility or medical bills. This program is ineligible for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding. The CDBG grant of \$825,000 will begin October, 2016.

2. Member reports – liaison and representative reports - Moran reported that the Budget Coordinating Group (BCG) met February 29 and she distributed the Summary Points document from that meeting. The BCG is requesting the following: addition of \$63,788 to fund the Community Liaison Police Officer; addition of \$55,506 to eliminate reliance of Department of Public Works staff on project and capital funds; and \$25,000 to fund library paraprofessionals at the current level (60% FTE) in the Elementary Schools budget. These three items total \$144,294. There is currently a projected surplus of \$111,278, which is \$33,016 less than needed. The BCG requests that up to \$33,016 come from reserves if necessary to fund these additions. The projected surplus amount could change as the state budget has not been finalized.

3. News affecting the budget Aldrich distributed a revised "Financial Projections - General Fund" document. Changes include increasing the tax levy due to increased infrastructure (Eversource and Verizon Wireless) and new growth. The above additions (in Member reports) are in this revision and the budget is balanced. If revenues increase, the money can go toward OPEB, capital, or the Stabilization Fund.

4. Minutes of previous meetings - The minutes of the February 25, 2016 meeting were approved by a vote of 4-0-3 absent. The minutes of the February 27, 2016 Four Town meeting were approved by a vote of 4-0-3 absent.

5. Next Meeting and Agenda - The next Finance Committee meeting will be Thursday, March

10, 2016. Agenda items include the Conservation and Development budget section, non-financial articles, and setting the order of budget sections.

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

The meeting adjourned at 10:05 pm.

Janice Ratner, acting clerk

Documents used:

Town of Amherst Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2017

Handouts: LSSE Winter Program Registration Highlights, 3/3/16

Projected LSSE Subsidies, 3/3/16

Friends of Amherst Senior Center Money Spent, FY13-FY15

Senior Center Monies Chart

CDBG Advisory Committee Recommendations, 2016 CDBG Proposals

Amherst Budget Coordinating Group, Summary Points, February 29, 2016

Financial Projections - General Fund, Draft, March 1, 2016