

Approved: 4/7/16

Amherst Finance Committee Meeting

Thursday, March 31, 2016, 7:00 p.m.

First-floor meeting room, Town Hall

ATTENDANCE: Kay Moran (chair), Steve Braun, Bernie Kubiak, Tim Neale, Janice Ratner, Anurag Sharma, Marylou Theilman.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Sonia Aldrich, Comptroller; Georgia Barnhill, President, Amherst Historical Society; Sharon Sharry, Director, Jones Library; Tamson Ely, trustee, Jones Library; Robert Pam, trustee, Jones Library; George Hicks, facilities, Jones Library; Carol Pope, garden designer; Michael Burkart, Town Meeting member; Andy Churchill, Town Meeting member; Larry Kelley, journalist; Janet McGowan, Town meeting member; Maria Kopicki, petitioner for Article 38; Vincent O'Connor, Town Meeting member; Mike Morris, Asst Superintendent, Amherst Pelham Regional Schools (APRS); Maria Geryk, Superintendent, APRS; Sean Mangano, Director of Finance, APRS; Gilford Mooring, Superintendent, Town of Amherst Public Works; Amherst Media.

1. News affecting budget

None

2. Town Meeting Warrant Articles

Article 41: Kinsey Memorial Garden

Mr. Braun recused himself, as he is a trustee of the Amherst Historical Society. Mr. Neale did participate, but disclosed that he is a former trustee of the Amherst Historical Society. Ms. Ratner did participate, but disclosed that she is on the Library expansion feasibility committee. Ms. Pope summarized the article, which is a request for Town Meeting to recommend to the trustees of the Jones Library that they (1) preserve the Kinsey Memorial Garden in its entirety, and (2) authorize a committee of horticultural experts to maintain and oversee the garden in the future.

Ms. Sharry summarized the position of the Jones trustees, the full statement of which can be found on the Jones Library website.

Finance Committee members did not see any financial impact on the Town.

The Finance Committee VOTED 5-0, 2 absent, to make No Recommendation on this Article.

Articles 31 & 32: 67 Amity Street Rezoning

Mr. Braun recused himself, as he is a trustee of the Amherst Historical Society. Mr. Neale did participate, but disclosed that he is a former trustee of the Amherst Historical Society. Ms. Ratner did participate, but disclosed that she is on the Library expansion feasibility committee. Ms. Barnhill summarized these two articles. Article 31 is a request by the Amherst Historical Society and the Jones Library Trustees to rezone the map for the property at 67 Amity Street (occupied by the Amherst Historical Society, AHS) from R-G (General Residence) to B-G (General Business). Says Ms. Barnhill, this rezoning is essential to the desire of the AHS to sell a piece of its property to the Jones Library (for the library expansion), enabling the AHS

property to be in proper conformity with applicable zoning laws and requirements. Article 32 would establish a restrictive covenant or historic preservation restriction in relation to the rezoning, which would serve to protect the property from developments that might otherwise be allowed in a B-G district.

Because the Town Planning Board has not yet made its recommendation relative to these articles, the **Finance Committee decided to delay its vote until it reviews the Planning Board report.**

Article 35: request to appropriate \$30,000 for a consultant for the newly formed Charter Commission.

Mr. Churchill discussed this request, emphasizing that the Charter Commission will have its first meeting on Tuesday, April 5. After much discussion relative to the merits of a consultant, the proper cost of such a consultant, and the experiences of other towns, **the Finance Committee decided to delay its vote until its April 7 meeting.** At that meeting, the petitioner will return with the following information: the opinion/vote of the entire Charter Commission, an amended dollar amount for the appropriation, the suggested source of such funds, and the clarification in the article wording as to whether requested appropriations are for more than just a consultant.

Article 15: Amherst Woods Station Road sewer extension project

Article 22: Easements, Pine Street Sidewalks

Article 23: Easements, Triangle and East Pleasant Street Intersection

Mr. Mooring presented each of these requests.

Article 15: This request is for authorization of \$3,000,000 for the Phase II completion of this project. It was noted that the original cost estimate for the project was \$4.6 million, and updated estimates now target the project at \$6 million. \$400,000 remains from the Phase I authorization, but \$3 million is still needed to complete the project. Source of funds will be debt, through the sewer enterprise fund. Mr. Mooring did not expect sewer rates to increase as a direct result of this project. And, he indicated that this project will almost complete the plans for sewer expansions throughout town.

The Finance Committee thanked Mr. Mooring for this additional information, and **reaffirmed its approval at a prior meeting to recommend this Article.**

Article 22: **The Finance Committee** noted that because the sidewalk construction on the land in question has already been completed, and the landowner has consented to the easement, they thus **VOTED 6-0, 1 absent, to Recommend this Article.**

Article 23: Mr. Mooring said that the landowner of the land in question (Bank of America) is amenable to this acquisition of easements, and thus this article specifically does not appropriate funds for the land taking. If funds are required, another article will be presented to a future Town Meeting for appropriation. **The Finance Committee VOTED 7-0 to Recommend this Article.**

Article 38: request that the Town of Amherst provide funds for the feasibility and estimated cost of renovating the Wildwood Elementary School and Fort River Elementary School.

Ms. Kopicki, the petitioner, spoke to her request. Mr. Morris spoke to the position of the APRS. Because this was a lengthy and complicated discussion, reference is made to the Amherst Media taping of this public meeting.

The Finance Committee decided to delay its vote to a future meeting, at which the petitioner was requested to provide the following information: a specific sum of money requested, its source of funds, and to the extent possible, some comment on the impact of this study on the timeframe of the Amherst schools' proposed elementary school renovation project and the receipt of funds from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA).

Article 39: accounting and budgeting for the Medicaid reimbursement payments received by the Town of Amherst relative to the education of appropriate elementary school students.

Mr. O'Connor, petitioner, spoke to his request. Ms. Aldrich noted that, by law, Medicaid reimbursement payments must go into the General Fund. After discussion between members of the Finance Committee, the school superintendent, and the petitioner, the petitioner agreed that all parties could work out a satisfactory presentation of this issue in future budgets/financial presentations.

Thus, **the Finance Committee VOTED 7-0 to Recommend Dismissal of this Article.**

Article 40: payment by UMass to the Town of Amherst for the education of students who live in non-taxable UMass-Amherst housing.

Mr. O'Connor, petitioner, spoke to his proposal. Mr. O'Connor's intention is to affect a mechanism that would enable the Town to receive what he termed "proportionate" compensation for the education of students who live in non-taxable UMass-Amherst housing. **The Finance Committee** felt that the wording of the petition did not adequately address this issue, and thus **VOTED 7-0 to NOT RECOMMEND this Article.**

Article 44: House Bill 2584

Mr. O'Connor, petitioner, summarized his request that the Town of Amherst issue a Resolution in support of Massachusetts House Bill 2584, which would establish a guideline/requirement for the payment in lieu of taxation by certain non-profits in Town. This Resolution, if adopted, would be advisory only. After some discussion, the **Finance Committee** was divided on its recommendation. One member felt it was not necessary to make a recommendation since the bill is tied up in committee and thus is essentially dead for the year. Another committee member had a concern regarding the substance of the bill, questioning whether the Town should support a bill which included what he felt was an arbitrary payment requirement. **VOTED 5-2 to Recommend this Article.**

Article 43: Resolution relative to open government for Amherst Town Meeting.

Petitioner Collins elected not to attend the Finance Committee meeting to discuss this Article. There was a brief discussion on the financial implications of this Article. Finance Committee members could see none. **the Finance Committee VOTED 7-0 to make No Recommendation on this Article.**

3. Member Reports – reports from liaisons and representatives

None

4. Minutes of previous meetings

None were discussed.

5. Next meeting and agenda

The next Finance Committee meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 7, 2016 to continue discussion and votes on Town Meeting Articles, including those pertinent to zoning.

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

None

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 pm.

Timothy A. Neale, acting clerk

Documents referred to:

Memo from Superintendent of Public Works on Article 15, sewer extension project debt

Memos from Superintendent of Public Works on Articles 22 and 23, acquisition of easements for Pine Street sidewalks and Triangle/East Pleasant Street intersection

Memos and maps from the Jones Library Trustees relative to Articles 31 and 32, rezoning of Amherst Historical Society property on Amity Street

Spreadsheet showing Town expenditures 2001-2005 for previous Charter Commission

Memo to Finance Committee from Superintendent of Schools' office about petition articles 38, 39, and 40

Information on renovation cost estimates derived from the Massachusetts School Building Authority web site by petitioner for Article 38

Memo from Austin Sarat, president of the Jones Library Trustees, about their position on petition article 41