

**Amherst Finance Committee Minutes**  
**January 12, 2017, 5:00pm**  
**First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

**ATTENDANCE:**

Marylou Theilman (Chair), Joseph Jayne, Tim Neale, Janice Ratner, Anurag Sharma, Bernie Kubiak. Absent: Steve Braun

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:**

Sonia Aldrich (Town Finance Department), Katherine Appy (Chair Amherst School Committee), Maria Kopicki (SASS), Andy Steinberg (Select Board), Amherst Media.

Meeting was called to order at 5:07 pm.

**AGENDA AND DISCUSSION**

**1. Amherst School Committee presentation-** Katherine Appy made a presentation about the Citizens Petition in favor of a re-vote for the new elementary school building project. This vote will occur 01/30/2017 at a Special Town Meeting. Appy pointed out that each year this project is delayed the construction cost alone increases by 3.5%, which would add approximately \$10.4 million to the cost of the project over an 8-year period. The towns share for the co-located school project is estimated to be \$32.8 million. The cost of bringing the current schools into the American Disabilities Act (ADA) compliance is \$38 million. The cost of rebuilding or renovating both schools is estimated to be \$76 million. Replacing both Wildwood and Fort River with a co-located school remains the cheapest cost option for the town. Furthermore, there is a projected savings of \$500,000/year from the new co-located school, which could help offset transportation/busing cost. Wildwood and Fort River are not eligible for *accelerated repair funds* from the state further adding to the cost of just renovating them as standalone structures.

Neale requested that Appy send the Committee “bullet points” outlining the statements in her discussion.

Kubiak inquired about the concern of the “swing space” that would house the students during the construction of the school project. Appy pointed out there would be portable classrooms that are not in the cost estimate.

Sharma expressed his concern about the cost associated with the delay. Is there a contingency plan if this project is voted down again? Appy acknowledged there is no contingency plan.

Sharma asked if the K-6 model is still in the running as an alternative option to the co-located project. Appy pointed out that the MSBA has said no to the alternative option. If this is voted down, the town would lose its place in the queue and need to start the whole process over again.

Theilman inquired about the possibility of renovating the existing school structures as an alternative. Appy pointed out that this would incur a very high cost to the town vs. the cost of building the co-located school.

Ratner asked if the “split school” design could change back to a “one school” configuration if after trying this different configuration, people did not like it. Appy acknowledged that is possible once MSBA money has fully paid its portion of the funding.

Theilman inquired if the school could physically expand if there was enrollment growth. Appy pointed out that the school *is* designed for the possibility of adding additional classrooms.

Steinberg shared a select board handout supporting the article before Town Meeting which included the projected cost of the new project vs. renovating Wildwood and Fort River as standalone projects.

## **2. The finance Committee recommended Article 1 at the Special Town Meeting.**

5 in favor, 0 opposed, 1 abstain, 1 absent.

Tim Neale will write up the Finance Committee’s recommendation and vote.

**3. Draft of Meetings. Re-arranging of the Amherst Finance Committee schedule.** Theilman distributed the meeting schedule for FY18 Budget Hearings. At the January 19<sup>th</sup> meeting, Finance Committee members will make their final selection of the departments they want to write up for the Finance Committee Report.

**4. Member Reports – Liaisons and Committees** – Jayne reported on DPW-Fire Committee meeting on January 10. There was a presentation by Kaestle-Boos Architects who were selected for the feasibility study for the new Fire Station. The possibility of the DPW site as a new Fire Station is not off the table. It is further possible that Amherst College or Hampshire College will give land along the 116 corridor. Architect believes a one-story building is more cost effective by making it a simpler structure to build and “grow into” if there needs to be additions in the future. Town of Amherst will need “drive time codes” from architects to help vet locations along 116. Communication center and emergency center may move from police station to new facility. The cost of the project will not be identified during the feasibility study but architect is confident they will have a good estimate. Committee wants the next vote for cost of Schematic Design delayed until fall Town Meeting. The Library and the DPW will be enough to deal with for Spring TM. Ratner distributed copies of the Jones Library FY2018 Budget, Five Year Capital Plan, and Proposals for CPA Funding provided by Library Director Sharon Sharry. The Budget has been voted by the Trustees. Aldrich said that the CPA proposals will be delayed.

**5. Upcoming Committee Agenda Items** - Sharma wants to study why the Town of Amherst is so expensive to operate and how it compares to other similar towns. He suggested that achieving a desired AAA rating status may not be in the best interest of the towns intermediate growth plans. Neale suggested he would like to do an overview of the revenue of the town. Theilman

started a list of future agenda items that the committee wants to discuss in detail. Sharma suggested that some of the more extensive topics could be assigned to working groups and then brought back to the committee for discussion.

The next meeting will be January 19, 2017 at 7:00 pm.

**6. Minutes of the previous meetings** – The minutes of the December \_\_\_\_, 2016 meeting were approved, \_\_\_\_\_, with 1 absent, abstention?

**7. Topics not reasonably anticipated by chair 48 hours in advance of meeting** – None.

The meeting adjourned at 6:50pm.

Joe Jayne, acting clerk

Documents distributed/used

(Article 2: Representative Town Meeting 2/3 vote, failed).

(Question 5: town wide/at large majority vote, passed)

The Jones Library Proposal Fiscal Year 2018 Town Library Budget.

The Jones Library, Inc. - Five-year capital plan.

The Jones Library- proposals for CPA funding.

Amherst Finance Committee, Meeting Schedule for FY18 Budget Hearings.

Select Board Recommendations on January 30, 2017 Town Meeting Warrant.