

## **Amherst Finance Committee Meeting**

Thursday, January 19, 2017

First-floor meeting room, Town Hall

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

**OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE:** Sonia Aldrich, Co-Finance Director; Amherst Media

Chair Theilman called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

### **Town Manager Review of Proposed FY18 Budget**

In the absence of the Town Manager, Aldrich summarized the FY18 proposed municipal budget. For detail, reference is made to pages iv-xvii of the Town Manager's written budget, as submitted to the Select Board and Finance Committee on January 12, 2017.

The proposed FY18 municipal budget is funded at \$22,967,135, an overall increase of 2.5%. The budget sustains core Town services, with increases in the budget only covering benefits, contractual payroll requirements, and adjustments in departmental expenses. No additional staff positions are proposed.

As has been the tradition in Finance Committee meetings over the last number of years, more detailed presentations will be made by town department heads in coming weeks regarding the various functional areas of the budget. Aldrich began this process by summarizing the following areas: Town Manager and Select Board (pp. 16-68 of the written budget report), Town Meeting and Finance Committee (pp.19-20), and Legal Services (pp.26-27).

Although this is a level services budget, which complies with the Select Board and Finance Committee's guidelines, Sharma was concerned with the ability of taxpayers to continue to support the operations of the Town. Accordingly, throughout the year, the Finance Committee will review and discuss various taxes/rates paid by taxpayers (e.g., property tax, water and sewer rates, CPA surcharges, excise tax), looking at data from the last ten years, as well as comparing such data with other comparable towns in the Commonwealth.

### **Discussion of Finance Committee's Zoning Guidelines**

Theilman began a discussion as to whether or not the Finance Committee should continue to make recommendations, and how, to Town Meeting relative to zoning articles and petition articles. For a number of years, the committee has used a set of guidelines to both assess whether or not a zoning proposal merited a Finance Committee recommendation, and if so, which criteria were used to develop the committee's opinion regarding potential financial impact on the Town.

Discussion ensued, ranging from whether or not the Finance Committee should consider any zoning proposals at all, to whether or not the criteria, last revised in 2013, were clear. The

committee concluded that it will continue to review each zoning article/petition for potential financial impact on the Town. For those articles/petitions deemed not relevant to a financial opinion, the committee will issue a No Recommendation. For those articles/petitions deemed to have a potential financial impact on the Town, the committee will make a recommendation, using its financial criteria as a guide. So that the wording of the 2013 revision reflects current thinking, Braun will redraft the criteria for future committee review and discussion.

**Draft School Project Recommendation**

The committee reviewed and discussed Neale’s draft statement summarizing the committee’s reasoning for its support of Article 1 of the January 30, 2017 Special Town Meeting.

There was extensive discussion of the draft, with the committee agreeing to review another draft developed by Neale and Braun. Final approval will occur at the January 26 meeting, with the intention to have a written statement available on the back table of the January 30 Special Town Meeting.

**News affecting the Budget**

None

**Assignment of Functional Areas and Other Items for Spring 2017 Finance Committee Report**

Postponed to a future meeting.

**Member Reports – reports from liaisons and representatives**

Ratner reported on the library trustee meeting this afternoon. The trustees voted to spend up to \$10,000 to hire an architect to provide costs of projects that needed to be done at the library if the library renovation/expansion project was turned down.

**Minutes of previous meetings**

Minutes of 01-07-17, with scrivener error corrections, were approved: 5 in favor, 1 abstain, 1 absent.

Minutes of 01-12-17 (Town Manager presentation of FY18 budget to joint meeting of the Select Board and Finance Committee), with edits approved at the meeting, were approved: 4 in favor, 2 abstain, 1 absent.

Minutes of 01-12-17 (Finance Committee, alone) were approved: 5 in favor, 1 abstain, 1 absent.

**Next meeting and agenda**

The Finance Committee will meet on January 26, 2017 to finalize its summary report on Article 1 of the January 30, 2017 Special Town Meeting and continue to review components of the proposed Town FY18 budget. Areas to be discussed will be:

**GENERAL GOVERNMENT**

- Information Technology
- Town Clerk/Elections
- Finance Department

Facilities Maintenance  
Human Resources/Human Rights  
Employee Benefits  
Retirement  
General Services  
Debt Service  
Other Expenditures and Assessments (OPEB)

**Topics not reasonably anticipated by the chair 48 hours in advance of meeting**  
None

The meeting was adjourned at 9:43 pm.

Timothy A. Neale, acting clerk

**Documents referred to:**

*Finance Committee Zoning Bylaw Recommendation Criteria*  
*Town of Amherst Proposed Municipal Budget Fiscal Year 2018*