

Amherst Finance Committee Meeting Minutes
February 2, 2017, 7:00 pm
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

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

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Sonia Aldrich (Co-Finance Director); Julie Federman, Director of Health and Community Services; Nancy Pagano, Director of the Senior Center; Maura Plante, Social Worker; Linda Chalfant, LSSE Director; Barbara Bilz, Assistant LSSE Director; David Ziomek, Assistant Town Manager; Steve Connor, Veterans' Services Director; Vince O'Connor; Amherst Media.

Meeting was called to order at 7:02 pm.

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION

1. Budget Topics (Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY2018)

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Health (pp. 95-98) - Julie Federman, Director of Health and Community Services, discussed the mission statement of the department and her responsibilities which include working with an organization of 70 human service agencies, planning for the John P. Musante Health Center, and overseeing infectious disease, heroin, opioid, and homelessness outreach and prevention.

The Health Center will see and treat all patients, with or without insurance. It will receive funding from Medicaid. It is not expected to have any impact on the Town's budget.

A new prescription monitoring system in effect in Massachusetts and neighboring states allows drug prescribers to check on other prescriptions that a patient might be getting. This system makes it more difficult for a patient to go from doctor to doctor to obtain prescription drugs.

The health inspectors and management assistant completed the move to the Inspection Services Department, so this budget decreases by \$42,787 or 23.8%.

Senior Center (pp. 99-101) - Nancy Pagano, Director of the Senior Center, said that her department tries to help people age in place. This includes support for care giving which has become one of the biggest problems. The senior population continues to grow. This year, 215 names were added to the Senior Spirit newsletter mailing list. These are people who turned 60.

Pagano described the two meal programs available to Amherst residents on the basis of need. Transportation is also often difficult for seniors. There are two van services run by the PVRTA but these are not always available. There is also a program where volunteers drive seniors to appointments for a fee. Seniors can purchase parking stickers for \$25/year to park in metered spaces near the Bangs when the Senior Center is open. The ongoing construction work at the Bangs has been a challenge for seniors.

A nurse, funded by a \$10,000 grant from an Amherst resident, runs two clinics/week. She also helps seniors with tasks such as organizing medications for the week.

A Senior Center building would be nice but unrealistic at this time. The Middle School would not be a good location for seniors, for the current in-town site better serves its core constituency. If there were more funding, Pagano would like to have a part time assistant.

The budget is only slightly changed from FY17. The Formula Grant is based on the population of seniors in Amherst from the 2010 census and provides \$10/senior. Grants go to the General Fund and are listed in Appendix A, p.178. Accepting federal and state grants requires the

town to serve other communities in addition to Amherst. Revenues also come from the Friends of the Senior Center, which raised over \$40,000 in FY16.

There are 4 full-time positions in this department and many volunteers.

LSSE (pp. 106-108) - Linda Chalfant, LSSE Director, is retiring after 30 years in this position. Theilman expressed appreciation for all that Chalfant has done for the town throughout her career.

Chalfant discussed the many different programs available for children and adults including: sports, special events every season, classes (hobbies, personal development, fitness, arts), two after school programs, and day camps. LSSE wants to provide access to all for quality programs in a safe environment.

The additional subsidies (\$105,000) voted by Town Meeting increased participation by low income families. Qualification for subsidies includes participation in the free and reduced school lunch program and documentation of need. The subsidy money is included in the Program Fees line in the Sources of Funds section of the LSSE budget. It is also in the Operating Expense line.

LSSE – Municipal Pools (pp. 109-110) - Barbara Bilz, Assistant LSSE Director, manages the pools and the golf course. She reported that numbers have increased significantly in pool use due to running specials, a warm June, and fee subsidies. The Groff Park spray park project was discussed. The wading pool was built in the 1950's and does not meet current safety standards. The project includes a spray park, pavilion and playground and is expected to cost about \$1 million. There is some funding from CPAC but the town did not receive a PARC grant for which it applied.

Calendar years (CY) rather than Fiscal Years (FY) are now being used in the service levels chart.

LSSE – Cherry Hill Golf Course (pp. 111-112) - Bilz said that the golf course seemed to have more use, also due to specials and different types of memberships, but this didn't seem to be reflected in revenues. Collaborations with some University departments have helped with turf management and internal operations. The drought was a challenge but measures were taken to preserve the greens.

It was suggested that service levels for the Golf Course be presented in Calendar Years (CY) rather than Fiscal Years (FY) in the future.

Veterans Services/Town Commemorations (pp. 102-103) - Steve Connor, Veterans' Services Director, discussed the regional veterans' services district which is composed of 11 towns/cities including Amherst and Northampton. The district provides an array of services to support veterans according to state mandates. Communities lay out funding for veterans' benefits and the state reimburses the towns 75% of the cost. If the client is homeless, reimbursement could be 100%. The district works with the treatment court to keep veterans out of incarceration and offer support to veterans when they get out of prison if they are incarcerated. The district also helps veterans from being evicted through the housing court.

The population of veterans seems to be stabilizing. There are 31 veterans currently being served in Amherst. The department cost remains the same as FY17.

2. News affecting the Budget - Aldrich discussed the FY17 Municipal Budget/Actual Reports for Quarter Ending December 31, 2016. We are 50% through FY17. Most variances from the 50% mark are due to timing. The town has collected 54% of budgeted revenue. The Hotel/Motel Tax line does not include the amount received from UMass. This appears in the Miscellaneous non recurring line. Expenditures are at 52.3% of budgeted amounts and include encumbered funds. Salary increases have not yet been allocated to departments. In the Enterprise Funds, Transportation Fund expenses are being watched but this could be a timing issue.

East Street School was discussed. There is an expense to maintain this building, which is not being used. There is a facility study available that could provide more information.

There is a small deficit expected in state aid. Revenue is expected to increase \$239,807 and assessments are also expected to increase \$363,320. Budgeting for FY18 is conservative so the budget still looks good.

3. Review of Zoning Guidelines Draft - Revisions will be made and discussed at next meeting.

4. Update on School Vote - Nothing more to discuss.

5. Other Items and Suggestions for Finance Committee Report - This report will be emailed to the committee for suggestions at the February 16 Finance Committee meeting.

6. Process for Study and Discussion of Future Agenda Items - Sharma, Kubiak and Neale will look at cost drivers in Amherst and will report back with some questions.

7. Committee and Liaison Reports - Braun reported that JCPC met this morning and discussed the library and Department of Public Works projects. If the library project is not approved, the elevator and accessibility issues as well as deferred maintenance will have to be addressed. The cost of the feasibility study (\$350,000) for the DPW building that was not passed at Town Meeting in the fall, now appears in the capital budget. Sharma suggested that this appeared to be an end run around the Town Meeting vote. Theilman and Ratner agreed. Braun will bring that feedback back to the JCPC. The JCPC has begun its weekly meetings.

Jayne reported on the DPW/Fire Committee meeting. This committee will meet with contractors working on the Fire Station feasibility study. They also discussed the DPW building and needed repairs to that facility which could cost \$1 million and still not address the problems.

For both the library and the DPW buildings, the cost to repair these buildings is likely to trigger the need for ADA compliance.

8. Minutes of Previous Meetings - The minutes of the January 26, 2017 were approved by a vote of 6-0 and 1 abstention.

9. Topics not reasonably anticipated by the chair 48 hours in advance of Meeting - None.

10. Next Meeting and Budget Topics

Thursday, February 9, 2017

PUBLIC WORKS

Public Works – General Fund

ENTERPRISE FUNDS

Water

Sewer

Solid Waste

Transportation

The meeting adjourned at 9:26 pm.

Janice Ratner, acting clerk

Documents distributed/used:

Town of Amherst Proposed Budget FY2018

Senior Center 2016 Fundraising Events and Friends of Amherst Senior Center information sheets

Town of Amherst Revenue and Expenditures Definitions, 2/2/17

FY17 Municipal Budget/Actual Reports for Quarter Ending December 31, 2016, January 24, 2017

The Town Manager's Budget is posted on the Town Website at amherstma.gov/3321