

**Amherst Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, March 16, 2017**  
**First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall**

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

**Others in Attendance:** Sonia Aldrich (Co-Finance Director), Michael Morris (Superintendent of Schools), Sean Mangano (Finance Director), Katherine Appy (Chair, School Committee), Vincent O'Connor, Amherst Media

Meeting was called to order at 7:03 pm.

**Budget Topics**

**Schools** – Mangano presented the FY2018 Proposed Budgets for both the Amherst Public Schools and the Amherst-Pelham Regional School District.

**Amherst Public Schools FY2018 Proposed Budget**

- So as to meet Finance Committee Guidelines of a maximum 2.5% increase, the approved final budget is \$22,523,222, or \$375,898 (1.7%) greater than previous year.
- A level services budget calculated to higher than the final approved number, and Mangano reviewed the \$83,906 in additions and reductions to the Level Services budget so as to meet the final approved target. Noteworthy are the following: food service will be brought back inhouse, the two positions of Director of Human Resources and the Director of Equity and Professional Development will be merged into one new assistant superintendent position, a procurement specialist will be hired and shared with the Town, four Special Education paraprofessionals will be added.
- There is some concern that Title IIA funding for low income students will be eliminated if the President's proposed federal budget is approved.
- School choice funds are expected to increase, due to a policy of "topping off" classrooms.
- A Special Education Reserve Fund is proposed in this budget.

**Amherst-Pelham Regional Schools FY2018 Proposed Budget**

- Recommended FY2018 budget is \$31,317,900, or \$513,778 (1.67%) increase over the previous year. The total percentage of increase to town assessments is 1.13%, the lowest increase since FY2010. Amherst assessment increase is \$306,566 (2.02%).
- Level services budget was calculated at \$109,827 less than final approved budget. Mangano reviewed the net additions and reductions that were included in the FY2018 budget.
- Modest capital expenditures of approximately \$165,000 were reviewed.

**Fort River feasibility study proposal**

Morris summarized a proposed \$700,000 feasibility study that will be presented at the Spring Town Meeting, should voters not approve the ballot authorization for bonding the existing 2-6 co-located elementary school project. The Finance Committee suggested to Morris that he provide more specificity for Town Meeting, in that the \$700,000 proposed expenditure would include more than just a report on the feasibility of renovating/building on the Fort River site.

**Petition articles** – O'Connor presented two petition articles that he will be submitting at the Spring 2017 Town Meeting.

1. The first article would ask the Town to fully explore and cost out a proposal to locate a third fire station in South Amherst, fully renovate the existing downtown fire station, and develop a plan to pay for the additional staffing and capital expenditures necessary if the Town implemented this suggested proposal.
2. The second article would ask the Town to authorize the Select Board to request a Special Act of the Legislature authorizing the Town of Amherst to establish a low-income property tax credit on certain rental housing in the Town.

A short discussion ensued, including a request from Theilman to the petitioner to provide cost information on the articles' potential financial impact on the Town. Petitioner had no numbers available at the meeting, but may submit some prior to Town Meeting.

### **News affecting the budget**

None

### **Committee and liaison reports**

**Budget Coordinating Group** – Neale reported that the co-chairs had asked members if they had a need to meet on March 23, 2017. Absent any requests, there will be no meeting.

**Joint Capital Planning Committee** – Braun reported that the JCPC met in the morning and agreed to the adjustments mentioned at the last meeting of the Finance Committee. The capital budget was approved for submission to the Finance Committee and Town Meeting.

**DPW/Fire Station Committee** – Jayne reported that the committee heard from the consultant and continued discussions regarding site, space, and design. The consultant recommended a 28,000 square foot facility. The committee is no closer to selecting a final site, with three locations remaining as possibilities: (1) South Amherst school, (2) DPW on South Pleasant Street, (3) West Pomeroy Road. In response to a discussion regarding response times, the Fire Chief emphasized quality of response was more important than raw response time. The staffing study will be available in two weeks. The Committee will update the Spring Town Meeting, and submit a more detailed report at the Fall Town Meeting.

**Library** – Ratner reported that there is no new information.

**Schools** – Theilman deferred to the earlier discussion regarding the school budget and possible Fort River Elementary School feasibility study.

**Cost Variables Committee** – Chair Sharma was absent, but it was mentioned that this subcommittee has yet to meet.

### **Minutes of previous meetings**

Approval of minutes from previous meetings was deferred to March 23.

### **Other**

Theilman reminded the committee that the deadline for submission of components of the Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting is March 28.

Neale moved that the committee vote this evening on its Town Meeting recommendation regarding the two petition articles presented. By a VOTE of 2 Yes, 2 No, 2 Abstain, the vote will be deferred to a future meeting.

**Next Meeting and Tentative Budget Topics**

Thursday, March 23, 2017

Zoning Articles – Christine Brestrup, Planning Director

Joint Capital Planning Committee report

Recommendation Votes

The meeting adjourned at 10:13 pm.

Timothy A. Neale, acting clerk

**Documents distributed/used**

Amherst Public Schools, FY2018 Proposed Budget

Amherst-Pelham Regional School District FY18 Proposed Budget

Statement of Principle and Agreement Amount Amherst, Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury Regarding

Amendment of Regional Assessment Method

Warrant Article Petition Form, signed but unnumbered, re fire station

Warrant Article Petition Form, signed but unnumbered, re low-income property tax credit