

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

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ATTENDANCE: Marylou Theilman (Chair), Steve Braun (Vice-Chair), Bernie Kubiak, Janice Ratner, Anurag Sharma.

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Sonia Aldrich, Co-Finance Director; Scott P. Livingstone, **Chief of Police**; Fire Chief and Deputies

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Reports by Scott Livingstone, Chief of Police

**Animal welfare:** Carol Hepburn, animal welfare person works out of the police department. Very few changes in the budget, except cola increases. Outstanding job. Opened up animal shelter so that it is now regional – Northampton already using this, Hadley maybe this year as well. Main concerns: rabies, dog bites, dog licensing (about 90% in town). She also responsible for all the farms as well.

The budget indicates only increase is salaries. Fees from Northampton \$1,500 annual fee plus each dog to be billed quarterly. Amount varies, depending on the services rendered. Per dog fee may be a reimbursement for expenses of taking in the dogs which is why it may not be showing up as source of funds. Franklin county has a real regional approach to animal welfare. Amherst is not there yet but moving in that direction.

**Communication Center:** Not much changed with respect to finances. Still employed 12 full time dispatchers, one funded by a state grant. Emergency medical dispatching for Hadley, for a fee, and also fire and area fire agencies. Continue to be Western Massachusetts hazmat dispatching (all the way up to 495). The other towns pay for actual service ambulance usage. Increases in the budget are only personnel related. Current increase of 1.4 percent will go up later when a contract issues get resolved. Note: Recently replaced communications equipment/hardware, except cruisers and radios.

**Discussion:** Why the decrease in call volume? A lot of it is community outreach which helps contain alcohol related disturbances etc. Mental and medical assistance calls are usually related to homeless population. A specific number of officers are trained as part of a crisis intervention team. But police work is quick fix, and it is not a long term solutions to these larger social issues and problems. How many bogus call do we get? This is dropping because all the technology allows call to be back tracked.

**Regional Lock Up:** Pay the dues annually. Access to the facility allows the town to bring people to Hampshire house of corrections, as they await appearance in court.

**Police Department:** Two officers in the academy currently; numbers getting up to where they should be: they were down to 43, but now back up to 48-49 officers. Two are grant funded. The headcount allows sector-based community oriented policing. An officer assigned specifically to downtown now, also deal

with homeless people, business people, etc. Specific goals to be delivered in terms of work that this officer does. Grant funded positions supplement monies from town. Funding received for another canine unit, for a current total of two canine units.

**Discussion:** Party Smart program registration (for off-campus housing only) working well, as it has an education component to it, about being responsible party persons. Once again, community outreach is working. The police continue to meet with incoming freshmen, and that helps educate and prevent problems later. Regarding crime statistics, all metrics are down...community outreach is working!

Amherst is an extremely safe town. Eight members on detective team. College community is vibrant and noisy, but that is not what drives the department.

Cooperation with UMass: mutual aid agreement. It's a collaborative relationship.

The university is funded for 64 officers, currently has about 58. Amherst College has 14 full-time officers, almost exclusively on campus but they are a professional police department and they help the town. Hampshire college force is for security only and don't come off campus to help.

Federal funding: Significant money tied up in federal funding; US Department of Justice about \$172,000. More and more grants want the department to take up a regional view and not just be limited to Amherst. The police are the most diverse department in town. Thirteen of 49 officers are women.

The budget shows Increases in salary only.

### **Fire Department**

Busy year. Busier every year. Some change. Two retirements in last year and then 2 more retirements and 1 resignation this year. New assistant chief; 3 more captains to be promoted, which means that the department will be bringing in 3 new people as replacements.

Call volume this past year gone up 2-3 percent, consistent with last 10 years. Service levels are rising, as the department faces increasing call volume without corresponding increase in staffing. Discussion about future staffing needs to serve the growing demand. Minimum staffing of 8 is split across two stations is not sufficient to handle day-to-day call or traffic volume. Sick leave going up the last 5 years and injury rate ticking up as well. Mutual aid ambulance requests – made 62 times – when the station cannot serve the demand.

The department has 5 vehicles but only 3 or 4 staffed at one time most of the times. The department does have 24 hour shifts – 24 on 24 off, 24 on and 5 off, leading to a 42-hour week. This is the model for the whole country. Waiting for results of staffing study, complete within a month by outside consultants.

New ambulance in service in about a month or so. Received new grants for new equipment, in part to help work with police.

Increases in personnel costs are all step and contractual; \$5,000 increase in operating expense to offset service agreements on equipment (CPR devices).

As to whether other towns paying up: All towns contract an annual retainer plus each patient billed for EMS calls. For FY16, the EMS call volume: Hadley 19.2% Leverette 1.7% Pelham 1.9% Shutesbury 1.5% UMass 684/5,031 about 17% five-year average as of a year ago.

### **Other**

Sonia Aldrich: "FY17 Frozen" Handout for benefits data by department.

### **News affecting the budget**

Nothing changed in the Manager's Budget. We received more in receipts (+\$239,000) but also had higher assessments (-\$363,000).

### **Zoning Guidelines Draft**

Discussion about concept and language, recommended edits for Braun to implement in a new draft.

### **Update on School Project**

Select Board seeking clarification from town counsel regarding the voter thresholds for override vote on the school project. By law, the town needs to have a separate ballot.

Expected expense of \$700,000 feasibility study for rehabilitating the Fort River school; \$500,000 Wild Wood boiler, which may be delayed two or so year for tactical (financial) reasons.

### **Committee & Liaison**

Jayne: Current DPW building is only 15 percent compliant. Top preferred site for the new building is old farm road, after Fort River; other sites discussed are Ball Lane and 379 Henry Street. Yet, another possibility is on West Street. Weston & Sempson will do estimates for repair and cost of renovations of the current building. Next meeting with architects will be about doing feasibility study for the fire station.

Minutes

February 2, 2017: Approved Vote 7-0

Acting Clerk,  
Anurag Sharma

Handouts: Benefits data from Sonia Aldrich