

Town of Amherst
Minutes of the Select Board

April 27, 2017 - 6:00 p.m. - Amherst Regional Middle School, Band Room

Members present: Alisa Brewer, Connie Kruger, Doug Slaughter, Andy Steinberg, Jim Wald
Staff present: Paul Bockelman, Town Manager; LSSE Interim Director Barb Bilz
Others present: Town Meeting member Jim Oldham
Press present: Scott Merzbach, Daily Hampshire Gazette

Meeting called to order by Ms. Brewer at 6:05 p.m.

Ms. Brewer reported that the Town Moderator had provided notice via email earlier in the day that a member of Town Meeting would propose an increase in the Community Services budget by \$60,000. Mr. Bockelman indicated he reached out to the Town Meeting member Jim Oldham regarding his intent and invited him to the Select Board meeting.

Mr. Oldham indicated his proposal to increase the appropriation for community services was focused in the social services area, a continuation of an ongoing effort to include funding in the operating budget for critical services. The effort began at the time the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding replaced town funding for the services some years ago, believing the change led to a reduction in services, which in his opinion should have never occurred, as CDBG is not meant to supplant funding. He noted concern with the changing politics at the Federal level and the possibility of funding loss. His recommendation was that the funds be distributed in a like manner to the current process for CDBG funding. Members noted concerns with the request at this point in the budget process, suggesting a dialogue occur within the budget building process.

Mr. Bockelman noted there is \$105,000 included in the LSSE budget for program subsidies and \$20,000 in an emergency fund managed by the Health Director. Typically proponents come to the Town Manager and encourage a budget proposal, citing the importance of funding going through the proper vetting, i.e. Finance Committee, Select Board etc. rather than from the floor of Town Meeting.

Mr. Oldham indicated the \$60,000 would bring social service funding to the level of funding Amherst was providing in the early two-thousands, providing funds for two or three additional grants. He agreed with the criticism regarding the timing, but indicated he had just recently learned of the denial of grants at the CDBG level. Mr. Oldham noted frustration that Town Meeting has increased funding to this area for the past several years, however the Town continuously fails to take the guidance into consideration when planning subsequent years.

Mr. Steinberg expressed concern that the amendment elevated the funding for this request over other important funding needs such as fire fighters and capital projects.

Members of the Select Board said guidance on policy issues like this should be included in the Board's budget guidelines which advises the Town Manager in his/her budget construction. It was noted that the Town has never and cannot give social service grants, but rather defines a need, issues a request for proposals and awards a contract, which is a different process than CDBG.

Barbara Bilz, Interim LSSE Director spoke briefly about use of the funds for program subsidies. It was agreed that there should be a more comprehensive review of needs in the community and how best to meet those needs, including evaluating the role of the Town. Mr. Oldham clarified his intent for the funds as a grant to a service provider. Members spoke about the cost and capacity of administrating, use of reserves for unanticipated needs and the consequence involving the anti-aid amendment if this were to pass.

Mr. Steinberg moved to not recommend the amendment to add \$60,000 to the community services budget as proposed by Mr. Oldham with Mr. Steinberg to speak. The motion was seconded by Ms. Kruger and it passed.

Ms. Brewer then moved that the Select Board to hold a public discussion no later than September 30, 2017 regarding the role of various types of community services funding in the FY 19 operating budget, prior to establishing budget policy guidelines. Ms. Kruger seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Steinberg moved to adjourn at 7:00 p.m. Mr. Slaughter seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Submitted by Paul Bockelman, Town Manager

List of Documents Presented at the Meeting – Available in the Online Packet for the Meeting Date

Agenda 04-27-2017