

Town of Amherst

Minutes of the Select Board

July 17, 2017 - 6:30 p.m. - Town Hall, Town Room

Members present: Doug Slaughter, Connie Kruger, Andy Steinberg, & Alisa Brewer
Members Absent: Jim Wald
Staff present: Town Manager Paul Bockelman; Fire Chief Tim Nelson, Firefighter Chris Bascomb, Fire Fighters Kendall Hill, Brian Morris, and Dylan Tunnell; Town Clerk Sandra Burgess; Economic Development Director Geoff Kravitz

The meeting was called to order at 6:30 p.m.

Call to Order

Fire Chief Time Nelson presented and introduced Christopher Bascomb, recently promoted to Captain. Town Clerk Sandra Burgess performed a ceremonial swearing in and Captain Bascomb offered words of thanks. Chief Nelson then introduced three new firefighters: Brian Morris, Kendall Hill, and Dylan Tunnell and provided a brief overview of each of their unique qualification. Town Clerk Burgess performed the ceremonial swearing in as a group. Each stepped forward and offered their thanks and a few personal remarks about the opportunity and what brought them to the position.

Chairman Slaughter reviewed the agenda, noting Mr. Wald would not be present this evening.

Reports and Comments

No public comment was offered.

PVTA Service Changes

The Chair reviewed the recommendation of the Transportation Advisory Commission relative to the Pioneer Valley Transportation Authority (PVTA) proposed changes to bus routes in Amherst. Mr. Slaughter noted the points outlined in the correspondence were duly noted during the public hearings and that he would deliver them to the PVTA Advisory Board, on which he serves as a member. Mr. Slaughter provided a brief summary of the financial situation creating a \$1.7 million gap in the PVTA budget. Members requested the comments from the TAC be penned into a letter from the Chair on behalf of the Select Board to the PVTA Advisory Board.

On a motion by Mr. Steinberg, seconded by Ms. Kruger, the Board voted 3-0 with 1 abstention (Slaughter), and 1 absent (Wald), to authorize the Chair or his designee to write a letter to the PVTA on behalf of the full Board to indicate the importance of the bus system to the community and our concern relative to the potential diminution of services to those that rely on that transportation network.

Berkshire Gas Moratorium Update

The Town Manager invited Economic Development Director Geoff Kravitz forward, offering congratulations to him and his wife who welcomed a new son, Samuel Michael, four days earlier. Mr. Kravitz provided an update on the Town’s role as an intervener in the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) review of the Berkshire Gas long-term forecast and supply plan. The DPU has approved Berkshire Gas’ plan and rejected proposed options offered by interveners to end the moratorium, requiring updates to the plan every six months. Mr. Bockelman noted as an intervener the Town had an option to appeal. Mr. Kravitz noted that the DPU decision cited the reliability and low cost of serving existing customers, not new customers, therefore he along with the Town Manager and Town Counsel believe the outcome of an appeal would not be in the Town’s favor. Members suggested contacting legislators regarding DPU basing their decision on existing customers only, as a precedent rather than a matter of law.

On a motion by Ms. Brewer, seconded by Ms. Kruger, the Board voted unanimously to not move forward with an appeal of the decision, but to contact the Town’s legislators and ask that they pursue legal remedy in terms of the basis of Department of Public Utilities review and decisions.

Public Hearing – Parking Regulations

The Chair read the public notice into the record: To consider changes to parking regulations including, but not limited to, changes in hourly rates, hours of enforcement and duration in space at multiple locations, fines, permit fees and duration (effective dates), and, and consideration of a winter storm parking policy to replace the town-wide parking ban. The public hearing opened at 7:06 p.m.

Ms. Kruger introduced members of the Downtown Parking Working Group: Sarah LaCour, Catharine Porter, Wendy Jones and Richard Roznoy; former member Christine Gray Mullen; and senior planner Nate Malloy. Mr. Malloy made the presentation, reviewing the charge, background, and work to date, including the outcome of a parking inventory and the recommendations for short (next six months), medium (6 months to 2 years) and long (2 year +) goals summarized below:

Short (next 6 months)	Medium (6month 2 year)	Long (2 year +)
Improved Online Map/Directions to Parking	Improved Signage	Reassess Parking Garage need
Install new Parking Lot Kiosks/Machines	Identify Parking Solutions for TNC (Uber/Lyft)	Increase Electric Car Parking
Define Downtown Parking Core and/or Parking Rate Zones	Create Shared Parking Agreements between Town and Private Parking Lot Owners	Evaluate expanding Downtown parking areas: permit, meters and Parkmobile
Adjust Parking Rates/Fines and determine Demand Responsive Pricing	Create Event Parking solutions: alternative lots and transportation	Park & Ride
Create standardized parking enforcement hours	Implement a Snow Emergency System for 2017/18 season	Maximize existing parking space areas
Adjust or Remove Time Limits on meters and lots and if needed implement meter feeding enforcement	Build support within the Downtown Business Community	Autonomous Vehicles: Drop-off locations & parking
Permit System: Improve Database Contact Information	Investigate possible private developer parking garage opportunities	Build support within the Downtown Business Community
Permit System: Create Daytime & Overnight Permits with adjusted Permit Costs to market rate with adequate payment methods	Explore Downtown Employee and Town Staff Parking options (Commuter Benefits Program	

Short (next 6 months)	Medium (6month 2 year)	Long (2 year +)
Parkmobile: *Implementation & Education *Determine how fees are paid	Explore Parking Benefits District options	
Evaluate Overnight Winter Parking Pilot	With Planning Board, reevaluate pro/cons of Fees in Lieu within MPD	
Switch to Pay by Plate Enforcement System	With Planning Board, after new downtown apartment buildings evaluate MPD	
Revise charge for DPWG and/or create new Town Parking (sub) committee	Hire Consultant for Parking Study to determine results from Parking System Improvements and possible impacts from new apartment buildings	
Build support within the Downtown Business Community		

Members noted the need to refine the number of town parking spaces cited, handicapped parking use, and impact of the municipal parking district. Mr. Bockelman noted that the Town was already in the process of replacing all of the kiosks, as well as labeling of all on street meters to allow use of the ParkMobile application.

Mary Wentworth, 22 Lessey Street, urged the Board to take no action on the DPWG recommendations, which she believes is oriented towards assisting student tenants towards use of the permit parking system.

John Kuhn, 147 Chestnut Street thanked the DPWG for the work they had done. He noted as a member of the Business Improvement District and a downtown business owner he had used the permit system since its inception, questioning the availability of spaces reported in the study. He objected to the proposed increase to the permit fee, noting he pays for the fourteen individuals they employ, which would subject them to a rather onerous increase. Mr. Kuhn requested a serious study for the need of a parking garage, questioning the way the study reported the need.

Sarah Lacour, speaking as BID Director, spoke about the need for greater analysis of available parking, unsure of what the data is telling us.

Ms. Brewer asked about the outreach to various downtown partners, believing that the charge by the Select Board was not followed as directed. The expectation was outreach to Disability Access Advisory Committee, Public Transportation and Bicycling Committee, Council on Aging, etc. in the formation of rather than at the time of the public hearing on recommendations.

Richard Roznoy, Strong Street, and Chair of the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) reported the TAC is awaiting their recommendations to be integrated into its work at a future point. In regard to a garage, a number of the DPWG members were strongly in favor of such an action, concerned with the perception that there is not sufficient available parking and the number of patrons that are not coming into town as a result of that perception. He hoped the Select Board would consider the recommendation for a consultant to review the data compiled.

Mr. Steinberg noted the comments the Select Board received will be made part of the public record.

Board members discussed the process for moving forward, including a time for closing the public hearing and deliberation of motions presented. Ms. Kruger recommended action on those items which did not draw opposition, including action on the change in winter parking ban, 4-hour limit and greater enforcement on the term limit for metered parking, ticket price and mobile device option. It was noted that it was not the goal for the working group to determine how best to implement their recommendations, but rather define how their recommendations matched the goals put before them. The Select Board may request the Town Manager to provide further information on implementation of specific recommendations.

Richard Roznoy brought forth concerns that closing the hearing at this time will eliminate an opportunity for residents to be heard. He also noted the DPWG will be coming forth with further recommendations for a change in the actual fee on the annual parking permits. Members noted a concrete recommendation on a change in annual permit fee would require an additional public hearing.

Christine Brestrup, Planning Director urged the Select Board to keep the public hearing open until the next meeting which may be beneficial in coming to a decision and provide the community greater opportunity to be heard.

Members agreed to a brief recess and upon return agreed to review the draft motions for a better understanding of what is being requested on each.

Mr. Malloy noted the boundaries of the 'core' parking area were chosen based on demand. Ms. Kruger noted these were recommendations to the Select Board and that it was within the Select Board's authority to make changes. Members wanted assurance that the demarcation of boundaries be clear to users, numbers be clarified to reflect metered parking versus permit spaces and options for southern boundary change.

Members agreed with need for meter and parking lot hourly rates increases in the 'core' from \$.50 to \$1.00 per hour to encourage users to move beyond the core.

Members questioned why the duration for parking in the CVS lot was not being reduced to 4 hours. Christine Gray Mullen spoke, explaining the plan was meant to encourage drivers to park in different areas and keeping this lot at eight hours provided an option for users who need to park long term in the downtown area.

It was noted that the study promoting a change in hours of enforcement from a variety of time periods to 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. for all Town metered spaces shows peak times at 7 p.m. Members agreed that if we were going to limit duration, there was a need for effective enforcement to discourage meter feeding.

Members believed the increase from \$10 to \$15 for time violations was reasonable and appropriate. Funds raised from the fines levied are used to cover the cost of enforcement and for services in the Business Improvement District.

Nate Malloy explained the winter pilot program that was put in place this past year allowing downtown residents to park off street overnight in portions of the public lot behind CVS and Amity Street was successful. Alternation of sides of street was found to be too confusing.

Addition of a mobile payment option for all metered parking spaces was agreed to be useful.

Members agreed to request the Planning Board review zoning related to commercial parking garages currently allowed by special permit and consider changes for by right in same or other districts.

Members expressed concerns with spending more funds for another consultant rather than perform in house and requested greater scope of services. Other members noted that the skill set needed is broader than what exists in staffing or volunteers.

Members indicated they did not have enough information to come to any decision on the recommendation for elimination of annual business permits (\$400/yr) in the Town-owned lot on North Prospect Street (behind CVS). Mr. Malloy reported the permit affords the holder the ability to park in the metered lot without having to feed the meter, compared to a reserved space in the lower level of the garage which has a waiting list.

Replacement of parking kiosks is already in process with the new system due to be up and running by or about November 1st.

Mr. Slaughter asked for a motion to continue the public hearing. Ms. Brewer requested clarification on purpose of continuance. Mr. Bockelman noted continuance provides for further public comment, and clarity on issues brought forth this evening before deliberation, however doesn't preclude the board from accepting comment or seeking further information. On a motion by Ms. Brewer seconded by Ms. Kruger, the Board voted unanimously 4-0 with 1 Absent to continue the public hearing to July 24, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.

On a motion by Ms. Brewer, seconded by Ms. Kruger the Board voted unanimously 4-0 with 1 absent to take action on the recommendations of the DPWG at the Select Board meeting of August 28, 2017.

Town Manager Performance Evaluation Update

Mr. Bockelman provided a summary of his FY17 Performance Goal Report based on his first eleven months on the job, highlighting key accomplishments, and challenges forthcoming. Members noted with appreciation the Manager's efforts in writing such a comprehensive report and for the leadership and level of teamwork he had brought to the position.

Appointments

On a motion by Ms. Brewer, seconded by Mr. Steinberg, the Board voted unanimously 4-0 with 1 Absent to appoint Stephen Jefferson as the Housing Authority designee to the Community Preservation Act Committee through June 30, 2018. Members offered their sincere thanks to Peter Jessop for having served in this position for a number of years.

On a motion by Ms. Brewer, seconded by Mr. Steinberg, the Board voted unanimously 4-0 with 1 Absent to reappoint Michael Birtwistle as the Planning Board designee to the Design Review Board through June 30, 2018.

Licenses and Street Closures

On a motion by Mr. Steinberg, seconded by Ms. Kruger, the Board voted 3-0 with 1 Abstention (Slaughter) and 1 Absent to approve street closures for that portion of Spring Street within the public parking lot from the intersection of South Pleasant Street to the intersection of Boltwood Avenue, including reservation of all available metered spaces in the Spring Street lot, and the closure of Boltwood Avenue from the intersection of Spring Street to College Street, on Tuesday, August 29, 2017 from 4:00 p.m. to 7:00 p.m. to ensure the safety of attendees for the Amherst/Pelham Regional School District's First Day Celebration; Michael Morris, Interim Superintendent of Schools. Mr. Slaughter noted he is employed by the school district and therefore would not participate in discussion.

On a motion by Mr. Steinberg, seconded by Ms. Kruger, the Board voted unanimously 4-0 with 1 Absent to approve a change in the licensee for the Special License approved to serve wine and malt beverages at a promotional event for the Amherst Cultural District at Amherst Works, 11 Amity Street on Tuesday, July 25, 2017 from 7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m., from the Amherst Business Improvement District to Bistro 63, Monkey Bar LLC; Rasif Rafiq, Owner.

Town Manager's Report

Mr. Bockelman reported on the following:

- Attendance at the recent coffee hour held at Brueger's Bagels with Superintendent Mooring. The next one is scheduled on August 25th with Chief Nelson.
- Team building exercises with department heads and core staff at school are scheduled in August.
- Business Improvement District will be coming before the Select Board in the coming weeks to discuss the idea of construction of a bandstand on the Town Common before going out to outside bodies for review.
- Work continues on the Triangle Street roundabout with the intersection planned closing on Thursday for paving.
- Updates on flood plain maps are available on the Town website for viewing.
- Award of the Boston Post Cane is scheduled for Wednesday at the Arbors.
- Negotiations continue with Amherst Media on a successor contract.
- Construction continues at the Bangs Center on both the Musante Health Center and the update planned for bathrooms.

- Brief updates on work related to recreational marijuana, DPW and Fire station study committee as well as for a dog park and the firefighter staffing study.
- A meeting in Boston on the Mass Works grant was productive and will aid in the proposed application.
- Correspondence from the State Library Commissioners places Jones Library project on their project list, fitting in the Trustees plans for coming before Town Meeting in several years.
- The Health Trust implemented a 10% increase on the PPO effective July 1, 2017 with an additional 10% increase planned for October 1st on both the HMO and PPO as a result of degradation of the Trust's financial balance as it has paid out on numerous significant claims.
- Reported on preliminary conversations with refuse management committee on transitioning to a broader scope for sustainability.
- Upcoming events announced and included CDBG announcement, new student luncheon, Greenfield Savings Bank ribbon cutting, LSSE Director Linda Chalfant retirement party, and International Student reception.

Members reported briefly on meetings they had attended as liaisons, including recycling refuse management, parking and TMCC, as well as proposed changes in open meeting law and marijuana legislation in process. A copy of a letter sent to Governor Baker stressing the importance of CPA funding, which Amherst signed onto, was provided.

Mr. Steinberg moved to adjourn at 10:56 p.m. Ms. Kruger seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

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

07-17-2017 Final Agenda and Draft Motions

Downtown Parking Working Group Recommendations and Maps

Comments from Downtown Businesses and Residents

Memo on Pioneer Valley Transit Proposed Changes and Service Equity Analysis Draft

Town Manager Performance Goals FY 17 Final Report

First Day Celebration Street Closure Request and Map

Request for Change of Special License Amherst Works 7.25.17

State Capital Briefs

Open Letter to Legislature on CPA Distribution Funding