

Amherst Finance Committee Meeting Minutes Approved 3/1/2018
Thursday, February 15, 2018, 7:00 pm
First Floor Meeting Room, Town Hall

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

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE: Sonia Aldrich, Co-Finance Director; Paul Bockelman, Town Manager; Jim McPherson, Facilities Director; Rob Morra, Inspection Services Director; Chris Brestrup, Planning Director; David Ziomek, Conservation and Planning Director/Assistant Town Manager; Amherst Media.

Meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm

AGENDA AND DISCUSSION:

1. BUDGET TOPICS: FACILITIES/PLANNING/CONSERVATION/INSPECTION SERVICES
Facilities Maintenance. This budget has decreased due to staff turnover. Jim McPherson, the new Facilities Director for the town and schools, gave an overview of 19 projects scheduled for FY19. These include exterior and interior maintenance for Town Hall, the Police Station, Bangs Center, the Munson Building, North Amherst School, and the parking garage (painting). No funds are budgeted for improvements at the South East Street School. There was some discussion about the possibility of selling this building which is considered surplus property. It can be sold for fair market value with restrictions. Paul Bockelman said that a committee is working on developing a policy and guidelines regarding surplus property and nothing will be done until those recommendations are made to the Town Manager.

Funds are included for roof design for the Police Station in anticipation of construction next year. The John Musante Health Center will pay rent for its space in the Bangs Center as well as its own utilities and cost of caring for that space.

Conservation. David Ziomek distributed a packet of diagrams and spoke about the master plan project at Community and school fields, the proposed dog park on the south (old) landfill, the spray park and playground at Groff Park, the North Common and parking lot project, and proposed solar project at the north (new) landfill. The dog park would be funded with a grant from the Stanton Foundation and Community Preservation Act (CPA) money. Leasing of the land for the solar array would generate revenue for the town.

The Conservation Department will continue to maintain and enhance what we have - 80 miles of trails, about 2000 acres in conservation, bridges, parking areas, etc. The CPA has provided \$30,000 for maintenance of infrastructure. A grant was submitted to the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) for \$30,000 to repair a bridge over the Hop Brook off of South East Street.

Planning. Chris Brestrup spoke about the turnover in the Planning Department with the retirement of a senior planner and the hiring of an associate planner. This resulted in a decrease in the budget. There are five planners. The planning department has worked on simplifying and clarifying the zoning bylaws as well as improving the permitting process. Several projects were discussed including: four marijuana dispensaries (one on Meadow Street and three on University Drive); One East Pleasant Street (brick siding); a solar project on Pulpit Hill Road; Beacon Property project in North Amherst: Aspen Heights (Route 9, 115 apartments, currently under appeal); Barry Roberts' restaurant and apartment project on University Drive;

Southpoint Apartment project (new building with 47 apartments); and Spring Street apartment project (38 apartments). A Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) obtained by the Planning Department is being used in part to build a path to make the South Amherst Village Center and Groff Park areas more easily accessible to those living in the apartments on East Hadley Road.

Many of these projects will generate revenue in the form of taxes and fees to the town. For the next year, the new growth is estimated to be about \$830,000. Neale requested information about the amount these projects might generate in succeeding years, perhaps 5 to 10 years out. This would be a question for the Assessor.

The town will have to pay for bike pads for the bikes in the Bikeshare program at a cost of about \$25,000 to \$30,000.

The number of single family homes being sold to LLCs (Limited Liability Companies) seems to be decreasing.

Inspection Services. Rob Morra said that the Inspections Department has been busy with all of the necessary inspections related to the new building going on in Town, as well as routine inspections (food, health, etc.). This department is only responsible for electrical inspections on the University campus. The rental regulation program is in its fourth year and is complaint driven. A new building code was issued by the state in January, 2018. This department inspects Bed and Breakfasts but is waiting for the state to issue regulations for Airbnb's in the state.

MUNICIPAL FY18 Budget Update. Sonia Aldrich distributed and discussed the FY18 Municipal Budget/Actual Reports for Quarter Ending December 31, 2017. This is halfway through the fiscal year and most budgets are on track. Some differences are due to timing. For Revenues, Cherry Hill is up 15% from last year but still low. Fines are up, mostly due to noncompliance fees paid by Presidential Apartments. Penalties and Interest is up about 25%, perhaps because people are having more difficulty paying their taxes. For Expenses, employee benefits are up due to health insurance costs. The salary reserve for unsettled contracts is also in this line. There was an unanticipated expense for a new boiler at the North Fire Station. Also, the snow and ice expenses are more than budgeted.

A grid with FY19 budget amounts and possible assignments was distributed. The Transportation Fund amount has been changed from that in the budget book. New sheets will be distributed. The total appropriation (and revenue) is reduced by \$50,000, an amount for a consultant for the North Common parking lot project which will come from borrowing instead.

2. News affecting the Budget (Other Sources) - None.

3. Committee and Liaison Reports. The JCPC met in the morning and discussed school maintenance needs and school vehicles as well as town capital projects mentioned above. There was also discussion about changing the definition of capital (perhaps to \$10,000, 10 years from \$5000, 5 years) which would have an effect on operating budgets.

4 Minutes of Previous Meetings.

The minutes of 1/11/2018 (Bernie Kubiak's) were approved by a vote of 5-0, with 1 absent, and 1 abstention.

The minutes of 1/29/2018 (Janice Ratner's) were approved by a vote of 6-0, with 1 absent.

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

6. Next Meeting and Budget Topics:
Thursday, March 1, 2018
Operating Budget Votes
MISC. and RESOLUTION PETITIONS (If Available)
NO meeting February 22, 2018.

The meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm.

Janice Ratner, acting clerk

Documents used:

Town of Amherst Proposed Budget Fiscal Year 2019

Packet of diagrams, upcoming projects (David Ziomek) and photo of bridge over the Hop Brook.

FY18 Municipal Budget/Actual Reports for Quarter Ending December 31, 2017.

Finance Committee Positions ATM 4/26/2017 (February 14, 2018)