

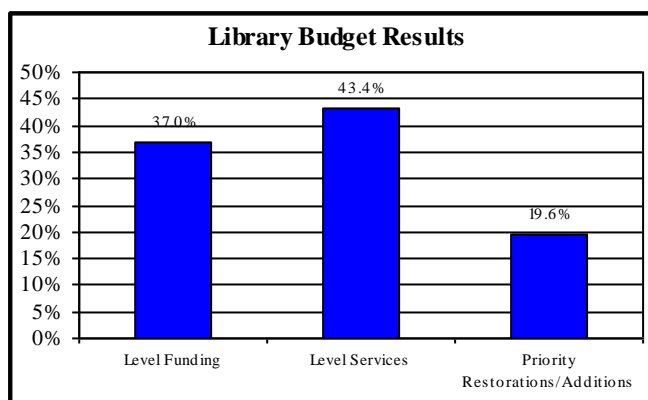
Chapter 6. Questionnaire Results for Individual Budget Areas

This section covers questionnaire results and recommendations for each of the five individual budget areas in the Amherst budget as presented in Questions 1-5 of the questionnaire. Question 7, which deals with individual bond measures, is also covered in this section.

Library Budget FY2010-FY2014

Results

A total of 424 people responded to the question regarding the proposed Library budget. This represents 97.0% of respondents. Of those responding, 43.4% favored a Level Services budget followed by the 37.0% that requested a Level Funding budget and the 19.6% that would like to see a Priority Restorations/Additions budget for the Library.



In addition to the 424 people responding to the Library-specific budget question, 23 people mentioned the Library in the open-ended response question. This represents 9.6% of those who provided an answer to that question. The comments regarding the Library fall into three general categories—comments in support of continued or increased library services; suggestions for budget cuts to the Library; and value-neutral comments about the Library. Some of the comments were mentioned along with additional suggestions for other areas of the budget while other people limited their comment to the Library alone. For the purposes of this section, the Library-specific comments have been extracted from the individual responses and categorized as described above. Comments appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments in Support of Increased/Maintained Library Services

- Fire and Police are important; however, library system serves everyone at such a bargain price. All areas of Amherst need access to information.
- It is important to maintain town services-strong libraries and schools including keeping the branch libraries open.
- Keep libraries and school budgets as they serve a variety of people.
- Nothing is more important than restoring funds to local public schools and maintaining basic services (fire, police, library, plowing, leaf-collection).
- Schools, Police, Fire, EMT, Public Works, Libraries. These are PRIORITY items for full and perhaps increased funding. Unfortunately, other budget categories should be reduced or eliminated.

Suggestions for Budget Cuts to the Library

- Close both branch libraries and sell/lease the buildings

- Close branch (North and South) libraries. Reduce budget at main library.
- Close North Amherst library.
- Close the branch libraries!
- Close the North branch of the library.
- ...combine more school/town/library services (payroll, IT) as has begun with maintenance.
- Consolidate school and town libraries into one department.
- Cut services that are "nice" to have in good times but need to be let go in hard times--outreach bus routes; branch libraries; non-essential staff.
- ...do we need--or can we afford-- three libraries--all open full time...
- I believe our tax dollars should fund public works, public safety/fire, schools first, as needed. THEN, if there is funding for leisure services, numerous libraries, funding should go there.
- Librarians--consolidate buildings--for size of permanent townspeople you only need main building @ Jones--rent out Munson, close N. Amherst or rent out. Amherst also has UMass, Amherst, Hampshire; let library keep funds collected from overdue books.
- Libraries - maintain core services but hive [sic] off ESL and related activities. Reduce times open.
- Library closed one day per week.
- Library--close branch libraries and reallocate money to Jones; sell or lease branch buildings
- Suggestions Library - Close the two branch libraries. Change the main library's weekday hours to 9:00am - 8:30pm. As a concerned customer of the library I also would like to mention that as a service provider library employees could do with a bit more training in dealing with their customers. A library's profit is measured in customer satisfaction!
- The town tries to do EVERYTHING. I.e. funding human service agencies versus seeking grants; having 3 libraries (I think the Jones Board should be encouraged to SPEND some of their endowment).

Value-neutral Comments About the Library

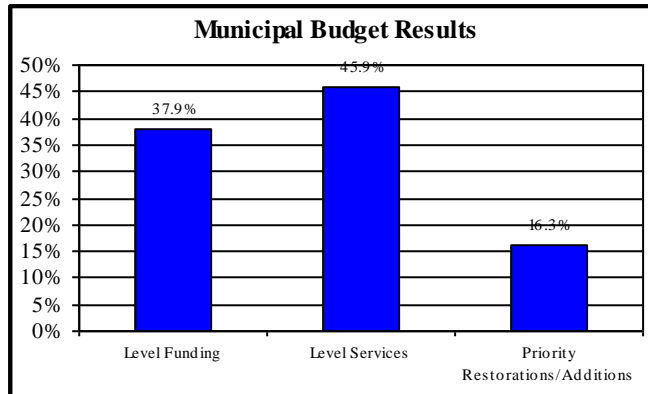
- Build a community cinema in the library to charge fees.
- What are Jones Library furnishings and equipment doing in the Capital Budget.

Core Budget: Under a level funding scenario, the Library director indicated that it may be necessary to close the branch libraries to fund the essential core of the Library budget. The core budget relates to State funding standards which require municipal libraries to allocate 13% of their total budget to new materials, and maintain "open" hours for a minimum of 63 hours per week. The Committee, however, was not provided with estimates of specific expenses associated with branch library operations so it was unable to comment on the magnitude of these prospective savings.

Municipal Government Budget FY2010-FY2014

Results

A total of 412 people responded to the question regarding the proposed Municipal budget. This represents 94.3% of respondents. The results of this question look very similar to those from the corresponding question about the Library. As was the case with the Library, the largest fraction of respondents (45.9%) favored a level services budget followed by the 37.9% that requested a Level Funding budget. The proportion of people who favor a Priority Restorations/Additions budget for the municipal government was 16.3%—lower than the corresponding 19.9% for the library.



In the open-ended question, 71 people had comments about various aspects of our municipal government. This represents 29.7% of those who provided an answer to that question. One of the possible reasons for this large number of open-ended responses mentioning the municipal government might be explained by the design of the initial budget questions on the questionnaire. This was mentioned by one respondent:

“There was not enough room to weigh in on choices within the different budget categories. For example, municipal government seems to include a huge range of potential funding needs (public safety, finance, public works, etc.). It would have been nice to have been able to comment separately on each of these.”

In order to best understand each budget area, individual comments themselves have been broken into separate categories, even if the comment came from one respondent. In addition to these specific comments, there were also a number of general comments about the municipal government and isolated comments about specific areas of the municipal government. These were put together in one category. Listed separately in the report are comments from the public that deal directly with the current form of government in Amherst. As this touches all aspects of our total budget, these comments are not found in the municipal budget section. Comments about the municipal budget appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

General Municipal Government Comments

- Address town luxuries: Tree warden
- Amalgamate services where possible: across dept lines and regionally e.g.: fire and police; continue technology pursuits to reduce staff time and environmental costs...reduce hours of services not actual services; aggressively pursue grants (get a grants writer) work on grants with university partnerships (multi-agency approaches are very fundable)
- Amherst needs to distinguish between core tasks for a town--education, public safety and roads, and virtually everything else. We consistently fail at this. Why do we need an assistant Town Manager?
- Close pl. [?] dept. They do little--follow Hadley example. Combine services--stop duplication. Get a real Inspection Services Dept who do their job and be of help to the public. Reorganize it. Stop the poor service and endless CYA attitude. When the town manager has to work on service quality of Insp. Services, there is a problem.
- Cut Assistant Town Manager. Cut Town Manager pay.
- Cut Municipal overhead (esp. management); ... assess services and budgets (demand transparency and accountability); create incentives for maximizing resources and accountability when they are not used efficiently (make managers' jobs dependent on the outcome);
- Cut services that are "nice" to have in good times but need to be let go in hard times--outreach bus routes; branch libraries; non-essential staff. Privatize [sic] health and safety above all else.
- Cut...Planning Department head[s].
- Get rid of deadwood HR director...Ask all town departments to do zero-based budgeting

- Hard work containing costs with outside professionals evaluating budgets at the end of a fiscal year to mercilessly cut programs that are underutilized/duplicate--in all parts of town.
- Have independent evaluations of Town operations and expenditures to improve performance and accountability (as the GAO does for the federal government). For example, like measures at UMass that resulted in large savings from water and electricity efficiencies. Utilize Town residents with expertise or outside professionals for the evaluations. Encourage new ideas and approaches like the Town's cost saving new telephone system. When looking at the value of any particular budget item or personnel position, base its value on a realistic complete cost that includes, depending on what you are considering, add-ons like benefits cost, insurance, overhead costs (like staff support, space and equipment), etc. Thanks.
- High at least one more grant writer for the town of Amherst. I would also recruit college students in the social service programs to learn aid and assist in the grant writing process. We also need to utilize the College work-study funds placing college students within the town services to alleviate the budget issues. ...Our Amherst Colleges raise millions of dollars each year thru their seasoned fund raising staff we need to utilize the fund raising tools thru the universities to help off set our budget crisis. Utilize the work study students to write grants and fund raise for our Disability Services. MRC Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Services. Each town needs to find creative ways to help assist the state and federal government in providing accommodations and assistance to disabled students, disabled renters, to live, work and enjoy the many amenities here is Amherst to live a quality of life that might not be achieved elsewhere.
- Leaner government offices.
- Lower temp. in all municipal buildings... Send out sewer/water bills only TWICE a year...NO salary increases for town employees... Do NOT cut bus routes... Reduce number of personnel in Planning Department (5 to 2 or 3).
- MAKE ADDITIONAL SERVICES FEE SUPPORTED
- Make administrators in all departments treat budgets in the same way that homeowners and heads of households have to treat their budgets. Don't think you can spend what you don't have and what the taxpayers also don't have.
- Reduce staff - esp. schools administrative staff... "middle management" at Town Hall and Public Works.
- Reduce staffing at municipal office--ex. recycling coordinator, etc.
- Run the government and schools as efficiently as possible.
- Try to reduce costs of town programs--not so much print materials/ mailing costs/etc.
- We don't need so many supervisory personnel. Combine departments. More worker bees, fewer queen bees.
- Whittle down both town and school administrative costs by elimination or combination.

Comments on IT

- Combine more school/town/library services (payroll, IT) as has begun with maintenance.
- Continue to improve IT. The more info is made available the more will "avg" citizen be willing to support the community.
- Cut IT...Department head[s].
- Municipal--work with schools to combine IT and combine positions.
- One IT should service town.
- REDUCE IT budget
- Technology expenses in the schools and town must be reigned in. Technology has become too important in our town.

Comments on Social Services

- Cut all funding for Leisure services, free school meals and other social programs, these are the domain of private charity.
- Cutting Community Services (especially Human Services and the Pools) is not the way to solve our problems. They are a minuscule number. Poor people and children will be disproportionately affected
- Discourage the settlement of abuse victims from other parts of the state. Put welfare people to working on street cleaning, trash removal, etc. Stop payments to welfare people. Establish a kitchen where welfare types have to work to prepare meals for others in same circumstances.
- Eliminate charitable contributions, i.e. Big Brother/Big Sister, ABC House, etc. Eliminate child care subsidy.
- Eliminate the human rights staff position, if it still exists.
- Focus on the services that only the Town can provide. Let the private sector handle everything else. The Town should not be ... giving money to charity.
- I wish I had one. But in the making of choices for cuts, please include human services, in particular the senior center, as a CORE service that must be preserved.
- Let non profits and religious groups manage day care and senior care leisure services type efforts.
- Senior Ctr.--self-funded--run more by volunteers or ask for fees for programs

- Senior population increases - so do services. Not all seniors are paupers.
- Stop funding for human services.
- The town tries to do EVERYTHING. I.e. funding human service agencies versus seeking grants...The town will have to cut back some NON essential ...

Comments on Leisure Services/Golf Course

- ...do we need--or can we afford--three pools...
- [Leisure Services] OK to increase full fee but NOT lower income fees.
- Amherst needs to distinguish between core tasks for a town--education, public safety and roads, and virtually everything else. We consistently fail at this...Axe Leisure Services.
- Charge actual fees for everything (e.g., LSSE, Cherry Hill, etc.) -- no subsidies.
- Cherry Hill with the restriction that it can only be a golf course or public recreation area. It could not be developed for housing.
- Close a pool. Close the golf course.
- Close swimming pool in middle school
- Close the Mill River Park swimming pool. We have one good pool in town....Raise as much as we can through increases in fees from users...
- Cut all funding for Leisure services, free school meals and other social programs, these are the domain of private charity. Lease, sell or turn Cherry Hill into a no-maintenance public area like Amethyst Brook. The town has no business owning a golf course. 3 swimming pools is far more than most towns support, they should be able to offset their own expenses or very close to it through fees and memberships. If not close one. These are luxuries, and should not be a burden to the tax payers. They are born out of good intentions, but there is no way to sustain non-self sustaining ventures any longer
- Cut out some leisure services such as golf course and one town pool in summer.
- Cuts--LSSE--make 100% self-supporting from fees.
- eliminate LSSE
- Find the budget items that are really not necessary. One example that comes to mind is paying professional referees for recreational league basketball games. I am sure there are many others like this.
- Focus on the services that only the Town can provide. Let the private sector handle everything else. The Town should not be running a golf course...
- Get rid of ... Leisure Services director
- I also believe LSSE needs to be self supporting. The town need to stop thinking that we can take care of everybody's needs.
- I believe our tax dollars should fund public works, public safety/fire, schools first, as needed. THEN, if there is funding for leisure services, numerous libraries, funding should go there. Our roads are terrible, our police and fire are maxed out, but we have a great rec department. That doesn't make sense to me. Take care of the core, then look to help others.
- It is important to maintain town services...LSSE budgets to keep swimming pools open.
- Leisure services is by no stretch a crucial function of a town government. In this environment, we can't afford it. It's time we prioritized, and leisure services is at the bottom of my list.
- Make leisure services completely fee-supported. Close one of the two pools in summer.
- One swimming pool.
- Prioritize better, focusing on maintaining public safety and education -- everything else is frosting on the cake...Increase LSSE fees to better cover costs. Close the Cherry Hill golf course. Open only one public pool in the summer, and/or charge a per-use fee (perhaps with summer pass option).
- Privatize the golf course.
- Slightly raise LSSE fees for summer pools
- Some services need to be reduced or eliminated (within LSSE).
- Start by selling the golf course. If you could get over the image of fiscal irresponsibility, the community might be more inclined to give you more of a budget to work with.
- The budget needs to prioritize things such as fire/EMS, police, DPW, our schools and make cuts in things that are "niceties" like LSSE and the golf course when things are tight. In tough economic times we have to cut "the fluff" and focus on the things that are really important to our community not just "nice," extra services. Amherst needs to realize that when prioritizing, every organization/service will be able to defend their reason for needing town support but we just can't make everyone happy all the time anymore! LSSE should be self-supported. Sure it's nice to be able to take a course through LSSE but it would be even nicer if we could provide adequate fire/EMS service to our community!!
- Town--sell or lease Cherry Hill golf course!!! Use money for essential town services.

- We also need to consider prioritizing and reducing funding for quality of life services...We are all tightening our belts and the town needs to do so as well.
- We need to pare out town budget to highest priority necessities only like public safety and schools. We may need to close the Bangs center and all the programs it houses for a few years.

Comments on Public Safety

- A group of residents in one neighborhood to help covering the job (or part of it) of one police officer to be hired in the future.
- Also, I would strongly urge the town to do more in encouraging collaboration between the Amherst and UMASS police departments. I would also encourage the town to remind the police department of the town meeting article that passed encouraging de-emphasis of enforcement of minor marijuana possession offenses. Too often I read in the paper of arrests for pot possession in situations that seem uncalled for (a police call for noise violation results in pot arrest).
- Amalgamate services where possible: across dept lines and regionally eg: fire and police... not sure how firefighters use their time when not active...is there any way to maximize this staff time.
- Amherst needs to distinguish between core tasks for a town--education, public safety and roads, and virtually everything else.
- Ask U. MA. to provide their own fire and ambulance services for the university.
- Consolidate emergency services on a region wide basis
- Explore regional dispatch service, equitable cost for ambulance service has to be paid by each town.
- Have lower paid town workers direct traffic around road construction instead of police officers...[ambulance fees] maybe if Amherst is significantly lower than neighboring towns. [Parking fees/fines] maybe OK.
- I believe our tax dollars should fund public works, public safety/fire, schools first, as needed....Our roads are terrible, our police and fire are maxed out, but we have a great rec department. That doesn't make sense to me. Take care of the core, then look to help others.
- I think public safety needs a lot of attention. Fire and ambulance seems particularly stressed and there is the whole fee structure issues related to our service to other towns and what the cost/benefit ratio is related to that expanded service. This needs answering in my opinion, not just hypothesizing. (What would the department look like without the revenue from other towns--better or worse, what is reasonable compensation from those other towns, etc.) Also, we HAVE to do a better job of capitalizing on the existence of two police forces in town regardless of the pragmatic difficulties that might exist. There HAS to be greater efficiencies to be gained there.
- If there's extra funds after hard costs, like schools ...police, fire, roads, snow removal and such, then spend some on other costs, but no funding for non-essential projects before the basics are covered in full and always with the middle and lower end tax payer in mind.
- Increase fines for auto violations.
- Integrate police forces with UMass. Make sure surrounding communities are paying adequately for ambulance.
- It is important to maintain town services... public safety and municipal services.
- Join with other towns and colleges for regional dispatch service Work with UMass to combine town and UMass police departments - we have over 100 police between the two - too many
- Make hard choices without compromising ESSENTIAL services -- fire, police and schools.
- Make UMass pay for police patrol, ambulance, fire.
- More data that make people aware how much UMass and Amherst College and Hampshire cost to the town. Sample: ... How much fire department services to that institution cost.
- Not a fix, but why do the Parking Enforcement folks ride around in full-size, four-door vehicles?
- Nothing is more important than restoring funds to local public schools and maintaining basic services (fire, police, library, plowing, leaf-collection).
- Prioritize better, focusing on maintaining public safety and education -- everything else is frosting on the cake.
- Provide for the necessities first, Police, Fire, Public Works and Schooling.
- Public safety--consolidate with other towns, esp. the dispatch center (re--current Bulletin article--Gawle).
- Reduce the police force size by 10-25%, with concomitant operational and capital savings.
- Services that serve all ages should be supported and not cut. Fire and Police are important
- Schools, Police, Fire, EMT, Public Works, Libraries. These are PRIORITY items for full and perhaps increased funding. Unfortunately, other budget categories should be reduced or eliminated. Raise or institute fees wherever possible (btw these choices did not offer TRUE cuts and/or elimination of budget categories).
- The budget needs to prioritized things such as fire/EMS, police, DPW, our schools and make cuts in things that are "nicities" ... Sure it's nice to be able to take a course through LSSE but it would be even nicer if we could provide adequate fire/EMS service to our community!!

- Town will have to cut back some NON essential services (i.e. not police and fire). Champagne taste on a beer budget comes to mind.
- We must have a more integrated dispatch and policing system between Amherst and UMass. They should be virtually one service...We must have a Fire/EMS service that asks the question: What is the most cost effective way to serve Amherst?
- We must stop subsidizing ambulance services to Hadley and the other towns, and not accept a long-term contract in lieu of actual cost payments.
- We need to pare out town budget to highest priority necessities only like public safety and schools. We also need to make DPW, Police and Fire departments are first priorities.
- We need to rely on the judgment of your committee and our elected boards to determine what is essential and what can be cut to produce real savings on the expense side. For example, if Cherry Hill is breaking even and we won't save anything by closing it, don't.

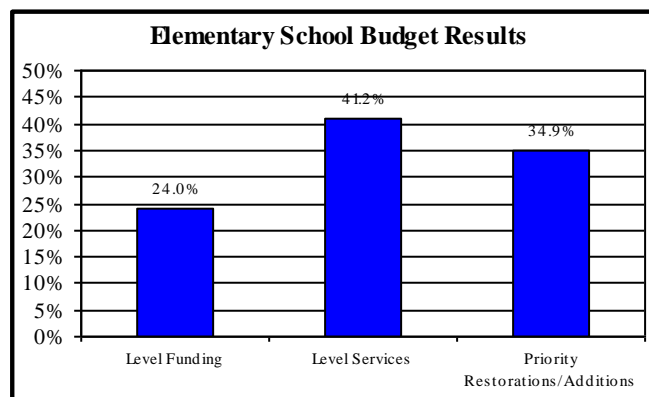
Core Budget: Questionnaire results, as well as commentary from the Finance Director, indicate that public safety and public works are the highest priorities for preservation under a level funding scenario. Much of the frustration expressed by residents in the questionnaires is directed towards "non-core" services. There is little support in the community for reducing staffing levels for public safety officers, but there does seem to be a willingness to accept reasonable fee increases for municipal services of all kinds.

Elementary and Regional Schools Budgets FY2010-FY2014

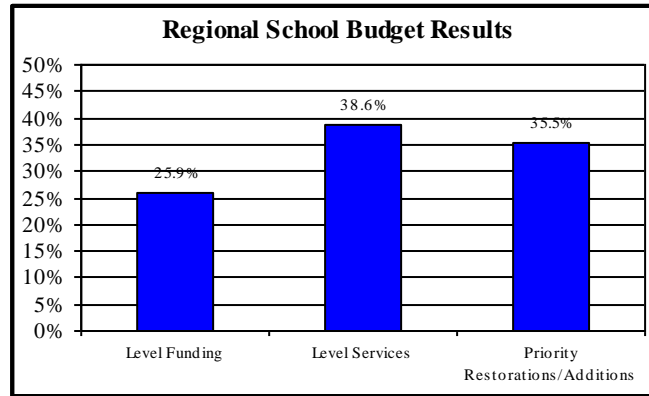
Results

The results for both school budgets (Amherst and Amherst-Pelham Regional) are presented here together, in part because the open-ended responses often did not distinguish between the two different budgets but also for systemic reasons. Both budgets were created by the same budget manager, both systems share a superintendent(s), the suggestions for cuts and/or additions were similar for both budget areas (and, in some cases, share positions), and there are overlapping governing boards for both entities.

A total of 413 people responded to the question regarding the proposed Elementary School budget. This represents 94.5% of respondents. 41.2% favored a Level Services budget. The next-highest category of preference was Priority Restorations/Additions, which was chosen by 34.9% of respondents. Only 24.0% of respondents would like to see a Level Funding budget for the Elementary School.



A total of 409 people responded to the question regarding the proposed Regional School budget. This represents 93.6% of respondents. The results were very similar to those of the proposed Elementary School budget. Here, 38.6% of respondents favored a Level Services budget, followed closely by the 35.5% who would like to see a Priority Restorations/Additions budget. Only 25.9% of respondents chose a Level Funding budget for the Regional School.



In addition to the responses to the School-specific budget questions, 63 people mentioned the Schools in the open-ended response question. This represents 26.4% of those who provided an answer to that question. The comments regarding the Schools fall into a number of different categories—general comments mentioning the Schools; comments reflecting the Schools as one of the Core services of the Town; suggestions for budget cuts to the Schools in general; comments requesting maintained and/or additional School services; comments specific to the Elementary Schools, and comments specific to the Regional Schools. Some of the comments were mentioned along with additional suggestions for other areas of the budget while other people limited their comment to the Schools alone. For the purposes of this section, the School-specific comments have been extracted from the individual responses and categorized as described above. Comments appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

General Comments Mentioning Schools

- Have the local colleges pay more in donations to schools and services since they own more and more residential property that doesn't pay tax revenue because of their tax exempt status.
- If you keep raising taxes people without kids will move out to be replaced by people who want to send their kids to Amherst schools.
- I'm not sure how that fixing the budget problem is so simple but a suggestion to help it is to tax the University for families that live on their property and have children attend Amherst schools.
- Increase state revenue sharing, especially for schools, so that all communities can offer quality education.
- Instead of increasing property taxes or service fees let's try this scenario: 1) an expert retired group of teachers who are residents of Amherst can replace one FTE position at Amherst schools by volunteering their time on .
- Invest in long term priorities supporting schools. Weatherise all schools.
- More data that make people aware how much UMass and Amherst College and Hampshire cost to the town. Sample: how much each child's education from University housing costs.
- Provide incentive to preserve land - it saves school costs.
- Start an initiative to raise the federal income tax to transfer K-12 school funding to the federal budget. Consolidate school and town libraries into one department.
- Stop waste. Why are we still working on sidewalks??? That project on N. Pleasant is never ending and really OTT. Money would have been better spent on schools.

Comments Reflecting Schools as Core Budget Area for Town

- Amherst needs to distinguish between core tasks for a town--education, public safety and roads, and virtually everything else.
- Cut services that are "nice" to have in good times but need to be let go in hard times--outreach bus routes; branch libraries; non-essential staff. Privatize health and safety above all else. Next comes schools.
- I believe our tax dollars should fund public works, public safety/fire, schools first, as needed.
- It is important to maintain town services--strong libraries and schools.
- It's time we prioritized, and leisure services is at the bottom of my list. Schools, public safety, potholes are at the top.
- Make hard choices without compromising ESSENTIAL services -- fire, police and schools.
- Nothing is more important than restoring funds to local public schools and maintaining basic services (fire, police, library, plowing, leaf-collection).
- Prioritize better, focusing on maintaining public safety and education -- everything else is frosting on the cake.
- Provide for the necessities first, Police Fire Public works and Schooling.
- Schools, Police, Fire, EMT, Public Works, Libraries. These are PRIORITY items for full and perhaps increased funding. Unfortunately, other budget categories should be reduced or eliminated.
- Spend money on only what is necessary and the schools.
- The budget needs to prioritize things such as fire/EMS, police, DPW, our schools
- We need to pare out town budget to highest priority necessities only like public safety and schools.

Comments Calling for Cuts School Budgets

- ...school and staff step increase should be a modest figure, say 250 to 500 per step...combine more school/town/library services (payroll, IT).
- A Question I have had for a long time is why does Amherst have six assistant principals? I would think we could have an assistant to the superintendent that could do the job of the six assistant principals. I have a hard time believing those jobs of the six assistants are that much different that one person could take care of it for all.
- Cut administrative positions at both elementary and regional schools.
- Cut all funding for Leisure services, free school meals and other social programs...A movement to make at least some cuts in special education and install an affordable cap should be considered. Cutting school programs that serve the fewest...If there's extra funds after hard costs, like schools (and I mean a sensible school program we can really sustain/afford)...
- Cut all school bus routes within 1.5 miles of school.
- Cut down on administrators in the school system. Do not overpay for a superintendent.
- Focus school budget on the basics.
- Get rid of the many "extra" teachers in the school system. Too many are doing nothing while classroom teachers carry the burden.
- Public employees, including teachers, need to understand that they cannot count on raises every year, regardless of the economy and regardless of whether the Legislature pays the state's fair share. If the economy tanks, then public employees will have to hold tight for awhile just everyone else. We could perhaps encourage our magnificent teacher corps to be entrepreneurial about developing on-line courses and other products that would bring income into the area.
- Recognize that in severe economic times, we have to make cuts and sacrifices, not just act as usual--including schools. Kids will survive.
- Reduce school administration comparably [by 10-25%]. ..but seriously consider referenda for bonds to support school reconstruction...
- Reduce top-heavy school administration.
- Schools: Use more volunteers. There are many retired teachers in this town. Do not hire more administrators. Turn off lights. Save fuel by making fewer school bus stops. Neighbors can organize volunteers to meet school buses and children can actually walk a reasonable distance. Be careful of technology spending. It can get out of hand and wreck a budget. See if companies will donate computers, etc. (It's done at UMass with pianos.) Forget about distance learning. It is over-rated and not good for the overall education of young people. It does nothing for socialization.
- Schools: divide students into classes by ability: honors, regular, and eliminate SOME of the "Specialty" FTE's like individual math or reading coaches.
- Schools--cut teacher aides except for SPED needs--aides may not help (never in existence till '70's and '80's) and students paid attention to teachers (may actually be a distraction if two adults in one room) . Needs to be discipline in schools--right now problems with ADHD students and all students (re: attention spans) just move up to college level.

- Technology expenses in the schools and town must be reigned in. Technology has become too important in our town.
- The major factors causing the problems are: ...(3) decreasing wherewithal of taxpayers to fund services that were "affordable" for some number of years... For #3, we are going to have to get used to much less service in public schools and people will have to increasingly rely on each other (i.e., volunteers) for home schooling, extracurricular programs, etc.
- WAY fewer school administrators. Keep one principal and assistant principal for each school--cut central office staff.
- We also need to consider prioritizing and reducing funding for quality of life services--I do think schools are important but I continue to think that there budget can be trimmed. We are all tightening our belts and the town needs to do so as well.
- Whittle down both town and school administrative costs by elimination or combination.
- Yes, we need schools, but their budgets are so large that I really wonder if they need to have all of these services for the students and parents.
- You HAVE TO control school expenses. Amherst does not HAVE to be number one in Western Mass.

Comments Calling to Maintain/Add Services to Schools

- Establish a position in the town to write education grants to provide outside funding for schools.
- Keep libraries and school budgets as they serve a variety of people.
- Long term: Stronger advocacy at the state and federal level for fair funding for our school children...Short term: Increased partnerships with area colleges, grants & a tax override - our kids have had enough taken away already & we cannot reduce the strength of Amherst schools anymore & still consider ourselves to be a high quality district.
- The schools are the greatest asset the community has. People's property values are directly tied to the real and perceived merits of the Amherst town and regional districts. Rising costs are not avoidable, given unfunded mandates such as NCLB. Let's not squander our legacy.
- While our schools have suffered heavy cuts in teachers, library staff, programs, lack of repair and renovation -- our town hall has been beautifully renovated and cared for, expensive sidewalks have been put in downtown. Our priorities as a community seem to have turned away from caring for and educating our children.

Elementary-specific Comments

- ...eliminate assistant principals in elementary schools (past rule of thumb, ass't for schools with 500 students, what elem. school has more than 500?).
- Close Marks Meadow.
- Close Marks Meadows School.
- Elementary Schools Reduce Special Ed program Make fee based ALL after school programs (academic and extra curricular).
- Elementary Schools--increase funding; concentrate on reducing class sizes.
- Get the colleges and University to contribute, i.e., renovate the elementary schools.
- More education is needed about why the elementary schools need to be renovated.
- Review the 1/2 day of school on Wednesdays. It has to be very wasteful to spend all these fixed cost (fuel, bussing, etc) for 3 hours of school time.

Regional-specific Comments

- College students can help seek grants for computers for the Regional School Budget.
- Cut all night games at school...Charge high school students a fee if they do NOT ride their bus but DRIVE to school instead.
- Cut more admin. jobs in the secondary schools, do we really need all these deans and asst. deans and counselors?
- Cut the high school football program!!!
- Energy conservation measures in the Middle School first, then in others as needed. Wind turbines on school grounds to provide municipal energy system
- High school seems heavy on high salary administrators.
- I believe we will have to have strong high schools to prepare our kids for the future
- I think restoring services to the regional school system should be a high priority. We are an educational community (education is our main industry) and we can't afford to let our public schools decline. This will have huge ramifications over time for the attractiveness of our community to those considering locating here for employment.
- Reduce administrative staff in the regional school budget.

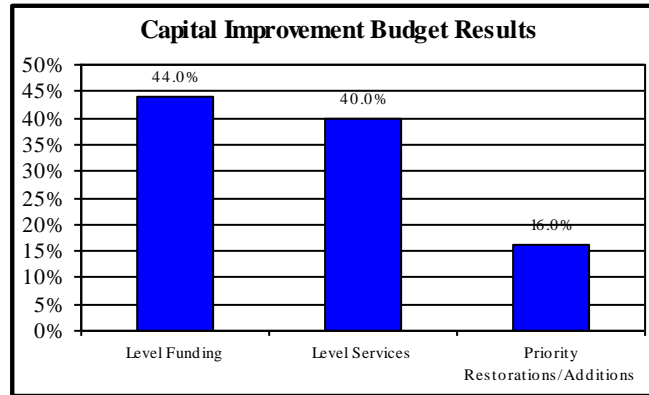
- reduce staff - esp. schools administrative staff at regional level
- Regional Schools Eliminate and/or make fee based Russian and German language programs and make fee based ALL after school programs (academic and extra curricular). Reduce Special Ed program
- Regional Schools--eliminate extras (low enrollment languages like Russian; low enrollment electives); charge fees for clubs just like you do for athletics; concentrate on strengthening the core subjects and getting kids out of study halls
- When junior high had three grades there were two administrators, now there are two grades in middle school and three administrators, one too many. Same in high school. Dostaff get paid 40 hours for 40 hours work or paid 40 hours for 37.5 hours of work. If so why pay for lunch?

Core Budget: Questionnaire results indicate that there is a slight bias towards the schools when it comes to the allocation of our shrinking financial resources. Although a Level Services budget is out of reach for FY 2010, the core of the School budgets; direct services to students, appears to rise to the top as the most important municipal budget priority.

Capital Budget FY2010-FY2014

Results

A total of 405 people responded to the question regarding the proposed Capital Improvement budget. This represents 92.7% of respondents. This is the only one of the five individual budget areas in which the largest proportion of respondents (44.0%) favored a Level Funding budget. An additional 40.0% favored a Level Services budget and 16.0% requested a Priority Restorations/Additions budget for Capital Improvements.



Only 25 people mentioned Capital Improvements in the open-ended response question. This represents 10.5% of those who provided an answer to that question. These Capital Improvement comments can be broken out into three general categories—comments in support of continued or increased Capital Improvement; suggestions for reductions to Capital Improvement; and value-neutral comments about the Capital Improvement budget. As was the case for the other four budget areas, some of the comments regarding Capital Improvements were made in conjunction with suggestions for other areas of the budget or ideas for revenue generation while others were limited to Capital Improvements alone. For the purposes of this section, the Capital Improvement-specific comments have been extracted from the individual responses and categorized as described above. Comments appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments in Support of Increased/Maintained Capital Improvements

- ...but seriously consider referenda for bonds to support school reconstruction (and possibly much later, a new fire station).
- ...we better up our capital budget as we cannot KEEP balancing the budget by cutting capital expenditures.
- Amherst needs to distinguish between core tasks for a town--education, public safety and roads, and virtually everything else.
- I believe our tax dollars should fund public works, public safety/fire, schools first, as needed. THEN, if there is funding for leisure services, numerous libraries, funding should go there. Our roads are terrible, our police and fire are maxed out, but we have a great rec department. That doesn't make sense to me. Take care of the core, then look to help others.
- It's time we prioritized, and leisure services is at the bottom of my list. Schools, public safety, potholes are at the top.
- Need to move forward on South Amherst Fire Station--too risky not to have it.

Suggestions for Budget Cuts to the Capital Improvement Budget

- ...do we need--or can we afford--to replace vehicles/equipment in the capital budget at the "optimal" rate, etc.
- [Fire Station Headquarters] we can't afford the annual costs.
- Capital Budget: The town needs much less plowing. Public Works plows incessantly and maniacally. What are Jones Library furnishings and equipment doing in the Capital Budget.
- Capital--complete buildings now in progress of restoration--freeze all else--no new vehicles, computers, only essentially--fix roofs--essential roads/sidewalks only.
- Do we really need all the DPW equipment we buy every year? Can we share more with other towns? Can we contract out jobs more often?
- Eliminate town vehicles that are poor on fuel consumption and replace with hybrids. (I just saw what looked like a new police vehicle that was like a small SUV--completely inappropriate considering gas prices.)
- Examine expenditures such as equipment and for duplicate service...We have best heavy equipment and worst streets in valley. Put off equipment purchases and use funds to fix infrastructure. Think more of rentals, services for hire instead of "owning everything." Town services have shifted to provide social services and not services to keep town functioning.
- Look at what is really needed to maintain what we have. Do sidewalks really need to be redone now? Even though some things have been planned years prior, it doesn't mean we can't cancel or postpone when the economy of the town gets bad.
- Make do with some out-of-date technologies and equipment.
- Reduce or eliminate capital projects.
- Run things more efficiently--contract out DPW work where it makes sense, such as big road and sidewalk projects.
- STOP CREATING DESIGNER SIDEWALKS.
- Stop superficial improvements such as new fancy sidewalks downtown.
- Stop waste. Why are we still working on sidewalks??? That project on N. Pleasant is never ending and really OTT. Money would have been better spent on schools
- Time to face facts. We don't have a budget shortfall. The town has consistently overspent. Instead of "renting," we buy. We now have the best equipped DPW and the worst roads in the valley. Use that 2.5M equipment slush fund to fix our roads and sidewalks.
- While our schools have suffered heavy cuts in teachers, library staff, programs, lack of repair and renovation -- our town hall has been beautifully renovated and cared for, expensive sidewalks have been put in downtown.

Value-neutral Comments About the Capital Improvement Budget

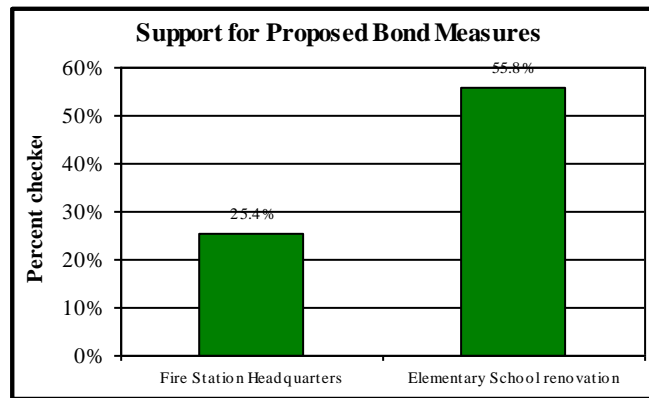
- Capital Budget Scenario Increases - Was any consideration given to depreciation allowances on equipment purchases and possible write offs on restoration projects.
- Debt Exclusions (as in Question 7) make sense to fund large capital projects.
- More education is needed about why the elementary schools need to be renovated.

Core Budget: Questionnaire results indicate that Capital Improvements is the area of the budget with the lowest level of support. Respondents seemed especially concerned about expenditures on sidewalks and new equipment. The Committee has recommended that this component of the budget be carefully scrutinized, (see "Recommendations, Conclusions, and Findings")

Potential Capital Bond Measures

Results

The Town Finance Director requested the addition of Question 6, which asks which (if any) of two property tax-funded bond measures respondents supported. The measures under consideration were construction of a new or renovated Fire Station Headquarters and the renovation of Amherst elementary Schools. Only 25.4% of respondents indicated that they would be in support of a measure to fund a new/renovated First Station Headquarters. In contrast, the of respondents (55.8%) were in support of a measure to fund the renovation of Amherst elementary schools.



Only 5 people mentioned either of these two proposed bond measures in the open-ended response question. This represents 2.1% of those who provided an answer to that question. These comments were also all included in the Capital Improvement section. Comments appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments in Support of the Bond Measure(s)

- ...but seriously consider referenda for bonds to support school reconstruction (and possibly much later, a new fire station).
- Need to move forward on South Amherst Fire Station--too risky not to have it.

Comment not in Support of the Bond Measure(s)

- [Fire Station Headquarters] we can't afford the annual costs.

Value-neutral Comments the Bond Measures

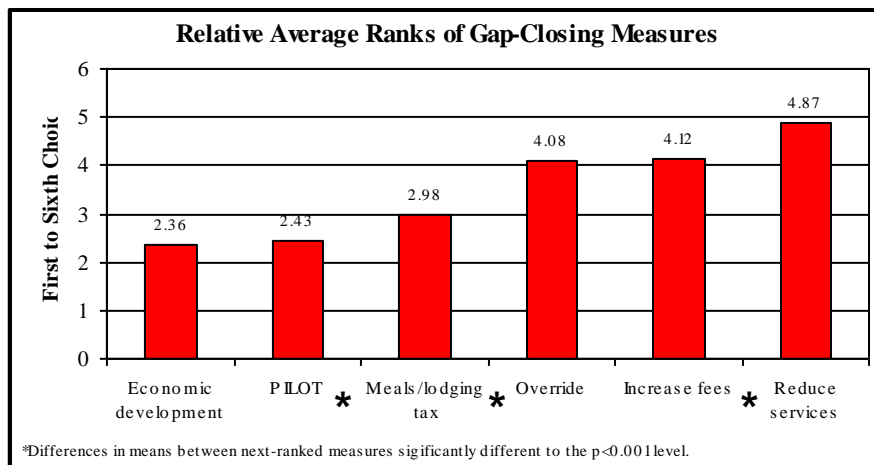
- Debt Exclusions (as in Question 7) make sense to fund large capital projects.
- More education is needed about why the elementary schools need to be renovated.

Chapter 7. Analysis of Potential Gap-Closing Measures from the Questionnaire

This section contains the analysis of Question 7 which solicited response on six potential gap-closing measures that could be pursued by the Town of Amherst to close its budget gap. Additional suggestions for other gap-closing measures, from the responses to the open-ended question, appear in this section as well.

Summary Results

Question 6 asked respondents to rank six potential gap-closing measures in order of priority to be used in hopes of closing Amherst's future budget gap. A total of 347 people provided ranks for all six choices, representing 79.4% of all respondents. The response rate for individual measures was higher, with a maximum of 383 people providing a rank for the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) choice. The highest ranked measure was Economic Development (average rank—2.36), followed closely by PILOT (2.43). An increase in the Meals/Lodging Tax ranked 2.98. The rank for Override and Increased Fees were nearly tied with ranks of 4.08 and 4.12, respectively. Ranked last, with an average rank of 4.87, was Reduce Services/Expenditures, exclusively.



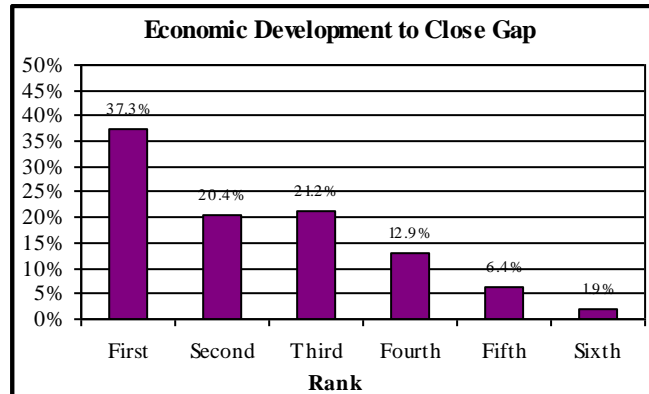
There are some statistically significant differences between means for some measures. The Increase in Meals/Lodging Tax was significantly different than the measures ranked above or below it. In addition, there is a statistically significant difference between Increased Fees and Reduce Services/Expenditures. No significant differences between means exist between Economic Development and PILOT (which effectively share an overall rank of being the second choice option) or between Override and Increased Fees (which effectively share an overall rank of being the fourth choice option).

Economic Development

Results

A total of 373 people responded to the question regarding Economic Development as a potential gap-closing measure. This represents 85.4% of respondents. This question asked respondents to rank six

potential gap-closing measures in order of priority to be used when closing the budgetary gap. Economic Development was the highest-ranked measure, with a mean rank of 2.36. It was ranked as the first choice by 37.3% of respondents. Overall, 78.9% of respondents ranked Economic Development in the top three ranks compared to only 21.1% who ranked it as either their fourth, fifth, or sixth choice.



In the open-ended question, 73 people had comments about Economic Development. This represents 30.5% of those who provided an answer to that question. These comments range from very specific (i.e. focus on services for retirees or to increase Amherst's presence as an arts hub) to the more general, but no attempt was made to categorize the comments but should instead be read as a single group. As is the case with all open-ended comments, some people commented on Economic Development alone while others discussed this topic in conjunction with comments on other areas of the budget (especially in conjunction with other revenue-generating ideas). Comments about Economic Development appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments on Economic Development

- ...economic development in the business district for more tax revenue.
- A combination of economic development, more support from the colleges and university, and an override
- Allow more development of businesses and R&D facilities on University Drive and other places not already protected. Allow current APR lands to stand, but end the vigilante style pursuit of a completely open-spaced Amherst. Why let Hadley get all the \$\$?
- And get "wise" economic dev. in Town, R&D, sensible retail, Services.
- Assemble a varied team of Amherst business owners whose volunteer task will recruit more businesses to the town. Ideally 50% of these biz owners should derive the of their profits from Valley residents.
- Attract clean green businesses, increase conference space (beyond the new Jeff).
- Bring in more hotels, stores to increase tax base.
- Change the anti-business zoning bylaw to encourage the sought economic activity. 5. Accelerate the approval, permitting and code procedures for economic development. 6. Act responsibly, proactively and impartially to encourage economic development...Tragically Amherst's zoning bylaw, approval, permitting and code enforcement regulations often require taxable entities years to navigate, while providing tax-exempt entities an accelerated process. That process seriously disadvantages Amherst's business initiatives, its ability to be competitive, favors non-taxable entities over taxable and reinforces Amherst's well-deserved anti-business characterization. From the business perspective, the resulting unreasonable delays increases costs, discourages venture that have immediate location/expansion needs, and constricts access to essential development capital. Interesting that 40-B "affordable housing" is granted preferential and expedited comprehensive permitting, while critically needed economic development is forces to endure endless and costly obstacles. Furthermore, tax exempt endeavors often receive municipal support, advocacy, and staff assistance; something unavailable to tax paying entities.
- Concentrated economic and housing development to have no impact on open space--preserving the quality of life here.

- Creating a more progressive business environment; especially downtown where there is abundant possibilities in close reach for students.
- Cut out the red tape on economic development. Encourage revenue generation business (that aren't large chains).
- Develop an industrial park to provide more local jobs and increase local tax revenue.
- Develop the town.
- Economic development is a long-term strategy.
- Economic development is essential, downtown as well as village centers. Working in partnership with the three colleges in this area is important.
- Economic development needs to be part of short and long-term plan.
- Economic development that is consistent with community values and maintain town character.
- Economic development unfettered by crippling, preservationist nonsense!
- Economic development! Not a new idea, but one that needs to be pursued. Develop downtown with mixed use multi-level structures.
- Economic development. The fact that Amherst is home to thousands of university students and we have allowed Hadley become the primary benefactor of retail, hotel and restaurant venue that they bring is a CRIME. It proves my argument that the Town Meeting form of government focuses too much on the present and has not paid enough attention to Amherst's future.
- Economic development--spin-off businesses from UMass research should be made easier for their location IN Amherst.
- Economic growth is essential in Amherst, while maintaining our small town feel. There are places for larger businesses on the outskirts of town.
- Economic/ Business Development in Amherst.
- Encourage increased commercial business in Amherst, thus added much needed tax revenues.
- Encourage more economic development.
- Enhance economic development first and foremost.
- Filling vacant store fronts in town, supporting business to stay here, ask Amherst College to buy Jeffrey Amherst Book Shop.
- Focus "economic development" efforts on RE-development of contaminated, already-built-upon sites, nearer to Amherst Center.
- Hire an economic development director and increase tax base.
- Hire an economic development director - get the colleges to pay for it.
- I am new in Amherst and I am coming from a town where property tax is not almost the only income the town has to support itself. I believe Amherst has to be more open and make a real effort to develop the town economically. These are hard times and you can't ask people to keep supporting everything by themselves [sic].
- I do think the town needs some additional economic development. I also think people need to get past the idea that Amherst is an agriculture based society. Too many of the decisions made revolve around the concept that Amherst is a small New England farm town. We are a dynamic community that has a mix of farm, retail, and education based economy. We need to understand this.
- In the long run, we need to promote sustainable commercial properties in specified zones. More important, we need to find partnerships to build business incubators for those businesses that align well with our intellectual labor pool: research and development, all aspects of publishing, the arts, and where we can sustain it, high tech. Manager Schaffer's idea for such a site in North Amherst is a good one..We could perhaps encourage our magnificent teacher corps to be entrepreneurial about developing on-line courses and other products that would bring income into the area. I hope it is possible to levy reasonable taxes on such businesses.
- In this economic climate promoting economic development will be tough however it needs to be done.
- Increase business development to increase tax base.
- Increase commercial tax base
- Increase economic development by pursuing a major tech employer to locate here, and by creating, encouraging facility development that would hold mid to large size companies. Also invest in downtown, increase downtown business AND residences, and change zoning to allow density increases. Also, encourage UMASS extension to create a facility in downtown geared at adult learners.
- Increase tax base through business development.
- Increase tax base through wise and responsible economic development.
- Increase the number of businesses paying into the tax coffer.
- Increase the tax base by promoting commercial development.

- Increase the tax base. No more discussions. Get more eco-friendly businesses to support the yearly increases in all services.
- Increased economic development.
- Increased economic development (including creative economy ideas) to bring more tax revenue into the town. Allow for conservative development of conference center, hotel, etc that will bring business to the town. Expand the arts hub in Amherst so that more tourism comes to town bringing increased revenue.
- Increasing the property tax base by facilitating smart, eco, high-density (condos), development in already developed areas like the intersection of Pleasant & Triangle, Atkins Farms Corner, University Drive and the North Amherst section by the library.
- It is also time to start bringing in development to help with taxes. The townies for years have said this but non townies seem not to go for it but want all the services.
- It would be great if the economic development became sufficient to generate increase revenue--but I think this will be slow.
- Lastly; smart, planful, economic development initiatives need to be a high priority in terms of our focus. It is the one thing, in all of the options presented in this survey that we have some control over. Continuing to streamline our permitting process is an important aspect of this process (I continue to hear horror stories) as well as planning board and zoning board of appeals approval of common sense proposals.
- Make Amherst a more welcoming place for business.
- Make it easier for businesses to be here and stay here.
- Make the public much more aware of the need for economic development.
- Making it easier for businesses to start up in Amherst. Going after the increasingly lucrative senior housing market (including extended care). This area has been selected as one of the top areas in the country for retirement and Amherst should be making it easy for retirement housing as well as other businesses to come to Amherst.
- More economic development!!!
- Please preserve open space! Concentrated economic development in already developed areas.
- Promote targeted, low-impact economic development on a large scale (not piecemeal); for example, senior/retirement housing communities, a clinic/medical complex (like Valley Medical) for the north side of town (tax contributions by Valley Med are not insignificant), etc. Rezone the section of Route 9 to Office Park, to get more tasteful business like Blair/cutting (again, see tax contribution) on that side of town.
- Pursue additional sources of revenue, through...the promotion of appropriate business development.
- Pursue economic development - although this is increasingly difficult in this economy.
- Pursue economic development that enhances (instead of diminishing) the current character of Amherst.
- Pursue more economic development.
- Revitalize downtown and make it easier for new businesses to open.
- Small economic development projects, the way Town Manager is doing it now.
- Strongly pursuing an appropriate type of economic development i.e. that fits with Amherst's values e.g. non-pollution and green industry, agritourism, computer-based industry, etc.
- Support cluster housing and low income housing as well as business development.
- Tax override in addition to promoting economic development with University & college associated business.
- The concept of Economic Development should be considered separately from the municipal budget question. No effective business would cut their sales and operations staff in the same proportions without examining them separately first, I suggest we do the same here.
- The town needs to become business friendly and develop means of generating income through technology and tourism.
- To sharpen the pencil work to get more or some economic development.
- Treating existing businesses better, encourage controlled business growth in town center.
- Very careful economic development that is locally owned.
- We must foster economic development and business growth so that property owners are not the principal source of revenue.
- We must plan for tough budget times in the short- to medium- term but start to work on as many long-term goals (such as economic development) as feasible.
- Work very hard on business development, and on making sure we retain the businesses that currently exist (and generate revenue!). ..Pay attention to the fact that Hadley doesn't have a revenue problem -- I don't want to live in Hadley (weak schools, poor zoning), but they are very smart to use business development to create a strong tax base. We can be smarter about zoning, but still see some business growth.

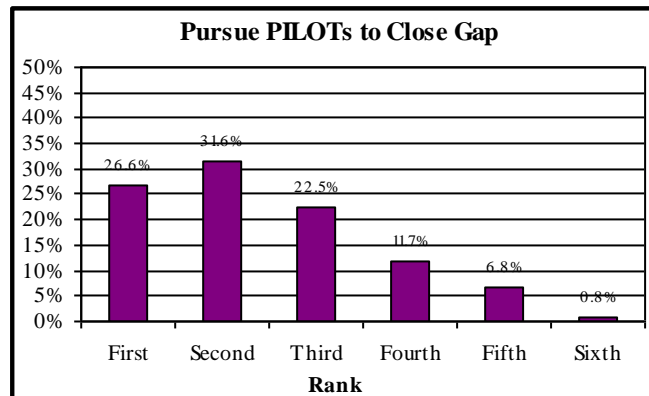
- Working with Amherst College on a large scale economic development plan for down town/senior housing. Tony Marx has asked us, "give me specifics, what can we do to help?"

The results of the questionnaire suggest that increased economic development is the preferred method of increasing revenue to Amherst. In addition, a number of respondents mention problems with the current process of Economic Development in Amherst. An analysis of those processes and by-laws is beyond the scope of this Committee. The current Amherst goal is \$20M of new development over the next ten years, which would bring in an average of \$320K in new revenue per year. This, however, does not take into consideration the overhead municipal costs of serving new businesses, so the net gain due to Economic Development (even if this goal is met) is still uncertain. The Committee, however, recognizes that Economic Development is a long-term strategy for improving Amherst's financial situation and, as such, should be utilized in conjunction with the other potential gap-closing measures proposed in the questionnaire. Few, if any, results of this initiative will be realized in FY2010.

Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs)

Results

Of those who completed the questionnaire, 383 people responded to the question regarding using Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs) from UMass, Amherst College, and/or Hampshire College as a potential gap-closing measure. This represents 87.6% of respondents. PILOTs ranked second only to Economic Development among the six options presented, with a mean rank of 2.43. The of respondents (31.6%) chose PILOTs as their second choice. Overall, 80.7% of respondents ranked PILOTs in the top three ranks compared to only 19.3% who ranked it as either their fourth, fifth, or sixth choice.



In the open-ended question, 45 people had comments about pursuing PILOTs. This represents 18.8% of those who provided an answer to that question. The comments can be split into comments that offer specific ideas for PILOTs and those that mention PILOTs in general. In some cases, one or more of the three institutions of higher education in Amherst are named specifically in conjunction with these ideas. Comments about pursuing PILOTs appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

General Comments on Pursuing PILOTs

- A combination of economic development, more support from the colleges and university, and an override.
- Assist from private colleges (Amherst, Hampshire).
- Be realistic about future funding from UMass and Colleges.
- Demand more \$\$\$ from local colleges.

- Get fair share from institutions.
- I believe in paying taxes I would appreciate increases in PILOTS but think our most likely sources of revenue are apt to be (over the short term) are overrides and local option meal taxes.
- Insist on appropriate revenues from tax-exempt institutions.
- Keep going after Amherst College (they should be ashamed of themselves).
- Look to increased town/gown relations and collaborations with the local colleges.
- More money should come from institutions.
- Negotiate for more money (PILOT) from UMass, Amherst and Hampshire colleges
- NO TAX EXEMPTION FOR AMHERST COLLEGE.
- PILOT needs to be done!
- PILOT programs.
- Press UMASS and Amherst College especially, for help.
- Pursue additional sources of revenue, through PILOT program.
- Pursue increased contributions from Amherst College, UMass.
- Require equitable PILOT payments from largest service users.
- Secure funds from the colleges as they can certainly shoulder part of our burden.
- Short term: Increased partnerships with area colleges.
- Short Term: Raise as much as we can through increases in fees from users and from our colleges and universities.
- Soak Amherst College.
- Tap the Colleges/University in any way possible;
- The colleges need to pitch in. They provide the jobs and most people live elsewhere. Check the afternoon traffic out of town. Time to get real.
- The colleges/universities need to help more.
- The University and Amherst College do not pay their fair share--they are elitist institutions that force the general population out of town.
- Work with colleges for more contributions.

Specific Comments on Pursuing PILOTS

- Ask U. MA. to provide their own fire and ambulance services for the university.
- Find a way to tax student individually every year/semester. This is probably illegal on many levels but can most likely be approved in the form of an override. Each student in the town of Amherst would be taxed anywhere from \$25-\$50 per semester/year depending on the language of the bill. Let's say that there are 30,000 student in the town (there are probably more but, round numbers are always easier). $30k \times \$25-\$50 = \$750,00-\1.5 million per year, twice that if per year.
- Get the colleges and University to contribute, i.e., renovate the elementary schools.
- Have the local colleges pay more in donations to schools and services since they own more and more residential property that doesn't pay tax revenue because of their tax exempt status.
- I'm not sure how that fixing the budget problem is so simple but a suggestion to help it is to tax the university for families that live on their property and have children attend Amherst schools.
- Increase usage service fees (esp. for emergency services to colleges and surrounding towns).
- Lastly, the colleges, especially UMass should not cost the town a cent, if anything they should offer the towns people some relief, after all if they were outright commercial businesses (and they are in the business of making money buy selling diplomas) the tax base they would be contributing would subsidize more then enough to lower property taxes, not make them higher. Colleges need to pay Amherst what they cost us, a meals taxes is a good start. But I suggest far more, as much of UMass and some of Amherst and Hampshire are actually an industrial research park.
- Make UMass pay for police patrol, ambulance, fire.
- More data that make people aware how much UMass and Amherst College and Hampshire cost to the town. Sample: how much each child's education from University housing costs. How much fire department services to that institution cost.
- Our Amherst Colleges raise millions of dollars each year thru their seasoned fund raising staff we need to utilize the fund raising tools thru the universities to help off set our budget crisis.
- There should be an all out campaign to leverage the wealth and resources of the colleges and UMass. This does not mean that the town can ask Tony Marx to write a check--he has said that he will not do it. But if the town comes to him with a proposal that uses Amherst College land--e.g. for senior housing--he would be interested. From my conversations with Marx, I get the impression that the Town has done NOTHING to engage him.

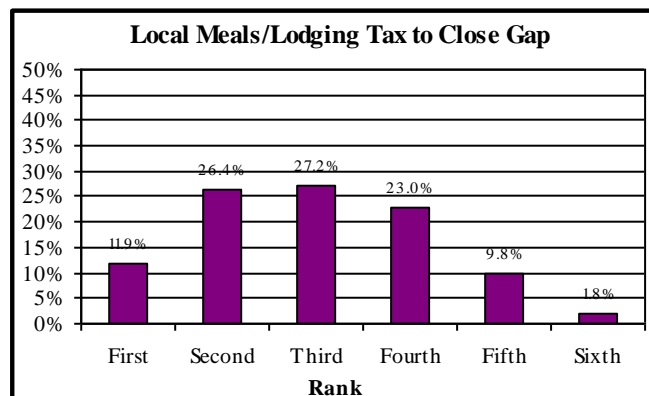
- To ask UMASS/Amherst College/Hampshire College to increase their contribution to the Town and in return Amherst town provides them with expert retired educators (on a volunteer basis) to fill a needed area.
- Well, it wouldn't FIX the problem, but a big help would be a liquor tax - like a meals tax, but geared towards addressing the multiple problems college drinking causes the town. Drunken students are a liability to the town - if they want to drink, they should have to pay taxes on it to help underwrite the costs of the police and ambulance services, destruction of public property, etc. I like the idea of a meals tax, too, but would hate to see Amherst restaurateurs lose business to other towns. I don't think that would happen with bars or liquor stores as much - the students lined up outside the Spoke or Delano's might think twice about ordering that third or fourth drink!
- Working with Amherst College on a large scale economic development plan for down town/senior housing. Tony Marx has asked us, "give me specifics, what can we do to help?"

The FCCC realizes that PILOTs represent a long-term solution and may end up generating no appreciable new revenue during the FY2010-FY2014 time period. Other Massachusetts communities (i.e. Springfield, Watertown, Cambridge/Boston, and Greenfield) have all either secured or are in the process of securing PILOTs from institutions of higher education within their boundaries³ so there is a precedent already in place within our own state. In addition, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania completed a study in 2006⁴ that clearly illustrates the financial deficits to municipalities of hosting state university campuses. Some of these communities closely resemble Amherst and this research can be used to inform the work of pursuing PILOT agreements. PILOTs should not be considered a panacea to Amherst's budget crisis, as the size of the projected deficits dwarf the amounts we can reasonably expect to receive from institutions as payment in lieu of taxes.

Increase in Local Meals/Lodging Option Taxes

Results

Three hundred and seventy-nine people responded to the question asking what rank should be given to "encourage State Legislature to increase local meals/lodging taxes" as a potential gap-closing measure. This represents 86.7% of respondents. This was the third-ranked choice of respondents, with a mean rank of 2.98. 27.2% of respondents picked it as their third choice, followed closely by the 26.4% that ranked it second. Overall, 65.5% of respondents ranked Increase Meals/Lodging Tax in the top three ranks compared to the 34.5% who ranked it as either their fourth, fifth, or sixth choice.



³J.F. Ryan Associates, Inc. "Springfield Financial Control Board Project Plan: Establishment of a Payment in Lieu of Tax Program (PILOT)," City of Springfield, September 16, 2005.

⁴ Pennsylvania Economy League, "Impact on the Cost and Financing of Government Services in the Selected Host Municipalities of the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education," November 2006.

The open-ended response question generated 8 comments specifically about state/federal taxes (including the local meals/lodging tax) and 8 additional people provided comments about other possible taxes. This represents 6.7% of those who provided an answer to that question. All the comments related to increasing revenue through non-property tax increases appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments on State/federal taxes

- Besides ideas in Question 6, visit the National Priorities Project Website to learn the \$ impact on Amherst of the current federal budget spending priorities! We all have to work hard to demand that billions of federal dollars being thrown away on war, military spending, etc. be redirected to fund human needs on a local level! There really is a HUGE connection between our predicament locally and these issues. NPP's research is VERY eye opening and empowering. Especially green technology businesses!
- Get together with other cities and towns to push for state and federal tax increases to support towns.
- I believe we need to push for a local meals tax at the state level to help local government.
- Raise state taxes and state allocations.
- Seek state and national funds wherever possible -- let's get creative about accessing Massachusetts and federal budgets.
- Start an initiative to raise the federal income tax to transfer K-12 school funding to the federal budget.
- Stop wasting time chasing state money that does not exist.
- The meals tax of some other fraction-of-a-percent tax would help the budget enormously. It's not clear that the town--in alliance with other towns--has pursued this hard enough. Given the state of the federal and state budgets, I think the people who are waiting for the state to come to the rescue with more funds are loony. It's not going to happen in the foreseeable (5-10 years?) future, if ever.

Comments on Other Taxes

- Can town enact any sort of taxation or fees?
- Introduce an Amherst income tax.
- Raise fines for student related problems such as Drunk, disorderly, traffic and noise violations. A more zero tolerance policy would, in the long run make our police costs lower and help make the police department more self sustaining.
- TAX commercial property at higher rate than owner-occupied residential.
- Tax landlord-owned residences at a higher tax rate than home owner-occupied residence. The city of Somerville does this by giving homeowners \$1,800 off their property taxes. Rental houses are businesses. 50% of Amherst homes are rentals and the increased taxes can be shared by landlords, who can write off ALL expenses related to their properties--unlike homeowners.
- Taxing businesses and not just property owners.
- Well, it wouldn't FIX the problem, but a big help would be a liquor tax - like a meals tax, but geared towards addressing the multiple problems college drinking causes the town. Drunken students are a liability to the town - if they want to drink, they should have to pay taxes on it to help underwrite the costs of the police and ambulance services, destruction of public property, etc. I like the idea of a meals tax, too, but would hate to see Amherst restaurateurs lose business to other towns. I don't think that would happen with bars or liquor stores as much - the students lined up outside the Spoke or Delano's might think twice about ordering that third or fourth drink!
- Work to reform the state tax code and if necessary the state constitution to permit local income taxes to fund municipal government and schools. This would be more progressive and align taxes with ability to pay. Increase state revenue sharing, especially for schools, so that all communities can offer quality education.

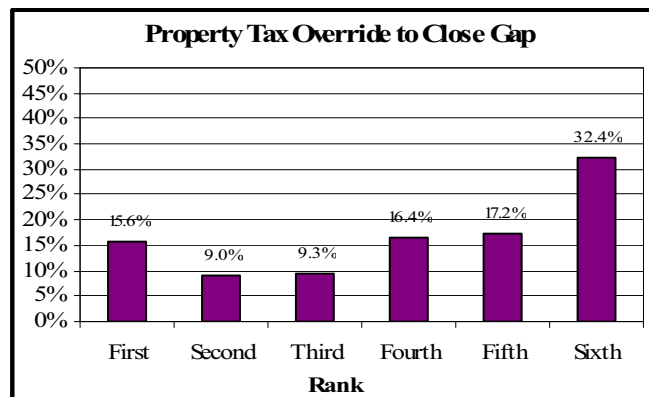
It is beyond the scope of this Committee to address the additional tax ideas suggested by the comments above, but our Town Finance Director should discuss the feasibility of these with our elected officials as part of the process. If the state legislature were to close the Telecommunications Tax Loopholes, Amherst would gain approximately \$230K annually. A local meals option tax could potentially bring in \$1.2M per year while a local lodging option tax could potentially net another \$25K per year. If the increased Economic Development also recommended by the Committee includes new (or expanded)

restaurants and/or hotels/inns, the new revenue generated through the local meals/lodging option taxes would exceed this amount. All of these measures, however, do require action at the state level.

Property Tax Override

Results

Of those who completed the questionnaire, 377 people responded to the question regarding using an Override as a potential gap-closing measure. This represents 86.3% of respondents. "Pursue a property tax override" ranked fourth out of the six choices, with a mean rank of 4.08. The of respondents (32.4%) chose an Override as their sixth choice. Unlike the case for the ranking of Economic Development (which showed a consistent inverse trend from first to last choice, the Override question reveals a consistent trend from second to sixth choice but also shows a jump in respondents (15.6%) making an Override their first choice. Overall, 33.9% of respondents ranked Override in the top three ranks compared to 66.1% who ranked it as either their fourth, fifth, or sixth choice.



In the open-ended question, 49 people had comments about pursuing and Override. This represents 20.5% of those who provided an answer to that question. The comments can be split into comments that seem to support an Override (however hesitantly) and those that oppose an Override. The average rank of the Override choice was 2.00 among those who made comments in support of an Override (range of ranks from 1 to 5) while the average rank of the Override choice for those who made comments against an Override was 5.00 (range from 2 to 6). Many of these comments were made in conjunction with other revenue-generating ideas; some with ideas for cuts. Other comments were restricted to the subject of an Override only. Comments about an Override appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments in Support of an Override

- A combination of economic development, more support from the colleges and university, and an override
- All of the 6? ideas enumerated on the forced-choice page. There will need to be regular overrides. There will need to be fiscal restraint. There should be an all out campaign to leverage the wealth and resources of the colleges and UMass.
- Attract clean green businesses, increase conference space (beyond the new Jeff), override.
- Build an expectation of a Prop 21/2 override every three years.
- Combine a property tax over-ride, new taxes on meals and lodging in Amherst, and economic development in the business district for more tax revenue.

- Continue doing what you are doing - find the excesses, consolidate where possible, keep going after Amherst College (they should be ashamed of themselves) and pursue an override that can pass.
- Develop a modest, graduated Prop 2.5 override plan as a last resort, but seriously consider referenda for bonds to support school reconstruction (and possibly much later, a new fire station).
- Economic/ Business Development in Amherst. Cut out some leisure services such as golf course and one town pool in summer. Make UMass pay for police patrol, ambulance, fire. Tax override.
- GO FOR OVERRIDE!!!
- Got to increase revenue. Can not cut more. There is nothing left to cut. Do anything possible to increase revenue. An override is appropriate at this time.
- I can't imagine how to fix the budget problem because I believe things are going to get worse due to the national fiscal problem (and this WILL "trickle down" to affect us locally). I can't see any way to "fix" this problem without an override--and nobody wants one. It'll be a tough pill to swallow.
- I would support an override, but I doubt most people will.
- In addition to an override, we need to focus on managing employee health care and other benefits.
- In Question 6 rankings, I reinterpreted "Cuts Only" as plain "Cuts", and ranked choices primarily by how much they'd contribute to bridging the gap: Overrides, Cuts, Economic Development, PILOTS, Other Taxes, Fees. (Both Overrides and Cuts need to be on the table, since that's where the big money is. Economic Development may require current investments to achieve net future gains. I distinguish Cuts from Efficiencies, which I believe to be small.)
- Increase property tax, press UMASS and Amherst College especially, for help.
- Increase property taxes. It makes sense because state and federal taxes have gone down over the past 6 years, which is why state aid to towns has decreased: the whole cause the whole problem to begin with. TOTAL taxation should be looked at, not just the property tax. A better idea is to increase state income tax and then increase aid to towns, but that is more out of our control.
- Library closed one day per week. One swimming pool. Lowest possible over-ride.
- Make people understand that the 2.5% allowable annual budget increase is not even enough to keep up with inflation in most years. The structure of Prop 2.5 virtually requires overrides in order to maintain even level services. Helping people understand this would make them more likely to support a well-constructed override.
- Medium tax override (2 million) IF includes tax abatement for lower income residents.
- Most residents can afford to pay more taxes for our services. We need to find a way to tax those who can afford it and protect those who cannot.
- My idea for fixing the budget problem is to pay for the services we need -- and pay it as a community through taxes. Unlike federal and state taxes, local taxes directly benefit my family. I'd rather spend more in taxes on local government, than federal or state taxes.
- Our only choice is to increase prop tax beyond the 2 1/2% limit which comes nowhere near covering uncontrollable increases in health insurance or even just the cost of living adjustments for personnel.
- Override and working with Amherst College on a large scale economic development plan for downtown/senior housing.
- Override.
- Pass overrides as needed to maintain level services.
- Pride=override!
- Property tax override in conjunction with economic development that is consistent with community values and maintain town character.
- Property taxes excluding first 100K-150K to increase progressivity.
- Raise property taxes via override.
- Reconceptualize taxes from being necessary evils to positive goods.
- Regrettably, an override is necessary at some point. We need to exercise restraint on spending and implement cuts in programs that make sense in order to minimize the tax increase. We need to rely on the judgment of your committee and our elected boards to determine what is essential and what can be cut to produce real savings on the expense side.
- Short term: Increased partnerships with area colleges, grants & a tax override.
- State money. Tax override.
- Tax override in addition to promoting economic development with University & college associated business
- Tax override with real publicity asking people to support the standard of living in Amherst.
- Taxes provide the services and ambience that make Amherst a wonderful place to live. I believe in paying taxes I would appreciate increases in PILOTS but think our most likely sources of revenue are apt to be (over the short term) are overrides and local option meal taxes.

- Taxpayers need to pay more in taxes in order to maintain the services that we see as important - and are the reasons why we choose to live in Amherst rather than elsewhere. We must pay for what we use.
- There is no way around a tax override this year. It is the only short term band aid to mitigate the budget shortfall this year and possibly next. Other solutions should be seriously pursued to increase revenues, state aid, economic development etc BUT these avenues will not have the near term impact that is imperative to keep services at the same level and possibly restore some critical services.
- To educate people that town taxes have to be higher and to explain that unlike fed and state taxes (which were both cut!!) this money would be used directly in our own town.
- Treating existing businesses better, encourage controlled business growth in town center, tax overrides.
- We cannot make it without an override. I don't have an answer for those who say they will have to leave town if taxes increase. The other side of this is why would we want to live here if services deteriorate as they will without an override. Of course we go after economic development and other means to increase revenue. The sooner we bite the bullet and accept that our local taxes have to increase, the better off we'll be.

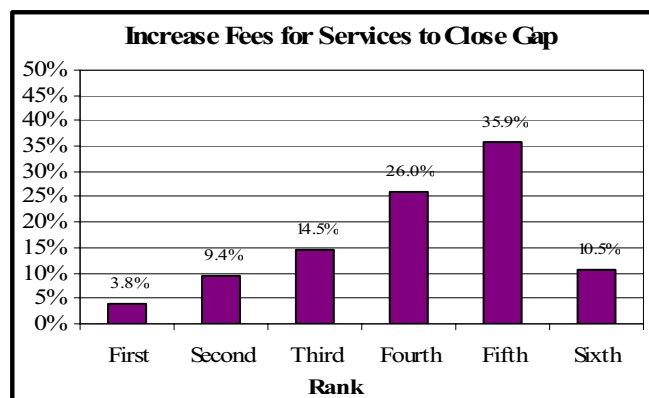
Comments Against an Override

- Figure out a way for low-income people to be taken into account, not taxed out of town.
- I don't know how to fix the budget problems. What I DO know is I CAN'T AFFORD AN OVERRIDE.
- Let's find alternative ways for raising the taxes.
- No new tax.
- Seek additional sources of revenue that relieves the burden on home owners.
- Seniors are especially hard hit by downturn in economy and low interest rates and it would add to their difficulty to raise taxes.
- We pay over \$6K in taxes and if our taxes continue to rise we will move out of Amherst and our 4BR house will probably be bought by someone who has kids. If you keep raising taxes people without kids will move out to be replaced by people who want to send their kids to Amherst schools.
- What used to be a reasonable real estate tax is now at maximum for me...Several people on my street are in similar position.

Increase Fees for Services

Results

In total, 373 people responded to the question regarding Increasing Fees for services as a potential gap-closing measure. This represents 85.4% of respondents. The of respondents (35.9%) picked it as their fifth choice; there is a consistent increase from first to fifth choices, then a sharp drop to only 10.5% choosing it as sixth. [NOTE: this position was held either by Reduce Services/Expenditures or Override for 313 of total respondents.] Increase Fees was ranked fifth by respondents, with a mean rank of 4.12. Overall, 27.7% of respondents ranked Increase Fees in the top three ranks compared to the (72.3%) who ranked it as either their fourth, fifth, or sixth choice.



When asked about their idea to fix the budget problem, 30 people mentioned Increasing Fees for services. This represents 12.6% of those who provided an answer to that question. Increased Fee-related comments can be categorized into comments related to fire/ambulance service and other Increased Fee comments. In addition, one comment included both fire/ambulance and other areas and was put into the “other” category for simplicity. Some of these comments are specific to the Increase in Fees while others were made in conjunction with other ideas. Comments about Increasing Fees for services appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments on Increasing Fire/Ambulance Fees

- Ask U. MA. to provide their own fire and ambulance services for the university.
- Fire and ambulance seems particularly stressed and there is the whole fee structure issues related to our service to other towns and what the cost/benefit ratio is related to that expanded service.
- Increase usage service fees (esp. for emergency services to colleges and surrounding towns).
- Make sure surrounding communities are paying adequately for ambulance.
- Make UMass pay for police patrol, ambulance, fire.
- We must stop subsidizing ambulance services to Hadley and the other towns, and not accept a long-term contract in lieu of actual cost payments.

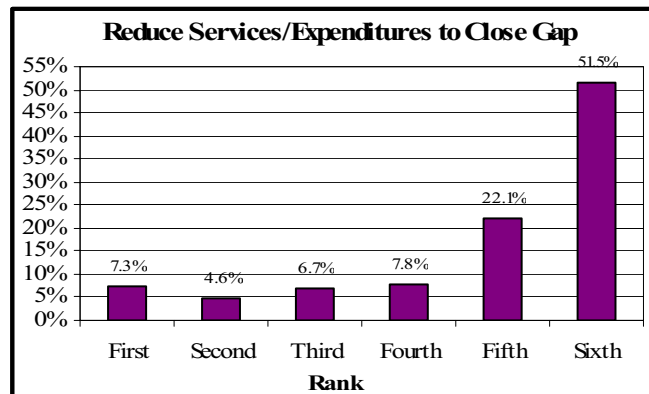
Comments on Other Increases in Fees

- [Leisure Services] OK to increase full fee but NOT lower income fees. [Parking fees/fines] maybe OK.
- 3 swimming pools is far more than most towns support, they should be able to offset their own expenses or very close to it through fees and memberships. If not close one. ...Raise fines for student related problems such as Drunk, disorderly, traffic and noise violations. A more zero tolerance policy would, in the long run make our police costs lower and help make the police department more self sustaining. The fire dept and Ambulance service should be made to account for all hours and expenses and therefore be able to bill for these costs. If the ambulance service cannot break even, if not turn a slight profit, sub-contract the service.
- Additional fees in town services when appropriate.
- Build a community cinema in the library to charge fees.
- Charge actual fees for everything (e.g., LSSE, Cherry Hill, etc.) -- no subsidies.
- Charge high school students a fee if they do NOT ride their bus but DRIVE to school instead.
- Charge real prices for services provided.
- Cuts--LSSE--make 100% self-supporting from fees. ...Senior Ctr.--self-funded--run more by volunteers or ask for fees for programs.
- Elementary Schools--Make fee based ALL after school programs (academic and extra curricular) Regional Schools -- Make fee based ALL after school programs (academic and extra curricular)
- Eliminate bus lines with low ridership; increase fees on remaining lines...Increase LSSE fees to better cover costs...Open only one public pool in the summer, and/or charge a per-use fee (perhaps with summer pass option)...Charge the farmer's market sellers a fee for use of the land each week.
- Get fair share from institutions. Can town enact any sort of taxation or fees?
- I also believe LSSE needs to be self supporting. The town needs to stop thinking that we can take care of everybody's needs.
- Increase fees to developers.
- Increase fines for auto violations.
- Increase parking fees and fines.
- LSSE should be self-supported.
- MAKE ADDITIONAL SERVICES FEE SUPPORTED.
- Make leisure services completely fee-supported.
- Raise or institute fees wherever possible.
- Regional Schools...charge fees for clubs just like you do for athletics.
- Short Term: Raise as much as we can through increases in fees from users and from our colleges and universities. Offer partial scholarship for programs to families that qualify for free or reduced lunch.
- Slightly raise LSSE fees for summer pools.
- Unless state aid is increased Amherst must endure severe cuts in services and increased fees for some services, where permissible by state law.

Reduce Services/Expenditures

Results

The first choice in Question 6 asks respondents to rank “Reduce services and expenditures, exclusively⁵” from first choice to sixth choice as a potential gap-closing measure. A total of 371 people responded to the question regarding Reducing Services/Expenditures as a potential gap-closing measure. This represents 84.9% of respondents. The results for this measure look similar to the results for an Override. Over half of respondents (51.5%) picked it as their sixth choice, there is a consistent increase from second to sixth choices, and a slightly higher proportion of respondents choosing it as their first choice rather than continuing that linear trend. This slight spike in first choice response (7.3%) was also seen for an Override, suggesting that there are pockets of our community who are either strongly in support of an Override or strongly in support of Reducing Services/Expenditures as methods of closing Amherst’s budget gap. Reducing Services/Expenditures was the option ranked last by respondents, with a mean rank of 4.87. Overall, 18.6% of respondents ranked Economic Development in the top three ranks compared to the clear (81.4%) who ranked it as either their fourth, fifth, or sixth choice.



In the open-ended question, 37 people had comments consistent with a Reduction in Services/Expenditures. This represents 15.5% of those who provided an answer to that question. The average rank for this choice among those who provided comments was 3.59, meaning that among these respondents, Reduce Services/Expenditures was essentially ranked third compared with a rank of five for respondents as a whole. Some people commented on Reducing Services/Expenditures alone while others discussed this topic in conjunction with comments on other areas of the budget and/or ideas for increasing revenue. No attempt was made to categorize these comments, as area-specific comments about budget reductions appear in the relevant budget area sections as well. Comments about Reducing Services/Expenditures appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments on Reducing Services/Expenditures

- Accept that we can no longer do all the things we thought were necessary to do.

⁵In hindsight, the Facilitation of Community Choices Committee realizes that the inclusion of the word “exclusively” in this choice alone most likely, by definition, contributed (in part) to the low rank of this option. No other choice in the suite of options required respondents to consider it to the exclusion of all other choices. Thus, it might have been the case that ANY “exclusive” choice would have naturally been ranked last as most open-ended comments mention a combination of a multiple types of reductions and/or revenue-generating ideas to close the budget gap. Clearly, the public (and indeed this Committee) favors a balanced approach to solving Amherst’s budget crisis.

- Amherst needs to learn to live within its means. The budget needs to prioritize things such as fire/EMS, police, DPW, our schools and make cuts in things that are "nicities" like LSSE and the golf course when things are tight. In tough economic times we have to cut "the fluff" and focus on the things that are really important to our community not just "nice," extra services. Amherst needs to realize that when prioritizing, every organization/service will be able to defend their reason for needing town support but we just can't make everyone happy all the time anymore!
- Be very careful about new expenditures.
- Be very, very frugal. Every other town is going to have to do the same. That's the kind of time we live in.
- Cut services that are "nice" to have in good times but need to be let go in hard times--outreach bus routes; branch libraries; non-essential staff. Privatize [sic] health and safety above all else. Next comes schools.
- Cut services to the basics only.
- Cuts in services (sadly).
- Do not spend more than we have!
- Don't pay for more than you have!
- Hard work containing costs with outside professionals evaluating budgets at the end of a fiscal year to mercilessly cut programs that are underutilized/duplicate--in all parts of town.
- I doubt we can "fix" the town's budget problem until the whole financial situation--local, national, and global improves.
- I might have had ideas before the bank failures and the stock market crash. Now I think we ought to all tighten our belts and spend only what is absolutely necessary. I have to.
- In the context of the global financial crisis, the situation seems more dire than presented, with significantly diminished likely available non-property-tax revenue. Level Servicers may realistically be out of reach, given the size of the gap to be filled. In choosing Level Services for Questions 1 through 5, I meant "Better Than Level Funding".
- It has to be a combination of creatively adjusting expenses and eliminating waste, making do with what we have until the economy improves.
- Like all family budgets adjust expenditures to fit current income.
- Live within our means.
- Live within your means.
- Make administrators in all departments treat budgets in the same way that homeowners and heads of households have to treat their budgets. Don't think you can spend what you don't have and what the taxpayers also don't have.
- No increase in budget.
- Plan, budget, and expend to live within the Town's annual income....Institute meaningful and constructive structural cost savings.
- Recognize that in severe economic times, we have to make cuts and sacrifices, not just act as usual--including schools. Kids will survive.
- Reduce services.
- Reduce services. Resided in Amherst for 50+ years. What used to be a reasonable real estate tax is now at maximum for me. You HAVE TO control school expenses. Amherst does not HAVE to be number one in Western Mass. Several people on my street are in similar position.
- Sadly, I don't see a lot of short term solutions for the Town's budget problems. Everyone I know is having to seriously cut back on personal spending just to make ends meet and with the global economic crisis, this will probably get worse.
- Stop spending! This is not easy, nor is it popular, but it must happen. Our town asks too much of its taxpayers. When times were more prosperous, we could better afford the wonderful services we have. Now, times are tough in the US and the world and we need to be satisfied with much less. ..Amherst can remain a beautiful, New England college town without all the "extras" we have come to expect in the past. Please act responsibly and stop overspending!
- Stop trying to fund every program that the community wants. Manage the taxpayers money much more wisely.
- Stop waste.
- Stop wasting money.
- Take a hard look at our spending expenses line for line and cut out unneeded expenses at this time...
- There is no fix, given the condition of the economy state-wide and nationally. Unless state aid is increased Amherst must endure severe cuts in services and increased fees for some services, where permissible by state law.
- Time to face facts. We don't have a budget shortfall. The town has consistently overspent.

- To be a "pay as you go" municipality; no funds, no dice.
- Town should live within its means--like any family budget.
- We need to adjust our expectations to financial realities and budget with available resources, respecting the need to maintain affordability for residents.
- We need to exercise restraint on spending and implement cuts in programs that make sense in order to minimize the tax increase. We need to rely on the judgment of your committee and our elected boards to determine what is essential and what can be cut to produce real savings on the expense side.
- We need to stop spending and who responsibility for maintaining a balanced budget or we will continue to have financial difficulties. This is very difficult but it MUST happen! We must have a responsible leader who is able to make these incredibly difficult decisions. With the US economy in such poor shape, the time has come to stop spending. Less government, more accountability.
- Why wasn't the option of higher cuts presented?

Additional Potential Gap-Closing Measures

In addition to the six potential gap-closing measures respondents were asked to rank in Question 6, members of our community came up with a number of additional potential gap-closing measures unsolicited. One of these—alternative forms of taxation—was covered in the section on Increasing Meals/Lodging Tax. Three of the other ideas mentioned most frequently—Health Insurance, Salaries, and Energy Conservation—are discussed in this section.

Health Insurance

Ten people provided comments on the rising cost of Health Insurance for our employees and how this has impacted our budget gap. This represents 4.3% of those who provided an answer to that question. These comments range from very specific (i.e. moving to GIC) to the more general, but no attempt was made to categorize the comments. Many people mentioned Health Insurance in conjunction with other ideas, others commented on Health Insurance in isolation. Only the Health Insurance-specific comments have been extracted here. They appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments on Health Insurance

- Actively demand the state become involved with health care cost reforms. without a state or national effort to reduce health care cost growth, we cannot expect to control local spending.
- Also have employees pay in more for health insurance.
- Decrease health insurance costs...wellness initiatives with dedicated staff time and policy change actions.
- I have no ideas. But, I do want to know what the cause of ballooning expenses is when our salaries are basically level. Where is this money going? I assume primarily to health and insurance industries.
- It's hard, but municipal staff should pay for more of their health insurance--we just can't assume that cost increases will be picked up by the town. I haven't had a raise in over six years! I can barely afford to live here.
- Stop hiding the real numbers. Look at how we under funded the health care trust fund, depleted the reserved and then made it seem like it was a surprise. No one is looking at numbers like these.
- Tackling the big cost - health insurance. It looks like we could buy a clinic and hire doctors at those costs, self insurance is not a terrible thing.
- The major factors causing the problems are: (1) health insurance costs increasing far faster than tax revenues...For #1, I recommend for consideration that the town self-insure its employees (i.e., create a municipal health care fund) and pay for most routine and common health care needs. Employees can be given the option to purchase premium plans at their own expense. We should also seek to develop a local network of low-cost health-care providers.
- Union benefits should be re-evaluated.
- We need to focus on managing employee health care and other benefits. The self-insurance model used by the town is inefficient. Moving employees and retirees to GIC would save hundreds of thousands of dollars immediately and slow the growth of health care costs in the future.

Salaries

Six people provided comments related to Salaries. This represents 2.6% of those who provided an answer to that question. As was the case with the Health Insurance comments, people mentioned Salaries both in conjunction with other ideas and alone. Only the Salary-specific comments have been extracted here. They appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments on Salaries

- Ask employees for a giveback on their raises.
- If salary cuts should be necessary (or increases temporarily denied), perhaps they could be applied only to salaries above a given level. I would hope that "fairness" would be the key to such severe actions.
- NO salary increases for town employees.
- Public employees, including teachers, need to understand that they cannot count on raises every year, regardless of the economy and regardless of whether the Legislature pays the state's fair share. If the economy tanks, then public employees will have to hold tight for awhile just everyone else.
- Renegotiate town employee's wages/salaries.
- Wage increases have to be kept to a minimum, school and staff step increase should be a modest figure, say 250 to 500 per step.

Energy Conservation

Seven people provided comments related to Energy Conservation as a potential gap-closing measure. This represents 3.0% of those who provided an answer to that question. These comments are very detailed and represent a number of thoughtful ideas for consideration. They appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments on Energy Conservation

- Energy conservation measures in the Middle School first, then in others as needed. Wind turbines on school grounds to provide municipal energy system.
- Implement energy conserving measures across the board (from automatic shut-offs on lights, solar power where possible, apply for EPA grants for energy conserving school buses--many towns have already gotten hundreds of thousands for this but I don't think Amherst has even applied). Eliminate town vehicles that are poor on fuel consumption and replace with hybrids. (I just saw what looked like a new police vehicle that was like a small SUV--completely inappropriate considering gas prices.)
- Reduce energy consumption; Masstech.org; clean energy. Solar hot water/P.V. Weatherise all schools. Biomass (sustainable wood chips). Biodiesel (for buses). Create a co-gen at the trash transfer station.
- Support and encourage energy conservation and alternative energy. Encourage public transportation and pedal/electric taxis.
- Take advantage of Commonwealth Solar grants to install photovoltaic panels on all municipal and school buildings to offset electricity costs. Partner with local businesses for additional tax credits to further bring down cost of photovoltaics. 5 year payback, savings of at least \$600,000/year. Invest in other energy efficiency projects on town buildings, roll improvements into bond package.
- The major factors causing the problems are...(2) fuel and electricity costs going up rapidly...For #2, continue to reduce transportation costs by minimizing door-to-door busing of pupils, invest in insulation and alternative heating/electrical sources (e.g., solar) for municipal buildings and schools.
- Turn off lights. Save fuel by making fewer school bus stops. Neighbors can organize volunteers to meet school buses and children can actually walk a reasonable distance.

Adopting a Core Budget Approach

Many comments focused on a framework that the FCCC calls the *core budget* approach. The core budget approach envisions the town focusing on providing certain essential services and curtailing programs that are not central to the basic mission of the town.

The FCCC did not include information about the core budget approach in its presentations to the public or ask questions about the core budget approach on the questionnaire. Many residents responded to the open-ended question with comments that are consistent with the core budget concept. These comments generally fall into two categories: Comments that suggest eliminating specific town services, and comments that recommend focusing on essential services.

Core Comments from the Questionnaire

In order to help provide guidance to this process, the Facilitation of Community Choices Committee has identified a series of comments from the open-ended responses that deal directly with the concept of a Core Budget. Among the 239 people providing a response to the open-ended question 26 (1.9%) included a comment that relates to a Core Budget. These comments appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

- Address town luxuries: Tree warden.
- Amherst needs to distinguish between core tasks for a town--education, public safety and roads, and virtually everything else. We consistently fail at this. Why do we need an assistant Town Manager? Axe Leisure Services. Reduce administrative staff in the regional school budget. It's hard, but municipal staff should pay for more of their health insurance--we just can't assume that cost increases will be picked up by the town.
- Amherst needs to learn to live within its means. The budget needs to prioritize things such as fire/EMS, police, DPW, our schools and make cuts in things that are "nicities" like LSSE and the golf course when things are tight. In tough economic times we have to cut "the fluff" and focus on the things that are really important to our community not just "nice," extra services. Amherst needs to realize that when prioritizing, every organization/service will be able to defend their reason for needing town support but we just can't make everyone happy all the time anymore! LSSE should be self-supported. Sure it's nice to be able to take a course through LSSE but it would be even nicer if we could provide adequate fire/EMS service to our community!!
- Cut all funding for Leisure services, free school meals and other social programs, these are the domain of privet charity. Lease, sell or turn Cherry Hill into a no-maintenance public area like Amethyst Brook. The town has no business owning a golf course. 3 swimming pools are far more then most towns support, they should be able to offset their own expenses or very close to it through fees and memberships. If not close one. These are luxuries, and should not to be a burden to the tax payers. They are born out of good intensions, but there is no way to sustain non-self sustaining ventures any longer...If there's extra funds after hard costs, like schools (and I mean a sensible school program we can really sustain/afford), police, fire, roads, snow removal and such, then spend some on other costs, but no funding for non-essential projects before the basics are covered in full and always with the middle and lower end tax payer in mind.
- Cut extra fluff and non-necessities. Charge real prices for services provided. Privatize the golf course. Let non profits and religious groups manage day care and senior care leisure services type efforts.
- Cut services that are "nice" to have in good times but need to be let go in hard times--outreach bus routes; branch libraries; non-essential staff. Privatize health and safety above all else. Next comes schools.
- Cut services to the basics only.
- Find the budget items that are really not necessary. One example that comes to mind is paying professional referees for recreational league basketball games. I am sure there are many others like this.
- Focus on the services that only the Town can provide. Let the private sector handle everything else. The Town should not be running a golf course or giving money to charity.
- Focus school budget on the basics.
- Fund the essential services. Cut the optional.
- I believe our tax dollars should fund public works, public safety/fire, schools first, as needed. THEN, if there is funding for leisure services, numerous libraries, funding should go there. Our roads are terrible, our police and fire are maxed out, but we have a great rec department. That doesn't make sense to me. Take care of the core, then look to help others.

- I think that it has to be a balanced approach that involves setting priorities (thank you for this initiative to seek input on what those are) and weighing the cost/benefit of those priorities (do we need--or can we afford-- three libraries--all open full time, do we need--or can we afford--three pools, do we need--or can we afford--to replace vehicles/equipment in the capital budget at the "optimal" rate, etc. are examples of questions we should examine. Not every budget item is created equal in my view.
- I wish I had one. But in the making of choices for cuts, please include human services, in particular the senior center, as a CORE service that must be preserved.
- It's time we prioritized, and leisure services is at the bottom of my list. Schools, public safety, potholes are at the top.
- Make hard choices without compromising ESSENTIAL services -- fire, police and schools.
- Make the public much more aware of ... the need to cut luxury services now provided by the town
- Nothing is more important than restoring funds to local public schools and maintaining basic services (fire, police, library, plowing, leaf-collection).
- Prioritize better, focusing on maintaining public safety and education -- everything else is frosting on the cake.
- Schools, Police, Fire, EMT, Public Works, Libraries. These are PRIORITY items for full and perhaps increased funding. Unfortunately, other budget categories should be reduced or eliminated.
- Spend money on only what is necessary and the schools.
- The town will have to cut back some NON essential services (i.e. not police and fire).
- Town--sell or lease Cherry Hill golf course!!! Use money for essential town services.
- We need to pare out town budget to highest priority necessities only like public safety and schools.
- We need to rely on the judgment of your committee and our elected boards to determine what is essential and what can be cut to produce real savings on the expense side.
- Whatever a sensible solution is, it is NOT funding Ques. 1, 3, and 4 at the Scenario 3 level but cutting municipal services that are essential support services for the town as a whole.

Comments on the Amherst Form of Government from the Questionnaire

Fourteen people provided comments on the intersection between our current form of Town government and the budget crisis. This represents 6.0% of those who provided an answer to that question. The range of these comments is varied and they appear verbatim with the exception of spelling/grammar corrections.

Comments on Amherst Form of Government

- Aggressive initiative to change our form of government. It is dysfunctional to try to make choices by surveys. The results don't reflect to true political will of Amherst. The results only reflect those who go to meetings and fill out questionnaires . . . and there is no way for those who do participate to be assured that their concerns will be addressed our can they hold anybody accountable for choices made. Who will be held accountable for the choices made? Town Meeting? The community Choices Committee? Who and how and what consequences? Why not put all your efforts to finally changing our form of government to a fully accountable government of professional politicians that are paid and held accountable for their choices. It is the way the State, US and hundreds of thousands municipalities govern themselves. And please, don't respond that we have to work with the government we have. If you er-call, the first vote on the charter lost by 14 votes in an election where 9,000 registered voters didn't vote. If the "Choices" committee put their efforts into changing town government, perhaps two years from now we may still be in this mess, but we can be assured that choices will be made by people we know and who we can hold accountable. Jim Pitts
- Change governmental structure from Town meeting. Stop confrontational attitudes of town Boards and regulatory staff (i.e. change is not inherently bad). Stop accepting not-in-my-backyard attitudes and think more about the public good. Neighbors have too much power. If something is legal, it should be allowed. If you want it illegal, legislate it as such, and stop second guessing everything. Take professional reports and input seriously instead of mandating it and then throwing it out the window if some uninformed board member, town meeting member, or neighbor disagrees. Need I go on?
- Dismiss the Town Manager immediately as well as the position. Elect a mayor at half the cost of the present Town Manager.
- Get a Select Board that is not subservient to the Town Manager, or go to another form of government.

- I also feel that the Select Board governance structure hinders the town's capacity to make changes that will increase the town's financial health and well being.
- I think the technique of letting a committee propose or negotiate difficult budget items is a way for the Town Manager to avoid taking heat for making difficult cuts, and he should make them. Actively demand the state become involved with health care cost reforms. Without a state or national effort to reduce health care cost growth, we cannot expect to control local spending.
- If cuts in the municipal budget are necessary, then we also need to look seriously at the regulations, bylaws and committees that are coordinated by the town and drive some of the budget. We may not be able to make all of our decisions together as a community in such a constrained environment, we may need to allow the town, or the townspeople more leeway to make decisions for themselves. Second guessing and the necessary justifications that follow, requires overhead to manage, we don't have space for that kind of overhead
- Isn't that the job of our Town Manager and Select Board?
- Move to a mayoral form of government that provides greater accountability to the budget process.
- Open up "the shop"--solicit involvement, allow people to DO something and let them do it; build community vs. defending prior bad choices. This community if filled with people who want to contribute in meaningful ways--with all due respect, sitting on another committee or appearing before one that has already determined the possible scenarios does not BUILD community. Quite the opposite. If the budget crisis is as bad as has been projected, then "collaboration" has failed and it is now time to listen to new ideas and creative solutions from new sources and examine the practices that led to the current crisis. No one wants a fiscally insolvent town or diminished schools. But the pervading impression is that meaningful change and debate is merely "tolerated" and those that speak out and ask difficult questions are marginalized. Whether that is the intent or not, the impression is worthy of examination and your committee has the power--if nothing else--to create an environment receptive to change rather than defensive of cuts to the status quo. Critique is a healthy and a meaningful expression of commitment to the Town, as much as carrying the torch. And when the torch is running out of fuel, it's time to seek alternatives to keeping it lit. Money follows policy. So when the money runs out, it's the policies that require change. It's a painful process watching Chanel 17 and seeing more questions from residents seeking information evaded than answered. Any suggestion of an override is disingenuous until new policies are adopted that demand vigorous accountability and transparent answers to residents' questions. I hope that is the intention of your committee and that you will create a new environment in which questions about policy, priorities and budgets can be posed--and answered--from residents regardless of their status on existing committees or, even more importantly, their disagreements with them.
- State law provides mechanisms for gathering decisive voter input with respect to Overrides, including choosing from a menu of options or a pyramid of levels, but not so for Cuts. I suggest asking voters at election time what Cuts they'd choose through nonbinding ballot questions that would subsequently guide Select Board and Finance Committee recommendations to Town Meeting, and ultimately Town Meeting itself -- hopefully avoiding descent into a free-for-all on the floor. (For the municipal silo, a January level-funded Manager's budget has to include proposed Cuts. The Select Board can present its own alternate Cuts, or solicit Alternative Cuts from the public. Alternative Cut package or packages should realistically match the size of the Manager's Cuts. Voters can thus be made to weigh in on their preferences.)
- The fact that Amherst is home to thousands of university students and we have allowed Hadley become the primary benefactor of retail, hotel and restaurant venue that they bring is a CRIME. It proves my argument that the Town Meeting form of government focuses too much on the present and has not paid enough attention to Amherst's future.
- The town should reassess its assumptions about the budget and what it will need to cover in a few years when the impact of peak oil phenomenon is felt throughout society and the world enters the post carbon reality. I would anticipate that some expenses will disappear and others that don't even exist now would become necessary. Therefore, both revenue and expense projections are likely to be way off. The actual problem is not accurately described by the information presented by the committee and on which near-term decisions will be made. The town should take proactive steps to reduce the shocks that will be coming. "Level Services" (the concept) should be first to go, because the services provided will be different.
- We need to stop spending and who responsibility for maintaining a balanced budget or we will continue to have financial difficulties. This is very difficult but it MUST happen! We must have a responsible leader who is able to make these incredibly difficult decisions. With the US economy in such poor shape, the time has come to stop spending. Less government, more accountability.