TOWN OF AMHERST
MAJOR CAPITAL INVESTMENT PROJECTS
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL(S), LIBRARY, FIRE/EMS, DPW
COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS
**Premise:** The Town has a clear need to make significant investments in four major facilities – elementary school(s), Jones Library, Fire/EMS Station, and DPW. These investments could happen through *new construction, extensive renovation, or addressing only major repairs.*

**Purpose:** The goal of the listening sessions is to provide the Town Council with some information from the community that will help inform their planning for and funding significant investments in each of the four facilities.
Facilities and Services

- Total of 712 students in grades K-6 in these 2 buildings – 69% of Amherst elementary school students
- Wildwood was built in 1970, Fort River in 1973 – almost identical designs with no major renovations in 50 years

- Other Services and activities:
  - Voting
  - LSSE youth and adult programs
  - League of Women Voters Book Fair
  - Summer community programs
  - Town Council Forums
  - Playgrounds and fields community use

Buildings do not meet current code for accessibility and do not meet modern safety and security standards
Challenges

- **Eroding Buildings**: Obsolete and costly mechanical systems; failing roofs and water seepage; inefficient heating and cooling; inadequate ventilation

- **Poor Safety**: Buildings do not meet modern expectations for safety— insecure entrances and exits; outdated fire code; not ADA compliant for students, staff, and visitors

- **Educational Challenges**: Open classrooms make it difficult for children and educators to concentrate and hear; no natural light in many classes; makeshift therapeutic rooms

- **The district has made short-term improvements**: replacing exterior doors; renting cooling systems; replacing Wildwood’s boiler; removing carpeting to improve air quality

- **Most problems require major renovation or new building**: increase classroom sizes and add full walls; reduce energy use; increase safety in main entry and exits; full ADA compliance; natural light in all classrooms; sufficient heating and cooling with moisture control
Facilities and Services

- Every year, over 270,000 patrons visit; almost 450,000 items are loaned; almost 7,000 people attend youth programs; over 26,000 reference questions are answered; and over 2,500 people attend ESL tutoring sessions.

  - **Collections** include: Wi-Fi hot spots; streaming videos; museum passes; and musical instruments (and, of course, books!).
  
  - **Services** include: Homebound delivery; meeting room rentals; wireless printing; and access to an in-house Social Worker (and, of course, interlibrary loan!).
  
  - **Programs** include: Bilingual story times; PC Doctor Hank; On the Same Page community read events; and STEAM programs (and, of course, 5 different Summer Reading Programs!).

- The Jones was built in 1928 and has gone through several major renovations – one in the 1960s, one in the 1970s, and most recently in 1993.
Challenges

- **Eroding Building:** Antiquated systems at end of life (fire, HVAC, electric, plumbing, burglar); slate roof must be replaced; water seepage damaging 1928 building due to faulty atrium design;

- **Poor Safety:** Too many nooks, crannies, and stairwells create inefficient layout and a lack of sight lines resulting in safety issues; the building is especially difficult to navigate for language learners, new patrons, children, and people with accessibility issues; mold and air quality issues;

- **Service Challenges:** Inadequate square footage to meet current community demand for programs, services, collections, and meeting spaces; not ADA compliant for patrons and staff;

- **The Jones Has Made Short-Term Improvements:** Chimney restoration; HVAC repairs; insulation upgrades; short-term roof repairs; carpet replacement;

- **Most Problems Require Major Renovation:** Cost efficiencies, increased sustainability, and an ability to provide full access and services to the entire community if systems and expansion are bundled rather than piecemeal (some systems and upgrades must be done at the same time).
Facilities and Services

- Central Station built in 1929; North Station built in 1974
- First responders - Fire and EMS
- Rescue and Emergency Management
- Fire prevention and safety education
- Hazardous material incident response, and disaster operations
- These are living spaces for Firefighters: 24/7, 365
- Provides fire and EMS services to the Towns of Leverett, Pelham and Shutesbury, and to Amherst College, Hampshire College, and the University of Massachusetts
FIRE AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE (FIRE/EMS): CENTRAL FIRE/EMS STATION

Challenges

- Central built as a fire station – no EMS
- Bays are too small for current/future Fire/EMS apparatus, unable to acquire all needed equipment.
- Inadequate storage, living, work and training spaces
- Cross Contamination – apparatus is too close to living areas. No barriers to contamination
- Outdated infrastructure – roof, electric, water, heating/air and poor interior air quality
- South Amherst and parts of East Amherst are not adequately covered
- Present site of DPW is the best site.
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS (DPW):

Facilities and Services

- 586 South Pleasant Street – 1915 trolley barn; retrofitted for DPW in the 1940s
- First-responders - snow, ice, and other disasters
- Emergency response - water and sewer breaks
- Maintains:
  - 100 miles of roads, water/sewer lines
  - Sidewalks, streetlights, traffic lights, and parking lots
  - 14 Water and wastewater sites, treatment facilities, water supply wells, and 2 reservoirs
  - 3 cemeteries
  - 2 pools and 80 acres of playing fields/parks/commons

Snow Plowing
Maintain Parks
Wastewater Plant
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS (DPW):

Challenges

- Undersized, inadequate layout, decaying building
- Lack of space for operations, vehicle, equipment and material storage
- Does not meet code for safety and ventilation
- Does not meet code for electrical operations, and locker rooms/restrooms
- Vehicles and equipment stored outside, accelerating depreciation of valuable equipment
- Facilities are dispersed throughout the Town
HOW THE TOWN PREPARED FOR CAPITAL INVESTMENTS

- BUILT UP EXTRA RESERVES
- INCREASED COMMITMENT TO CAPITAL
- DECREASED EXISTING DEBT
- VERY GOOD BOND RATING
Reserves as a Percentage of General Fund Budget

Fiscal Year

2006: 7.1%
2007: 6.9%
2008: 6.7%
2009: 7.3%
2010: 6.7%
2011: 7.5%
2012: 8.6%
2013: 9.3%
2014: 11.1%
2015: 13.0%
2016: 13.7%
2017: 14.9%
2018: 16.4%
2019: 15.6%
2020: 19.7%
INCREASED COMMITMENT TO CAPITAL; DECREASED EXISTING DEBT

2009-2018 Actual, 2019-2025 Projected

Debt & Capital

Debt  Capital


$7,000,000.00
$6,000,000.00
$5,000,000.00
$4,000,000.00
$3,000,000.00
$2,000,000.00
$1,000,000.00
$-
The estimated cost to the Town and the Taxpayers of new construction for all four projects is more than $100 Million.

The estimated cost of extensive renovation or major repairs for all four projects is more than $100 Million.

Therefore, financing these projects will require at least one debt exclusion override.
WHAT IS NEXT?

MSBA decides if Amherst is in the next round for feasibility study for one New or Addition/Renovation 600 student school. If accepted, Town Council appropriates money for Study.

July 2020
Notification of award of MBLC grant regarding the Library project. Town Council decides how to proceed.

Winter/Spring 2020
Town Council decides on location of new DPW and appropriates money for schematic designs of both Fire/EMS and DPW Projects.
Follow These Projects:
www.amherstma.gov/capital