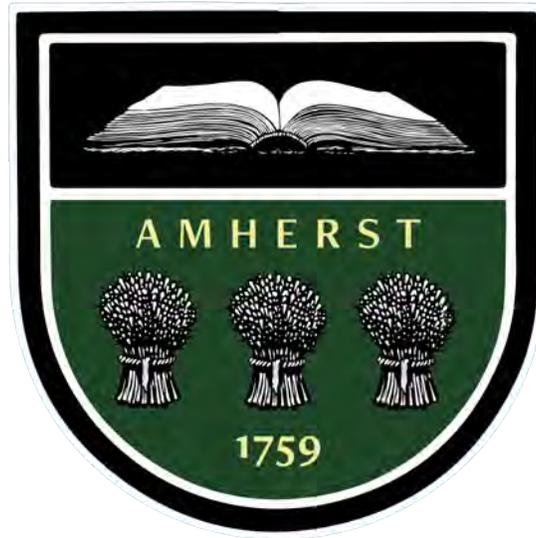


# Town of Amherst

## Capital Investment Projects



## December 2019 Listening Sessions Report

### January 21, 2020

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THE LOGUE GROUP

Bringing people and ideas together

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## **Introduction**

The Town of Amherst is faced with the need to maintain and upgrade its public facilities and infrastructure and provide other services to its residents and the wider community. It seeks to do this in a way that will continue to have the town be viewed as a desirable place to live and work while maintaining a viable and stable financial posture.

The Town has a clear need to make significant investments in four major facilities – elementary school(s), the Jones Library, a Fire/EMS Station, and the main Department of Public Works facility. These investments could happen through new construction, extensive renovation, or addressing only major repairs. Some prior proposals have divided the town and emotions have run high at times. In addition, several state agencies have pending decisions that may affect the cost implications for the town. The Town Council recognized that these important decisions about the Town’s facilities all need to be addressed, but that competing interests could derail progress on all projects and the discussion of how to prioritize these investments could have a divisive impact on the community as a whole. The Town Council decided to engage the public in initial listening sessions early in the process to encourage and facilitate communication and community feedback to the Town Council, as the main decision-maker for the Town.

The goal of the listening sessions at this early stage in the process was to provide the Town Council, working with the Amherst School Committee and the Jones Library Trustees, with information from the community that will help inform the planning for and funding of significant investments in each of the four facilities. This report summarizes the outcomes from those sessions.

## **Listening Sessions**

Four public listening sessions were held, two on December 3, afternoon and evening, at the Bangs Center; and two on December 9, afternoon at the Fort River Elementary School Library and in the evening at the Wildwood Elementary School Library. The Town Council conducted outreach through public notice, web & social media postings, multiple school community notifications and email. At the sessions the agenda and informational materials were available including summaries of each of the four projects and Frequently Asked Questions. (Appendices A -C.) These materials and other information relevant to the capital planning process were made available on a dedicated page on the town’s website ([www.amherstma.gov/capital](http://www.amherstma.gov/capital)).

All listening sessions were well attended and followed a similar format. At each session, the facilitator welcomed the public, introduced Lynn Griesemer, President of the Town Council. The attendees were then shown a pre-recorded video presentation featuring Town Manager, Paul Bockelman who introduced each of the proposed capital investment projects and their presenters - School Superintendent Dr. Michael Morris; Jones Library, Director Sharon Sharry; Fire Chief Tim Nelson; and Department of Public Works Superintendent Guilford Mooring. The video presentation was followed by a brief Q&A session for the

purpose of providing the attendees with the opportunity to ask any clarifying questions. Following the Q&A session, attendees were then divided into facilitated small groups for the purpose of discussing these framing questions:

1. What underlying core values of the Amherst community should shape the decision making?
2. Based on your concerns, what questions should the Council be asking as it considers these four projects?
3. What additional information do you need about the individual or overall capital projects?
4. What makes you hopeful or excited for Amherst about these four projects?

Following the small group discussions, the facilitators gave brief reports of the conversations in each group and the public was provided additional opportunity to ask questions or make comments. Participants were also asked to leave any additional comments or questions on index cards.

**Attendance (based on sign-in sheets):**

**Tuesday, December 3, 2019**

**3:30 PM Listening Session – Bangs Center:**

Elected Officials: 11

Town of Amherst Staff: 8

Members of the Public: 32

**7:00 PM Listening Session – Bangs Center:**

Elected Officials: 11

Town of Amherst Staff: 4

Members of the Public: 24

**Monday, December 9, 2019**

**3:30 PM Listening Session – Fort River Elementary School Library:**

Elected Officials: 14

Town of Amherst Staff: 4

Members of the Public: 34

**6:00 PM Listening Session – Wildwood Elementary School Library:**

Elected Officials: 13

Town of Amherst Staff: 3

Members of the Public: 39

A few members of the public attended multiple sessions. Facilitators noted when this occurred and used care in taking notes and drafting this summary not to overweight similar comments made at multiple sessions by the same individual.

### Online Survey

An online Survey was created that provided the opportunity for people to respond to the framing questions. This summary includes 14 responses received through December 20, 2019.

# Town of Amherst Capital Investment Projects

## Listening Sessions

### Summary of Facilitator's Session Notes

The following is a summary of the discussions at each listening session grouped into themes. In many instances the words and phrasing are as close to possible to those used by the participants.

The ✓ indicates the relative frequency of a comment of that type.

#### ***Session 1 – Tuesday, December 3, 2019, 3:30 PM***

#### ***Location: Bangs Center***

**Framing Question 1. What underlying core values of the Amherst community should shape the decision making?**

#### **Themed Responses:**

##### **General**

- *We serve a diverse population*
- *We are inclusive ✓*
- *We are welcoming of all ✓✓*
- *Amherst is unique*
- *Acceptance of new ideas*
- *Accessible – ADA compliant ✓✓✓*
- *Ability to attract talented workers ✓*
- *Durability – built to last*
- *Future viability*
- *Preserve our culture*
- *We value our senior citizens – need to hear their voices*
- *Historic preservation ✓*
- *We value transparency in government ✓✓*
- *We treat town employees well*
- *Unified/Civility*
- *Creative Thinking*

##### **Economic**

- *Affordable housing ✓✓*
- *Keep taxes affordable ✓*
- *Need to remember 30% of citizens live below poverty line*
- *Higher taxes will drive people out*
- *Fiscal responsibility*

- Maximize “bang for buck” by thinking creatively

### **Education**

- Schools were state of the art when built – not a popular design now
- Education matters
- We are known for high quality education/colleges ✓✓✓
- We are a town that is about education and our schools and libraries should reflect that
- Open classroom layout is not conducive to learning

### **Environmental**

- Environmentally conscious/Sustainability ✓✓
- Commitment to “net zero”
- Save the planet
- Protect the trees

### **Safety**

- We need to make sure our Town employees have a safe work environment ✓✓✓✓
- Safe schools for our children ✓✓✓✓
- School buildings are “sick”
- Safe roads
- Would like to be able to bike more – need better roads
- Fire station has asbestos

### **Framing Question 2. Based on your concerns, what questions should the Council be asking as it considers these four projects?**

#### **General**

- Keep historic/current character
- Preserve beauty and nature of downtown
- Keep lights, trees and pedestrian walkways
- Council should consider who benefits from these projects
- How do we maintain our diversity?
- Why are we not talking about senior centers? We should not be locked into just these 4 projects
- Be open to re-thinking projects
- What is really “good enough” vs. the absolute “best?”

#### **Costs/Funding**

- Wants council to look at all 4 projects at once to use overlapping services/search for economies of scale
- Is there a way to not duplicate services/storage/space? ✓✓✓
- Wants value vs. newest, best, biggest

- *Consider financial projections for taking on all 4 projects – check cost assumptions ✓✓*
- *How will all of this be paid for?*
- *How we will prevent affluence? We want to maintain our diversity*
- *What are the costs of renovation vs. new construction? Impact on community? ✓✓*
- *Concerned about “big money” coming in and destroying beauty of downtown*
- *State reimburses town – does not provide funding up front – this needs to be figured in*
- *Consider costs of future natural disasters*
- *Consider phasing/staging projects rather than do all at once*
- *If it is a priority of the town to save money, town council should listen*
- *Cost savings vs. cost addition need to be clear*
- *How do we best maximize/leverage these outside funds?*
- *How do we ensure that the project satisfies state requirements in order to maximize funding?*
- *What strings are attached to state funds? Do these requirements make sense for the town in terms of building requirements and long-term budgets?*

### **Decision Process**

- *Funded or not-funded – how will the council prioritize?*
- *Obviously, we can’t do all of this – how will the council decide how to prioritize? ✓✓✓✓✓*
- *Council should not get stuck in what we figured out so far. Consider each project – needs vs. wants – be very strict in decision-making*
- *How will decisions be made on new locations?*

### **Environmental**

- *Consider how all of this will impact the environment, climate, emissions control ✓✓*
- *How buildings are going to address needs of changing climate – stronger storms*
- *Think about the impact of demolition on the environment*
- *How are we pragmatically confronting the climate crisis? Not being sustainable?*

### **Project Specific**

#### **Library**

- *Would like council to look at all 4 projects and compare to other town facilities such as the library – schools already have great libraries in place*
- *Branch libraries should alleviate some issues affecting the Jones*
- *Consider number of students who use library vs. who is not*
- *Population using library should be looked at closely*
- *Concerns of library staff need to be addressed – if you can’t staff the library now – how are you going to staff an even bigger library?*

#### **DPW**

- *What is the cost of the new DPW site?*

### **Framing Question 3. What additional information do you need about the individual or overall capital projects?**

#### **General**

- *How do projects meet current/future needs of town?*
- *Benchmarking data – how does Amherst compare to other towns?*
- *What will the sequencing of the projects be? ✓*
- *Timing on start dates for projects*
- *Is there a prioritization of the “critical need” or are all 4 projects viewed as being the same?*
- *Information on farmer’s market/supermarket*

#### **Costs/Funding**

- *Cost projections for each project – don’t want any surprises*
- *Is there a way to scale back so we can afford all of these?*
- *Ongoing capital expenditures – what’s the maintenance on town buildings?*
- *More info on maintenance costs if capital projects don’t happen for 10-20 year period*
- *What is the long-term operational cost for each project? If there is long-term savings based on new construction vs. renovation – what is it? Are there other savings?*
- *Would love to do all 4 – we need information/transparency to see how we’re making trade-offs*
- *Are there other state funding/grants available?*
- *Would like to see break down of total costs less state funding and also what debt will be*
- *Cost projections for maintaining what we have rather than building new*
- *Why do we lure developers here who do not support the needs of the town?*
- *Why do we offer incentives? What is the opportunity cost for each venture?*
- *Are locals/diverse people likely to be pushed out with a higher tax rate?*

#### **Environmental/Sustainability**

- *This should be a priority – how sustainability will be addressed*
- *What efforts can we make to be sustainable?*

#### **Outreach**

- *Would like better outreach to non-computer users and non-English speaking groups ✓✓*
- *Would like community engagement officers ✓✓*
- *Would like more communication in a variety of ways*
- *Most of the information is online – worry about the population who does not have access to computers*

## **Project Specific**

### **DPW**

- *Could you combine DPW and Fire? Would that result in a savings? How was it decided that there is not enough space to do that?*
- *What is the cost of the new DPW site?*
- *Would like to hear from council how they came up with decisions – such as no land to build new DPW. What has been investigated and researched thus far?*

### **Fire**

- *What are the projections for EMS/Fire in terms of anticipated services/calls? ✓*

### **School**

- *What are the projections for school enrollment? ✓*
- *How do “choice” students impact the school project?*

## **Framing Question 4. What makes you hopeful or excited for Amherst about these four projects?**

- *Hope old fire station becomes a performance space - would love to see creative use of old spaces*
- *The investments we make have big long-term payoffs – like the rails to trails project*
- *There is a long history of value in Amherst – we treasure Amherst’s quality of life*
- *Voting against school projects previously – we can examine how our government and politics changed - We need to talk and listen to each other and have robust conversations*
- *Amherst cinema project made our town more vibrant and exciting – we need more vibrancy*
- *We have great town staff/volunteers*
- *People with divergent views build better projects when we do so civilly*
- *We need to be able to have difficult conversations*
- *Pleased and hopeful about getting “group” mindset for problem-solving*
- *This is the first time I feel “reached-out to”*
- *I am hopeful because this process is an improvement over “previous behavior”*
- *Excited the bond rating is so good and money is in the bank – reassuring*
- *We have a good staff in Amherst*
- *Excited about investing in this town – we’ve done a careful job of stewarding our resources*
- *Excited to have environmental goals*
- *Hopeful about using technology to achieve “net zero” buildings*
- *Excited about having healthier, more accessible buildings*

## Comment/Question Cards:

### General

- *Process suggestion: Invite project opponents to participate in planning and decision process*
- *Hold meetings at apartment complexes*
- *Insure public input is gathered from people for whom English is a second language and low income families*
- *Consider needs of parents and people who have no car or only one car*
- *Why is debt override the only option? Could we do all four projects without an override? For example – more revenue and/or savings in operating budget?*

### Project Specific

#### Library

- *How will the town pay for staffing, cooling, heating and cleaning a library that's 1/3 larger than at present? Operating costs count.*
- *How about a mobile library?*
- *Think outside the box – use school libraries – East Branch and Book Mobile instead – not free \$ - strings attached*

## **Session 2 – Tuesday, December 3, 2019, 7:00 PM**

### **Location: Bangs Center**

## **Framing Question 1. What underlying core values of the Amherst community should shape the decision making?**

### **Themed Responses:**

#### General

- *Planning for the long-term – planning for change*
- *Equity*
- *Welcoming ✓✓✓*
- *Accessible ✓✓*
- *Walkable/convenient*
- *Ability to be forward thinking, listen respectfully, try to understand each other*
- *Civil discourse*

#### Economic

- *Viability/long-term financial sustainability*
- *Attention to low income residents*

#### Education

- *Inclusion and diversity*

- *Non-ADA compliance is sad to hear*
- *Good public education ✓✓*
- *High quality education/educators*

### **Environmental**

- *Sustainability – Amherst is an affluent community that should focus on this as a primary concern*
- *Achieving town energy goals*
- *Energy efficient/sustainable ✓✓*

### **Safety/Health**

- *Water quality*
- *Fire safety*
- *Workplace safety/health and safety of employees ✓✓*
- *Child safety*
- *Protecting the elderly*
- *Facilities should be safe and healthy ✓✓✓✓*
- *Personal security ✓✓*

### **Framing Question 2. Based on your concerns, what questions should the Council be asking as it considers these four projects?**

#### **General**

- *How are streets/sidewalks being taken care of?*
- *What are the trade-offs and uncertainties?*
- *If we focus on these four projects individually, is there a possibility this would “crowd out” other projects?*
- *Get stories from people directly impacted every day who serve the town – what are they experiencing? ✓*
- *How have people dealt with these issues in the past – former employees?*
- *Is it something we need...or want?*

#### **Costs/Funding**

- *What is the impact on the regular budgeting?*
- *What will be the impact on the tax rate/taxpayer? ✓*
- *What are the costs associated with not doing these projects?*
- *What is the maintenance budget?*
- *Is there any additional revenue to be gathered?*
- *Can we increase the commercial tax? Why is it always the residential taxpayers who are impacted?*
- *Why do we give tax breaks to residential developers?*
- *What are other comparable towns doing? We should look at them to see if what we are planning is realistic within financial constraints ✓*

- *What will be ongoing operating costs?*
- *What are the costs of “inaction?”*
- *What are transition and demolition costs?*

### **Decision Process**

- *How will each project be prioritized?*
- *Will residents have input into “ranking” the town’s needs?*
- *What can we not do? Are residents aware of what is not going to get done if these projects get done?*

### **Environmental**

- *What is required to reach “net zero” energy?*

### **Project Specific**

- *Each project has “pros” but what are the “cons?”*

### **Fire**

- *Is there a reason why there is no other location being considered for the Fire Department?*

### **Framing Question 3. What additional information do you need about the individual or overall capital projects?**

### **Costs/Funding**

- *We need to know the tax implications ✓✓*
- *Ways that residents can contribute to creative financing*
- *Can town folks offer an endowment or low interest loans to the town?*
- *We need to have a variety of options – not just one design – but a range of options for each project*
- *Operating costs for projects moving forward*
- 

### **Environmental/Sustainability**

- *This should be a priority – how sustainability will be addressed*
- *What efforts can we make to be sustainable*

### **Project Specific**

#### **DPW**

- *Would like a definite price tag for DPW consolidation – ex. does this mean increased staff? If so, how do we pay for it?*
- *Where will DPW go? What are the potential sites under consideration?*

#### **Fire**

- *Will we need more fire and EMT staff? How will we pay for it?*

#### **Framing Question 4. What makes you hopeful or excited for Amherst about these four projects?**

- *I am most excited about the schools – I grew up here, left and returned – devastated to see the conditions and what the teachers have to endure*
- *Fire station – it is sad to see that those doing the most dangerous jobs (saving lives) don't have a good work environment – this will give them a better environment to work in*
- *Excited about working together as a town – not being pitted against each other like in the past*
- *Excited that this seems to be finally moving forward after years of knowing these projects are needed*
- *Schools being focused on*
- *Fire station video really touched me and others – those people who save lives are working in an unsafe environment*
- *Excited that it is a long-term, big-picture vision and a holistic approach*
- *Staying open to options (one or more) – it may not be a full renovation or new construction*
- *Hopeful about several things but mostly we will see these things get done*
- *School projects most important – we need to hear human stories of how people are affected*

#### **Comment/Question Cards:**

##### **General**

- *Folks are taxed to death in Amherst already!*
- *What assumptions for the future are being made in projecting the future financing of all four projects?*
- *What are the town's priorities for these 4 projects? Rank in priority 1-4. If #1 is the schools and the state does not provide funds – will the other projects be bumped so the schools project can still move forward? In other words, do priorities trump financing?*
- *Which project(s) will require a debt override? Why this/these projects? Current project cost for each project and then total (1. schools, 2. library, 3. Fire/EMS, 4. DPW/Total)*
- *If all 4 of these projects are approved, how soon before any other (e.g. new senior center) will be considered?*
- *How will the town's financial projections change if the state does not provide funding for the schools?*
- *Financials - \* impact on property taxes – how maintain L \$25/thousand*
- *I have lived in Amherst since 1970. At this point I am concerned about the elderly and low income residents. I see no mention of issues that will let them continue to live in town – increasing taxes and public transportation – we need more low income and*

*elderly housing and extended bus service to let us stay in our homes. Why are these issues not being considered? (Name/address provided)*

- *Amherst has the 10<sup>th</sup> highest property tax rate in the state. How much will the rate increase for any/all of the projects? What can be done to keep the rate from increasing? Can a spending limit/budget be set so that costs are contained?*
- *Expand the community engagement positions to FT (full-time), assign 1 to each district. Have as communication role (2 way)*
- *Hopeful that we can replace inadequate/unsafe buildings with new ones that will be net zero (illegible) they are still useful when we have to stop using fossil fuels. I hope they will be practical – what we need and not the most fabulous possible options in terms of the spaces that get built.*
- *Do it! Waiting (and deliberating) is costly. Don't let factions obstruct the process. Don't let the "perfect" be the enemy of the possible.*
- *Each project needs to be allocated a budget cap. Keep enough capital for other needs including roads, sidewalks, athletic fields, maintenance and other town buildings, ladder truck, ambulance, North Amherst intersection, etc., etc., Cap total town costs for all 4 projects at \$80 million – Schools \$40 million; DPW \$20 million, Fire \$15 million, Library \$5 million.*

## **Project Specific**

### **Fire**

- *Does the town benefit from providing fire services to Pelham, Shutesbury and Leverett? Would those towns be willing to help pay for the new fire station?*
- *What will be done with fire station if a new one is built?*
- *Get comparables from other towns. We need increased staffing first. Has building one station been considered and closing North Station? Could North Station house DPW office if unconsolidated option is pursued?*

### **DPW**

- *Why can't the town take land by eminent domain adjacent to the DPW site?*
- *Could the DPW stay where it is and the fire station move to the vacant land across from Hampshire College entrance (where Dakin (sp?) was going to go on West Street)*
- *Can the original price come down to \$20 million?*
- *What are core needs vs. "ideal?" Get comparisons from other towns?*
- *We need comparables from towns of comparable size. How many staff do they have? How many vehicles do they have? Do we need 80 vehicles? What size facility do they have?*

### **Library**

- *Jones Library is a precious gem in the center of Amherst. Too many flaws in the design. Not at the environmental standard we have set for Amherst. Historical issues are not honored. Duplication of services available in others – better ways. This is not our only chance for state funds – the other 3 projects are critical – not so the Library.*
- *What was said about the library hourly workers is accurate – I am well informed about this.*

- *Why design a library for a population of 51,000, when Amherst has a year-round public library-using population of only about 12,000?*
- *Why did trustees decide on such a large expansion without considering if services could be in another public space? Community room for 300 not necessary at the Jones; ESL could be in the new schools; Teen room could be moved to (illegible) office; move that to smaller office; Did (illegible) other public spaces? UMass? Can we repair in stages (illegible)? Library duplicates space, ideas in other buildings. 1. community room in new school; 2. If central fire no longer fires – teen room/ESL (illegible) Green/net zeros should have been a top priority – renovate not expand large footprint*
- *I would think that the Jones library could be renovated. Knocking down half and doubling the size seems wasteful and unnecessary*
- *Let the grant go. We don't need a library for 47,000 people when only 19,000 registered users. We can't afford the expansion – allocate \$5 million for repairs instead*

### **Schools**

- *We need more than one option. For example: 600 students new/reno school K-5; 480 students new/reno school K-5, add to Crocker Farm; 420 & 280 students new/renovated FR & WW K-5 & K-6 options if 6<sup>th</sup> grade doesn't move.*

## **Session 3 – Monday, December 9, 2019, 3:30 PM**

### **Location: Fort River Elementary School Library**

### **Framing Question 1. What underlying core values of the Amherst community should shape the decision making?**

#### **Themed Responses:**

#### **General**

- *General concern – loss of family-friendly restaurants, shops, etc. downtown*
- *General loss of retail space – replaced by apartments – should keep first floor as retail*
- *Forward thinking designs to be good for 100 years – both the engineering of the buildings and the layouts (such as not ending up with open classrooms)*
- *Glad we are not being asked to choose one project over another to avoid pitting one group against each other*
- *Inclusiveness in talking about the projects, listening and feeling listened to*
- *Well-designed buildings*
- *Diversity and inclusiveness ✓✓*

#### **Economic**

- *Keeping town affordable ✓✓*
- *Build ASAP to keep the costs from increasing more*
- *Recognize it may cost a little more up front to ensure the building is done responsibly*
- *Classism should be addressed for taxpayers*

- *We have a history of fiscal responsibility*

### **Education**

- *Value of education at the elementary and secondary levels ✓*

### **Environmental**

- *Remember conversations when the town bought new bus – environmental consciousness*
- *Sustainability is more than good environmental sense – it also means what will be usable for the longest time*
- *Sustainable/environmentally conscious ✓✓*
- *Changing the way we live to reduce use of fossil fuels – which may impact size of certain buildings if fewer vehicles are used*

### **Safety/Health**

- *Safety for the town workers – such poor conditions have been ongoing for 30 years ✓*
- *Show respect for the town employees by giving them adequate resources and a good environment to work in ✓*
- *Healthy buildings are important*
- *Safe buildings with no leaks*
- *Walking conditions should be improved – commitment to infrastructure for pedestrians*
- *Safety/health of our children ✓*

### **Framing Question 2. Based on your concerns, what questions should the Council be asking as it considers these four projects?**

#### **General**

- *How will old buildings be used/repurposed in future?*
- *What other projects/staffing won't be done – what are the ramifications if these projects are done? Need to take a holistic, long-term view*
- *Sidewalk safety – bottom-up motivation*
- *Other capital projects need to be considered as well as these four*
- *Capital is needed for high school, track and community field*
- *What are the current demographics for the town?*
- *Look to the future but preserve a sense of “town” from the past*
- *How do you make changes while addressing the fear of change?*

#### **Costs/Funding**

- *Will existing Fire HQ be sold as prime downtown real estate at a good price to offset the project?*
- *Hope that all projects are flexible enough so that they can still happen – especially if there is a funding crunch/lack of funding ✓*

- *Concern about taxes in the future – so much so that people are wondering if they should sell/move now before no one wants to move into town because of high taxes*
- *What is overall time frame and budget?*
- *Is the cost of debt included in the estimated budgets?*
- *What are the projected savings in building more sustainable buildings – both in terms of energy savings, maintenance and overhead costs?*
- *Budgeting is a concern – innovation is needed*
- *Projected energy costs should be done when planning the building*
- *Explore alternative revenue sources*
- *Information needs to be shared with everyone regarding all capital spending and how money is raised*
- *What projects have the best return on investment? Biggest bang for the buck?*
- *How many people are taxpayers that live in Amherst?*
- *The elderly population is on the rise in Amherst*
- *Please note that there is a housing and road crisis in town*

### **Decision Process**

- *What is the council's priority? Feels schools should be – but how will this be determined?*

### **Environmental**

- *Keep climate change/adapting to climate change in mind*
- *Loss of available land to conservation*

### **Project Specific**

- *Each project has “pros” but what are the “cons?”*

### **Fire**

- *Examine whether if fire station moved, could it be used by the library?*
- *What can be modified at the North Fire Station to avoid duplication of efforts*
- *Where are the most fire and EMS calls – how far do crews have to travel – will this data be considered when considering the new location?*
- *Does the fire station need to be at the DPW site? Is that a given?*
- *We need increased Fire/EMS staffing – how does this*

### **DPW**

- *Where are the most calls – how far do crews have to travel – will this be considered when deciding new location?*
- *Is there a possibility of using Fort River for DPW – or what would it be used for otherwise?*

### **Schools**

- *Has the last proposal for the school been dismissed or is it still under consideration?*
- *What is the projected school enrollment?*

### **Framing Question 3. What additional information do you need about the individual or overall capital projects?**

#### **General**

- *How do these four projects fit into the Master Plan?*
- *How will the council prioritize and make decisions? ✓✓*
- *Need details re renovation vs. new construction*
- *Need “granular” details for better choices*
- *Where do we put things that nobody wants?*
- *NIMBY sentiment has to end if we want to respond to needs of town*
- *Would like to see a timeline – stages for completion of the next several*

#### **Costs/Funding**

- *What is the cost of not doing anything?*
- *What will be the impact on the tax rate?*

#### **Environmental/Sustainability**

#### **Safety**

- *All four projects have extreme safety needs – how do we prioritize?*

#### **Project Specific**

#### **DPW**

- *What happened to the land offered by Amherst College to town for DPW site?*

#### **Fire**

- *Need more info around the need for S. Amherst fire station*
- *What are response times?*

#### **Schools**

- *What is the impact on colleges if we don't have excellent schools?*
- *What are the implications for education – what grade levels would be moving?*
- *Number of students projected for the future (given declining population) details on this study and various options to accommodate moving classes around*
- *Input from UMass and its long-term plans – including schooling young students*
- *Do outreach to families to study at UMass – those would have an impact on town*
- *What role can the colleges and UMass have on these projects? Endowment? Having the town strong would make Amherst more attractive to their professors*
- *Wetland issues at the Fort River site or any other sites*
- *Should consult with UMass officials*

### **Framing Question 4. What makes you hopeful or excited for Amherst about these four projects?**

- *Hopeful and excited to finally get them built so residents can stop fighting about them*
- *These early listening sessions give hope for the projects*

- *Better use of the Fire HQ as a downtown location*
- *The opportunity to prove nay-sayers wrong – that the town can complete a project on budget and on time*
- *Concerned that the town will max its borrowing capacity for the next 30+ years – because we cannot predict the future and what might happen*
- *Excited to make Amherst the best it can be – including schools and outside perception*
- *Excited about library for all*
- *Excited that Town Council will do a better job at planning than Town Meeting*
- *Do not ignore the branch libraries*
- *Capital plan generally encompasses all*
- *Hopeful that all employees can work in a healthy environment*
- *Hopeful that schools will be better for students, teachers and staff ✓*
- *Think outside the box – use “cultural creatives” when planning ✓*
- *Look for donors for some of the projects*
- *Hope for the legacy that all classes can live here and enjoy these benefits – balance is needed – middle class is vital ✓*
- *Carbon footprint is important to keep in mind. Keep buildings in use as long as possible - make them last 100+ years and be energy efficient*
- *Out of the box spending – creative use of buildings we already have – use outside advisors*
- *Work of volunteers should be recognized and valued*
- *What is important other than these 4 capital projects?*
- *Fields, track should also be considered*
- *Lighting, sidewalks, bus routes*
- *Have hope for all 4 of these projects*
- *I hear a lot of commonality among people – council will be able to move faster than Town Meeting ✓*

### **Comment/Question Cards:**

#### **General**

- *Patching up old buildings = putting lipstick on a pig! Build new if at all possible*
- *I am also concerned with attention to senior needs in the town*
- *I am hopeful for these projects because it appears Amherst has already been planning ahead to save money and manage our finances and we have strong leaders who are out here listening to the community and searching for solutions*
- *Will there be listening sessions in different languages? The group of participants was not reflective of our town’s demographics*
- *Pressure on Amherst College for more PILOTS. Or could we borrow the debt exclusion from them at 0% interest? Out of a \$2 billion+ endowment, \$20 million is really peanuts! Please put some pressure on them to show the town some money – thank you!*
- *Can you hold a session at Amherst Survival Center at lunchtime? At the Boulders?*
- *How do you balance different opinions?*

## **Project Specific**

### **Fire**

- *Will the new fire station location be close enough for “Deep South” neighborhoods?*
- *Does the N. Amherst fire station need to be renovated?*
- *I am concerned about firefighters being exposed to contaminants – that is unacceptable*
- *Fire – yes do it*
- *Is the proposed site for the new fire station set in stone? Are any other sites still in consideration?*
- *Is it proposed to be a brand new building or would the DPW be re-purposed?*
- *Has a noise and traffic impact study been done?*

### **DPW**

- *What land does the town own that could be used for the DPW? And is the current site unavailable because we need a South Amherst fire station?*
- *DPW – Yes needed*
- *At the DPW site, will new traffic lights be installed on Rt 116?*
- *I love the solar panels that are on the car parking ports at UMass. If you have outdoor parking for vehicles, can you put solar panels on the shelters?*

### **Library**

- *Could the “bones” of the Jones Library be preserved?*
- *High priority*
- *Repair the Jones and improve the branches!*
- *Can the senior center be part of the library? Community!*
- *I want a new design that maintains the aesthetic of that building including on back side – not steel and glass. Change your architect. Do not demolish.*

### **Schools**

- *I would like to see us get answers before ruling out possibilities, e.g. where would a new school be sited before ruling out the use of a current school building with upgrades – such as the use of Fort River for DPW*
- *If the state funding does not come through for the schools, or even if it does, is there private funding/donors that could be pursued?*
- *It will be much cheaper to build one combined school than two elementary schools – and other projects (DPW, etc.) need those dollars so please don’t waste money on two reno/new constructions*
- *#1 priority*
- *Please emphasize that Fort River and Wildwood were each built for 650 (?) students so one school for the same number of kids is not a “mega school!” Especially now that we have the Spanish Immersion School which is 2/3 of the Fort River Cohort having a second small school is not feasible*

**Session 4 – Monday, December 9, 2019, 6:00 PM**  
**Location: Wildwood Elementary School Library**

**Framing Question 1. What underlying core values of the Amherst community should shape the decision making?**

**Themed Responses:**

**General**

- *Sense of community ✓✓*
- *Build consensus – being respectful even when you disagree*
- *Widespread input (such as tonight's event)*
- *Cutting edge, progressive, forward-thinking*
- *Socially conscious*
- *Full of ourselves/righteous*
- *Provincialism*
- *Caring for others*
- *Openness to diverse learners, backgrounds, experiences and income*
- *Value our history*
- *Openness to accepting different ways of looking at our core values*
- *Caring about Amherst as a whole*
- *Friendly, welcoming place*
- *Excellence – build public facilities that show this value*
- *Respect for children/patrons of the library*
- *Generationally fair – wants to leave town in better shape than now*

**Economic**

- *Fiscal responsibility/stability*
- *Affordability – keep it that way*
- *Affordable taxes, ability to stay in own home on a fixed income*

**Education**

- *Strong schools with good educational resources*

**Environmental**

- *Open space/conservation land*
- *Sustainable/long-lasting/planning for future needs*

**Safety/Health**

- *It is important that employees like their jobs, be safe and not overworked*
- *Comfortable working environment – accessible, warm, elevators, etc.*
- *Respect for town employees – make work environments more friendly/functioning to work in*

- *Fall prevention – streets/sidewalks – the “nuts and bolts” of running the town – presently does not feel like a priority*

**Framing Question 2. Based on your concerns, what questions should the Council be asking as it considers these four projects?**

**General**

- *Do we value the safety of our citizens? Are our citizens at risk – such as our firefighters?*
- *What is the crisis/danger level/urgency of one project over the other?*
- *The Town Council needs to consider what defines the town and draws families here – schools and library and accessibility to those*
- *What shows success politically?*

**Costs/Funding**

- *What is the debt override vs. exclusion? Costs and terms of each?*
- *How do the state grants impact the budgets for specific projects and how does that impact the projects overall?*
- *Why is Amherst so high compared to other communities with similar projects?*
- *What would it look like without an override?*
- *Is there a possibility of 2 overrides?*
- *Concerns with what is more likely to pass on an override*
- *After sessions – can plug information into models for financing the projects*
- *Is \$100 million realistic? ✓✓*
- *Can numbers constrain the design of projects, e.g. giving the schools a number (\$400 million) and let them work within that limit?*
- *What is tomorrow’s cost of construction?*
- *Timeline for grant funding?*
- *Are there other funding sources? State grants that might be available?*

**Decision Process**

- *Is there some type of priority among the 4 projects? ✓✓*
- *What aspects of this decision will be put directly before the voters?*
- *What is the overall decision process? What are the Town Council’s thoughts on this so there are no surprises to residents/voters?*
- *What are the stages/steps/timeframes for collecting more/better information and project estimates?*
- *Should look at need vs. want in general ✓*
- *Will there be phasing in of projects or will all 4 projects come at once?*
- *How do you decide which project(s) to attach to an override? All 4 projects?*

**Environmental**

- *Keep climate change/adapting to climate change in mind*

- *Loss of available land to conservation*

### **Health/Safety**

- *Safety needs to be a priority ✓✓*

### **Project Specific**

#### **DPW/Fire**

- *Logical sequence – site for DPW if use old site for Fire Department*

#### **Library**

- *How does the town not own the library? How does that play into these projects?*

#### **Schools**

- *Why did the schools get voted down before – what was the attitude at that time and what is different now? How can we do better this time?*
- *How to look at future population needs with this projects - schools*

### **Framing Question 3. What additional information do you need about the individual or overall capital projects?**

#### **General**

- *Historic buildings (Jones and Fire Station) what happens to them? Synergy space to address all the projects?*
- *What is town doing to find synergies between projects – multi-purpose spaces?*
- *Would be nice to have some visuals/pictures of what needs to be fixed*
- *Visuals/Schematics of proposed buildings*
- *What is the council's decision making process and timeline? ✓✓✓✓*
- *Will a variety of options for each project be considered?*
- *Why are we “holding the bag” for decades of neglect?*
- *Will other projects be approved individually?*
- *Will the process for deciding be transparent?*
- *What will be communicated to whom and when?*
- *Will our needs change over time?*
- *How do we ensure that other priorities are still being considered while we move ahead with capital projects?*

#### **Costs/Funding**

- *Upfront costs, long-term costs and short-term/long-term savings*
- *Would like to see numbers on building vs. repair/maintenance on all projects ✓*
- *What's the cost of doing nothing?*
- *Keeping things affordable is important*
- *More concrete numbers – so far this is all guesses*
- *Timeline for grant process*

- *Will this evaporate our “rainy day fund?” How will we deal with a future downturn in economy?*
- *How might we get some resources from colleges? PILOTS?*
- *Better explain timelines for outside funding*
- *How much will state funding drive priorities of these projects?*
- *What are lost opportunity costs?*

### **Environmental/Sustainability**

- *Will all projects have to be “net zero?” ✓*
- *Does state grant require library to be net zero?*

### **Project Specific**

#### **DPW**

- *Need more/better promotion/marketing on the DPW – maybe an open house so people see how bad it is*
- *How do other projects like DPW roads, etc. fit into the scheme of things*
- *What about the land Amherst College was going to give to DPW? Seems like this would represent a big savings ✓✓*

#### **Fire**

- *What will happen to the Fire Station? ✓✓*
- *Keep Fire Station as a community use or maybe tie-in to the library?*
- *Sell Fire Station to off-set project cost*
- *If Fire Station goes to DPW site – both will be new*

#### **Schools**

- *Very clear information on the school designs and how voters input/support will be obtained*
- *Various questions on electric buses for schools – what is the cost payback in terms of fuel savings*
- *School issues not resolved as to demolish or refurbish*
- *If we build a new school, would all students fit in new school or might 6<sup>th</sup> grade go to ARMS or add on to Crocker Farms? What are those numbers?*
- *Should show people who are less informed how the old school project was different than the new project*

#### **Library**

- *How will library be used? Downtown location?*

### **Framing Question 4. What makes you hopeful or excited for Amherst about these four projects?**

- *An end to the horrific conditions for kids and employees*
- *Positive environment for kids and employees*
- *Looking forward to better air quality*

- *Healthier environment ✓*
- *Growing elementary school population*
- *All projects will make our community more desirable/revitalized*
- *Hopeful to see “action” we are awash with deferred maintenance*
- *Hopeful that library/history will be preserved*
- *Want to be the envy of other towns*
- *Support hardworking civil servants*
- *Find a community building plan that can coalesce the energy of the community instead of divide the community*
- *Feels better than previous listening sessions about the school projects*
- *Building on our assets*
- *Community input*
- *New buildings would be wonderful*
- *Hopeful for green builders – will be cheaper*
- *Hope the process involves meaningful compromise and is truly affordable*
- *No more mediocrity*
- *Have great belief and confidence in this Town Council and their ability to find a way forward*
- *Excited about making progress*
- *Concerned about depleting our rainy day fund*
- *Revitalizing the town makes me feel hopeful*
- *Drawing in new families*
- *High School kids can’t do homework at the library – they have to go to restaurants*
- *Town feels “stuck” – there is a built-up desire to do something*
- *Hopeful and excited to see how Town Council will handle all of this- feel confident citizens will get to weigh-in*
- *Building diversity and social equity in our town*
- *Pride in our buildings*
- *Was excited in the 90’s by new school, police department and renovation on Town Hall – can be again with these projects*
- *Feels like the need is great – especially at DPW*
- *Process is not exciting – but the outcome will be*
- *Climate action is hopeful – new buildings will be more expensive but in the long run we’ll save*
- *Feels good to be innovators*
- *This feels less contentious than the schools – we’ll need to compromise and to make things affordable*
- *Hopeful for what libraries can do for the community – in so many ways – not just books*
- *Excited about library supporting diversity, social equity and giving teens a space*
- *Excited about the schools and that the classrooms will have natural light – kids and teachers deserve better*
- *Excited to know the Fire Department can respond – would like to feel the same way about DPW because they provide essential services*

- *Excited to have the staff work in better offices and have better equipment*
- *Concerned that we need more firefighters but hopeful that bigger HQ will encourage having more staff, equipment, ambulances*
- *Wondering about UMass's financial input/support for projects*
- *Concerned about taxes even though projects will make the town more desirable*

## **Comment/Question Cards:**

### **General**

- *What is the council and town manager doing with regard to pushing UMass and Amherst College with its \$2.5 billion endowment to contribute much more in terms of PILOT payment to help support town costs?*
- *How does UMass and Amherst College contribute to these projects?*
- *Does the town have access to top-notch financial advisor to see us through all of these expenses?*
- *Is a new Senior Center not feasible in the near future?*
- *Do not go for any trends or fads in plans – for example – open quads in schools turned out badly/atrium in library – think long-term*
- *I cannot afford to stay in Amherst when the taxes are raised – what can be done to help seniors and fixed income people deal with this?*

### **Project Specific**

#### **Library**

- *I feel very strongly that the renovation of the library is essential to sustaining Amherst as a community that serves the widest cross-section of our population – young, old, new immigrants, job hunters – to do this, it must be updated and made truly accessible.*
- *Very concerned about the aesthetics of the addition to the library. The Jones is one of the gems architecturally of our town. A huge, glass monolith jutting from behind could really ruin its beauty. Also concerned that since the town doesn't own the building, we will not have control over whether it is energy efficient to the town's wonderful standard.*

#### **Schools**

- *Smallish schools, neighborhood-centered, K-6 students need long-term community and relationships; better for both families and schools*
- *I would like the Council or School Committee to really think about other options than a massive school or two schools or the Wildwood School site. How about a North School (Wildwood site) and a South School (Crocker Farm site)? There is plenty of land near Crocker for an addition. What about 6<sup>th</sup> grade moving to the middle school?*

## ***Summary of Online Survey Responses Received December 2 – 20, 2019***

### **Framing Question 1. What underlying core values of the Amherst community should shape the decision making?**

#### **Themed Responses:**

##### **General**

- *Social equity✓*
- *Diversity*
- *Priority on core services (fire, police, DPW) over more peripheral services (libraries)*
- *The future of our town relies on families wanting to live and raise children in Amherst*
- *Value: Maintaining infrastructure = new DPW headquarters*
- *Acknowledge that these are not the only 4 major projects, nor are they necessarily the most important ones to residents*
- *Amherst residents want information and a say in how decisions are made, not a sales pitch*
- *Provide town-wide, written, non-biased information to every resident and then conduct town-wide, non-biased surveys at multiple steps along the way*
- *Do not rely on people being able to get to "listening sessions" to be heard - you'll only get the same demographic and you won't hear from those who would be most (negatively) impacted by bigger projects/more spending*
- *Support diverse peoples who live in Amherst - of all ages, colors, abilities, identities, incomes, means - to thrive in a place that feels like they belong, where they can access opportunities and resources to meet daily material and social needs; where they can learn and grow*
- *Inclusive decision-making that brings people in not just for comment but for thinking through the conception of decisions, including, in the case of big capital projects, how the place will look and feel*
- *Service to the community*
- *Scale projects down and renovate whenever possible – good enough but not perfect*
- *Traditional aesthetics, small details rather than grandiose international-style or Communist-era architecture*

##### **Economic**

- *People are struggling to afford to live here✓*
- *We need to live within our means as a town✓✓*
- *Fiscal conservatism*
- *Affordable taxes✓*
- *Fiscal responsibility = not expanding Jones Library*
- *Keeping budgets "in check"*
- *Financial stewardship*

- *Less spending, reducing taxes, reducing town budget*
- *A little New England frugality – focus on what is really important ✓*
- *Fiscal prudence – not only now but future costs and unforeseen consequences*
- *I must live within my means – the town, despite ‘proclaimed needs’ must as well – tax overrides will send this town in a slippery slide when residents will try to exit and lose value on property as there will not be those willing to pay what they are currently taxed at – people will be unable to continue to live/pay bills/eat properly - the town relying on grants are another form of ‘carrot dangling’ and encouraging the town to live beyond their means is another ‘tax’ in disguise – it forces the current residents with tax overrides and the cycle thus continues*

### **Education**

- *Our schools need to be top in the state – clean, safe and tech savvy*
- *Community schools ✓*
- *Education (generally) ✓✓*
- *Pay special attention to the young people in Amherst (preK – 12 and college students) and strive to give them experiences putting these values into tangible practice on a daily basis, that will help them share these values as they go on to the wider world*
- *Decisions about school buildings should focus on small schools sizes that are best for kids and not big, shiny buildings*

### **Environmental**

- *Value: sustainability = renovate Jones Library, don’t demolish*
- *Sustainable/long-lasting/planning for future needs*
- *Climate crisis/green design*
- *Sustainability/green design = not expanding Jones Library*
- *Net zero buildings*
- *Conserve resources and protect natural environmental systems as much as possible – locally, regionally, nationally and globally*
- *Environmentally conscious – reuse of what we already have, sustainable materials, net-zero energy, water conservation*

### **Safety/Health**

- *Value: safety = new So. Amherst Fire Station ✓*
- *Safety (generally) ✓✓*

**Framing Question 2. Based on your concerns, what questions should the Council be asking as it considers these four projects?**

### **General**

- *Why?*
- *Is it needed? Are all of the proponents talking points accurate?*

## **Costs/Funding**

- *What is a wise investment and how can the buildings be configured to last as long as possible?*
- *What can we reasonably afford? What do we really need?*
- *How to scale projects back to keep taxes from going up which will push out middle-class working people*
- *What effect will it have on taxes in 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, etc. years (including maintenance)?*
- *Is it fiscally conservative?*
- *Can we really afford to do them all or should one be dropped (the library) and costs of other 3 reigned in?*
- *The trouble is – we view this days as if it will remain so in the future – there are no guarantees that the economy will be stable and able to support projects – grant-wise or resident-wise, therefore [to] burden this town with these 4 projects is ludicrous*
- *What happens 2-5 years down the road when the ‘proverbial rug’ is slipped out beneath us – how will we uphold our debts for the next 20 years?*
- *Not all have the means of executives and college professors are blessed with – there are working people struggling to live week to week and [this] will affect their lives greatly*
- *How can we ensure construction costs are truly reasonable and appropriate for the town’s needs?*
- *54% of houses in Amherst are rental properties – they should be taxed at a higher rate than year-round residents. This will assist in paying for the capital projects as well as attract year-round owner-occupied families. We need more apartment buildings paying over \$1 mil in taxes and less “bedroom” rentals in homes that should be single family and would be if taxes went up and landlords were not paying the same as residents who give back to the community*
- *Which of these projects would we not execute if resources are limited?*
- *How will we constrain the budgets on these and other projects?*
- *How will we address the need to increase operating budget spending while addressing capital needs (e.g. we need more firefighters now)*

## **Decision Process**

- *Have we reached a wide enough population and set of interests in terms of the voices we are hearing?*
- *Is there some type of priority among the 4 projects? ✓✓*
- *How would residents prioritize these and other capital projects?*
- *How will residents know about and provide input that is heeded by the Council?*

## **Environmental**

- *Is it green? Outsized?*
- *Loss of available land to conservation*

## **Health/Safety**

- *Safety needs to be a priority ✓✓*

## **Project Specific**

### **DPW/Fire**

- *The DPW's equipment graces our highways with everything that has to be brand new – use up the current budget so you'll get the same amount delved out next year*
- *Consider other sites for the Fire Station (Pomeroy) and think about the AFD needs as a whole (should it have one station, increase staffing?)*
- *Do a rigorous assessment of what the DPW needs (building, vehicles) and then design a project that has nothing more than that – reduce the scope and additional sites will become feasible*

### **Library**

- *Why not renovate instead of demolish the 26-year old, ADA compliant Jones Library addition? The current building falls \$100, 000 short each year and is drawing down its endowment. A larger library building is NOT the answer. Better stewardship is. Why locate all programming at the central Jones Library? Why not more creative solutions? Use branch libraries with improved public transportation, mobile library, etc.*
- *When the Jones Library is currently operating at a \$100k deficit each year and drawing down its endowment, why should voters consider funding an expanded library building? Instead of demolishing 40+% of an ADA compliant addition, fully renovate the Jones, upgrade the electrical, HVAC, and replace the leaky atrium, while making better use of existing space. Keep 1660+ tons of demolition debris out of the landfill. What capital projects can we actually afford without needing a tax override?*
- *Can we justify the expense to replace an already-great library to taxpayers paying among the highest rates in the state?*

### **Schools**

- *Amherst had to have the best of schools – they spent time/money on consultants and ended up with the mess with Ft. River and Wildwood. Who is to say you'll get it right this time? There are other schools in the state that do not come close to the facilities that these current schools have – make due with what you have – if the roof leaks and structural roof configuration was not thought through – then what makes you think the same scenario won't happen again – spending phenomenal monies for more mistakes – more common sense is needed – not more spending that we don't have and then look to the townspeople to support your projected ideals*

### **Framing Question 3. What additional information do you need about the individual or overall capital projects?**

#### **General**

- *That experts are designing and building them- their aesthetic is objective and honestly no ones opinion matters on that- do they function at the highest level for the safety of our community. Our kids and first responders deserve the best*
- *Assurances that you will pick one not four and run with that...see how we all do with that...it is imperative that you hear from those who do not wish to be filmed/ videoed/get up and speak amongst all the yes people and get a true general consensus of this town so that representation is not powered by those with most education political aspirations nor money! We live now in a society of "I want what I want when I want it" Caution is needed.*

#### **Costs/Funding**

- *Upfront costs, long-term costs and short-term/long-term savings*
- *Tax implications*
- *Detailed information about costs and different options and impacts to different homeowners*
- *Comparative examples form other towns for each department's budget and each project. Is Amherst demanding more than is needed? Dreaming too big?*

#### **Project Specific**

##### **DPW**

- *Perhaps we could do with fewer DPW vehicles and DPW staff?*

##### **Fire**

- *We need more firefighters ✓*

##### **Schools**

- *Would like TC to insist that all costs of one mega school, including renovations at the Middle School and Crocker Farm Elementary be disclosed to the public before asking the public to support the proposed school project ✓*
- *What is the actual full cost of renovations that would be needed at the Middle School and Crocker Farm Elementary?*

##### **Library**

- *I'd like to see specifically how the Library Trustees think they're going to raise \$3 million in donations for their new project – I find that extremely unrealistic and fear that the taxpayers will end up making up the difference between hope and reality*
- *What is the full actual cost to renovate the Jones Library and why wasn't this option fully explored?*

- *I need to understand why the library project is being considered at all in an environment of limited resources. The town is failing its residents if it fails to provide schools, works, and emergency services – a town is not failing its residents if it fails to improve an already-great library system*
- *We need to scrap the proposed Jones demolition and expansion project and instead engage in a multi-year repair and reorganization of the Jones. This project is far too big and we just don't have the money or desire to do what they want. If it faces a debt exclusion override, it would very likely fail (I will not support it) and if it didn't, it would negatively impact the chances for the other, more necessary projects. For example, the chances of having a second successful override for the schools would go down dramatically and the budgets for the fire station and DPW would need to be curtailed even more. Replacing roofs, installing fire suppression and alarm systems, repairing athletic fields, etc. would also suffer. If school consolidation does occur, the programs the Jones wants to provide could be located in the school building that is not replaced/rebuilt.*
- *Trends in library usage, demographics of library users*
- *What would it cost to make the Jones Library ADA compliant if there was no demolition and little or no expense?*

**Framing Question 4. What makes you hopeful or excited for Amherst about these four projects?**

- *A new school, fire house, and DPW facility would really bring Amherst into the 21st century and would greatly improve the quality of life for thousands of people*
- *We need to show this community that we care about it and the future. We need to show that we can not only build what is needed but that we can maintain and care for these projects and others.*
- *Mildly hopeful that a fire station in South Amherst may finally happen, but that depends on whether Amherst foolishly votes to expand rather than fully renovate Jones Library. Amherst can't afford all 4 major projects, and a larger library building should be the lowest priority.*
- *I am only slightly hopeful that South Amherst will finally get the fire station discussed for the past 40+ years. It's past time. Safety and fully staffing our fire department needs to be a Town priority.*
- *I believe the new town charter and the activism around it has brought thoughtful leadership prepared to make the critical prioritization of taxpayers' money. I am hopeful that the system works and our resources are respected and only used on the highest priority items rather than just doing everything.*
- *Getting the fire station done. The possibility of looking at the school issue with a diversity of voices having a seat at the table and looking at a variety of options.*
- *New community spots*
- *I think the goals behind all 4 are great.*
- *Hopeful because we have excellent town government which I trust to make good decisions about these worthy projects.*
- *Nothing*

- *It would be good to make some decisions but they will be hard ones. I hope our decision-makers will carefully think things through.*
- *I support a new DPW; I support an enlarged or new Fire Station; I am opposed to the proposed demolish/expand the Jones Library; I am unhappy about replacing 2 schools with 1 school.*
- *That the school project will happen within 6 years. That we will drop the ridiculous library Expansion plan. That we will fund additional firefighters and do some priority repairs at the fire station.*
- *I cannot tell you the number of close friends/ associates and true townies who were born n' raised educated here.. who have come back to this town and say what the heck happened here...the massive ugly obtrusive buildings in the center with more to come have ruined.*
- *The very fabric of this charming quaint town that people have known and come to love.*
- *All because pressure from the "flagship" UMass to be more city-like in order for THEM to recruit more students and make more \$ to inhabit the multitude of new buildings the state encouraged them to build again the 'carrot' that this town is now doing to us...*
- *Beware of the smoke and mirrors...town council must be cognoscente of the looming uncertainty that may very well befall on this town and all will be held accountable!*

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Listening Session Agenda (sample)

Appendix B: Project Summaries

Appendix C: Frequently Asked Questions



## **AMHERST CAPITAL PLAN LISTENING SESSIONS**

December 3, 2019 3:30 – 5:30, Bangs Center, Large Activity Room  
December 3, 2019 7:00 – 9:00, Crocker Farm Elementary School, Cafeteria  
December 9, 2019 3:30 – 5:30, Fort River Elementary School, Library  
December 9, 2019 6:00 – 8:00, Wildwood Elementary School, Library

### **Goal of Listening Sessions**

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***. 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.

## **AGENDA**

- Welcome & Overview of the Session
- Video Overview of the Four Capital Projects
  - Brief Clarification Questions
- Small Group Discussion of the Following Questions
  1. What underlying core values of the Amherst community should shape the decision making?
  2. Based on your concerns, what questions should the Council be asking as it considers these four projects?
  3. What additional information do you need about the individual or overall capital projects?
  4. What makes you hopeful or excited for Amherst about these four projects?
- Small Group Facilitator Report Out
- General Q&A

Visit [www.amherstma/capital](http://www.amherstma/capital) to submit written answers to the questions, view listening session video and material, link to relevant studies and documents, and find updates.

## Planning for New or Renovated Elementary School Buildings

Wildwood Elementary School, built in 1970, and Fort River School, built in 1973, are the schools in which the majority of K-6 students in the Amherst Public Schools are educated. The schools have not undergone significant renovations since their opening almost 50 years ago, despite the fact that they are not well-constructed in terms of educational design, safety, or moisture control. The Wildwood and Fort River buildings were built for a significantly larger population of students than is currently educated in them; however, they were built without consideration for educating students with special needs and other specific populations that are currently critical members of our student population.



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

### Why are new or renovated elementary school buildings needed?

Due to their age and condition, the existing Wildwood and Fort River Schools have many problems and deficiencies in both buildings, including:

- Undersized classrooms;
- Inadequate layout for current educational models;
- Open classroom design that is noisy and impedes learning;
- Failure to meet current ADA accessibility codes;
- Failure to meeting current safety standards for front entry access and fire sprinkler systems; and
- Antiquated HVAC systems that are inefficient environmentally and do not provide a comfortable learning environment.

Additionally, the roof at Fort River is in very poor condition and will need replacing in the near future.

### What work has been done to study the issues at Wildwood and Fort River?

Feasibility studies have been completed for exploring options on both the Fort River and Wildwood site. The Fort River study was completed in September of 2019 and can be found at [https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/48691/2019\\_09\\_17\\_Final](https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/48691/2019_09_17_Final). The Wildwood study was part of a previous Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) study completed in 2016 and can be found at <https://drive.google.com/open?id=0By0mz4P0v3bWaG9vUk54emJud2s>.

### What are the next steps toward a new school building(s)?

With unanimous votes of the Amherst School Committee and Amherst Town Council, the Town applied to the MSBA process in April. The MSBA will vote on which towns are accepted into the process for the upcoming year on December 11, 2019.

If the Town is invited into the MSBA process, it will receive a date when work can commence on the feasibility study, which will likely be in the spring of 2020. A building committee will be formed to begin the work of hiring consultants to support the Town's exploration of options for consideration.



Municipality

Amherst

Library

The Jones Library

Project Type

Renovation

Population

2016 | 37,819
2035 | 34,675

Total Square Feet

Existing Gross
48,000

Projected Gross
65,000

Estimated Total Project Cost
\$35,623,100

Estimated Eligible Project Costs
\$32,265,900

Recommended Grant Award
To be placed #9 of 24 on the waiting list funded at \$13,871,314



Originally built in 1928 and renovated in 1993, the Jones Library in Amherst has outgrown its dated space and would be providing Amherst residents with a more usable and inclusive library with this expansion project. The current building does not have a designated space for teens to use. Falling in between the children's room and the adult stacks, teens need their own space to work on collaborative school projects, and to gather when school buildings are closed. In addition, the library is not fully ADA compliant, hindering service to a significant part of the population. The new library will also be able to fully meet the technology needs of patrons. The computer terminals are currently oversubscribed on a regular basis. Access to the computers and the Internet is especially important for the substantial population segment in Amherst who cannot afford a computer or broadband access at home.

Table with 3 columns: Current Facility, Planned New Facility, and various metrics like Population, Year constructed, Addition, Square footage, Accessibility, Fixed public computer, Public seating, Community meeting/program room, Quiet/collaborative study spaces, Children's room, Teen/YA room, Self-service holds/checkout.

MPLCP Green Library Incentive: \$146,457 - \$256,300 upon completion of project and receipt of LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environment Design) certification and level of certification

Listening Sessions - December 3 and 9, 2019 & Online Survey Feedback

Town of Amherst Capital Investment Projects

## Planning for a new Fire/Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Station:

**Facility:** Fire/EMS services reside in 2 facilities in Amherst – North Amherst and Central Stations. Built in 1929 as a fire station, the Central Fire Station is woefully inadequate for the operational needs of today’s modern fire and EMS service and Amherst’s greatly increased population.

**Services:** The Department provides services in fire suppression, emergency medical services, rescue services, fire prevention, safety education, and hazardous material incident response and disaster operations.



### Why is a new Fire/EMS facility needed?

The facility is totally inadequate and not a safe place to work. The space is too small for the fire and EMS apparatus and sufficient work and storage space. *The Department cannot acquire the types of fire apparatus necessary because of the space restrictions.* The electrical and plumbing systems are outdated. *The living and bathroom areas do not meet national standards or codes. There is no decontamination area,*

*no barriers between living spaces and areas susceptible to contamination. Air quality is an issue as Firefighters are constantly exposed to products of combustion and other contaminants.* Studies conducted in 1966, 1983, and 2006 all pointed out that emergency responses to parts of South and East Amherst are dangerously delayed due to their distance from the Central Fire Station. All three studies recommended replacing the station with a new one located somewhat south of the downtown. The full 2006 report can be found at [www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/33791](http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/Home/View/33791). In fall 2016, the Special Town Meeting approved \$75,000 to do a feasibility study to build a new fire/EMS station south of the downtown, replacing the fire station at 68 North Pleasant St. The feasibility study by the firm Kaestle Boos, working with Mitchell Associates Architects, which specializes in fire and EMS station design, was completed in 2018.

### What did the Fire/EMS Feasibility Study include?

The study included a report and conceptual design and floor plans. This report, based on interviews with Amherst Fire Department staff and a review of current state and national standards for fire stations, is available at [www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/42046](http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/42046). A staff study is also available at [www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/42045](http://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/42045). The best site for the fire/EMS station is 586 South Pleasant St., the site of the 102-year-old dilapidated building housing the Amherst DPW headquarters.



### What are the next steps towards a new Fire/EMS facility?

Once a site is finalized for the Fire/EMS station, the Town will hire a consultant to prepare the schematic design for a new facility. This phase will include site-specific analysis involving existing conditions, environmental and geotechnical investigations, and a Traffic Impact Assessment. The final report will include detailed drawings showing all interior spaces, exterior spaces, operational adjacencies and a detailed construction cost estimate.

## Planning for a new Department of Public Works (DPW) Facility

**The Facility:** Over Amherst's 257-year history, the Town has never built a Department of Public Works facility. Instead, in the 1940's, the Town retrofitted a 1915 trolley barn at 586 South Pleasant St. This building has seen very few significant improvements or modernizations even as Amherst's population has increased and DPW responsibilities greatly expanded.

**Services:** The DPW is an important first-responder when snow, storms, or other disasters hit. This essential Town Department is responsible for maintaining roads, water/sewer lines, pump stations, water/wastewater treatment facilities, 5 water supply wells, 2 reservoirs, 3 cemeteries, 80 acres of playing fields/parks/commons, 2 pools, sidewalks, and parking lots.



### Why is a new DPW facility needed?

Due to the age, original intended use, and condition, the existing DPW headquarters has many problems and deficiencies. The facility's insufficient size restricts DPW operations, including vehicle, equipment, and material storage that are dispersed throughout the Town and/or stored outside, accelerating depreciation. Antiquated mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems result in safety, ventilation, electrical operations, and locker rooms/restrooms that do not meet industry and code standards. Due to these issues, renovating the existing facility is estimated to cost the same, if not more, than constructing a new one.



Auto repair with no ventilation



Decaying Building



Vehicles Outside in Winter

### What did the DPW Feasibility Study include?

In March 2016, a DPW Feasibility Study was completed at a cost of \$75,000. The study included assessment of current property and facilities, operational space needs, potential sites, basic building conceptual layouts, and related cost estimates. The full report is at [www.amherstma.gov/documentcenter/view/34943](http://www.amherstma.gov/documentcenter/view/34943).

### What are the next steps towards a new DPW facility?

Once a site is finalized for DPW, the Town will hire a consultant to prepare the schematic design for a new DPW facility. This phase will include site-specific analysis involving existing conditions, environmental and geotechnical investigations, and a Traffic Impact Assessment. The final report will include detailed drawings showing all interior spaces, exterior spaces, and operational adjacencies and a detailed construction cost estimate.



**Four Major Capital Investments  
Pre-Listening Sessions  
General Questions**

**Below are the questions that some people have asked.  
Please suggest others questions we should be asking.**

**FISCAL**

**1. *Can the Town afford to do all of these projects/make all of these major investments?***

**Yes**, if we make responsible choices about what to do for each of the troubled buildings, obtain grant funds when available, appropriately time the projects, and the residents approve a debt-service override for at least one project. All of the current buildings have significant problems because of deferred maintenance, the Town’s growth, and changes in needs since they were constructed. If we make significant investments in all four, at least one will need a debt service override.

**2. *How is the Town going to pay for these projects/make the needed major investments?***

**We have known that we need to address the needs of these buildings for many years and have planned accordingly.** The Town’s debt obligation is very low and much of our debt, including previously issued bonds, have been fully paid or will be within the next few years. We accumulated reserves to help us to pay for part of the projects and manage future debt that will be required. The Town managed its finances responsibly and has a strong bond rating, which will enable it to borrow at a low interest rate. The Town increased the proportion of the budget allocated to meet capital expenses to address the needs of these four projects, address other deferred capital needs such as roads and sidewalks, and provide the equipment and tools needed to provide the services we expect from our Town.

**3. *Why did we get so far behind with addressing the needs of our important public buildings?***

**Our capital budget was inadequately funded.** In 2008, the Town adopted Financial Management Policies and Objectives that determined the appropriate amount of the annual budget that should be used to address capital needs, including infrastructure.

“The annual budget should include a Capital Program that includes debt service obligations and cash-funded capital projects funded from current revenues equal to at least 10% of the estimated property tax levy. This does not include capital projects funded via debt exclusions (debt excluded from Proposition 2 ½ limits).”

For FY 08, only 7.2% of the tax levy was allocated to the capital program. Because of the recession that began shortly after the policy was established, the allocation for capital was reduced, not

increased. The allocations to the capital program were 6.51% in FY 10 and 6.23% in FY11. The result was that we deferred investments in infrastructure and building maintenance that we now must address. Since FY11, the Town has made a concerted effort every year to increase that percentage. This year, FY20, we have reached 9.5%, the highest it has ever been.

**4. *How will the funding of these projects affect other capital needs like roads and sidewalks?***

**The Town has significant other capital needs and any plan must be prepared to ensure there are capital funds available to address problems with streets and sidewalks, buy important vehicles (ambulances, police cars) and address other identified capital needs.** Regardless of whether we repair these buildings or replace them, the deferred need to address the problems at the elementary schools, library, DPW building, and Fire/EMS Station, as well as, roads and sidewalks will require expenditure of capital funds. Because the large capital projects would be funded by borrowing, the annual expenditure is for repayment of debt and other capital needs. Those payments will have some effect on the capital budget, but there will be funds to address other important capital needs. If one or two projects are funded by a debt exclusion override, that expense will have no effect on the Town's other capital needs. If we decide to repair a building without a major addition or new structure that will require borrowing, those expenses will compete with other needs for capital expenditures.

**5. *What are the consequences of a decision to not proceed with a project to replace or make substantial improvements and additions to one of these current buildings?***

**Should we not go forward with significant new construction/renovation, the Town will need to make substantial investments to repair and improve the existing building.** In anticipation of possibly proceeding, we have spent as little as possible to maintain these buildings. It did not make sense to do more than necessary to continue to use a building if it might be replaced. The cost of repair and renovation would rival the cost of new construction, but would not completely address programmatic, safety, environmental, and other concerns.

**6. *Will all of these projects be done at one time? What is the timeline?***

**The projects may not be done at once.** We cannot manage that much construction and it would not allow for responsible financial management. The timeline has not been determined. The Schools and the Jones Library applied for grants for those projects and the timing for them will be largely determined by the grants. The DPW and Fire/EMS Department projects will be timed according to such other factors such as the location of a DPW facility. If the Fire/EMS Station is built at the site of the current DPW building, then DPW decisions has to be made first. We also need to manage the financing of the projects as we determine the timing.

**7. *Will my taxes go up? By how much? When?***

**Property taxes go up every year, but are limited by Proposition 2 ½. To proceed with investments in all four facilities will likely require the voters to approve an override to fund one or two of the projects. If passed, taxes will increase after the funds are borrowed. The amount of the tax increase depends on the amount borrowed pending approval of the override.** The funds for these investments will be borrowed and the money to repay that debt will come out of the operating budget. Projects funded from the current budget will not cause taxes to increase more than they would in any other year. A provision of Proposition 2½ allows voters to decide whether to exclude indebtedness for a building project from the normal budget and to pay for it with a temporary property tax increase. Voters will decide whether to fund one or two projects by a debt exclusion override. The amount that taxes will increase is determined by the cost of the project, the interest rate at the time funds are borrowed, and the assessed value of the property.

Usually payments on municipal debt are larger in the first year and decline in each succeeding year until the bond is fully paid. Therefore, unlike a home mortgage, the additional taxation on property will go down each year. For example, if voters approve a debt exclusion override for a \$20,000,000 building that meets the Town's net zero bylaw requirement and bonds are issued at 4%, for a \$325,000 home the increase in taxes will be highest in the first year, an additional \$220 in the property tax for the year, \$55 for each quarterly payment. The annual increase will be \$200 in the fifth year, \$180 in the tenth year, \$140 in the twentieth year, and \$104 in the 29<sup>th</sup> and final year. The debt exclusion override authorization then ends.

**8. *Does the Net Zero Energy Building Bylaw apply to all of these projects?***

**The Net Zero Energy bylaw applies to all new Town-owned buildings and additions.** It does not apply to renovations. The decision whether to build a new building, build an addition, or renovate will be determined through the process to develop a Major Capital Plan. The bylaw does not apply to the Jones Library since the Town does not own the building. That building belongs to Jones Library, Inc. a separate nonprofit organization. However, the Library Trustees are committed to making the building energy efficient and may choose to adhere to the standards established in the Net Zero Energy Building Bylaw. In addition, while renovations are not subject to the Net Zero Energy Building Bylaw, if the Town Council adopts the Climate Action Goals currently under consideration, the Town Council may decide that extensive renovations also need to meet the Net Zero Energy Building Bylaw.

**9. *What is the additional estimated cost that will be incurred adhering to the Net Zero Energy Bylaw?***

**We estimate that the additional expense for new construction to comply with the Net Zero Energy Building Bylaw is between 7.5 - 10% of the building cost.** We expect that there will be substantial savings in utility bills since new buildings will be largely or entirely powered by solar and other renewable energy, including for heating. This will substantially reduce the cost to operate these buildings. It is possible that the annual savings in utility expenses will be equal to or greater than the cost to borrow the additional funds in order to comply with the bylaw.

**PROCESS**

**10. *What is the process for making the final decision on these projects?***

**The final decisions will be made by the Town Council after it has all of the information it requires and receives public input** through listening sessions, by email and paper mail, at Council Committee and Council meetings that include the topic in the agendas, and by other means of communication. Because of deadlines associated with library and school grant programs, the Council may need to make decisions about some projects before adopting a plan encompassing all four identified projects and other capital needs.

**11. *When will the Town Council complete their Major Capital Plan encompassing all of these projects?***

**While the Council would like to have a Major Capital Plan by June 2020, the Council cannot predict a specific date without more information.** We will not know whether the Massachusetts School Building Authority will respond favorably to the Statement of Interest filed earlier this year until December 2019 or later. If invited in by the MSBA and accepted by the Town, the School Committee and a building committee will need to initiate a community process to make final decisions on the educational and building plans. The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners has notified the Jones Library Trustees that they will award Amherst the Library

grants in July 2020. The Council has not made a decision on a location for a new facility for the Department of Public Works, which affects that project and the Fire/EMS Station projects.

**12. *What will be included in the Major Capital Plan?***

**The final Major Capital Plan will encompass decisions about what should be done to resolve problems in our existing elementary school, Jones Library, Central Fire/EMS station, and DPW buildings; the expense involved; the timeline for each project; and the means of funding.** The Plan will need to be adjusted as additional information becomes available.

**13. *What are the next steps after the listening sessions?***

We expect to hear from the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) about the 2019 Statements of Interest by December 2019 or February 2020. **The Council Finance Committee and the Council will carefully consider the information it receives from the public and the MSBA decision. The Council will also consult the Joint Capital Planning Committee, which includes members from the School Committee and Library Trustees. It will develop an initial draft plan that will be adjusted as we receive further information and public comment on that initial draft.**

**14. *Will there be additional opportunities for members of the community to give input before final decisions are made? How will we be kept in the loop?***

**There will be opportunities to provide comments and make suggestions throughout the process** as the initial draft plan is developed, reviewed, and adopted and then as successive versions of the plan are considered. You can find these at [www.amherstma.gov/capital](http://www.amherstma.gov/capital). There will be reports through the press and at regularly scheduled and special meetings.

**SPECIFIC PROJECT QUESTIONS**

**15. *What happens if the Schools are not accepted into the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) this year?***

**We will submit another Statement of Interest in 2020, but may need to do some emergency repairs to the current buildings.** The Town Manager, in consultation with the School Committee and the Joint Capital Planning Committee, will determine what repairs must be made to the current Wildwood and Fort River buildings. He will include essential repairs in the Capital Plan he submit to the Council on May 1. The Council and School Committee can submit another Statement of Interest in the spring of 2020. The recently completed Fort River Study, the assessment of the Crocker Farm building, and the 6<sup>th</sup> grade study will continue and provide important information when a Statement of Interest is accepted by the MSBA.

**16. *What are the next steps after the Jones Library is awarded the grant from the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissions (MBLC) in July 2020?***

**The Town Council will have 6 months from the date of the MBLC announcement, with the possibility of a 6-month extension, to secure funding for the Town's portion of the project. If local funding is not secured, the grant will be deemed rejected.** If local funding is not secured, the grant will be deemed rejected. Construction Grants are offered by the MBLC "on an irregular basis, based on a number of factors, including state bond authorizations and the availability of funds through our annual capital budget." (<https://mblc.state.ma.us/programs-and-support/construction/construction.php>) As a result, if Amherst does not accept the state funds it is not clear when there would be another MBLC grant competition. In the absence of state funding, it will still be necessary to make repairs to assure the building's integrity, accessibility, and

public safety. The cost to the Town for such repairs, or renovation of the Jones, would be similar to the amount of the Town's portion identified in the grant.

**17. *Is there any state or other funding available to offset the cost of the DPW and Fire/EMS Station?***

**We continue to diligently search for grant opportunities but are not aware of possible state or other funding opportunities.**

**18. *Where is the DPW moving?***

**This decision has not been made.** The Council will continue to consider all options so that it can make a decision and allow the planning process to move forward.

**19. *Does the Fire/EMS Station have to be on the DPW lot?***

**This proposed location is the best alternative.** The Town has investigated a number of possible locations for a Fire/EMS Station. This is clearly the best available location to assure adequate service to all parts of Town including downtown, South Amherst, and East Amherst. The DPW building cannot be renovated to resolve its problems so it is logical to move that facility to a new location and use the current property for the Fire/EMS Station.

**20. *Is the Fire/EMS Station decision dependent upon the DPW site?***

**If we are to locate a new Central Fire/EMS Station location at the current DPW site, we need to build a new facility for the Department of Public Works in order to make that property available. There is not adequate space on the property for both facilities.**