



FINANCE COMMITTEE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NOVEMBER 7, 2011 SPECIAL TOWN MEETING

Traditionally, the Finance Committee Report includes the full text of the warrant articles. Because this warrant includes a long zoning article (Article 17 – Village Center Re-Zoning), it is not repeated in this report in order to reduce printing and mailing expenses. Please refer to the Warrant from the previous mailing for the wording of this article.

As the Finance Committee reported in an August 29 memorandum from its Chair to Town Meeting, the Town ended Fiscal Year 2011 in a sound position. The new Fiscal Year, for which you adopted a budget at the annual Town Meeting, began on July 1. We are now starting the process to develop the FY 13 budget for your consideration in the spring. This report will address aspects of all three of these years.

Fiscal Year 2011

The Town ended FY 11 with General Fund revenues exceeding the budget by \$634,658 and expenses that were \$467,589 less than budgeted. While this could be considered as an operating surplus of \$1,102,247, that is not a useful analysis. The Department of Revenue certifies free cash at the end of each year and makes various adjustments. We were notified earlier in October that the General Fund free cash increased by \$875,000 from the previous year. If you authorize additional expenditures at this Special Town Meeting, those funds will come from the free cash portion of the Town's reserves, so the addition to reserves will accordingly be less than the \$875,000.

Fiscal Year 2012 and the one-time additional state aid

The other good news is the result of a provision in the FY 12 state budget and the Commonwealth's good results from FY 11. The budget signed by the governor included a special provision that is expected to provide a one-time supplemental local aid appropriation of \$65 million this fall, approximately \$500,000 for Amherst. The provision requires that 50 percent of any "aggregate balance of appropriations" (unused appropriations in state budget accounts), not to exceed \$65 million, be distributed to cities and towns no later than Oct. 31, 2011. We expect to report at Town Meeting that this money was allocated. We have been advised not to consider this as recurring revenue. It is approximately equal to the decline in state aid from FY 11 to FY 12 but we must budget for FY 13 with the assumption that state aid will be closer to the FY 12 budget.

Reserves and the OPEB obligation

The FY 11 "surplus", the total variation in revenues and expenses from the budget as adopted, is about 1.8% of the budget. This is consistent with previous years. It would not be sustainable to adopt budgets that would be in deficit since that would drain free cash. It is quite remarkable and evidence of the Town's sound management that the annual variance is less than 2% and a surplus. In reality, after Department of Revenue adjustments and additional appropriations, our reserves declined in two of the last five years. We will increase reserves this year, but remain at the lower end of the goal of having reserves equal to 5-15% of the budget. For FY 12 reserves will be 7.5% of the budget.

As we have advised in previous reports, the Town has an obligation to pay the health insurance of present and future retirees and has not set aside funds to do so. We also share that obligation to retirees of the regional schools with three other towns. Our total liability is between \$50 million and \$74 million, depending upon assumptions about future health care costs and expected returns on funds we invest in an OPEB (Other Post Employment Benefits) Trust. The Fall 2010 Special Town Meeting established a Trust, but we have not allocated funds to that Trust. If we do not allocate funds for the retirement of current employees, the Town will pass the obligation for their retirement to future taxpayers. Furthermore, it is likely that bond rating agencies will eventually consider whether municipalities are planning to pay that obligation.

Appropriations at this Special Town Meeting

Town Meeting will consider proposals to allocate funds for capital programs for the War Memorial Swimming Pool, design and construction of improvements at Puffer's Pond, and to conduct a housing market study. If approved, these will be general fund expenditures from Free Cash. Other proposed expenditures that Town Meeting will consider are from the Sewer and Water Enterprise funds.

As Town Meeting takes up these proposals, members should consider that capital expenditures are one-time, offset in part by future grant revenue that will reimburse free cash, matters that have been previously determined to be high priorities, or will help the Town to manage a smart growth program that will increase future revenues consistent with the core values of the Master Plan.

Projections for Fiscal Year 2013 and after

The Town is in a more stable financial position than in the past several years, but still in a precarious one. If we manage costs, we should be able to continue current programs and services. This forecast is based upon some assumptions that will need to be monitored closely.

The largest revenue source for the Town is property tax (63%). The 2010 override was fully implemented over two years so this revenue source can only grow by 2.5% plus taxation from new growth. However, it is a predictable amount. The second largest source of revenue is State aid (20%). We have just been through a period of four consecutive years of state-aid cuts as a result of the recession and the effect on state revenue. The Massachusetts economy has improved somewhat, which enabled the legislature to plan for the one-time additional aid discussed above and allows us to project a small increase for FY 13, estimated at 2%. Other revenue, in total, will also increase by a modest amount. The net result is that we can project a 2.7% increase in total revenue. The Town is in collective bargaining with employees. Our health plan increases continue to be less than many other employers' experience, but are likely to be 5%. If these expenses can be controlled, we will be able to continue the current level of services in FY 13.

The assumptions that we will need to monitor in the months ahead include these:

- The Town will be able to control its growth in expenses to no more than 2.8%.
- The economy won't enter into a second recession, affecting state revenues.
- The federal deficit reduction process and budget won't affect the state's federal aid allocation, which would limit the state's ability to help cities and towns.
- The federal deficit and budget process will not reduce grant programs that support school and municipal programs.

Because of these uncertainties and the need to develop and fund a plan to meet our obligation to former and current employees who are relying on a promise to provide health care in retirement, we need to remain cautious in our planning and budgeting. It is unreasonable to project large increases in state aid in FY 14 and 15, or based on future property tax overrides.

Fiscal Year 2013 budget process

The Finance Committee will issue preliminary guidelines for the development of budgets in early November. We will establish targets for the Schools, Region, Library, and municipal services and provide guidance for the format and content of budgets. The Budget Coordinating Group is a forum for the Finance Committee, the elected policy boards for the schools, town, and library, and the chief executive and financial officers to share information and coordinate the development of budgets. An essential component of the BCG is the coordination of the calendar to assure that all processes enable the Finance Committee to develop and present a balanced budget for your consideration at the Annual Town Meeting in May.

There are several ways to remain informed and involved in this process. The government section of the Town web site has a budget page and sections for the Finance Committee and the Budget Coordinating Group. Finance Committee meetings are public, televised later on Amherst Media Channel 17 and available for viewing in the Meetings on Demand section of the Amherst Media web site. Budget Coordinating Group agenda, minutes, and meeting summaries are posted on the Town web site.

The Finance Committee welcomes your questions and comments. Communications by email should be directed to fincom@amherstma.gov. Finance Committee Members:

Kay Moran, Vice Chair 549-5767
Janice Ratner 253-7214
Robert Saul 253-6631
Anurag Sharma 549-1542
Douglas Slaughter 253-9920
Andrew Steinberg, Chair 549-6826
Marylou Theilman 253-7980

**ARTICLE 1. Reports of Boards and Committees
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will hear those reports of Town officers, the Finance Committee, and any other Town boards or committees which are not available in written form.

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 6-0, 1 absent.

**ARTICLE 2. FY 12 Water Fund Operating Budget Amendment
(Finance Committee)**

To see if the Town will increase the FY12 Water Fund operating budget by \$100,000 for a total of \$4,201,543 by transfer from the Water Fund free cash balance.

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

This article proposes transferring \$100,000 from the Water Fund free cash balance to the Water Fund operating balance, to allow installation of more radio transmitters on water meters so the meters can be read remotely from the street. The upgrade, currently underway, improves productivity and greatly reduces the time needed to read the Town's 8,000 meters. After this transfer, the Fund's free cash balance would be \$1,014,642, and the total Water Fund operating budget would be \$4,201,543. Money in the Water Fund comes from fees for municipal water and may be spent only on management and operation of the Town's water supply system.

**ARTICLE 3. Capital Program - War Memorial Pool
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will vote to transfer the care, custody, and control of the parcel of land located at 205 Triangle Street, which contains 1.3 acres, more or less, and is described in a deed recorded with the Hampshire Registry of Deeds in Book 941, Page 199, from the board or officer having custody thereof for the purposes for which it is currently held to the Town Manager for recreational purposes under the provisions of G.L. c. 45, § 45, as it may be amended, and other Massachusetts statutes related to recreation, to be managed and controlled by the Leisure Services and Supplemental Education (LSSE) Commission, and to appropriate \$297,600, \$252,600 of which shall be from Free Cash and \$45,000 of which shall be transferred from the Community Services FY 12 budget for the purpose of repairing, rehabilitating, improving, and/or restoring said land and the structures and facilities thereon, including, without limitation, the pool, the pool building, the filtration system, and the decking, and further to authorize the Town Manager and/or the LSSE Commission to file on behalf of the Town any and all applications for grants and/or reimbursements from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts under the Urban Self-Help Act (301 CMR 5.00) and/or others in any way connected with the scope of this article, and to enter into all agreements and execute any and all instruments as may be necessary or convenient to effectuate the foregoing.

RECOMMENDED by Finance Committee vote of 6-0, 1 absent.

This authorizes an appropriation of \$297,600, of which \$252,600 will be from Free Cash and \$45,000 from the FY12 Community Services budget for the purposes of repairing and upgrading War Memorial Pool. An application was submitted in July to the Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) Grant Program for \$208,320, or 70% of the total project cost. The Town would

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pay the remaining \$89,280, or 30%, as the local match. The Town must appropriate the full cost of the project, receiving the grant later as a reimbursement. If full grant funding is not available, the project could be scaled back but would proceed using Town funds, as well as applying for additional grants. While we would prefer that capital expenditures be considered as part of the annual capital planning process over the winter and spring, we recommend approval now because of the PARC grant application timetable, and so that necessary repairs can be made in time to open the pool in June 2012.

ARTICLE 4. Capital Program - Puffer's Pond (Select Board)

To see if the Town will appropriate and transfer \$370,000 from Free Cash in the Undesignated Fund Balance of the General Fund for the purpose of the design and construction of improvements to the Puffer's Pond beaches, parking area and trails (Assessors Maps 2D-8; 5B-33; 5B-130; 5B-129; and 5B-16), contingent upon award of grant application and, if necessary, transfer and/or dedicate all or a portion of the foregoing properties to recreation purposes and seek special legislation therefore under Article 97 of the Amendments to the Massachusetts Constitution.

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 6-0, 1 absent.

Puffer's Pond is the victim of its own popularity as a recreation resource for Amherst residents and people from across the region. Years of heavy use have caused erosion and deterioration that continue to accelerate. In June 2010 a number of recommendations to solve the problem were made in the Puffer's Pond 2020 Committee report to the Conservation Commission. The committee's report came after more than a year of study, meetings and public hearings.

A number of needed improvements identified in that report are proposed at a total cost of \$370,000. The Town has applied for a state Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant of \$259,000 to help fund the work; the Town would pay the remaining \$111,000. However, the PARC grant would come as a reimbursement, and Town Meeting would have to appropriate the entire \$370,000 up front. As of this writing, we did not know whether the grant application would be successful. If it is denied, the project will not go forward at this time.

While we would prefer that capital expenditures be considered as part of the annual capital planning process over the winter and spring, the opportunity to apply for the PARC grant came up earlier. If the grant is awarded, we believe it is financially prudent to go ahead now with this vital project to protect a major Town asset.

ARTICLE 5. Amherst Housing Market Study (Select Board)

To see if the Town will appropriate and transfer \$40,000 from Free Cash in the Undesignated Fund Balance of the General Fund for the purpose of conducting a prospective residential market analysis for housing in Amherst.

RECOMMENDED by Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

This article would authorize expenditure of \$40,000 from Free Cash to conduct a residential market analysis to determine the demand for various types of housing. This information will enable the Town to

assess the likely success of zoning changes and other initiatives at encouraging the development envisioned and desired. Growth that is consistent with community values will increase the tax base and the Town's financial stability.

**ARTICLE 6. Stabilization Fund: Appropriate/Transfer
(Finance Committee)**

To see if the Town will appropriate and transfer a sum of money from available funds to the Stabilization Fund.

RECOMMENDED by Finance Committee vote of 6-0, 1 absent.

As explained in the introduction of this report, for the fiscal year that ended June 30, spending was \$467,589 under budget and revenue exceeded budget by \$634,658. This was due largely to increased court fines and noise by-law violation fines; larger than expected revenues from motor vehicle excise, the meals tax and the hotel/motel tax; a one-time premium on bonds sold; and Medicaid reimbursements substantially above the budgeted amount. As a result, total reserves have grown to \$5,588,429, or about 7.5% of general fund operating revenue. In addition, the State is expected to make a one-time payment to the Town of about \$500,000.

The Town's Financial Management Policies & Objectives state that reserves should be from 5% to 15% of general fund operating revenue, as a cushion against a financial downturn, especially in the current economic climate. The written policy on reserves also states that if Free Cash exceeds 5% of operating revenue, the excess may be appropriated to the Stabilization Fund. As of July 1, 2011, the Town's state-certified Free Cash balance was \$4,167,028, or 5.6% of operating revenue, and the Stabilization Fund contained \$1,421,401.

The Finance Committee is developing a policy on how to fund the OPEB Trust. (Again, see the Introduction to this report.) The Committee considered whether to recommend that Town Meeting make a significant transfer to the Trust at this Special Town Meeting in order to begin that process. We determined that the Committee should develop a more specific policy before taking such an action.

We recommend transferring \$400,000 from additional State Aid to the Stabilization Fund. This is part of the amount above the 5% guideline noted above for transfers into the Stabilization Fund. Because it takes only a simple majority of Town Meeting to appropriate money from Free Cash while appropriations to or from the Stabilization Fund require a two-thirds vote, building the Stabilization Fund would encourage the fiscal restraint that is especially necessary now and makes the money available for future transfer from that fund to the OPEB Trust.

**ARTICLE 7. Authorization for Affordable Housing Restriction – #5 - 11 Olympia Drive
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Select Board to accept, on such terms as the Select Board deems appropriate, an affordable housing restriction on the Amherst Housing Authority property located at 5-11 Olympia Drive, which restriction is granted in consideration of the Community Development Block Grant funds granted by the Town to the Amherst Housing Authority.

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

The Town has provided Community Development Block Grant funds to the Amherst Housing Authority to modernize and preserve its existing rental housing units on Olympia Drive. In exchange, the Housing Authority must grant the Town an affordable housing restriction on the property. Authorizing the Select Board to accept this restriction would guarantee that the property is always used for affordable housing, a requirement of the CDBG program.

**ARTICLE 8. Local Option Abandoned Property
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will vote to accept M.G.L. c.200A, §9A, as amended by section 65 of Chapter 188 of the Acts of 2010, which includes new notice requirements and provides an alternative procedure for the Town to follow for managing abandoned funds (unclaimed checks or “tailings”).

RECOMMENDED by Finance Committee vote of 6-0 (1 absent).

Currently, checks issued by the Town that are not cashed within 3 years go through a process of notification to the payee, listing on the website, and published legal notice. The unclaimed funds are then returned to the General Fund. Revisions to state law enacted in 2010 permit the Town to modify this procedure. This article would allow this process to occur after 1 year and also would not require expensive legal notice for checks of less than \$100.

**ARTICLE 9. Watershed Land Acquisition Shutesbury
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will (1) authorize the Select Board, in its capacity as the Board of Water Commissioners, to acquire by purchase, gift, or eminent domain, for water supply protection and other similar purposes, two parcels of land in the Town of Shutesbury, one of which is located off West Pelham Street, contains 7.19 acres, more or less, is described in a deed recorded with the Franklin Registry of Deeds in Book 5455, Page 215, and is shown as “Parcel B” on a plan recorded in Plan Book 125, Page 38, and the other is located on Baker Road, contains 10.6 acres, more or less, is shown on the aforesaid plan, and is a portion of the property described in a deed recorded in 2894, Page 147; (2) appropriate \$120,000 for such acquisition, and, to meet such appropriation, transfer \$120,000 from the Water Fund Surplus; (3) authorize the Select Board, the Town Manager, and/or such other boards as may be appropriate, to apply for and accept gifts and grants of funds, including grants of reimbursement, in any way connected with the scope of this acquisition, and to enter into all agreements and execute any and all instruments to effectuate the foregoing acquisition.

RECOMMENDED by Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

This article would authorize expenditure of \$120,000 from the Water Fund Surplus for the purchase of two parcels of land totaling almost 18 acres in Shutesbury for the purpose of protecting the Town of Amherst's water supply (Atkins Reservoir). The Water Fund Surplus was \$1,114,642 before any actions by this Town Meeting. We believe it is financially prudent to protect Amherst's valuable water supplies.

**ARTICLE 10. Watershed Land Acquisition Pelham
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will (1) authorize the Select Board, in its capacity as the Board of Water Commissioners, to acquire by purchase, gift, or eminent domain, for water supply protection and other similar purposes, a parcel of land in the Town of Pelham, which parcel is located off Boyden Street, contains 14 acres, more or less, is identified on Assessors Map 17 as Parcel 4, and described more particularly in a deed recorded with the Hampshire Registry of Deeds in Book 1928, Page 213; and (2) appropriate \$14,000 for such acquisition, and, to meet such appropriation, transfer \$14,000 from the Water Fund Surplus.

RECOMMENDED by Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

This article would authorize expenditure of \$14,000 from the Water Fund Surplus for the purchase of 14 acres of land in Pelham for the purpose of protecting the Town of Amherst's water supply (Centennial Water Treatment Plant Watershed). The Water Fund Surplus was \$1,114,642 before any actions by this Town Meeting. We believe it is financially prudent to protect Amherst's valuable water supplies.

**ARTICLE 11. Capital – Sewer Extension Project
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will (1) appropriate a sum of money to pay for the costs of designing and constructing sewer system improvements and sewer main extensions, and any and all costs related thereto; to determine whether this amount will be raised by taxation, transfer, borrowing, or by any combination of the foregoing, (2) authorize the Select Board, as the Sewer Commissioners, to assess sewer betterments under G.L. c.83, §14 for one hundred percent or a lesser percentage of the cost of such sewer projects upon those who benefit from each project, unless another percentage is voted by Town Meetings, such assessments to be made by the fixed uniform rate or a rate based upon a uniform unit method, as provided by G.L. c. 83, § 15; and (3) accept G.L. c. 80, §13B, which provides that upon application of the owner of real property assessed, if such owner is a low-income elderly homeowner eligible for an exemption under clause 41A of G.L. c.59, §5, the Town shall enter into an agreement with such owner for the deferral of the payment of the assessment.

RECOMMENDED DEFERRED UNTIL TOWN MEETING.

**ARTICLE 12. Pelham Road Bridge Replacement Project Easements
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will authorize the Select Board to acquire by gift, purchase or eminent domain, for the purpose of repairing, improving or reconstructing Pelham Road and/or the bridge thereon, temporary construction easements in, on, and under the parcels of land shown on a plan entitled "Plan and Profile of Bridge Preservation Project Pelham Road," prepared by AECOM Technical Services, on file with the Town Clerk.

<i>Owners</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Book and Page</i>
Luddy, Frederick L. and Judith H.	Pelham Road	1920/281

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Goldstein, Joshua S. and Rose, Andra M.	Poets Corner	9363/65
Amherst Schools	South East Street	1638/169

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

The three temporary easements are expected to be granted at no cost to the Town and help the Town to support the Massachusetts Department of Transportation bridge replacement project. Failure to grant the Select Board permission to seek these easements would delay the project and potentially jeopardize the state's funding of the bridge's replacement.

**ARTICLE 13. Snell Street Project Easements
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will authorize the Select Board to acquire by gift, purchase or eminent domain, for the purpose of repairing, improving or reconstructing Snell Street and/or the bridge thereon, a temporary construction easement in, on, and under a portion or portions of the parcel of land owned by Hampshire College, located at Baker Street, identified on Assessors Map 14C as Parcel 69, and shown on the plan entitled "Rehabilitation of Snell Street Pedestrian Bridge Amherst, MA.," dated October 3, 2011, prepared by Simpson Gumpertz & Heger, on file with the Town Clerk.

<i>Owner</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Book and Page</i>
Amherst College	355 South Pleasant St	7485/136

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

This temporary easement will allow the users of the Rail Trail a shorter and safer bypass of the bridge refurbishment work that is being done by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. The easement on the Amherst College property is expected to be granted at no cost to the Town.

**ARTICLE 14. Atkins Corner Project Easements
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will vote to supplement the votes taken under Article 5 of the 2009 Annual Town Meeting and Article 3 of the November 8, 2010 Special Town Meeting, and authorize the Select Board to acquire, by gift, purchase, or eminent domain, for public way purposes in connection with the Atkins Corner intersection project, permanent easements in the properties identified below and shown on a plan entitled "Plan of land in the Town of Amherst Hampshire County Bay Road, West Bay Road and West Street Altered and laid out by the Town of Amherst," dated May 2009, prepared by Foresight Surveying, on file with the Town Clerk.

<i>Owner</i>	<i>Address</i>	<i>Book and Page</i>
Atkins Peach-Berry Hill, Inc.	West Street	Book 4877, Page 321
Orchard Run Associates	West Street	Book 4886,

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Hampshire College	West Street, Bay Road	Page 314 Book 4600, Page 314, and Book 5374, Page 83
Seymour Epstein and Alice H. Epstein, Trustees of Balderwood Realty Trust	West Street	Book 4116, Page 321

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

These permanent easements will provide continued support to the Atkins Corner project and are expected to be granted at no cost to the Town. The larger easements were initiated by and are to be obtained from Hampshire College in order to preserve the black walnut trees at their admissions entrance. The other smaller easements allow for above ground utilities at the site to be on Town property.

**ARTICLE 15. Boltwood Walk Sewer Relocation Project Easements
(Select Board)**

To see if the Town will vote to authorize the Select Board to release a sewer easement on the parcel of land shown as “SE2” on a plan entitled “Easement Plan, Amherst (Hampshire Co.), MA,” dated January 9, 2001, prepared by Clough, Harbor & Associates LLP, Engineers, Surveyors, Planners & Landscape Architects, recorded with the Hampshire Registry in Plan Book 188, Page 58, which sewer easement was acquired by the Town pursuant to the instrument recorded with the Hampshire Registry of Deeds in Book 6158, Page 247, on such terms and conditions as the Select Board deems appropriate, and to authorize the Select Board to accept, as consideration for the aforesaid release, a sewer easement in the parcel of land shown as “New Sewer Easement” on a plan entitled “Proposed Site Plan,” dated January 10, 2011, prepared by SVE Engineering Planning Landscape Architecture Surveying, which plans are on file with the Town Clerk.

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

The moving of a sewer line as part of the Boltwood Place construction requires the release of an existing easement and the acquisition of a new easement. The new easement is expected to be granted at no cost to the Town and allows the easement and the actual location of the newly moved sewer line to coincide.

**ARTICLE 16. Zoning Bylaw – Official Zoning Map Conversion
(Planning Board)**

To see if the Town will amend Section 2.1, Zoning Map, of the Zoning Bylaw, by deleting the ~~lined out~~ language and adding the language in ***bold italics***, as follows:

SECTION 2.1 ZONING MAP

The location and boundaries of zoning districts shall be ~~shown on a map of the Town comprised of sheets numbered 1-B through 30-D at a scale of 1” = 200’ and 1” = 400’~~ and ***as delineated on the Town of Amherst Geographic Information Systems (GIS) map*** entitled ‘Official Zoning Map, Amherst,

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Massachusetts, May 1984 2011,' as amended. This map, including overlays *districts*, shall be on file in the Town Clerk's Office *in electronic and hard-copy (paper) format with copies available upon request. The "Official Zoning Map" shall also be available for viewing on the Town of Amherst website.*

Said Zoning Map and amendments thereto as shall be duly adopted shall be considered an integral part of this Bylaw. *Amendments to zoning district boundaries adopted by action of Town Meeting shall be shown as amendments to this Map or shown on such other maps as may be incorporated as part of this Zoning Bylaw.*

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 7-0.

Converting from a paper map to the Town's electronic GIS (Geographical Information System) map will make the map more accurate, increase public access to the data, and allow quicker and more efficient updating at less expense.

ARTICLE 17. Zoning Bylaw – Village Center Re-Zoning (Planning Board)

RECOMMENDED by a Finance Committee vote of 4-3

The Master Plan, completed in 2010 after nearly four years of town-wide input, deliberation, and consensus building, concluded, among other things, that "smart development" as applied to Amherst in particular, meant concentrating new and denser development projects in several village centers, including Atkins Corner and North Amherst Village Center. To implement this Master Plan strategy, certain zoning changes are required, and this article is a critical part of the Village Center Re-Zoning necessary to upgrade and support smart development in these locations.

More specifically, Article 17 proposes to create new form-based Zoning Bylaw regulations applicable either to all village centers or specifically to Atkins Corner or North Amherst Village center, create new form-based zoning districts, and makes other necessary revisions to the Zoning Bylaw. These changes add another layer of design criteria called "form-based regulations" to the existing Zoning Bylaw and establish specific form based criteria to the two village centers to reflect their different design characteristics. Both the town-wide and the village specific changes add design criteria that govern the general design (form) of new development as it relates to streets, buildings, open spaces, parking and landscaping. This will insure that Town Boards apply a more consistent application of design criteria in these village centers because much of the "form" component of new development will be pre-determined. This new regulatory layer should make the process of developing these spaces more efficient since the basic form requirements will have been prescribed. A streamlined development permitting process benefits everyone with increased definition of design requirements that promote a faster, more predictable, and more economical outcome.

The Finance Committee supported these changes because development in these areas, in a manner consistent with the Master Plan, would have a positive effect on the Town's financial circumstance by growing the Town's tax base and revenue streams while meeting broader community goals. The three Finance Committee members voting in the negative did not specifically oppose the intent of the Article. Instead, they would have preferred to make no recommendation because they did not see a clear financial impact on Town finances.

**ARTICLE 18. Resolution Regarding a Committee on Homelessness
(Committee on Homelessness)**

To see if the Town will vote to adopt the following Resolution:

WHEREAS, since its establishment in the fall of 2007 by the Select Board, the Committee on Homelessness has assisted the Town in achieving significant progress in its efforts to prevent and end homelessness in Amherst; and

WHEREAS, in 2007, immediately following the establishment of the Committee on Homelessness, three of its members participated in a series of regional meetings that produced the report “*All Roads Lead Home, The Pioneer Valley’s Plan to End Homelessness*”; and

WHEREAS, in 2008, the Committee on Homelessness worked with the Town to secure motel rooms for the homeless during the coldest nights of the New England winter; and

WHEREAS, in 2009, Committee on Homelessness worked with the Town to establish a seasonal warming place, which provided nighttime shelter, hot meals, and outreach and referral services for the homeless; and

WHEREAS, in 2010, the Committee on Homelessness worked with the Town to establish a full-fledged and state-approved emergency shelter at the site of the former warming place, with improved safety measures; and

WHEREAS, in 2011, the Committee on Homelessness proposed and successfully advocated for the inclusion of housing units for the homeless and those of extremely low income in the affordable housing development planned for Olympia Drive; and

WHEREAS, the Committee on Homelessness has assisted the Town in securing state approval of hundreds of thousands of dollars in CDBG funding to improve the lives of the homeless in Amherst; and

WHEREAS, the Committee on Homelessness has assisted the Town to better safeguard the well being of homeless shelter guests by successfully advocating for the development of a protocol for sheltering during extreme weather, a shelter guest grievance policy, and a more enlightened shelter admission policy that addresses the heightened needs of female, elderly, and frail homeless individuals; and

WHEREAS, because the shelter’s state-issued occupancy permit is scheduled to expire at the end of the 2012-2013 shelter season, the Committee on Homelessness has assisted the Town in locating and securing a permanent site for the shelter; and

WHEREAS, because of the absence of permanent supportive housing for the 16-20 chronically homeless individuals of Amherst estimated in 2009, the Committee on Homelessness had been collaborating with the Town to develop a goal in the Housing Production Plan of creating enhanced single room occupancy units to address this unmet housing need; and

WHEREAS, the Committee on Homelessness proposed, produced, and has distributed more than 1000 copies of a local Resource Guide for the poor and homeless in Amherst, presently in its third edition; and

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WHEREAS, the Committee on Homelessness routinely conducted its business in a manner consistent with the Open Meeting law, including posting its meeting agendas and minutes in a timely manner, and has among the most detailed and thorough meeting minutes of all Town boards and committees; and

WHEREAS, unlike all other Town committees and boards, the Committee on Homelessness addresses housing issues that are unique to the poor and homeless among us who, often because they do not meet minimum income thresholds, do not qualify for affordable housing;

WHEREAS, in light of the significant amount of work yet to be done to secure a permanent home for our homeless shelter, additional housing for individuals of very low and extremely low income, and 16-20 units of permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless among us;

WHEREAS, in September of 2011, believing its mission could better be achieved by a new committee, the Select Board dissolved the Amherst Committee on Homelessness; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, that Town Meeting hereby calls for the establishment of a *Committee on Homelessness* that shall:

- Participate in local and regional discussions to prevent and end homelessness;
- Provide recommendations to the Select Board and Town Manager on the best known practices to prevent and end homelessness, and assist the Town and Town Manager in implementing those practices; and
- Assist the Town in securing a permanent site for the Town's homeless shelter, permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless, and permanent housing for those of very low and extremely low income; and

Be it further **RESOLVED**, that the *Committee on Homelessness* shall consist of seven members appointed by the Select Board for terms of three years, among them, to the extent possible, members who have experience working with the homeless and two members who are homeless or have a history of homelessness.

The Finance Committee voted 6-0, 1 absent, to take NO POSITION on this article.

The Select Board has voted to create a new Sheltering and Housing Committee to consider the state of housing needs in Amherst across the affordability spectrum and to make recommendation to the Select Board about creation of new housing options to address those needs. This new committee would replace and consolidate the work of the Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee and the Committee on Homelessness.

The Finance Committee agreed that Article 18 would not have a discernible effect upon the Town's finances; however, several Committee members expressed a concern that this article pushes the number (currently 55) of town committees in the wrong direction. In the past, the Finance Committee has noted its concern that the Town's administrative professionals are overtaxed by their advisory responsibilities to an overabundance of committees. The exact cost of this burden will eventually need to be quantified, but in the meantime, the Finance Committee believes that, townwide, a smaller number of committees would benefit the efficiency, longevity, and sanity of the our administrative team.

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It should be noted that the petitioners believe that a single committee focused on the issues of the homeless would be more effective at raising funds and administering homeless shelter oriented programs. Again, the financial benefits or costs of a single committee to address homeless issues is unclear and would need to be documented more precisely to gain Finance Committee support.