



TOWN OF
AMHERST
MASSACHUSETTS

**Town of Amherst
Special Town Council Meeting
Finance Committee JCPC Presentation & CPAC Proposal
Thursday, May 23, 2019 2:00 p.m.
Town Room, Town Hall
4 Boltwood Avenue**

Minutes

Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-finance-committee-52319>

1. Call to order and declaration of a quorum

President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Councilors present: Councilors Bahl-Milne, DeAngelis, Griesemer, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, and Steinberg.

Councilors absent: Councilors Brewer, DuMont, and Swartz

Councilors participating remotely: None

Others present: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Assistant Town Manager M. David Ziomek, Clerk of the Council Margaret Z. Nartowicz, Planning Director Christine Brestrup, Interim Finance Director Sonia Aldrich, and Regional Schools Finance Director Sean Mangano

President Griesemer announced audio and video recording by Amherst Media.

2. Presentations and Discussion

a) **JCPC Presentation**

b) **Discussion on CPAC Proposal**

Councilor Steinberg called the Finance Committee meeting to order, and President Griesemer called the Special Town Council meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Nate Buddington, Chair of CPAC and Jim Oldham, Vice Chair of CPAC - Presentation on CPAC proposals.

1. Open Space – 1) Szala Property, 2) Hickory Ridge, 3) Keet-Haskins Property
2. Recreation – 1) Improvements to Groff Park and Water Park, 2) Mill River Recreation Area

Councilor Schoen – Question regarding use of Szala property for passive recreation (trails), possible uses of land for community farmland. Mr. Buddington and Mr. Ziomek – discussion of wetlands. Land is identified in the OSRP as high priority. Small area could be developed. Looking at community garden opportunities in all parts of town. This would be an opportunity in North Amherst.

Councilor Hanneke – Seems low development opportunity versus open space protection. Mr. Ziomek – doesn't make good planning sense to allow remote development rather than protect the entire site for open space. Szala is willing to put roughly 200 acres into preservation. Councilor Hanneke – question re: CPA funding in the coming fiscal year versus next fiscal year. Mr. Oldham - Committee did consider that and there wasn't a compelling reason to delay.

Councilor Bahl-Milne - how is assessed value determined. Mr. Buddington – appraisals. Mr. Ziomek – explanation of expert appraisal value. \$188,000 is the appraised value of the Szala property. Councilor Schoen – Keet-Haskins (\$238,000). There was no attempt to negotiate a lower price. Grant in play. Mr. Ziomek – in all negotiations there is always an appraised value. \$400,000 state grant to help with that purchase. It is by luck that 3 opportunities for open space protection would come up at the same time. Councilor Hanneke – question on Keet-Haskins and trails. This connects open space. Is there any plan to connect/create trails? Is there a CPAC plan to regularly fund trail maintenance on CPA land? Mr. Buddington – fully aware of deteriorating trail conditions. Discussion in CPAC to come back to make proper investments in these properties. Councilor Schoen – question regarding Hickory Ridge. Mr. Ziomek – responded; would like to try to get funds every year through CPA to maintain trails and connect trails. To Councilor Hanneke's question – focus on Master Plan to examine uses for the Hickory Ridge land. Mixed use. Would want to retain parking lot for multiple uses. If this goes through would come to Council with conceptual map. Solar comprises @23 acres of 120 acres. Mr. Oldham – the bulk of the land purchase probably wouldn't be conservation. Councilor Pam – question re: Groff Park. Mr. Ziomek – under construction there now. Contractors are on site. Goal is to complete project over next couple of months and have grand opening. Will serve South Amherst and will be great amenity to entire town. Councilor Bahl-Milne youth programs will be held at Groff Park.

Councilor Steinberg – won't attempt to parse questions at this meeting on finance versus merits of projects.

Historic Preservation – 1) Historical Commission Preservation Plan Update (\$25,000), 2) Historical Commission West Cemetery Headstone Restoration Phase II (\$50,000), 3) Farmhouse Window Restoration North Amherst Community Farm (\$30,000), 4) Data Migration to collective access at Jones Amherst Historical Society and Museum (\$22,76

Councilor Schoen – comment on farmhouse. It is housing farmers-in-training. Nice mix that cuts across farmland and historic preservation. Councilor Pam – Library data migration – Georgia Barnhill total cost is captured in the CPA request.

Affordable Housing – 1) Development and consulting support municipal affordable housing trust (\$200,000 for development support; \$40,000 for consulting support), 2) Rental Subsidy Program Amherst Community Connections (\$116,280) to transition people in homelessness to a more self-sustaining lifestyle, 3) Studio Apartment Supportive Housing Valley CDC (\$500,000) housing for homeless, DMH residents.

Councilor Steinberg – question on program similarity to prior program. Mr. Oldham – this is slightly different than previous program. Committee felt that this affordable housing proposal was important. Councilor Hanneke – management fee approx. 13% of full request. Is that a typical management fee seen

in this type of program? Ms. Greeney – Housing First. Typical fee. Councilor Schoen – subsidies – are there inspections of the properties – is that part of the management fee? What is the oversight? Ms. Greeney -- landlord self-certification before willing to sign lease. Councilor Hanneke – East Street School – not directly for assisting in development, but going to the AMHT with the intent for East Street School. Is the goal to have developers go to Housing Trust and have the Trust manage requests? Mr. Buddington – expectation is to come back to this. Mr. Oldham – one is an ongoing discussion between CPAC and AMHT. Ms. Aldrich – clarify that the AMHT is a municipal trust. Still has to abide by all rules applicable to the town. Councilor Bahl-Milne – recognize Valley CDC for work. Why is the cost looking so high? Ms. Baker - real estate manager for Valley CDC. Looking at development cost of approx. \$200,000 per unit. Explained reasons for high cost of housing construction. Councilor De Angelis – cost of bathroom construction. Discussion regarding construction costs, utilities. Councilor Schoen – East Street School – Could this be potentially be postponed to the next fiscal year? CPAC – thinks there is that flexibility. Looking for clarification on debt. Usually through reimbursement. Mr. Malloy – future funds to pay debt service. Valley CDC would need the commitment up front and could pay when needed. Councilor Steinberg - Wouldn't incur the debt until construction. Ms. Aldrich– flexibility in funding options but project may not allow for that. Councilor Hanneke – Valley CDC questions – current borrowing is over \$400,000. Has CPAC discussed a cap on borrowing? Mr. Buddington - Any bonding restricts ability to do other projects. Discussion debt service for CPA projects. President Griesemer- what are next steps? Ms. Baker Valley CDC – explained steps/process, including comprehensive permit. Councilor Schoen – if project moves forward, crosswalk, bus stop, etc., would town be able to do that – would Valley CDC be able to draw on resources? Ms. Baker – traffic, safety, etc. is part of ZBA process. Explained funding ongoing operations. Councilor Pam – do units stay at rental levels when a tenant leaves and another moves in? Ms. Baker – explanation. Discussion re: pre-screening and lottery system. Discussion re: project services. Ms. Baker- Community meeting planned toward the end of June.

Public Comment:

Johanna Neumann of Stanley Street commented that she is really excited about CPA projects. Three points – slate of projects is impressive. Aligned with town values. Conservation projects – once in a lifetime opportunity. Pleased with roles and responsibilities, including financial. Urgent needs; shouldn't delay.

Dave Huber of 104 Dana Street commented regarding Valley CDC project. Not saying not in our backyard. Concern with size of project given the residential area. Neighbor got police reports from Northampton on Valley CDC projects.

Susan Degrave of 88 Rolling Green and of the Affordable Housing Coalition spoke about concerns from residents; it is a mistake to assume that low income and homeless residents will bring crime and drugs.

Amanda Robertson of 39 Northampton Rd – neighbor to this project. Scope of this project is a concern. Residents have specific questions regarding this specific project; not affordable housing in general.

Hallie Hughes of 39 Orchard Street, concerned with being labeled NIMBY. Concerned with lack of notice/information. Valley CDC has rebuttal to April 24 meeting concerns, that hasn't been shared with the community.

A resident of Northampton Road commented that the plan should be delayed until more research on SROs can be completed.

Carol Lewis of 21 Ward Street – strongly supports the studio apartment project. Amherst goal to create mixed income housing. There is an urgency in the Town committing to the project now. Property value will increase. Strongly urge the Finance Committee to recommend this project and the Town Council to vote on it.

Kate Sims of 77 Dana Street – delay vote until meaningful community conversation pursuant to housing production plan. Are you open to alternatives such as family affordable housing, or other?

John Page of 96 North Prospect St – this project has been discussed for 16 to 18 months. Just the beginning of a long process. Real question today is the financial impact. Valley CDC is required to hold certain meetings. Size and scope of project is a ZBA issue.

President Griesemer – following the FinCom hearing, she and the Town Manager discussed holding a public forum. Reaching out to Valley CDC to have forum.

Ms. Brestrup – discussion in support of need for project. Reference to Master Plan goals for affordable housing. Overview of project location and proximity to amenities and transportation. Amherst has already given \$50,000 to Valley CDC for feasibility and site studies. Town meeting voted unanimously to support this type of project with single sized units. Discussion has been ongoing for years.

Amy Gilbert Loinez of Orchard Street – residents deserve time to discuss impact on neighborhood. Asking for delay in the vote.

Councilor Steinberg – Charter requires Finance Committee to provide a report to Council on operating budget on June 3. Does not encompass CPA proposal, which will be separate vote. At May 28 meeting, Finance Committee focus will be on required budget report. Council is required to have forum on Capital budget, scheduled for June 10. Will take budget vote on June 17. President Griesemer – June 3 Council will focus predominantly on budget, schools and library. June 10 capital forum. June 17 Council will focus votes on capital projects. Budget must be in place by June 30. President Griesemer – have not yet set a date for Valley CDC forum. Council might vote on June 17.

Capital – JCPC Recommendation

Presentation – Mr. Mangano and Ms. Aldrich

Mr. Mangano explained the capital process.

President Griesemer – Announced that she, Councilor Hanneke and Councilor Steinberg are JCPC members, and Councilor Schoen regularly attends. Councilor Steinberg - Another meeting is scheduled for June 6 to discuss process. Councilor Steinberg – JCPC report provides additional information on projects presented. Councilor Schoen – Will Council be looking only at FY20 at the June 10 forum, or will it be looking out into future years? President Griesemer – Correct. Councilor Schoen – Questions on CPA and excess project funds? Mr. Mangano – if the funds aren't spent when the project is closed out they are reappropriated through the capital process.

Discussion on Fiber Optic I-Net. Discussion on projects, borrowings. Borrowing authorizations require Council vote.

Councilor Ross asked about citizen requests, how did you choose which resident requests were funded, and how does cost work? Councilor Steinberg responded that this process is evolving, JCPC decided that citizen input is valuable, part of the original submittal form included an estimated cost.

President Griesemer – Each requester came in and presented to JCPC. Discussion on Crocker Farm feasibility study. Councilor Steinberg – request for North Amherst Library. Amount was placed into a future year so the project remains on the plan. Discussion on capital process – project priorities. Councilor Bahl-Milne – resident capital requests. Mr. Mangano – JCPC determines how much information is known. What gets recommended is determined by how much detail is provided. Councilor Steinberg – this is a learning process. Questions and answers on capital equipment requests.

Long Term Capital Plan – Councilor Schoen – Suggest refining capital estimates for future years. Sean explained that there is an effort to be conservative in the estimates. Department head requests should better fine tune the future years. Overview of capital funding sources, projected spending, % of levy to capital requests. Overview of 10-year capital plan – equipment, buildings, and facilities. Discussion on possible debt exclusion for buildings FY20 – 23. Councilor Steinberg – summarized how JCPC views the 10-year plan. Critical decisions come in the year at hand.

Councilor Steinberg – Finance Committee will make recommendations on Manager’s capital recommendations. Entire JCPC report is available online with budget documents.

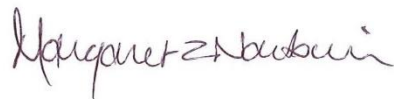
3. Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the President 48 Hours in Advance – None

4. Adjourn

MOVED: Councilor Ryan moved, second by Councilor Hanneke to adjourn.

VOTED unanimously to adjourn at 5:06 p.m. on May 23, 2019.

Respectfully submitted,



Margaret Z. Nartowicz
Town Clerk & Clerk to the Council

Attachment: Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

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