



TOWN OF
AMHERST
MASSACHUSETTS

Town of Amherst
Special Town Council Meeting – Public Forum on the Town Budget
Thursday, November 7, 2019
7:00 p.m.
Town Room, Town Hall
4 Boltwood Avenue

Minutes

Complete video is available online beginning at 1:02: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-four-boards-meeting-november-7-2019>

1. Call to order and declaration of a quorum

President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

Town Council Members present: Councilors Bahl-Milne, Brewer, De Angelis, Griesemer, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, Steinberg, Swartz.

Councilors absent: Councilor DuMont

Others present: Town Manager Paul Bockelman and Comptroller Sonia Aldrich

President Griesemer announced audio and video recording by Amherst Media.

2. Presentations and Discussion - Amherst Financial Indicators

President Griesemer explained that this is a preliminary budget hearing, with the goal of sharing early and obtaining public comment. She referenced the Special Town Council meeting early today at 6 p.m. on the Preliminary Financial Indicators, held jointly with the Amherst School Committee and the Jones Library Board of Trustees.

P. Bockelman reviewed the PowerPoint entitled Public Forum on Proposed FY21 Town Budget, which is a briefer presentation than at the earlier joint meeting. Priorities include financial stability; sustainability and resiliency (energy efficiency and addressing climate change, for example); planning for the future, including the downtown, village centers and affordable housing; building community, for example through age-friendly improvements; the pending infrastructure needs at the school(s), Department of Public Works headquarters, Fire headquarters, and Library, along with roads, sidewalks and crosswalks. The model for capital projects is to build reserves, move up the commitment to capital, and maintain a strong bond rating.

Between now and February, Bockelman will meet with departments to continue to review the budget. The deadline for the Town Council to adopt the budget is June 30.

President Griesemer opened the floor to public comments, starting with the Fire department.

David Clooney, Fire Department member, asked for an increase in staff funding. The minimum staffing has remained at 7 since 1992, despite multiple studies done over the years. There have been recent occurrences when a single firefighter responded to a call due to lack of personnel to respond to the calls.

Denise Barberet of North Whitney Street, asked why if we can find the \$100M needed for capital projects, can we not find the funds needed to provide for the Fire Department staffing.

Bonnie MacCracken of Chadwick Court, and mother of an Amherst firefighter, questioned why additional staffing is not added when UMass brings more resident students to town. During a recent fire call, ambulances had to be called from other towns to respond to EMT calls, three of which happened to be at student residences. Not only should the staffing be increased, but also the town should provide a state-of-the-art firehouse.

Dawn Schabach of West Street, daughter of a long-time Amherst firefighter, urged for an adequate fire station and increased staffing.

Liz Welsh of Aubinwood Road, home-care nurse and the parent of a firefighter, expressed concern about firefighter staffing.

Sarah McKee, and Amherst resident, spoke on the staffing configuration at the Jones Library, many being kept under 20 hours a week with no benefits. One consequence is that there is high turn-over in these part-time jobs.

Sharon Povinelli of Montague Road, responded to comments on general town services, suggesting that it would be useful to have a police officer in the downtown at night.

Don Hafner of Shays Street asked about the impact of the University and Colleges on the budget. Bockelman responded that these institutions are factored in for water and sewage usage. UMass and Amherst have their own police force; Hampshire does not have their own force. Town fire responds to all three institutions; there is only a surcharge for additional services on particular weekends. The Town is under negotiations with UMass relating to students and staff with children in Amherst schools.

Judith Williams of Shays Street asked about business taxes included in revenues. Bockelman responded that there is not a separate business property tax, although some do pay additional personal property tax, as appropriate.

3. Adjourn

MOTION: Town Council voted unanimously to adjourn at to adjourn at 7:55 p.m.

Prepared by Martha Marteney, Minute taker

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented
Budget Public Forum - FY21 – 11-07-2019 FINAL