



**Town of Amherst  
Special Town Council Meeting  
Monday, March 16, 2020  
5:00 p.m.  
Town Room, Town Hall  
4 Boltwood Avenue  
Minutes**

Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/amherst-town-council-special-meeting-march-16-2020>

**1. Call to order**

President Griesemer called the meeting to order at 5:01 p.m., announced audio and video recording and live broadcast by Amherst Media.

Councilors present: President Griesemer

Members participating remotely: Councilors Bahl-Milne, Brewer, De Angelis, DuMont, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, Steinberg and Swartz

Others present: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Assistant Town Manager David Ziomek, Police Chief Scott Livingstone, Fire Chief Tim Nelson, Superintendent of Public Works Guilford Mooring, Health Director Julie Federman, Information Technology Director Sean Hannon, Interim Finance Director Sonia Aldrich, Clerk of the Council Athena O’Keeffe

Others participating remotely: State Senator for the Hampshire, Franklin, and Worcester District Jo Comerford, and State Representative for the 3rd Hampshire District Mindy Domb

Note: This meeting was held in compliance with Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18 and the Governor’s March 15, 2020 Order imposing strict limitations on the number of people that may gather in one place.

**2. Announcements**

President Griesemer stated that Governor Baker’s order allows the Council to hold this special meeting with Councilors participating remotely.

President Griesemer noted the following upcoming Council meetings:

- Town Council Meeting – Monday, March 23, 2020, 6:30 PM
- Joint meetings of Town Council and School Committee to fill School Committee Vacancy, Town Room, Town Hall:
  - Tuesday, April 14, 6:00 p.m. – Candidate interviews
  - Thursday, April 16, 6:00 p.m. – Continued candidate interviews, if needed, and joint Council and School Committee vote to select a candidate

**3. Hearings - None**

**4. General Public Comment - None**

**5. Proclamations and Commemorations – None**

**6. Presentations and Discussion**

**a. Town of Amherst Preparedness for COVID-19**

Town Manager Paul Bockelman gave an update about the Town’s response to the Coronavirus outbreak. Health Director Julie Federman spoke about the nature of the virus, how it is spread, and mitigation tools.

P. Bockelman spoke about the Town’s preparations and plans, the Core Emergency Team, their duties and support, force protection, Incident Command strategy, continuity of operations and ongoing communication with Town employees.

Fire Chief Tim Nelson spoke about the continuity of operations of Fire and EMS service in Town.

Police Chief Scott Livingstone spoke about the police operations and dispatch services.

Department of Public Works (DPW) Superintendent Guilford Mooring spoke about water/sewer operations. Normal water line flushing, water sampling and other operations are proceeding. G. Mooring asked that if there are water concerns to please call the DPW office. The wastewater plant is functioning as well, routine sewer maintenance is under way. Flushable wipes and other materials should not be flushed down the toilet. Highway and parks staff will be out working while maintaining social distancing. The transfer station is open, but residents are asked to remember to keep social distancing, and focus on household trash.

Assistant Town Manager David Ziomek spoke about Town operations. Working with our department heads to work with staff on remote work from home, rotating shifts at offices. Public can call or email with concerns. Focus on essential functions to ensure continuity. Outreach to boards and committees, board and committee public meetings have been suspended until April 7. Protocols regarding communications with outside groups. Ask that members of the public have patience and leave messages and staff will get back to them.

P. Bockelman spoke about communication with the Library Director and Superintendent of Schools, the status of higher education in Town, Town committees, additional communication with the public, and about services to vulnerable populations in Town. Schools are coordinating food distribution to families; Senior Center is working on food for the senior community. Social distancing, cleaning and screening procedures are in place at the shelter. The Town is looking at options for locations for people to go during the day.

Assistant Town Manager David Ziomek reported that Community Participation Officers are reaching out to leadership at Craig’s Doors for volunteer opportunities.

P. Bockelman stated that he made a State of Emergency Declaration at 4:00 p.m. today, which aligns with decisions at the federal and state level.

The Town is working on the formation of a “Resilient Amherst” group of residents who are interested in helping in various ways.

**b. State Level Perspective**

State Senator Jo Comerford spoke about efforts at the state level. Working on advocacy with the Governor, also looking at funding.

State Representative Mindy Domb reported that there are currently 197 confirmed cases in Massachusetts. Residents can visit [www.mass.gov/covid19](http://www.mass.gov/covid19) for up to date information. Representative Domb spoke about

the importance of social distancing, guidance to those who think they may be ill, and additional testing in the State. The Governor's executive order banned on-site consumption of food, but allows delivery or take-out. Representative Domb spoke about supporting local businesses who will be hit hard economically.

### **Councilor questions and comments:**

Councilor Steinberg thanked everyone for their presentations, spoke about special problems that small businesses will have and upcoming deadlines related to the budget, Massachusetts School Building Authority and the Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. Under the current circumstances, some deadlines will be difficult to achieve.

Representative Domb responded that she can bring these concerns to the State House on behalf of the Town. Senator Comerford added that the legislature is working on these issues as well.

Councilor Schoen asked about shifting tax deadlines.

Senator Comerford responded that while the federal tax deadlines are set by the federal government, the senate is working on the state tax deadline.

Councilor Bahl-Milne asked about the availability of federal and state aid and emergency funds for businesses. Representative Domb responded that small businesses will be able to apply for interest free loans, and additional information about the loan package will be coming soon.

Senator Comerford added that she is working on channeling money equitably and making sure it reaches western Massachusetts.

Councilor Ross asked about low wage service industry workers, rent relief or rent deferment.

Representative Domb responded that the Governor is working on getting unemployment out to people quickly. Community Foundation of Western Mass is working to help people.

Councilor Pam asked about Councilors' using precincts and block captains to form email lists within districts.

Councilor DuMont spoke in favor of the creation of the Resilient Amherst group and suggested scheduling a meeting that could be entirely public comment.

Councilor Brewer spoke about the community response and how community members can be helpful without putting people at risk.

Councilor Bahl-Milne stated that residents are confused about what to do if they have symptoms, commented that we are not reaching those residents without internet service, and asked about safety of pick-up and delivery food. J. Federman responded that the FDA should have a statement tomorrow; if restaurants use cleaners then restaurants are safe. If restaurants abide by the food code, they are safe for takeout and delivery. If you are sick at home with flu like symptoms, stay home and call primary care provider to review symptoms. Mild to moderate cases will be able to stay home and isolate while monitoring temperature. The Town is looking at different ways of sharing information, such as mailings to apartment complexes.

Councilor Pam asked about using an empty Town or University building for emergency hospital services. J. Federman responded that surge planning has been ongoing. 94-town coalition of health and medical services working on supply needs in emergencies.

Councilor Ross asked about the shelter applying social distancing with cots, if that reduces the shelter's capacity, and asked about potential loss Town revenue of water and sewer, parking, and meals tax. D. Ziomek responded that social distancing has not reduced capacity of the shelter. P. Bockelman added that today was the first day we saw a downturn on parking, may not know the impact until we have a month's worth of revenue. Can adjust deadlines, but plan to move forward with cognizance of what the economic impact may be.

President Griesemer spoke about prioritizing the Council's work.

Councilor Hanneke suggested that Councilors utilize Facebook live or other social media platforms for office hours.

Councilor DuMont asked about further protocols for food handling, wondering if there are protocols for delivery and pickup of food. J. Federman responded that research indicates that the virus is not spread through food consumption.

Councilor Brewer spoke about people being asymptomatic while spreading the virus. J. Federman spoke about routine contact in families, but outside families learning role of asymptomatic transmission, starting to see there does appear to be pre-symptomatic stage that could be transmitting the virus.

Councilor Brewer asked that the meeting Monday be called a special meeting with no public comment.

Councilor Steinberg commented about regional school and Town budget deadlines, some of which come from the Charter.

Councilor Bahl-Milne suggested collecting questions from residents to bring to Council meetings.

Councilor Pam asked for information to send to constituents how to watch the next meeting.

Councilor DuMont commented that the Teams meeting has a 250 person capacity and could be used for public comment.

**7. Action Items – None**

**8. Appointments – None**

**9. Committee Reports – None**

**10. Approval of Minutes – None**

**11. Town Manager Report**

**12. Town Council Comments**

**a. President report**

**b. Future agenda items**

**c. Councilor comments**

**13. Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting**

**14. Executive Session – None**

**15. Adjourn**

President Griesemer thanked everyone for their participation and adjourned the meeting at 7:14 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Athena O'Keefe

Clerk of the Council

**Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented**

03-16-2020 Special Town Council Agenda 3-16-20

COVID-19 Town Council Presentation 03-16-2020

KP Law eUpdate - 3.13.2020 - Suspension of Open Meeting Law

March 16, 2020 COVID-19 Update

Signed Open Meeting Law Order 3.12.20