



**Town of Amherst
Special Joint Town Council, School Committee, and Library Trustees
Meeting and Budget Coordinating Group**

Monday, May 11, 2020

**5:30 p.m.
Virtual Meeting
Minutes**

Complete video is available online: <https://amherstmedia.org/content/joint-amherst-town-council-amherst-school-committee-jones-library-board-trustees-may-11-2020>

1. Call to Order

Councilors Participating Remotely: Councilors Bahl-Milne, Brewer, De Angelis, DuMont, Griesemer, Hanneke, Pam, Ross, Ryan, Schoen, Schreiber, Steinberg, and Swartz

Councilors Absent: None

School Committee Members Participating Remotely: Peter Demling, Heather Lord, Allison McDonald, Kerry Spitzer

School Committee Members Absent: Ben Herrington

Library Trustees Participating Remotely: Alex Lefebvre, Bob Pam, Chris Hoffman, Tamson Ely, Lee Edwards, Austin Sarat

Library Trustees Absent: None

Others Participating Remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Finance Director Sean Mangano, Comptroller Sonia Aldrich, Superintendent of Schools Mike Morris, Library Director Sharon Sharry, Information Technology Director Sean Hannon, and Clerk of the Council Athena O’Keeffe

After confirming that all Councilors can hear and be heard, President Griesemer declared the presence of a quorum and called the Town Council meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

After confirming that all School Committee members can hear and be heard, Allison McDonald declared the presence of a quorum and called the School Committee meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

After confirming that all Library Trustees can hear and be heard, Austin Sarat declared the presence of a quorum and called the Library Trustees meeting to order at 5:32 p.m.

Note: Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, this joint meeting of the Town Council, School Committee, and Library Trustees was conducted via remote participation.

2. Announcements - None

3. Presentations and Discussion

a. Updated Financial Indicators – Town Manager Paul Bockelman and Interim Finance Director Sonia Aldrich

Town Manager Paul Bockelman recognized Sonia Aldrich for her incredible efforts and work for the Town.

Town Manager Paul Bockelman and Comptroller Sonia Aldrich spoke about the following:

- One month FY21 budget, FY21 budget on an adjusted schedule, schedule for submittal of budgets to Town Manager and Council
- Tax due dates extended, revenues delayed and reduced
- Tax due dates extended
- 3rd quarter revenues
- Projections for 4th quarter revenues
- Unanticipated expenses due to COVID-19
- Reduced revenues due to COVID-19
- No requests for additional funds for FY20
- Unknowns: local aid, economy driven revenue, duration of impact
- Brief overview of revenue sources: property tax, state aid, local receipts, and other
- State aid outlook
- Local receipts outlook
- Other revenues impacted
- Residual duration of impact
- Major variables: state aid, economy driven revenue, and residual duration of impact
- Revenue models
- Estimated deficit of \$3.6-7.7M
- Expenditures variables: costs related to COVID-19
- Proposed guidance
- Upcoming budget process dates

Councilor Schreiber joined the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

President Griesemer thanked the Town Manager and staff.

Austin Sarat asked about personnel reductions in Town, Schools, and Library.

P. Bockelman responded that the Town has not announced layoffs or furloughs.

Councilor Schoen spoke about cuts to capital and OPEB in determining how much to draw on reserves to equal state aid cuts, asked about options to offset cuts to state aid such as pay cuts, postponed step increases, and personnel cuts, and asked about savings over last few months on utilities, overtime, heating and cooling.

P. Bockelman responded the Town will look at how we can maintain core services and staff to support those services.

Councilor Brewer asked for an update regarding collective bargaining, and communication with employees, and commented that the library grant is not an easy trade-off.

Allison McDonald asked about timing of recovery and what that means.

P. Bockelman responded that the economy-driven revenue has a two-month lag from when taxes are paid to when the Town sees the revenue.

Superintendent of Schools Mike Morris noted that the Schools are obligated to notify bargaining unit staff by June 15 if they will not return to work in the fall.

Councilor Pam asked about social distancing at the libraries, and if that will change the plans for any library building or renovation project.

Library Director Sharon Sharry responded that changes to the design are not allowed by the MBLC at this point in the grant round.

M. Morris added that projects that are in construction will not be adjusted, but the pandemic will force us to rethink what are spaces look like in the future.

Councilor Hanneke asked how the Town could bridge a potential \$6.6M budget gap.

P. Bockelman responded that the Town has identified about \$100,000 in COVID-19 related expenses, but does not count on reimbursement for those expenses.

S. Aldrich added that COVID expenses will be paid from current year operating budget, if the Town is reimbursed those funds would go into a prior year refund.

Councilor Bahl-Milne asked how can we stay committed to thinking about creative ways of enhancing revenue and supporting economic growth.

Peter Demling asked about capital planning for FY21, and if the Joint Capital Planning Committee (JCPC) will be useful in that process.

P. Bockelman responded that we would rethink what role the JCPC can play this year.

Councilor Schoen added that after the 18th will have a better sense of allocation, the committee could meet that week.

Councilor De Angelis asked about homeless residents now that the shelter is closed.

P. Bockelman responded that the Town is working with non-profits and vendors to help our homeless residents.

President Griesemer added that homelessness is a regional responsibility, and that the Town needs to work with Greenfield and Northampton; the biggest problem now is that there is no library or senior center to use for shelter on bad weather days.

Lee Edwards asked about preparation for future pandemics.

P. Bockelman responded that Town staff are looking ahead in case this becomes a sustained event or comes back. Food insecurity will be a high priority issue.

Councilor Dumont commented that this will make the Town more resilient in the future, and focus on climate goals with a shift in financial priorities to think about resilience.

Alex Lefebvre asked about expenses related to reopening buildings.

P. Bockelman responded that Town and school staff are thinking a lot about what school will look in the fall and about how employees can do their jobs safely.

M. Morris added that the schools have received a health grant, and that schools staff are actively following and learning from other countries as they reopen. It will be important to address both public health and public confidence and we need to get them both right. Staff are working on this all the time in every conversation.

Sharon Sharry echoed M. Morris' comments, adding that this is just the beginning, there will be placeholder costs in budget and conversations about the future are ongoing.

Councilor Pam asked if teachers are retiring in greater numbers that expected.

M. Morris responded that there have been some early retirement offers, but right now people are getting advice not to retire.

Councilor Schoen asked about the possibility of postponing the award of the MBLC grant.

Austin Sarat commented about strategic investments, the limited control of what happens on the state level and that library usage will go up, as it does during tough economic times.

Councilor Brewer asked about accommodations for employees with underlying conditions, even with social distancing there will be people who will be rightfully frightened to return to work.

P. Bockelman responded that this is an active conversation.

Councilor Schreiber commented that it is a good time to build a library, it has become clear to everyone since about middle of March how valuable the library is, there is a need for indoor space and access to technology.

Councilor Steinberg commented that the Finance Committee will meet tomorrow with a full agenda, including public comment; any questions for the committee can be emailed to the chair for consideration at the meeting.

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

5. Adjourn

Chris Hoffman moved, second by Alex Lefebvre, to adjourn the meeting of the Library Trustees. The Library Trustees voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:10 pm.

Peter Demling moved, second by Heather Lord, to adjourn the meeting of the School Committee. The School Committee voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:11 p.m.

President Griesemer adjourned the Town Council meeting at 7:11 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Athena O'Keeffe

Clerk of the Council

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

05-11-2020 FINAL Special Town Council Agenda - Three Boards Meeting
Budget Update Presentation- 05-11-2020 FINAL