



**Town of Amherst
Special Town Council Meeting
Friday, May 1, 2020
10:00 a.m.
Virtual Meeting
Minutes**

Complete video is available online:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaLIX5KTB3U&list=PLcnmFtV6BPFPeZpkOIHP0u83gis1YODYp&index=2&t=0s>

1. Call to Order

President Griesemer declared the virtual presence of a quorum, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m., and announced audio and video recording by Amherst Media.

Councilors Participating Remotely: Councilors Brewer, De Angelis, DuMont, Griesemer, Hanneke, Ross, Schoen, Steinberg, and Swartz

Councilors Absent: Councilors Bahl-Milne, Pam, Ryan, and Schreiber

Others participating remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Superintendent of Public Works Guilford Mooring, Assistant Superintendent of Public Works Amy Rusiecki, Interim Finance Director Sonia Aldrich, Justine Carroll and Meagan Heslin of Tata and Howard, Clerk of the Council Athena O’Keeffe

Note: Pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020 Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A, §18, the meeting was conducted via remote participation.

President Griesemer confirmed that all Councilors can hear and be heard by all participants.

2. Announcements - None

3. General Public Comment - None

4. Presentations and Discussion

a. Water and Sewer Rates

(1) Block Rates and their Use – Presentation by Tata and Howard, consultants to the Town

Town Manager Paul Bockelman made introductions.

Justine Carroll and Meagan Heslin of Tata and Howard presented information about the following:

- How water and sewer rates are determined
- Key aspects in setting rates
- Pricing structures
- Types of rate structures
- Current rate structure
- Ascending block rate overview and benefits

- Different user categories
- Separate irrigation meters
- Fixed charges
- Rate structure of surrounding communities
- Fixed charges of surrounding communities
- Suggestions for Town of Amherst to encourage water conservation and ensure stable and fixed revenue

Councilor Schoen asked if tiers could be set differently for residential, and industrial/commercial, and about an agreement with Hadley.

Councilor Steinberg asked about the agricultural rate and its implementation.

Councilor Hanneke asked about “essential use” and how to account for that in block rate structure, and about service charges.

Finance Committee member Robert Hegner asked what problem the Town is seeking to resolve with any changes.

Councilor DuMont commented that the problem is overuse of water, and asked where in Town conservation would be most effective.

Councilor Schoen asked for rate impacts of different decisions over 10 years rather than 2 years.

P. Bockelman spoke about management of water as a valuable resource and noted that the Town would recover enough revenue to offset expenses.

Superintendent of Public Works Guilford Mooring added that the Town has implemented a block rate structure in the past, and that the Department of Environmental Protection will ask that the Town look at the rate system. The Town does not currently have a fixed quarterly charge, but there is a minimal meter fee.

J. Carroll stated there are a number of ways to set rates, differing rates could be set for specific institutions. A rate study could show 10-year data.

President Griesemer asked if there is data that shows that changes in rates effects water usage.

J. Carroll responded that one community is set up to allow users to view water usage in real time, and when it began the community saw a drop in usage.

G. Mooring explained that an agricultural meter is only used in specific categories. There is only one agricultural meter in Amherst at this time. In terms of an agreement with Hadley, in the past Amherst has provided water to Hadley when there have been emergencies or maintenance. Right now, it is difficult to receive water from Hadley without a pump. When Amherst provides water to Hadley, the Hadley Board of Health must notify Hadley residents that there is fluoride in the water.

President Griesemer asked about the colleges opting to dig their own wells.

G. Mooring responded that UMass could become their own water system, but it is a difficult process. Water would come from Hadley or Amherst aquifers, and new piping would be required as well as consumer confidence reports, sampling and building. Essentially it required building a completely new system.

G. Mooring explained how the Town bills and meters the colleges.

Councilor Hanneke asked about service charges and separate charges for water or sewer if a property has a septic system.

Councilor Swartz spoke in favor of maintaining agricultural rates if a block or tier rate system is adopted.

Councilor Steinberg asked how much water is used for irrigation at athletic fields at the colleges, and about brown water recapture at the water treatment plant.

G. Mooring responded that the colleges use more potable water in heating and cooling than in irrigating fields. Amherst provides effluent to the colleges to use in the heating plant. The Town has been working with the university to reduce water usage.

P. Bockelman asked how other towns have addressed having a few large water consumers.

M. Heslin and J. Carroll spoke about how large users could fit in a rate structure, and how the Town may categorize the colleges' use.

Councilor Schoen asked about how apartment complexes are billed.

G. Mooring responded that the Town reads usage for institutions and apartment complexes on a monthly basis rather than a quarterly basis.

Councilor Hanneke asked if service charges are the same amount for all users.

G. Mooring responded that service charges for residences are different than for institutions.

Councilor Brewer stated that UMass has already instituted water conservation that affected water usage, and asked about storm water management.

G. Mooring responded that storm water management is a separate issue than water usage; residences are limited in ability to use storm water. Use of storm water is a process permitted via the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Environmental Protection; there are requirements to treat the water before it is released to downstream neighbors.

G. Mooring added that as we look at rates for the coming year, we have an opportunity to research and think about different options.

Councilor Schoen asked how much work is involved in coming up with different options and timing, and if it would be helpful to narrow options to a few variations.

Councilors discussed the need for rate hearings.

5. Topics Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting -
None

6. Adjourn

President Griesemer declared the meeting adjourned at 11:16 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Athena O’Keeffe

Clerk of the Council

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

05-01-2020 FINAL Special Town Council Agenda

Water Rates Presentation 5-1-2020