



**Special Joint meeting of the Town Council and Finance Committee of the
Town Council**

July 14, 2020, 1:30 p.m.

Virtual meeting

Minutes

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

Finance Committee Members Participating Remotely: De Angelis, Griesemer, Pam, Schoen, Steinberg

Non-voting Finance Committee Members Participating Remotely: Robert Hegner, Marylou Theilman, Sharon Povinelli

Finance Committee Members Absent: None

Councilors Participating Remotely: DuMont, Hanneke, Ryan

Councilors Absent: Bahl-Milne, Brewer, Ross, Schreiber, Swartz

Others Participating Remotely: Town Manager Paul Bockelman, Finance Director Sean Mangano, Comptroller Sonia Aldrich, Assistant Comptroller Holly Bowser, Police Chief Scott Livingstone, Health Director Julie Federman, Amherst Police Captains Gabe Ting and Ron Young, Town Clerk Shavena Martin, Collector/Assistant Treasurer Jennifer Lafountain, Treasurer Cheryl Boucher, IT Director Sean Hannon, Principal Assessor Elizabeth Duffy, Fire Chief Tim Nelson, and Clerk of the Council Athena O'Keefe

1. Call to Order

Steinberg declared the presence of a quorum of the Finance Committee, called the meeting of the Finance Committee to order at 1:40 pm, and confirmed committee members could hear and be heard, and announced audio and video recording.

President Griesemer called the meeting of the Council to order at 1:42 pm, and confirmed that Councilors could hear and be heard.

Agenda item 3. FY21 Budget: other matters as determined

Amherst Police Chief Scott Livingstone, and Amherst Police Captains Ting and Young spoke about the following:

- Operations and structure of the department in terms of staffing
- Jurisdictional boundaries
- Amherst College and UMass Police jurisdictions
- Shift lengths and staffing
- Busy periods and events during the year
- Discretionary holdovers
- Mental health training and crisis stabilization

- Partnering with Clinical Support Options, Safe Passage, Service Net, rape and crisis centers, and a grant-funded civilian advocate embedded within the department

Health Director Julie Federman spoke about the following:

- Partnership between the Police and Health Departments
- Homeless systems meetings
- Need for the Police Department
- Bias training

Chief Livingstone spoke briefly about vacancies due to recent retirements and resignations.

Schoen asked about the hiring process for the three current and upcoming vacancies.

Livingstone responded that the recruitment process began in January; it is not unusual for the department to have one or more vacancies.

Schoen asked about a mental health advocate teaming with an officer.

Livingstone spoke about the benefits and restrictions of a team of mental health professional with an officer.

Steinberg asked about a domestic violence advocate pairing with an officer.

Livingstone responded that domestic violence calls are more dangerous.

Hanneke asked about the grant funding for a domestic violence specialist, and asked what will happen to the position if grant funding is not renewed.

Captain Young responded that the department reapplied for grant funding and if approved it will extend the position for a length of time.

Livingstone added that if funding for the position is not renewed, the department will need to reevaluate the position.

Griesemer asked about police-initiated calls versus follow-up calls.

Livingstone spoke about police follow-up that are often categorized as “police-initiated” calls.

Captain Ting added that the activity is predicated on problems in each neighborhood in Amherst. The police do not target a neighborhood, but response is based on calls for service.

Griesemer asked if police are in neighborhoods for calls and follow-up, or if they are patrolling those neighborhoods.

Captain Ting spoke about officers spending a lot of time in an area due to a call, response, and follow-up.

Amherst Fire Chief Tim Nelson spoke about policing that needs to change, not the police. The Amherst police department is part of a team that includes the Health and Fire departments. Chief Nelson spoke about his life experience as a Black man.

Pam commented that there might be some restructuring of follow-up calls; some calls need not be made by an officer, spoke about residents’ feeling of being policed, and commented that the Town cannot ignore that the feeling of being policed is real.

Chief Livingstone reiterated that officer-initiated calls are for follow up to calls.

P. Bockelman spoke about engaging in the conversation about how Amherst does “policing” and systemic change.

DuMont pointed out the attendees that have indicated they wish to make comments, and asked that they be allowed to speak.

De Angelis thanked the members of the Police department for attending today, and asked if there is public comment from people who did not speak at the budget hearing last night.

Hanneke stated that out of respect for staff, the committee should get through the general government portion of the meeting so staff can move on with their work.

2. FY21 budget: General Government Budget, and Debt

General Government

Town Manager Paul Bockelman stated the budget shows an increase of 21.5%; the Clerk of the Council position shifted departments and had not been budgeted in the Town Manager department previously. The other change is the reallocation of the Communications officer position. Travel expenses were removed from the budget.

Griesemer stated there will probably not be a physical Massachusetts Municipal Association meeting this year, and the Council budget includes funds for minute takers for Council committee meetings.

Schoen asked about legal fees, and asked if there is a team that can come together and do research on behalf of the Council.

Bockelman responded that the Town Manager is the Council's staff, and can delegate if needed to research and report back.

Aldrich added that we can add a separate line for legal fees next year and historic data can be added to the budget book.

Mangano stated the Finance team is comprised of Accounting, Treasury, and Assessing. Staff worked through the pandemic and have done great work keeping the Town going. Mangano spoke about the funding strategy for the department, achievements, and challenges.

Members spoke about financial goals.

Hegner asked about property values.

Assessor Elizabeth Duffy spoke about options to increase the PILOT payments.

Hegner asked about parking trends.

Hanneke asked about the review of evaluations, and paper payroll checks rather than electronic transfers as a less costly alternative.

Mangano responded that the Town is trying to move away from paper checks but have not made direct deposit a requirement.

Holly Bowser added that there were some bargaining unit changes regarding direct deposit, there are some employees who have been grandfathered in and are still receiving paper checks.

Members discussed valuations and negotiations of PILOT payments from UMass and Amherst College.

Pam stated parking permits increased due to new buildings that do not have adequate parking and that the fees for permits are too low.

Human Resources and Human Rights

Town Manager Paul Bockelman stated the HR Director and HR Manager run the department. The currently vacant HR Director position has been advertised, and some applications have been received.

Pam stated she hopes to devote more resources to this area in coming years.

Mangano spoke about insurance rates.

Hegner asked about health insurance for regional school employees.

Members spoke about health insurance, liability insurance, and workers compensation insurance payments.

Members asked about the opt-out health insurance incentive program.

IT

IT Director Sean Hannon stated that a portion of the communication manager position was moved to the Town Manager department, spoke about a cybersecurity training grant, permitting software, fiber I-Net new fiber to be installed, new GIS map, and indoor and outdoor WIFI upgrades.

Pam suggested that the Town provide WIFI to apartment complexes.

Griesemer agreed the Town needs to make WIFI more accessible to more areas in Town.

Schoen asked about technology compatibility in a new school building.

Members discussed WIFI in downtown and how WIFI could be provided to a greater portion of Town residents.

Town Clerk

Town Clerk Shavena Martin spoke about operations through the COVID-19 crisis, department goals, and accomplishments.

Hanneke asked why issuance of dog license is through the Town Clerk and enforcement is police, and noted the conflict of interest service levels much higher one year.

Martin responded that per MGL, dog licensing is responsibility of Town Clerk. Conflict of interest certification must be completed every other year, new employees only would have completed in 2018 and all employees in 2019.

Theilman asked about students voting from out of town. Martin responded that students registered in Amherst and unable to come to a polling place on Election Day can vote by mail.

Theilman asked how we can avoid people voting twice. Martin spoke about the statewide voter registration system (VRIS).

General Services

Town Manager Paul Bockelman stated this includes postage, phones, and the annual audit.

Members discussed the local option for personal exemptions of veteran surviving spouse, veteran disabled Purple Heart surviving parents, spouse, legally blind and senior.

Griesemer noted that this is not the same program as seniors who can work to offset their taxes.

Theilman asked about the East Street School bond.

4. Budget review and recommendation process

5. General public comment

Bryan Monesson-Olson, Amherst resident, spoke about police departments as racist organizations and spoke in favor of defunding the Amherst Police Department (APD).

Kinga McCraven, an Amherst schools and UMass graduate, commented that the Council was dispassionate when hearing public comment at the public hearing on the budget, and spoke about the need for a space for Black community in Amherst, and spoke in favor of cutting the APD budget by 52%.

DW, an Amherst schools graduate, spoke about the lack of representation in Town government, and spoke about the need for transformational justice practices, solutions outside of policing that work, and spoke in favor of cutting the APD budget by 52%.

Amilcar Shabazz, Amherst resident and UMass employee, spoke about the need to reassess and rethink the budget. Need to start the process now of thinking about where we can involve and create program like Cahoots, putting unarmed trained people.

Rick Last, stated the process seems wrong. Defund campaign was about systematic racism in the Amherst Police Department. Last asked did you really hear the testimony last night. “We are not clinicians, we don’t pretend to be.” Resources should be used at the point of the crisis. >1% of calls required police presence. Last spoke in favor of passing a one month budget and in order to take a deeper look at the police budget.

Zoe Crabtree, Amherst resident, spoke about officer initiated calls and follow up calls. Being watched and policed is part of the violence we are speaking about.

Terry Mullen, Amherst resident, spoke about defunding the APD.

NJ Rivilis, Amherst resident, commented that they never noticed a police car in their neighborhood, asked why drug addiction response by police and not EMS, spoke in favor of funding for community services.

Alexandra Monesson-Olson, Amherst resident, stated that only 12% of calls come from a 911 call, spoke about patrolling and instigating, different parts of community policed differently, asked why not employ crisis response teams, and that Amherst needs more social services and less police.

Michele, an Amherst resident, spoke about a personal experience with a mentally ill family member and experience with the Amherst police department, stating that APD was compassionate and that the police need more help but need specialized professionals.

Jose Adastra, area resident, commented that they elected not to send their children to the Amherst schools because there were police in the schools, spoke about the history of the name of the Town, and that Black people need respect, Reagan and the CIA, indigenous people suffering, double meetings and prioritize hearing from people.

Gazit Chaya Nkosi, Amherst resident, commented that they are disturbed by limited public comment when APD was given so much time, demeaning to imply that our sharing is unfounded hysteria, spoke in favor of a one month budget, and asked the committee to admit they have done something wrong.

Alysha Desharnais, Amherst resident, commented that cutting the APD budget would not create an imbalance, spoke about social services budget reductions, and that the Town needs to pay attention to how we are spending money.

Curry Kautz spoke about personal experience with police escalation and spoke in favor of cutting the APD budget by 52%.

Lauren Reingold, former Amherst resident, spoke about medical code of ethics, stated that pouring money into police department does not keep the community safe, asked to reinvest 52% of the police budget and address the mental health crisis in Massachusetts.

Kacey Oen read a statement by a disabled Black resident who faced abuse and harassment from an APD officer via “wellness checks.” The community member wants safety and accountability, cuts to the APD budget by 52%, and to use 80k in the budget in a community directed way led by Black-led community members.

Steinberg and Griesemer thanked those who spoke for their comments, and asked that written comments be submitted for inclusion in the meeting records.

Members discussed timing of the committee’s recommendation vote.

Members discussed the review, report, and recommendation process.

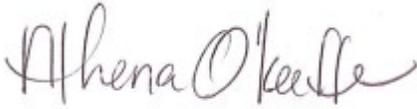
Members discussed the budget review process.

6. Items not anticipated by the Chair 48 hours in advance - None

Steinberg declared the meeting of the Finance Committee adjourned at 5:34 pm.

Griesemer declared the meeting of the Town Council adjourned at 5:36 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Athena O'Keeffe".

Athena O'Keeffe

Clerk of the Council

Record of Agenda Packet Materials and Documents Presented

- 1) FY2021 GRID FOR BUDGET WITH FINCOM (VOTES) TO TOWN COUNCIL
- 2) CO FY21 - 04B Operating Budget 2021 Rescind 1 Mo and Appr 12 Mo
2020-07-14 Finance Committee agenda
- 3) CO FY21 - 11 Acceptance of Optional Tax Exemption
- 3.1) FY20 Additional Optional Exemption Memo
Finance Committee Questions 7.10.20