

**Town of Amherst, NH**  
**WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE MEETING**  
**MINUTES**  
**2 Main Street**  
**Monday, November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2020**  
**6:00 p.m.**

**PRESENT**

- Lisa Eastland
- Danielle Pray
- Matt Seiler
- Scott Tuthill
- James Kuhnert
- Bill Loscocco
- Mike Parisi
- Lori Mix (Alternate)
- Cheryl Eastman (Finance Director)
- Christopher Buchanan (Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee)
- George Bower (Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee)

**ABSENT**

- Sarah Bonnoit (Alternate)

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

- Minutes of the 11/09/2020 meeting were approved as circulated
- Motion to approve by Scott, seconded by Bill, vote unanimous with Mike abstaining
- Minutes, as taken, will be formally approved and/or amended at the next meeting, with acceptance/amendments so noted in subsequent minutes.

**CALL TO ORDER**

- Meeting began at 9:12 PM

**AGENDA**

**Item #1 : Citizen Comments**

- No citizen comments (none in attendance)

## **Item #2 : Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission Warrant Article – Chris Buchanan and George Bower**

- Warrant article will be \$75,000, with three total requests of this size planned
- The 2020 FHA TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program) Grant has not yet been created by the Federal government. The Bike & Ped Committee is using the 2018 version as a placeholder for decision making until more information is available
- In 2018, there was a \$400k minimum grant request size
- If more projects are needed to meet the minimum grant size, the Committee could recommend reexamining past proposals or expanding the scope of planned projects
- Bill stated that he was unclear of the intent of the warrant article, as the purpose of the spending is not clear
- The preliminary wording of the article was shared with W&M, with Chris and George stating that the terse language was dictated by the statutes governing warrant articles. If a specific project is listed in the warrant article, then only that project may be funded, limiting the Committee's flexibility when applying for the grant
- Bill said he understood the situation and his concerns were alleviated
- Bill asked who would be approving the expanded project list, and George answered that it would be the Board of Selectmen with the advice of the Bike & Ped Committee
- Any excess funds in the Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) as a result of winning a grant will go towards further projects, as the CRF is meant as a long-term funding mechanism beyond just the Boston Post Road project
- Jim asked how voters will know all the details of the Boston Post Road project, since the wording of the warrant article is limited by law
- George answered that the Boston Post Road project will be mentioned in the voting guide and during the Deliberative Session
- W&M members generally agreed that widely sharing all details of the project would be important to give the warrant article the best chance of passing in March
- Danielle stressed that it would be necessary to mention to voters that the CRF is meant to be longer-term than just the Boston Post Road project for the sake of transparency
- Jim suggested that the Bike and Ped Committee clearly define the term "multi-modal", since voters may be unfamiliar with the term
- Matt asked for a brief synopsis of the Boston Post Road project
- Chris stated that the Boston Post Road project comes out of the Safe Routes to Schools study that was done with the help of the Nashua Regional Planning Commission. This study identified locations for side-paths in the Village as well as Amherst Middle School and Souhegan High School. Side-path is an engineering term that allows for bicycles to legally use the pathways as well as pedestrians, as opposed to traditional sidewalks which must be pedestrian only
- Danielle asked for the expected tax impact of the warrant article, and Cheryl answered that it would be \$.04

## **Item #3 : Discussion of Proposed Budget and Warrant Articles**

- The Town will not receive the finalized health insurance cost increase until 12/9/2020. Lisa asked how W&M can vote on the budget before the 12/7 meeting if this information is pending

- Cheryl answered that the W&M votes don't have to be done until 12/14, since the budget is not finalized anyway
- W&M agreed at this meeting to discuss the budget and warrant articles, but take the final vote next meeting when all of the budget information and warrant article language is available
- W&M discussed at length the proposed Department of Public Works (DPW) warrant article to create a CRF in place of the current lease-purchase arrangement
- Scott stated that there are tax advantages to leasing, which the Town should consider
- Cheryl clarified that the Town as a municipality paid no taxes
- Matt felt the current CRF as proposed would not be as transparent to voters as a budget line item, and absent any changes would vote no. In addition, he felt CRFs should be reserved for large ticket items, such as the \$300k grader
- Danielle said it would help to get the documents presented by Dwight Brew at tonight's BoS meeting
- Jim said he felt running the purchases through the budget and having money left over in the unassigned fund or having a CRF with a fluctuating balance was not materially different since the same amount of money would be taxed and spent. He did mention that the Default Budget scenario may cause headaches that the CRF would not
- Lisa asked rhetorically why the purchase of vehicles every year by DPW should be treated any differently than other budget items, such as desks purchased by the school
- In response to Lisa, generally W&M agreed that the high purchase amount of a single vehicle requires a different approach
- Jim stated that the \$20k cutoff of budget vs. CRF items as presented in the BoS meeting didn't make any sense. It was arbitrary and too low given the current cost of equipment generally
- Danielle mentioned that the \$75k threshold is used by the Capital Improvements Plan Committee to define what they would consider a capital item
- It was generally agreed that a Town Default Budget was unlikely based on the result of past votes
- Matt clarified that if the cutoff for the DPW CRF vehicles was raised above \$20k, he would be more willing to support the warrant article
- Jim stated that he is leaning toward yes on the Conservation Commission open space warrant article, because he stated it was small money
- Lisa added that she would be reserving judgment until all the information on the Conservation Commission warrant article is finalized
- Scott mentioned that he is leaning towards no on the Conservation Commission warrant article, as it appeared to him as more of a want than a need
- A discussion began as to the nature of the W&M Committee, whether it should be viewed as a watchdog for process and fairness, or if the votes should reflect individual member's personal leanings on the budget and warrant articles
- Danielle noted that the basic philosophical debate of the W&M Committee purpose was had last year, without a satisfactory conclusion
- Jim said that since the W&M members' votes will be included on the ballot along side the votes of the Selectmen, we should take great care with our decisions regardless of the interpretation of their purpose
- Bill added that he has lived in Town a long time, and he has always believed the W&M vote represents the voice of the taxpayer as their representative in the process
- Jim said he wished there was a way to express the opportunity cost of each item
- Danielle responded by saying that the W&M Committee will be submitting an Op-Ed to the Amherst Citizen, and W&M can expand on their opinions at that time
- Matt added that he believes the W&M Committee is to serve in an oversight role, making sure the budget and ballot initiatives are fair, clearly stated, and appropriate. For example, he was not going to support the open-ended version of the open space warrant article written by the Conservation Commission, but for legal reasons that was changed and his concerns are now alleviated

- Cheryl agreed to provide the tax impact of the open space warrant article once the wording is complete
- Cheryl also stated that the earliest a bond could be issued would be July 1<sup>st</sup> after the March vote
- Lisa reminded everyone that it was a big loss to the Town when the Hazen property was not able to be acquired, since this included an excellent aquifer
- Bill stated that he believes the Conservation Commission is very frugal
- Jim noted that the open space warrant article was a quality-of-life item, and rhetorically asked if we needed more open space

#### **Item #4 : Questions, Comments, and Concerns**

- Bill and Jim both requested that the agenda with the Zoom link not be sent as a PDF, since this made it harder to join the Zoom meeting

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

**None**

#### **NEXT STEPS**

- Lisa said she will request the DPW CRF documents presented at tonight's BoS meeting from Dwight Brew and Peter Lyon
- Cheryl will provide the tax impact of the Conservation Commission warrant article once the wording is complete

#### **ADJOURNMENT**

- Meeting adjourned at 10:20 PM

#### **NEXT MEETING**

December 7<sup>th</sup>, after the BoS Meeting