

**Town of Amherst
Ways & Means Committee
December 10, 2018
Minutes**

Members in attendance: Peter Moustakis, Sarah Bonnoitt, Elaina Bedio, Mike Facques, Scott Tuthill, and Maggie Paul.

The committee met prior to the Board of Selectmen's meeting to discuss the new draft version of warrant articles, specifically the articles we wished to see some changes in as noted in the 11/26/18 minutes.

We also began to discuss the article for the "Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Capital Reserve Fund". We took under consideration if the article is a "need" or "want," as well as if it serves the town as a whole or is more beneficial to one particular area / likely to be used only by a few that live near the proposed path. The path was compared to Joshua's Park, which was paid for by the community through fundraisers and work days.

After the BOS meeting, W&M met again for discussion and voting. Members feel that some departments are more dedicated to keeping their portion of the town's budget as lean as possible and feel frustration that concerns over nonessential expenses are dismissed, that in fact the definition of essential vs. nonessential is different between departments, particularly when it comes to staffing levels and full-time benefits, which are a very high percentage of costs in the budget of several departments.

We returned to discussing the "Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Capital Reserve Fund" (article 28) and do not believe we have enough information at this time to vote in favor of this article. We appreciate that the article was changed to make it contingent upon receiving grant funds, however, we don't think that the community has had adequate time and information to understand the full scope of this multi-year project, nor is it clear enough that the funds raised with this article are only half of the necessary funds for a very specific section/phase of this project.

We believe that lack of information puts the project as a whole at risk. If only this year, or this phase, of the project passed, we believe the scope is too narrow to be of adequate benefit for a majority of the town. We would like to have seen more details be better disseminated to the citizens so that they understand the project has a potential of being in the neighborhood of \$2.36Million with a grant or \$2.5Million without and that, without total buy-in, phase 1 could end up as a stand-alone path connecting only Baboosic Lake Rd with Thornton Ferry I.

The committee then discussed the article to raise funding for the "Department of Public Works Mechanic Garage." All members agree upon the need for the garage, however there is still some concern from some members over not having specific sources for cost estimation and what would happen if the project goes significantly beyond the budgeted amount.

47 The committee moved on to the topic of the undesignated fund balance, specifically the portion
48 of the balance that the BOS has determined is superfluous to the current budgetary needs
49 (emergency funding resources). (For the purpose of these minutes, SFB adds that this question
50 was also brought up during the regular BOS meeting and citizens may see those minutes for
51 details on the answer given). BOS has earmarked just over \$328,000 as “Balance to reduce
52 taxes” and will return that to the voters in the form of a refund to property tax payers. W&M
53 brought up the question of why the balance is not applied directly to the budget, thus reducing
54 taxes directly rather than indirectly.

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56 The final order of business was to take votes on the articles that changed since the last vote, were
57 new, were un-voted on at the last meeting, and to take a revote on certain articles - due to having
58 an additional member of the committee present at this meeting. We did also discuss whether or
59 not the vote of the alternate member would be counted as a regular vote and, upon consulting a
60 previous year’s Annual Report, we saw that in the past they had been recorded.

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62 The following article numbers reference the draft issued for the 12/10/18 meeting:

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64 Voting tally is listed in the following order: In Favor / Opposed / Abstained

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66 Article 22: 4/2/0

67 Article 23: 6/0/0

68 Article 28: 0/6/0

69 Article 29: 6/0/0

70 Article 30: 6/0/0

71 Article 31: 6/0/0

72 Article 32: 6/0/0

73 Article 34: 5/1/0

74 Article 35: 6/0/0

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