



Town of Amherst, NH

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES

Barbara Landry Meeting Room

2 Main Street

Tuesday, October 25, 2021, 6:30PM

1 **1. Call to Order**

2 Chairman Peter Lyon called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

3
4 Attendees: Chairman Peter Lyon, Selectman Dwight Brew, Selectman John D'Angelo,
5 Selectman Tom Grella, and Selectman Danielle Pray.

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7 Ways & Means Committee present: Mike Parisi – Chair, Lisa Eastland, Jim Kuhnert, Wendy
8 Rannenberg, Lori Mix, Bill Loscocco, and Diane Layton.

9
10 Also present: Town Administrator Dean Shankle and Recording Secretary Kristan Patenaude.

11
12 **2. Pledge of Allegiance** – led by Eric Hahn, retiring DPW Director.

13
14 **3. Citizen's Forum**

15 Tom Quinn, 30 Christian Hill Road, addressed the Board. He explained that he is before the
16 Board as a citizen of Town and not as a Planning Board member. At the last Planning Board
17 meeting, the group was informed by the School District that it plans to place a non-
18 conforming sign at the Souhegan High School. There were no representatives from the School
19 District there to present the project, and no input was sought from citizens or the Planning
20 Board. The proposed sign is not allowed under current Town zoning ordinances. He has
21 concern that the sign could be offensive to nearby residents. While it is unclear if this is under
22 the purview of the Board of Selectmen, Tom Quinn asked that the Board address this issue for
23 future projects for Town entities. Tom Quinn noted that he understands that Town and School
24 entities have leeway for completing non-conforming projects but stated that he believes it
25 would be a good idea for them to be held to the same standards as the citizens are. He believes
26 these projects should have public meetings held to have them explained to the public and
27 should be finished to the satisfaction of the citizens. He believes Town and School entities
28 should be held to the same rules as citizens are, unless absolutely necessary. He mentioned a
29 recent expansion and construction at the DPW that did not appear to be run through the
30 typical Town processes. He believes the Town should comply with its own procedures
31 moving forward.

32
33 Chairman Lyon agreed with Mr. Quinn. He stated that the Town, with some notable
34 exceptions, has tried to go before the Planning Board, not necessarily for a comprehensive
35 application process, but to at least give information on projects.

36
37 Selectman Brew stated that he was also at the Planning Board meeting where this was
38 addressed and agrees with Mr. Quinn. He spoke with Community Development Director, Nic

Strong, to discuss that while Town and School entities are not technically required to follow the same application process as citizens, that it would still be good for them to follow many of the steps. He noted that all required permits were pulled for the DPW construction project.

Eric Hahn stated that he believed the mechanic's garage construction was okay, as it was previously approved by the public as a warrant article. The driveway in front of the DPW was redone and parking was pushed to the side during the project. He did not believe this would upset anyone and was working to bring the driveway up to current standards.

Selectman Pray noted that she believes Mr. Quinn would like to see future projects at least heard during a public hearing.

The Board agreed this to be an appropriate thing to do.

4. Scheduled Appointments – none.

5. Administration

5.1 Administrative Updates

Town Administrator Shankle explained that the search for a new DPW Director and Finance Director are going well. Currently, MRI is filling in for the Finance Director.

5.2 Speed Limit Ordinance Recommendations

Chairman Lyon explained that the recommendation from the Highway Safety Committee is to have a 25mph speed limit the entire length of Pettingale Road, and for a section of Walnut Hill Road, from Old Quarry Road to Embankment Road. The Board previously held two public hearings for this item.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Brew and SECONDED by Selectman Grella that, pursuant to the authority granted to the Board of Selectmen of the Town of Amherst by virtue of NH RSA's 31:39, 41:11, and 47:17 for the purpose of enforcing and regulating traffic, the following traffic control regulations are hereby established for the Town of Amherst:

1. A maximum speed limit of 25 M.P.H. for Pettingale Road

2. A maximum speed limit of 25 M.P.H. for the section of Walnut Hill Road located between the intersections of Old Quarry Lane and Embankment Road

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

5.3 Budget of FY23 Budget

Town Administrator Shankle explained that he has been working to put together a draft budget with the help of the previous Finance Director, Cheryl Eastman. He explained that Ways & Means will be discussing the schedule for meeting with Department Heads later this evening. He stated that the budget for FY23 appears to be increasing 3.09% over the FY22 budget. The step increases are included in the wage lines.

Selectman Brew noted that, without the Cost-of-Living Increase Adjustment (COLA), the budget appears to have increased approximately \$450,000 from the previous fiscal year. He noted that approximately \$120,000 of that is due to increase in medical line items, and

85 \$100,000 of that is due to an increase in the roads budget. He asked what else can account for
86 this increase.

87
88 Town Administrator Shankle stated that the Administration Health Insurance line is up
89 approximately \$19,000. There is approximately \$25,000 worth of an increase in the part-time
90 help line for the Town Clerk. He stated that the Department Heads can outline other major
91 increases for the Board.

92
93 Bill Loscocco asked why the Town develops its budget based on a comparison to last year's
94 budget, without knowing if that budgeting was good or bad. Chairman Lyon explained that a
95 comparison is used as a reference point, but that the budget is created line-by-line by the
96 Department Heads. The Department Heads also try to identify one-off costs from the previous
97 year, to make the current proposed budget as accurate as possible.

98
99 Town Administrator Shankle noted that FY21 (July 2020 – June 2021) was an odd year in
100 terms of expenditures. He noted that he cut money from the Welfare line this year because the
101 line item has historically not been fully spent.

102
103 Jim Kuhnert asked if this practice for creating budgets is common in municipalities. He has
104 not encountered this method in his previous lines of work.

105
106 Chairman Lyon stated that the proposed budget number comes as a result of Department
107 Heads looking at each line of the budget and trying to predict what will be needed 18 months
108 from now.

109
110 Bill Loscocco stated that it appears the budget is being created without knowing exactly how
111 it relates to what is actually happening for expenditures.

112
113 Selectman Brew stated that a report could be run to show the current year amount for each
114 line item that was expended at the end of the first quarter.

115
116 Town Administrator Shankle stated that all increases under the Administration Department's
117 budget are for salaries and health insurance. He noted that the Conservation Commission did
118 not submit its budget in time to be included in this draft, but that their proposed budget is
119 reduced from last year's budget.

120
121 Gail Stout, Tax and Assessing Department, stated that there is money in the outside hire
122 budget, in order to put the contract assessing out to bid.

123
124 Town Administrator Shankle noted that he decreased the welfare budget line from \$14,000 to
125 \$10,000 because no more than \$11,000 has been spent from that budget in the last five years.

126
127 Nic Strong, Director of Community Development, stated that the department's budget has
128 decreased overall. There are additional funds in the outside hire line. This is for the

implementation budget for the Master Plan. There are additional funds for education and professional development, in order for Town Planner, Natasha Kypfer, to attend trainings. One additional computer has been added to the department's budget.

Police Chief Mark Reams stated that there is an approximately \$100,000 increase in the department's budget for this year. Approximately \$90,000 of that is wages and benefits. The other money budgeted is to restart a motorcycle lease and increase vehicle repairs. The Communications budget has a \$25,000 increase proposed. This is all due to wages and benefits.

Fire Rescue Chief Matt Conley stated that the Rescue Department's budget is up 1.5% and the Fire Department's budget is up 2.15%. A significant portion of this is due to radio pager updates.

Selectman Dwight Brew suggested that Chief Conley look into a grant for the radios.

DPW Director Eric Hahn stated that the single largest budget item in the department's budget is the Souhegan Regional Landfill District contract. This is approximately \$50,000. He noted that the tipping fee for trash will increase from \$77 to \$90 per ton. Amherst processes approximately 3,000 tons of trash per year. Later in this meeting, Eric Hahn stated that he will be requesting an increase in pay for Transfer Station staff. He has had two vacancies at the transfer station, one for 19 months.

Selectman Brew noted that the tipping fees will be increased starting January 1, 2023. Eric Hahn explained that these numbers are contractual.

In response to a question from Selectman D'Angelo, Eric Hahn stated that the Transfer Station employees are currently on Grade 2 of the pay scale. This equates with Recreation Department part-time employees for field maintenance, and Library pages.

Amy Lapointe, Library Director, noted that some of the larger budget increases for the Library are personnel costs. Other notable budget items are office supplies and Library materials.

In response to a question from Selectman Brew, Amy Lapointe stated that this budget cycle other employee benefits have been rolled into the salary and benefits line. These used to be broken out into different lines.

Selectman Brew noted that, while the Library renovations are complete, this did not free up any money in the budget because Town money was not used for these renovations.

Chairman Lyon noted that the principal and interest rates have not changed on this document but should be noted to have gone down.

Recreation Department Director Craig Fraley stated that approximately 80% of the Department's budget is staffing. He noted that the lease/purchase agreement for the lawn mower does need to be revisited.

Chairman Lyon stated that the budget needs more work and attention, and this will continue in the individual Department Head meetings. Chairman Lyon presented a chart for the COLA in previous years. He stated that the average COLA was 2.2%.

Town Administrator Shankle noted that a 1% COLA increase is approximately \$44,898. He explained that for every approximately \$23,000 there is a \$0.01 increase to the tax rate. Thus, each COLA percentage increase adds approximately \$0.02 to the tax rate.

Chairman Lyon noted that the COLA rate being discussed is only for non-union employees, as unionized employees are bound by contractual agreement.

Selectman Brew noted that the COLA in some years is greater than the CPI, but in some years is less. This ends up tracking over yearly averages.

Selectman D'Angelo stated that inflation is higher this year than before. He believes the Town must do its best to balance the interests of taxpayers and its employees. He stated that, if a 2.5% COLA is used, the total budget increase from last year's budget would be closer to 3.8% than 3.09%.

In response to a question from Lisa Eastland, Chairman Lyon stated that the Board usually uses two reference points when deciding on the COLA, the CPI, and the Social Security cost of living. He noted that the Board also compares this number with the Police Department unionized COLA. If there is a new contract with a larger COLA increase for the Police Department, the Board needs to pay attention to that on the non-unionized side.

Selectman Brew noted that, in 2019 for example, the CPI data that was reviewed was from 2018, in order to make this determination.

The Board agreed it was not yet ready to determine a COLA number.

Selectman Brew explained that each \$23,000 increase is a \$0.01 increase to the tax rate. In the past, each \$17,500 increase added \$0.01 to the tax rate. The most recent revaluation of the Town increased from \$1.7 billion to \$2.3 billion. The average home price in Amherst also rose from \$355,000 to \$482,000. Due to the revaluation, the tax rate per thousand has changed, but so has the value of the typical home. As a homeowner, each dollar of Town spending has approximately the same impact on the tax bill.

6. Staff Reports

6.1 Light Equipment Operator Job Description - revision

DPW Deputy Director Eric Slosek stated that the DPW has an anticipated opening for a Light Equipment Operator and would like to update the job description at this time. This description was last updated in 2001. He stated that the most significant change to the job description is some amount of supervision over other employees in the field.

In response to a question from Selectman Pray, Eric Slosek stated that other changes to the description include vehicle inspections, using the electronic work system, removing beaver dam debris, and cemetery maintenance.

In response to a question from Selectman Brew, Eric Hahn stated that this job should be listed as Grade 7.

A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to accept the updated DPW Light Equipment Operator job description as presented, with small corrections mentioned, effective today, October 25, 2021.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

6.2 Transfer Station Permanent Part Time Attendant Wage Adjustment

Eric Hahn stated that he has had no luck filling positions at the Transfer Station. While there has been a fair amount of interest in the positions at first, the wage proposed seems to be an issue.

In response to a question from Selectman D'Angelo, Eric Hahn stated that he would also like to adjust the rate of pay for the existing Transfer Station employee. He stated that the proposal is to bring that employee up to Grade 3 Step 4.

Eric Hahn noted that it would cost approximately \$11,000 a year to fill the three Transfer Station positions, each at 29 hours per week.

Town Administrator Shankle suggested changing the pay rate at Grade 2 Step 1 and adjusting all those ahead of it, instead of moving the existing employee to Grade 3.

Selectman Brew stated that he is not typically in favor of changing the pay scale based on a single individual, however he felt that for this position, a change in grade is warranted. He noted that another option could be offering a temporary sign-on bonus. Eric Hahn agreed that he did not want to change the pay rate for Grade 2 as he believes there is a difference between a part-time worker and a skilled laborer.

Chairman Lyon stated that he initially believed that a sign-on bonus could be the right way to handle this, as that could be paid from ARPA funds. This could be awarded if a new employee stays in the position for six months to one year. However, after listening to the discussion, he now believes that changing the grade for this position is the proper way of addressing this.

A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray that the Part Time Transfer Station employees be moved from grade 2 to grade 3 on the Town Wage Scale, effective October 31, 2021.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

Eric Hanh stated that, in his five years in this position, the Board has proven its support for departments, particularly the DPW, with adoption of policies that have helped employees to do their jobs and to get the public the right help it needs.

Chairman Lyon stated that Eric Hahn has done a lot for the Department and Town, and that both have much to be thankful for because of him.

6.3 Amherst Tree Lighting 2021

Jennifer Stover stated that the COVID-19 Task Force discussed the Amherst Tree Lighting event for this year. The Task Force agrees with the motion made by the Board of Selectmen on September 27, 2021, in consideration of Halloween and trick-or-treating and reiterates that same statement: That participants do their due diligence and participate based on their own comfort level. The CDC provides guidance for outdoor activities. She thus proposed that the Amherst tree lighting take place on December 10, 2021.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Grella and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo to recommend that those considering participation in the Amherst Tree Lighting activities on the Town Green do their due diligence and participate based on their own comfort level. The CDC provides guidance for outdoor activities.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

7. Approvals

7.1 Approvals

Item A.

A new residence was recently constructed on the parcel which disqualified 2 acres from current use. The Land Use Change Tax in the amount of \$15,000 represents 10% of the full and true market value of \$150,000.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Brew and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to approve the Land Use Change Tax in the amount of \$15,000 for Tax Map 006 Lot 026-000.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

Item B.

This lot was purchased on 10/12/2021 and is less than 10 acres and is no longer contiguous with the same owner. The Land Use Change Tax in the amount of \$27,500 represents 10% of the full and true market value of \$275,000.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Brew and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to approve the LUCT in the amount of \$27,500 for Tax Map 005 Lot 059-020.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

Item C.

Our assessor has reviewed the attached Veteran Tax Credit Application provided and the applicant qualifies for the Tax Credit under RSA 72:28 for the 2022 tax year. The attached application has been reviewed by our assessor and our assessor recommends granting this credit.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Brew and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to approve the Veteran Tax Credit for the year 2022 in the amount of \$500 for Map 001, Lot 012-000 000-021.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

Item D.

Our assessor has reviewed the attached Veteran Tax Credit Application provided and the applicant qualifies for the Tax Credit under RSA 72:28 for the 2022 tax year. The attached application has been reviewed by our assessor and our assessor recommends granting this credit.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Brew and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to approve the Veteran Tax Credit for the year 2022 in the amount of \$500 for Map 003, Lot 086-028.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

7.2 Payroll, AP, & Minutes

A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to approve one (1) FY21 Payroll Manifest in the amount of \$228,166.90 dated October 21, 2021, subject to review and audit.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

NH DMV

A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to approve one (1) FY21 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$38,362.72 dated October 18, 2021, subject to review and audit.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to approve one (1) FY21 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$37,316.45 dated October 18 2021, subject to review and audit.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

Vendors

A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to approve one (1) FY21 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$353,021.00 dated October 14, 2021, subject to review and audit.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Pray and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo to approve the Board of Selectmen meeting minutes of October 12, 2021, as presented.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

8. Action Items

The Board reviewed its action items.

9. Old/New Business

352 Selectman Brew stated that he recently attended the wood-energy seminar at the Space Station
353 in New Boston. He noted that there will be a Master Plan Steering Committee meeting
354 tomorrow at 6:30pm. There will also be a public forum for the Master Plan update on
355 November 15, 2021, at 6:30pm at the Middle School.

356
357 Selectman Grella stated that the Historic District Commission recently approved two
358 applications.

359
360 Selectman D'Angelo stated that he also attended the wood-energy seminar. He stated that the
361 SAU's Joint Facilities Advisory Committee had one public forum and will have another on
362 November 8, 2021.

363
364 Selectman Pray stated that there will be a Recreation Committee meeting tomorrow.

365
366 *A MOTION was made by Selectman Grella and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo to*
367 *adjourn the meeting at 9:20pm.*

368 *Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.*

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370 **NEXT MEETING: Monday, November 8, 2021**

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375 _____
Selectman Danielle Pray

Date