



Town of Amherst, NH
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES
Barbara Landry Meeting Room
2 Main Street
Monday, November 8, 2021, 6:30PM

1. Call to Order

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

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

Ways & Means Committee present: Mike Parisi – Chair, Lisa Eastland, Mike Patterson, Wendy Rannenberg, Bill Loscocco, and Diane Layton.

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

2. Pledge of Allegiance – led by Bill Loscocco – Ways & Means member.

3. Citizen's Forum – none.

4. Scheduled Appointments

4.1 Chris Buchanan, BPAC, Donation of Easement

Chris Buchanan, Chair of the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC), stated that the Committee is hoping to achieve safety for bicyclists and pedestrians to travel around Town. In order to use trails for connectivity, the Committee must rely on private landowners for easements for public trails. The Committee has been working with the Amherst Land Trust (ALT) and private landowners to create easements on private lands. At this time, the Committee is ready to recommend the first proposed easement on a private property, from the McOsker family.

Chairman Lyon stated that the BPAC created an easement form to allow landowners to donate easements to the Town. This was approved by Town Counsel. He asked Board members to note Paragraph 6 of the easement form, regarding Defense of Claims. He explained that Town Administrator Shankle has been in contact with the Town's insurance company, Primex, regarding assumed liability coverage should an injury occur on one of these trail easements.

Selectman Brew noted that he believes NH law may prohibit lawsuits against the Town if injury occurs on easements. He questioned if the insurance liability limit should be increased. He is comfortable with the easement as written.

In response to a question from Selectman Grella, Mr. Buchanan stated that there is no current explicit plan for trail configurations. This easement document only addresses access. It notes the proposed width of an easement and that there shall be buffers on each side for vegetation

management. The cost of improving these trails is a separate matter. If the Town eventually would like for these to be more rail trail-esque, this may require future funding. However, no future improvements can even be considered without first gaining access to these areas.

Selectman Pray agreed with Selectman Brew's consideration of increasing liability coverage.

A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to approve and accept the proposed trail easement from the McOsker family and to authorize the Chair to sign the document on behalf of the Town.

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

Town Administrator Shankle stated that he will reach out to Primex regarding possibly increasing liability coverage. He believes that, in New Hampshire, using trails is often seen as at-your-own risk.

4.2 Rob Clemens, Conservation Commission: Recommendation for change of position for Bill Widmer

Rob Clemens, Chair of the Amherst Conservation Commission (ACC), stated that he is recommending the Board appoint Bill Widmer to a full member. He noted that Bill Widmer has been an alternate for approximately three years and has done a good job managing the finances for the Commission.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Pray and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo to appoint Bill Widmer to a full Amherst Conservation Commission member, term ending in 2024.

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

5. Administration

5.1 Budget Update

Town Administrator Shankle stated that all Department Heads have met with Ways and Means.

Chairman Lyon stated that the budget has seen a slight reduction, resulting in a change in the increase over last year's budget from 3.09% to 2.77%. Police Chief Mark Reams stated that some of the reductions in his budget come from retirement system benefit reductions.

Town Administrator Shankle read through the list of proposed warrant articles. Chairman Lyon asked Chris Buchanan to speak to the BPAC Warrant Article at the next Board meeting.

Chairman Lyon noted that there is approximately \$120,000 set aside in the budget for proposed health insurance increases. The Town has been told that this increase is not to exceed 10%. The only item missing from the budget at this time is the cost-of-living increase (COLA).

5.2 COLA Discussion

Town Administrator Shankle stated that a 1% COLA equates to approximately \$0.02 on the tax rate. The Department Heads are recommending a 4% COLA for non-unionized employees. This is driven by the labor market, turnover of staff, and economy issues. He

86 explained that, in tracking the last six years of COLA increases for non-unionized employees
87 versus union employees, the average non-unionized employee COLA was 2.5%, and the
88 average unionized employee COLA was 2.7%. He explained that a 4% COLA, as proposed,
89 does not represent a significant shift in the position between union and non-union COLA. He
90 stated that a 4% COLA increase equates to approximately a 1.2% increase on the tax rate. He
91 requested that the Board consider a 4% or 5% COLA this year.

92
93 In response to a question from Selectman Grella, Chairman Lyon stated that the CPI for 2021
94 is 4.6% and the Social Security adjustment for 2021 is 5.9%. The Board usually considers
95 these statistics when setting the COLA.

96
97 Selectman Grella stated that he is okay with a 4% COLA and possibly a 5%.

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99 Selectman D'Angelo stated that he believes a 4% COLA should be the base amount, and he
100 would prefer 4.5%.

101
102 Selectman Pray it stated that she is okay with a 4% COLA.

103
104 Selectman Brew noted that a 4% increase would equate to approximately \$180,000, or a
105 \$37.16 tax impact on the average home in Town. He stated that the Town's past practice has
106 been to cover medical plan deductibles for each employee. The insurance company then gives
107 the Town a higher rate. Each year the Town has said that it would like to analyze this practice
108 but has not had time to do so. He is proposing coupling part of the COLA increase with
109 intended savings on medical insurance. He would like to budget for a 3% COLA with up to
110 1% in real savings for medical insurance costs that can then be applied toward the COLA. He
111 stated that he believes the Town needs to be competitive but also needs to be responsible with
112 its health insurance choices. This would be a request for staff to shop for a less expensive
113 health insurance plan and apply those savings to a greater COLA.

114
115 It was noted that the Town's health insurance plan usually runs from July 1 to June 30. This
116 would give staff time to shop for a new plan between now and June.

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118 Chairman Lyon stated that he is in favor of a 4% COLA.

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120 In response to a question from Lisa Eastland, Selectman Brew stated that his proposal is to
121 keep the insurance budget at the proposed 10% increase, to budget the COLA at a 3%
122 increase, and then, once the Town receives the actual medical plan information, it could move
123 some of these savings to the COLA. Lisa Eastland asked what will happen if the savings from
124 the health insurance plan does not equate to the extra 1% for the COLA, to bring it to a total
125 of 4%.

126
127 Selectman Brew stated that the Town does not receive accurate numbers for health insurance
128 until after the budget is complete. He stated that his proposal would require the Town
129 Administrator and staff to address rising health insurance plan costs, as it might otherwise not
130 happen.

Selectman D'Angelo stated that he would prefer the COLA be set and then the Town also try to find savings in health insurance plans. He does not prefer forcing Administration to find these savings while the employees' COLA is held hostage.

Selectman Brew stated that the Board has told taxpayers in the past that it will look into insurance savings, but there has been no follow through. This would be a way to make that happen.

Town Administrator Shankle asked the Board to hold off on making this decision to the next meeting, to allow him time to find out if he will be able to put the health insurance plan out to bid and receive a response before July 1. Executive Assistant Jennifer Stover stated that this is the type of project she would typically work on with the Finance Director, but the Town currently does not have a Finance Director.

Bill Loscocco stated that he believes it is unlikely the Town will not be able to receive a quote for this within the next 6-8 months. He also believes holding the extra 1% COLA hostage may not be the best practice.

Selectman Brew stated that, if a good faith effort is made by staff to find health insurance savings, the 4% COLA will be there in the end.

5.3 Administrative Updates

Town Administrator Shankle stated that the search for a Finance Director is still in progress. The Board will be interviewing a new potential DPW Director on Wednesday afternoon.

6. Staff Reports

6.1 485 Boston Post Road – Emergency Culvert Pipe Repair

Deputy DPW Director, Eric Slosek, explained that the culvert at 485 Boston Post Road had known deficiencies. The DPW was working on the culvert with Hoyle Tanner last summer. The plan was to replace the culvert in the summer of 2022 with a slip line culvert. On October 28th Hoyle Tanner was on site for preliminary engineering and discovered, due to the recent nor'easter, that the headwall for the inlet side of the culvert had collapsed unexpectedly. In consulting with an engineer for Continental Paving, Eric Slosek explained that the Town can either temporarily repair the culvert in hopes of it lasting until a permanent replacement in 2022 or replace the culvert now as an emergency repair. The benefits to replacing the culvert now include eliminating the unknowns, such as a real possibility of the culvert failing in mid-winter or spring. This would require a longer closure of Boston Post Road. It would also potentially be less expensive to do the emergency repair now, as the Town will not be paying for a temporary repair and then a permanent repair later. He explained that Continental Paving has stated that it will honor its unit pricing for this project and that almost all materials needed are on site, except for the headwalls which need to be precast and made. Disadvantages to making this emergency repair now are that it will need to be a sole source project, and that the Town will not be able to take advantage of less school traffic on the road during summer months.

Eric Slosek explained that he originally received verbal estimates for the project of up to \$300,000. However, an updated cost summary shows a preliminary cost estimate of

approximately \$550,000-\$650,000. He noted that the state of New Hampshire has approved emergency authorization for this project.

Selectman D'Angelo stated that the Town cannot ignore this issue and recommended allowing the project to proceed for as little cost as possible.

In response to a question from Selectman Brew, Mr. Slosek stated that the emergency repair would require Boston Post Rd to be closed starting November 29, 2021, for approximately one month.

In response to a question from Selectman Brew, Mr. Slosek stated that slip lining the culvert is no longer an option. The pipes are too far in disrepair to use this method.

In response to a question from Selectman Brew, Mr. Slosek stated that the estimated \$550,000-\$650,000 does not include engineering costs. Engineering for this project is estimated at \$100,000. He explained that the engineering for Boston Post Road is approximately \$53,000, but the Town must pay approximately \$40,000 to DES in order to not be required to obtain the necessary wetland permits for the emergency repair.

In response to a question from Selectman Brew, Mr. Slosek stated that the Bridge Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) has approximately \$586,000 in it. He believes that there is an additional \$200,000 yet to be placed in that fund from the last Town vote, bringing the total to approximately \$786,000.

Selectman Brew stated that he believes this project may be eligible for ARPA grant funding.

Selectman Grella stated that the Contingency Fund could be used for this project, if necessary.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Brew and SECONDED by Selectman Grella that the DPW expeditiously start repairs on the culvert located at 485 Boston Post Road, to allow funding to be approved by the Town Administrator and Chair, and that the Board will ratify this after the fact, as required.

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

6.2 Amherst Street Construction Update

Town Administrator Shankle asked that the Board table this discussion to its next meeting, in order for him to first discuss it with Mr. Slosek.

Gerry Daniels, State Senator for District 11, joined the Board for a brief presentation. He noted that towns are now being allocated 30% of the meals and rooms tax, which is a large increase over previous years. This will equate to approximately \$586,000 for the Town in FY21, approximately \$789,000 in FY22, and approximately \$815,000 in FY23. Amherst will also be the recipient of approximately \$1M in ARPA funds. He also noted that the Milford Board of Selectman unanimously voted to work together with Amherst on an interjurisdictional grant application for outdoor recreational activity.

7. Approvals

226 **7.1 Payroll, AP, & Minutes**

227 **Payroll**

228 *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to*
229 *approve one (1) FY21 Payroll Manifest in the amount of \$239,883.86 dated November 4*
230 *2021, subject to review and audit.*

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

232
233 **NH DMV**

234 *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to*
235 *approve one (1) FY21 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$26,731.23 dated*
236 *November 3, 2021, subject to review and audit.*

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

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239 **Schools**

240 *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to*
241 *approve one (1) FY21 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$3,176,201.00 dated*
242 *November 1, 2021, subject to review and audit.*

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

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245 **Vendors**

246 *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to*
247 *approve one (1) FY21 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$213,695.67 dated*
248 *October 26, 2021, subject to review and audit.*

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

250
251 *A MOTION was made by Selectman Pray and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo to*
252 *approve the Board of Selectmen meeting minutes of October 25, 2021, as presented.*

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

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255 **8. Action Items**

256 The Board reviewed its action items.

257
258 **9. Old/New Business**

259 Selectman Brew stated that there will be a public forum for the Master Plan update on
260 November 15, 2021, at 6:30pm at the Middle School. He explained that a recent build out
261 study over the next 20 years completed by NRPC showed that, with current zoning ordinances
262 and approximately 30 new residential building permits issued each year (equating to 33 new
263 housing units per year), the Town is set to have a 15% growth on housing units. The
264 Department Heads and Superintendent of Schools have been asked to look into key metrics of
265 how to support this growth.

266
267 Chairman Lyon stated that there will be a Veteran's Day observance on Wednesday at
268 10:45am at the Souhegan High School.

Selectman D'Angelo stated that the Amherst School Board will meet on November 10, 2021, at 6pm, and the Souhegan Cooperative School Board will meet on November 15, 2021, at 6pm.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Brew and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo to adjourn the meeting at 8:25pm.

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

NEXT MEETING: Monday, November 22, 2021

Selectman Danielle Pray

Date