



**Town of Amherst, NH**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES**  
**Barbara Landry Meeting Room**  
**2 Main Street**  
**Wednesday, October 19, 2016**

**The Board met in Work Session from 6:00 to 7:15 p.m.**

**1. Call to Order**

Chairman Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 7:15 p.m.

Attendees: Chairman Dwight Brew, Selectmen Tom Grella, Nate Jensen and Peter Lyon, and Vice Chairman Reed Panasiti. Also present: Town Administrator, Jim O'Mara and Suzanne Beauchesne taking minutes.

**3. Pledge of Allegiance** – Doug McAllister, ACTV operator, led the pledge.

**4. Recognition – Doug McAllister, ACTV**

Chairman Brew announced the departure of Doug McAllister who will be leaving the Town of Amherst and moving to Silver Lake, NH with his family. A Certificate of Appreciation was read and presented to Doug for his committed efforts to ensure that the Town Meetings were made accessible to all NH residents. Board members thanked him personally and wished him well.

**5. Citizens' Forum -- None**

**6. Strategic Planning Presentation**

**6.1 Amherst Fire Rescue**

Fire Chief, Matt Conley, and Deputy Chief Brady came forward to present Amherst Fire Rescue's Strategic Plan [attached to these minutes]. The plan included mission and vision statements along with a departmental overview as follows:

- Amherst Fire Rescue is responsible for 1) fire suppression, rescue and hazard mitigation, 2) fire prevention, code enforcement and inspections, 3) emergency medical services, 4) emergency management, and 5) communication public education.

- The Fire Division has 46 staff, 22 having EMS certification. Vehicles include: Four Class A pumpers, one tower ladder, one tanker (3000 gallons), one forestry tanker, one forestry pick-up, one Ford Explorer SUV and one Ford pick-up.
- The Rescue Division has 49 part-time members (19 are paramedics, 18 are intermediate/advanced, 12 are EMTs, and 27 have fire certification). Vehicles include: two Type I ambulances and one Ford Explorer SUV.

Chief Conley said that while some communities are struggling to maintain members, Amherst's membership base continues to grow and has become an attractive and highly competitive organization. Combined staffing include a total membership of 95, 49 being cross-trained.

The remainder of Chief Conley's report included historical facts on fire calls, property loss, and Amherst's performance relative to the industry standards for fire response. The Amherst Fire Division is below the national average for response times.

The report stated that the Rescue Division responds to an average of 66 calls per month. The total number of calls responded to in 2016 will exceed 2015's 792 calls. EMS transport information was included. The standard established for Advanced Life Support (ALS) response is within eight minutes 90 percent of the time. Amherst beats the industry standard for response times at 7.81 minutes.

Chief Conley went over the department's four initiatives:

- Initiative #1: Deliver the needed and required emergency services to the citizens and visitors of the Town of Amherst efficiently, professionally, and timely all while protecting the tax base and reducing property loss.
- Initiative #2: Maintain high level of quality services.
- Initiative #3: Maintain, replace, and expand as needed services and capital assets.
- Initiative #4: Maintain current programs and develop new community outreach opportunities.

The Board discussed the need and the cost of a third ambulance, and the timeline in recycling the ambulances. Selectman Jensen inquired whether the imbalance in coverage between days and nights had been resolved. Chief Conley said there are still some gaps but they are much better off than they were prior to consolidating the divisions. Overall, Board members were very pleased with the presentation.

A member of the Ways & Means Committee asked what would happen if the two Amherst ambulances broke down and there was not a third, and asked if the third ambulance might not be revenue generating. Chief Conley said they would have to rent an ambulance for \$1,000 a month. Revenue might be generated unless an individual does not want the transport. Any revenue received is placed into the General Fund.

John D'Angelo pointed out that an older ambulance needs more repairs, so are more expensive. He would like a revenue and cost summary, and asked about progress in getting renovations done to the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of South Station.

## 6.2 Administration – will be heard at the next Board meeting

### 7. Town Administrator

#### 7.1 Tax Rate Calculation

Chairman Brew indicated that the NH Department of Revenue recommends that municipalities maintain an unassigned fund balance equal to 8 and 15 percent of total appropriations for the town, schools, and county. Amherst's policy does not have a recommendation as to what to do if it achieves that number, or if that amount is exceeded. Revenues over, and expenses below, expectations could have wide fluctuations in the tax rate. Chairman Brew said the second part of the problem is what to assume the town will take to offset the tax rate. If 100% is taken, there is no amount to use the next year.

On her last day on the job, Finance Director, Lisa Ambrosio, provided a spreadsheet noting the fund balance retention and growth since 2011. She said the Board votes to take a portion of the fund balance that goes to offset the tax rate. Selectman Jensen felt the difference between 33% retention and 50% retention was minor since in either case the unassigned balance was increasing well above the 10% threshold. He is in favor of retaining the 50% over the 10% target to return to the taxpayers. The Board discussed various scenarios and figures. Chairman Brew asked if some loans would be coming due in the next couple years and whether it might be feasible to ask voters if they would be willing to take funds from the undesignated fund balance to pay off notes. Ways & Means Committee Chair, John D'Angelo, felt it would be a political mistake to set a policy goal of returning 50 percent of the unassigned balance above the 10% threshold going forward.

A copy of the Fund Balance Policy dated February 27, 2012 was reviewed by the Board along with proposed changes to Section E of the Policy. Selectman Jensen moved, second by Selectman Grella, to approve Section E to read as follows:

"The New Hampshire Department of Revenue recommends that cities and towns strive to maintain an unassigned fund balance in its General Fund equal to 8-15% of the total annual appropriations of the community (which includes the Town, County, and School Districts).

"The Amherst Board of Selectmen have chosen to target an unassigned fund balance equal to 10% of the total annual appropriation. To balance the desire to minimize the property tax rate and to help avoid large fluctuations in the tax rate, the Selectmen will generally apply 50% of the unassigned fund balance that exceeds the targeted 10% each fall to offset property taxes.

"The Selectmen will review this information each year in order to determine if circumstances warrant increasing or reducing the amount applied from the unassigned fund balance to reduce property taxes." Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

Town Administrator O'Mara noted the preliminary rate which DRA needs to approve as follows:

|                             | 2015      | 2016 (50%) | %INC/DEC | %INC/DEC |
|-----------------------------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|
| Amount Voted to Reduce Rate | 200,000   | 335,000    |          |          |
| Fund Balance Retained       | 4,260,727 | 5,045,982  | 18.4%    | 785,255  |
| % of Fund Balance Retained  | 9.3       | 10.71      |          |          |
|                             |           |            |          |          |

|                                     |       |       |        |        |
|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| Town Rate                           | 5.39  | 5.10  | -5.38% | (0.29) |
| County Rate                         | 1.29  | 1.27  | -1.55% | (0.02) |
| Local School Rate                   | 17.39 | 16.50 | -5.12% | (0.89) |
| State School Rate                   | 2.41  | 2.23  | -7.47% | (0.18) |
| Total Tax Rate                      | 26.48 | 25.10 | -5.21% | (1.38) |
|                                     |       |       |        |        |
| Average Annual Tax                  | 8,739 | 8,835 | 1.10%  | 96.00  |
| Average Home Valuation of \$352,000 |       |       |        |        |

Selectman Jensen moved, second by Selectman Grella, to apply 50% of the unassigned fund balance from FY 2016 that exceeds the targeted 10% to offset property taxes. Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

## **7.2 Veteran's Tax Credit**

Vice Chair Panasiti asked about the Veteran's Tax Credit. Administrator O'Mara said that everything is in place to apply the "all service tax credit".

## **8. Approvals**

### **8.1 Payroll**

Selectman Jensen moved, second by Vice Chairman Panasiti, to approve one (1) FY17 Payroll Manifest in the amount of \$199,200.34 dated October 12, 2016, subject to review and audit. Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

### **8.2 Accounts Payable**

Selectman Jensen moved, second by Vice Chairman Panasiti, to approve one (1) FY17 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$26,835.99 dated October 18, 2016, subject to review and audit. (Town Clerk Transfers to the State of NH). Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

Selectman Jensen moved, second by Vice Chairman Panasiti, to approve one (1) FY17 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$179,594.62 dated October 18, 2016, subject to review and audit. Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

### **8.3 Previous Meeting Minutes: October 11, 2016**

Selectman Jensen moved, second by Selectman Lyon, to approve the Board of Selectmen meeting minutes of October 11, 2016, as presented. Motion passed unanimously, 5-0.

## **9. New/Old Business**


Administrator O'Mara said he will have the global assumptions for the Board's review at its next meeting. He also mentioned the Fire Department's "concentration accounts" that is not related to the operating budget. PMEC, through donations, has seven such accounts. Administrator O'Mara said many of these accounts are dormant and were never approved, and maybe the Board should approve a "concentration gift account" to include in the public record. Board members agreed.

170 Administrator O'Mara distributed a proposed timeline for the recruitment of a Finance Director  
171 which is attached to these minutes.  
172

173 **10. Non-Public Session, RSA 91-A:3, II (b)**  
174

175 Pursuant to NH RSA 91-A:3, II (b), Selectman Jensen moved, second by Selectman Grella, to  
176 enter into non-public session at 9:10 p.m. Roll Call: Brew-yes, Grella-yes, Jensen-yes, Lyon-yes,  
177 Panasiti-yes. Vote was unanimous, 5-0.  
178

179 **NEXT MEETING: October 24, 2016**  
180  
181  
182  
183  
184

185  
186  
187  
188  
189   
190 \_\_\_\_\_  
Selectman Nate Jensen  
Clerk, Board of Selectmen

185  
186  
187  
188  
189   
190 \_\_\_\_\_  
Date