



# **Town of Amherst, NH**

## **BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES**

**Barbara Landry Meeting Room**  
**2 Main Street**  
**Monday, September 10, 2018**

1       **1. Call to Order**

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3       Chairman Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:37 p.m.

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5       Attendees: Chairman Dwight Brew, Selectmen John D'Angelo, Tom Grella, Peter Lyon,  
6       and Reed Panasiti. Also present: Town Administrator James O'Mara.

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8       **2. Pledge of Allegiance** – Eric Hahn, Acting Director of Public Works, led the pledge.

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10       **3. Citizens' Form** – none.

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12       **4. FY20 Ways & Means Committee Introductions**

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14       Chairman Brew introduced the Ways & Means Committee members:

15       Peter Moustakis, Chairman (not present)

16       Sarah Bonnoit (present)

17       Margaret Paul (not present)

18       Elaina Bedio (present)

19       Michael Facques (present)

20       Scott Tuthill (present)

21  
22       **5. Strategic Planning Presentations**

23  
24               **5.1 Police Department**

25       Chief of Police, Mark Reams, presented the department's strategic plan. He stated that the  
26       department's vision statement is "To promote safety, foster justice, and inspire trust." One  
27       goal of the department is to reduce neighborhood property crime by 15%. There were only  
28       69 residential property crimes in 2017; a 17% reduction from the previous year. Another  
29       goal is to increase traffic safety along town roads and through residential areas. In order to  
30       achieve this goal, the department has worked to increase their time spent on town roads  
31       versus state roads. The department currently has a 77% (very good) rating (from a 2017  
32       Community Survey) for their traffic enforcement. The department's third goal is to reduce  
33       the availability of illicit drugs. Chief Reams stated that part of this goal includes  
34       increasing major drug arrests by an average of 20% each year through 2020. The  
35       department's final goal is to maintain an overall level of service consistent with the  
36       current community survey approval rating. In 2017 the department achieved a rating of  
37       96% for overall service on the town community survey. Although this level may be hard  
38       to reach for each year, the department strives to keep their rating above 90%. Chief Reams

39 explained that modifying the current police facility is one way to ensure the maintenance  
40 of professional standards.

41  
42 In regard to the Amherst Public Safety Communications Center, the department's goal is  
43 to maintain a caller satisfaction rating of 90% or better, and to maintain the  
44 communications infrastructure to provide continued quality public safety services to the  
45 community.

46  
47 In response to a question from Selectman D'Angelo, Chief Reams explained that the data  
48 in his presentation is from a calendar year of January-December 2017. Selectman  
49 D'Angelo explained that it might be helpful to drop a vertical line down the graphs in  
50 between the historic and projected data to make the goals accomplished versus those to  
51 work on clearer.

52  
53 Selectman D'Angelo stated that he had never heard of the Amherst Police Association  
54 until he saw they had donated to the Vietnam Memorial Moving Wall. He suggested  
55 putting their contact info on the department's website to highlight the organization.

56  
57 In response to a question from Selectman Panasiti, Chief Reams stated that the original  
58 goals from 2013 were reorganized and refined for 2016/17. This is a continual process to  
59 develop and refine them.

60  
61 In response to a question from Selectman Grella, Chief Reams explained that the  
62 department has been able to meet their obligations on the state roads, while also spending  
63 more time on town roads, due to their extra staff person and better organization at  
64 eliminating overlaps in schedules.

65  
66 The Ways & Means committee had no questions at the time.

## 67 68 **5.2 Tax & Assessing**

69 Gail Stout, Tax Collector, presented the department's strategic plan. She explained that  
70 there are two full-time employees in the department, and they are currently using KRT  
71 Appraisal as their contracted assessing firm. There are currently about 5,500 properties in  
72 town that the department deals with. The town goes through revaluation every 5 years, per  
73 state regulations. The town last revaluated in 2016 and will again in 2021.

74  
75 The department's first goal is to maintain a collection rate of greater than 94%.  
76 Historically, the department has maintained excellent collection rates. The property liens  
77 balance, as of 8/31/18, is \$281,964 on 73 properties. Another goal of the department is to  
78 maintain the downward slope of property tax liens. Both of these goals will be worked  
79 towards by expanding services through technology, maintaining quality services and  
80 staffing. A third goal is to maintain the DRA issued COD rating of 12 or below.  
81 Historically, Amherst's COD ratings have ranged from 8-14. A final goal for the  
82 department is to maintain an acceptable rating of 4 or less on DRA's annual Cyclical  
83 Review of Assessment Data. From 2011 through 2013, Amherst maintained a perfect  
84 rating of 0, but beginning in 2015 with more stringent requirements, the town has

maintained a rating of 4. The second two goals will be worked towards by looking at software upgrades.

In response to a question from Selectman Grella, Ms. Stout stated that the software upgrade is planned for FY20. This update will have a significant cost due to a platform change. There will be training provided.

In response to a question from Selectman Lyon, Ms. Stout stated that she believes the general property types in town (residential, commercial and utility) have stayed fairly steady over a period of time.

Chairman Brew stated that the goal of the Board and of the Tax & Assessing Department is not to extract extra money from the town's citizens, but to make sure that each person is paying their fair share. The good ratings shown during this presentation reflect the positive efforts to make all tax bills in town accurate. The Board and Town also don't want to take anyone's property, and thus the Tax Department works to create payment plans that work for everyone.

#### **5.2a Tax & Assessing Quarterly Report**

Ms. Stout presented the department's quarterly report. She explained that the town's valuation has increased by about 18.1 million dollars over the 2017 valuation. Most of this increase is due to residential construction and remodeling. As of May 11, 2018, there were tax liens on 52 properties in town. This is 20 fewer properties than were under tax liens at that time the year before. As of September 1, 2017, the department began offering an online payment option. In mid-October the department will begin talking about the tax fund balance retention

#### **5.3 Fire Rescue**

Fire Chief, Matt Conley, presented the department's strategic plan. The goals for the Rescue/EMS Department are to maintain a high quality of service, and to keep the infrastructure stable. The first goal will include initiatives of strengthening patient care advancements and improving ambulance 2's response time. The goal for the Fire Services Department is to increase the level of fire protection to the Town, stabilize or lower insurance rates, protect the tax base, and reduce property loss from fire. The Fire Services department has 47 members, 23 of which have EMS certification. The Rescue department has 46 members, 17 of which are paramedics and 30 of which have fire certification. Amherst's membership for fire continues to grow.

Amherst's average response to fire calls (10.3 minutes, 100% of the time) is below the national standard for an on-call department (14 minutes, 80% of the time). The EMS department received 901 calls in 2017 and 962 calls in 2018 (fiscal years). Amherst's average response to EMS calls (within 7.81 minutes), exceeds the industry standard (within 8 minutes, 90% of the time). Chief Conley pointed out that the town's EMS services might increase in the coming years due to the number of senior housing plots being planned.

For FY20, the department wants to continue their cross use of personnel that are certified in both disciplines, allowing for a betterment of response times. The department would also like to work on replacing certain capital assets, and adding a 3<sup>rd</sup> ambulance. Finally, the department would like to maintain their current programs and develop new outreach opportunities.

Selectman Panasiti suggested that the department look at replacing the AED's in the EMS vehicles using grants and philanthropy groups, before asking the citizens for money.

In response to a question from Selectman D'Angelo, Chief Conley stated that he would like for the ratio of cross-trained members between departments to increase, but he is comfortable with the current ratio.

In response to a question from Selectman Lyon, Chief Conley explained that the current cardiac monitoring is being done in an obsolete manner. The department will make the update as economic as possible, and he is currently speaking with vendors. The current units are possibly about 10 years old.

Chairman Brew suggested that the Board and the Department look at a replacement schedule for the capital items and then level fund them over a number of years.

## **6. Town Administrator**

### **6.1 New Hire, Program Coordinator – Recreation Department**

*A MOTION was made by Selectman Panasiti and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo to appoint Rachel O'Sullivan to the position of Program Coordinator for the Amherst Recreation Department, at the hourly wage of \$21.57.*

*Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*

### **6.2 Director of Public Works Announcement**

Town Administrator O'Mara stated that on April 7<sup>th</sup> the Board asking Eric Hahn to become the Acting Director of Public Works to evaluate his abilities in the position. Mr. Hahn has now spent 120 days in the Director role and considerable strides have been seen in the Department. Administrator O'Mara nominated Mr. Eric Hahn to the Director of Public Works position.

*A MOTION was made by Selectman Lyon and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo to approve the Town Administrator's nomination of Eric Hahn as the Director of Public Works.*

*Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*

*The Board entered a brief recess at 8:13p.m. to celebrate Mr. Hahn's appointment.*

*The Board reconvened at 8:21p.m.*

178                   **6.3 Horace Greely Road Bridge, Change Order #2**

179           Town Administrator O'Mara explained that the request to replace the initial plan for the  
180           deck of the bridge with concrete instead of asphalt has been approved by the NH DOT.  
181           The change order has been executed by the town, the contractor, and the project manager.  
182           The Board gave the Town Administrator a \$5,000 threshold for executing change orders,  
183           so this is for informational purposes only.

184  
185                   **6.4 Town Green Use Request, Boy Scouts**

186           *A MOTION was made by Selectman Lyon and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to*  
187           *approve the request by the Amherst BSA Troop 613 for the use of the Town Common for*  
188           *their annual Halloween fundraiser, October 31, 2018 from 4:00pm until 8:15pm.*

189           *Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*  
190

191                   **6.5 Historic District Survey Bid – Community Development**

192           Director of Community Development, Gordon Leedy, explained to the Board that the  
193           town received a CLG Grant from NH DHR which will be used for a new survey of the  
194           Historic District. Four consultants replied to the bid and Mr. Leedy is recommending the  
195           Board approve a bid from The Preservation Company, out of Kensington, NH. This bid is  
196           \$191 higher than the lowest bid, but this company will require significantly less travel and  
197           other direct expenses, than the lowest bid company. Mr. Leedy suggested that the Board  
198           make the motion for the bid to be awarded at \$30,000, instead of the exact amount the  
199           vendor submitted, as this is grant money that is 100% refundable, and the extra money  
200           could allow for any additional expenses that occur during the project. This project will  
201           need to be completed by the end of the federal fiscal year, September 2019.

202  
203           In response to a question from Chairman Brew, Mr. Leedy explained that the contract  
204           should contain a fixed labor fee in the amount of \$29,691, but make an allowance for the  
205           extra \$309, if needed.

206  
207           *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to award the*  
208           *Historic Preservation Survey bid to The Preservation Company, being the most qualified bidder,*  
209           *in the amount of \$29,691, and to authorize the Town Administrator to sign all related documents,*  
210           *and to allow the Town Administrator to approve any overrun, not to exceed \$30,000 in total.*  
211

212           Selectman Panasiti verified that this bidder is \$191 more than the lowest bidder, who would be  
213           coming up from Rhode Island and thus have some travel fees associated. Also, the bid amount  
214           being awarded (\$29,691) is \$309 less than the total \$30,000 grant.

215  
216           *Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*  
217

218           Mr. Leedy confirmed that this is subject to Governor's Council approval, and they meet on the  
219           26<sup>th</sup>.

220  
221                   **6.6 Town Administrator Hiring Process**

222           Chairman Brew stated that on August 28<sup>th</sup>, Town Administrator O'Mara informed the Board that  
223           he is planning to step down from his position. His last day will be on September 28<sup>th</sup>. The Board  
224           met on August 29<sup>th</sup> and accepted Administrator O'Mara's resignation, with regret. The Board  
225           discussed conducting a search for a new Administrator in-house, or a hiring company with  
226           expertise in doing so.. Two companies were invited to submit proposals: Municipal Resources, Inc

(MRI), and Edward J. Collins Jr Center for Public Management – which was unable to respond due to restrictions regarding being a company funded out of Massachusetts. On September 5<sup>th</sup> the Board reviewed MRI's proposal and unanimously voted to accept it at a total of \$6,500. As part of this process, MRI will work to develop a timeline for the search, interview members of the Board, receive all applications, work to develop an ad copy, review the database to look for any previous potential candidates, reach out to potential candidates, and hold all cover letters and applications in confidentiality.

MRI will develop a written questionnaire for the top candidates, and approximately the top 10 will then hold phone interviews. At the end of the process, MRI will reduce the pool to 3-5 candidates and conduct face-to-face interviews, along with comprehensive background checks. An advertisement for the position will be posted on Friday the 14<sup>th</sup>, with a deadline of October 8<sup>th</sup>. On the 12<sup>th</sup>, an essay question will be sent to the top candidates. During the weeks of October 22<sup>nd</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, MRI will grade the essays, do background work on the candidates, and conduct telephone interviews. On November 5<sup>th</sup> there will be an onsite interview with the finalists.

Chairman Brew stated that the Town Administrator job description was last updated in 2010. There have been a few minor edits to the description, with the most significant ones regarding the Strategic Plan process.

## **7. Approvals**

### **7.1 Charity Solicitation Application**

*A MOTION was made by Selectman Lyon and SECONDED by Selectman Panasiti to approve the application from the Front Door Agency to solicit donations door-to-door for the Souhegan High School Soccer Team on September 29, 2018 from 9:00 am to noon and to authorize the Chairman to sign on behalf of the Board of Selectmen. This is an annual fundraiser.*

*Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*

### **7.2 Petition & Pole License**

*A MOTION was made by Selectman Lyon and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to approve the EVERSOURCE petition and pole license #12-0691 dated 7/12/2018 for placement of a pole on Highland Drive.*

*Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*

### **7.3 Assessing**

*A MOTION was made by Selectman Lyon and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to approve and sign the Veteran Tax Credits RSA 72:28 (2019 Tax Year) for:*

*Property Map/Lot 007-060-000 in the amount of \$500.00.*

*Property Map/Lot 007-073-004 in the amount of \$500.00.*

*Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*

*A MOTION was made by Selectman Lyon and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to approve and sign the Service Connected Total Disability Tax Credit RSA 72:35 for:*  
*Property Map/Lot 007-073-004 in the amount of \$1400.00*

*Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*



275           **7.4 Payroll**

276       *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Panasiti to*  
277       *approve one (1) FY19 Payroll Manifest in the amount of \$229,989.68 dated August 30,*  
278       *2018, subject to review and audit.*

279       *Voting: motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

280  
281       *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to*  
282       *approve the updated Town Administrator job description.*

283       *Voting: 5-0-0; motion passed unanimously.*

284  
285           **7.5 Accounts Payable**

286       *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Panasiti,*  
287       *to approve one (1) FY19 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$32,764.03 dated*  
288       *September 4, 2018, subject to review and audit (Town Clerk Transfers to the State of*  
289       *NH).*

290       *Voting: Motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

291  
292       *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Panasiti,*  
293       *to approve one (1) FY19 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$468,916.21 dated*  
294       *September 5, 2018, subject to review and audit.*

295       *Voting: Motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

296  
297       *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Panasiti,*  
298       *to approve one (1) FY19 Accounts Payable Manifest in the amount of \$2,938,852.00*  
299       *dated September 4, 2018, subject to review and audit (Schools Disbursement).*

300       *Voting: Motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

301  
302           **7.6 Concentration Account**

303       *A MOTION was made by Selectman D'Angelo and SECONDED by Selectman Panasiti,*  
304       *to approve one (1) FY19 Concentration Account Manifest in the amount of \$10,274.34*  
305       *dated September 4, 2018, subject to review and audit.*

306       *Voting: Motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

307  
308           **7.7 Previous Meeting Minutes**

309       *A MOTION was made by Selectman Panasiti and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo,*  
310       *to approve the Board of Selectmen public meeting minutes of August 27, 2018, as written.*

311       *Voting: Motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

312  
313       *A MOTION was made by Selectman Panasiti and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo,*  
314       *to approve the Board of Selectmen non-public meeting minutes of August 29, 2018, as*  
315       *amended.*

316       *Voting: Motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

317  
318       *A MOTION was made by Selectman Panasiti and SECONDED by Selectman D'Angelo,*  
319       *to approve the Board of Selectmen public meeting minutes of September 5, 2018, as*  
320       *written.*

321       *Voting: Motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

322 **8. Action Items**

323 There were none to review.

324  
325 **9. New/Old Business**

326 Selectman Lyons stated that the Planning Board met last Wednesday and reviewed the  
327 Capital Improvement Plan and it was well received. There was a request to make a few  
328 language changes in the Tax Impact Table, which Mr. Leedy is looking into.

329  
330 Selectman Panasiti commented how nice Old Home Day was last weekend and gave  
331 thanks to all those involved.

332  
333 Selectman D'Angelo discussed that there will be a Department of Education official in  
334 town tomorrow visiting the schools. The Board discussed that many of them will be busy  
335 due to it being voting day.

336  
337 **10. Non-Public Session, RSA 91-A:3 II (a) & (b)**

338  
339 *A MOTION was made by Selectman Lyon and SECONDED by Selectman Grella to enter*  
340 *into Non-Public Session, per RSA 91-A:3 II (a) & (b) at 8:49 p.m.*

341 *Voting: Motion passed unanimously, 5-0-0.*

342  
343 *By roll call vote: D'Angelo: yes, Panasiti: yes, Brew: yes, Grella: yes, Lyon: yes, the*  
344 *Board went into non-public session.*

345  
346 **NEXT MEETING: September 24, 2018 – Monday**

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355  
356 **SIGNATURE ON FILE**

**09.24.2018**

357 \_\_\_\_\_  
358 *Selectman Reed Panasiti*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*