



**Town of Amherst, NH**  
**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES**  
**Barbara Landry Meeting Room**  
**2 Main Street**  
**Tuesday, December 9, 2014 at 6:00 PM**

**I. Public Session**

Chairman Dwight Brew called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. Attendees: Chairman Dwight Brew, Vice Chairman Mike Akillian, Selectmen John D'Angelo, Brad Galinson and Tom Grella. Also present: Town Administrator, Jim O'Mara, and Jessica Marchant taking minutes.

II. **Pledge of Allegiance** – Craig Fraley, Director of Parks and Recreation, led the pledge.

III. **Citizen Forum** – No citizens came forward.

IV. **Old and New Business**

**a. Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Cemetery Trustees**

Chairman Brew brought up two topics that are not on the agenda – the MOU from the Cemetery Trustees and approvals.

Selectman Galinson indicated that the draft MOU was similar to one publically released. All of Vice Chairman Akillian's suggested changes were accepted. Appendix A includes the MS-9 form. Selectman Galinson further stated that the document outlines the economics and clarifies much misinformation but follow-up will be required on procedures; such as where the checks go, who signs them, and the like. Selectman Galinson moved to accept and execute the MOU to be presented to the Cemetery Trustees who will address the matter at their next meeting. Second by Vice Chairman Akillian. Vote 4-0-1 (Selectman Grella abstained).

**b. Approvals**

Vice Chairman Akillian moved to approve one FY 15 payroll manifest in the amount of \$183,524.56 dated December 9, 2014. Subject to review and audit. Selectman D'Angelo seconded. Vote 5-0

Selectman D'Angelo moved to approve one FY 15 payroll manifest in the amount of \$23,158.44 dated December 9, 2014. Subject to review and audit. Vice Chairman Akillian seconded. Vote 5-0

**V. FY16 Budget Discussion**

Town Administrator, Jim O'Mara, stated that after discussions with all department heads, they were able to reduce the budget by \$244,761. (The library portion of \$14,000 hasn't been confirmed). There was discussion on what constituted the \$87,494. Lisa indicated that amount was outside of any global

initiatives. There was discussion of where the reductions come from in the \$244,761.

The Board decided to discuss specific line items and then scroll through the budget to see if there are more changes that can be made. Based on the changes made by staff, the percentage increase has dropped to 8.4 percent.

Selectman Galinson stated that he and Town Administrator, Jim O'Mara, made some tweaks to employee benefits. One suggestion is to offer a 2% COLA increase instead of 1.5%, but have the employee pick up a slight amount (3 percent) in health care costs. This shift would move the non-union employee cost more in line with the union employee cost and would produce a savings of about \$12,700. Vice Chairman Akillian liked the idea since many employees are maxed out for steps so the 2% gives them an increase. The benefit to the employees outweighs the expense since their salary will increase by 2% but the health care costs will only increase a small percentage of the cost.

Another suggestion is to raise the life insurance and long term disability cap. Town employees do not participate in the NH retirement system. Selectman Galinson suggested raising the 3.5% match to 4.5%. This would cost \$20,000. The annual increase would be \$85,632 instead of \$93,889.

Selectman Galinson stated that he prefers putting money into capital infrastructure and little to no money into more personnel, and plans to vote "no" to HR and "yes" to capital and equipment needs, except for the full \$200,000 for roads.

Chairman Brew asked for Board member thoughts on personnel. Selectman Grella stated that he would like to see one in DPW so that some duties (stormwater in particular) are done by someone other than Bruce Berry, DPW Director. Selectman Grella does not think a new HR person is a good idea; but thinks help for the Town Clerk is justified. Replacing DPW equipment is a priority. Selectman Grella also asked about the secondary account for the Recreation Department.

Recreation Director, Craig Fraley, came forward. He was asked if the accounts are expected to increase, decrease or stay the same. Director Fraley responded that he expects the general account, once reduced, to stay at the \$50,000 mark unless a special project is going on. Selectman D'Angelo asked about the Peabody Mill account which is not self funding. Director Fraley responded that he would like to spend that account down and was comfortable reducing the town's commitment by 50% and drawing the difference from the Peabody Mill account. Selectman Galinson clarified that the \$139,000 Peabody Mill account is at a safe, low-point number; it is not a seasonal spike. The Board reduced the Recreation budget by \$10,000.

The Board discussed the cemetery MOU. Cemetery maintenance gross budget is \$47,808 with \$38,000 to come from Cemetery Trustees. Burial revenue is between \$5,000 and \$10,000 annually. Selectman Galinson reminded everyone that the Cemetery Trustees have 100 percent statutory authority to give the town whatever amount they wish.

The Board discussed the bridge issues. DPW Director Bruce Berry came forward. The rough estimate is \$1M to get each bridge fixed. The state gives \$400,000 at the beginning of the project, the town borrows \$600,000, then the state gives \$400,000 at the end of the project and the town pays down on the borrowed money. The project will probably start in May of 2015, so the town needs 40% in FY15. The bills will need to be paid as the project moves along. The town won't be borrowing in this fiscal year.

The Board discussed when money will be borrowed and paid back. Chairman Brew asked Town Administrator O'Mara, Director Berry and Finance Director, Lisa Ambrosio to put together a

PowerPoint presentation on this item for next Monday's BOS meeting.

The BOS had a lengthy discussion on the bridge budget. Vice Chairman Akillian asked what the BOS intends to do with the road budget number of \$200,000, e.g., reduce it by \$40,000, as was proposed at the last meeting? It was noted that State reimbursement cannot pay contractor expenses.

Vice Chairman Akillian agrees that equipment is needed but looking at the organizational structure of DPW, it is not plausible to expect one person to run a \$4.5M operation over four different categories with only a couple crew chiefs to assist. The number one priority for Vice Chairman Akillian, and Selectmen John D'Angelo and Tom Grella is to add a person to DPW. Vice Chairman Akillian pointed out that if the position is not added in now, it will be two years before it goes through. Research needs to be done to clarify what /who is needed.

Selectman D'Angelo agrees and added that with the pipeline coming into town, there is not enough management bandwidth to cover the workload. There is need for a second person at the managerial level, preferably with engineering expertise. Selectman Galinson asked what budget items will be cut if resources are committed to DPW. Vice Chairman Akillian asked what the cost is for the salary and benefits for a Deputy Director. Director Berry replied that the number in the budget is ½ of last year's number which was for 1 full time person in that position. Vice Chairman Akillian stated that there would be overall cost savings by having a person in this position because they could find ways to save money within the general operating budget like Director Fraley did in the Recreation Department.

Chairman Brew suggested funding the study and a person for half a year for \$40,000 and \$43,000, and asked if the road budget could be cut from \$200,000 to \$120,000. Selectman Galinson discussed other line items: solid waste/vehicle heavy equipment. Director Berry came forward. Vice Chairman Akillian clarified that the \$46,762 for additional transfer station coverage includes both wage increases and increased hours. Director Berry stated that land fill employees were paid at \$10 and \$12 per hour. Vice Chairman Akillian supports the wage increase, but not the hours. The Board cut that number down to \$15,000.

The percent increase was now 7.66 percent. Vice Chairman Akillian suggested reviewing the initiatives from the top again to confirm what is staying.

Line 69 - yes

Line 91 - yes

Assessing-yes

Community Development - yes

Vice Chairman Akillian pointed out that Sarah Marchant (previous Director of Economic Development) had an economic development plan with a goal to increase the commercial tax base to give tax relief to residents. It is a multi-year project, but it isn't even in the budget for next year. Vice Chairman Akillian pointed out that if it isn't budgeted for, it will never get started.

Line 124 - road increase- change from \$200,000 to \$120,000.

Line 126 - yes

Line 132 - changed to \$15,000 for additional salary - \$8,000 or 10,000

Line 137 - yes

Line 129 - change \$5,000 to \$10,000 (Selectman Galinson)

Line 146 - no

Line 150 - no

Line 153

Line 183 - There is money to buy an ambulance now. No

Line 187 - yes

Line 228 - no

Line 230 - no

Line 325 - yes. Vice Chairman Akillian asked if this could be done this year, is \$60,000 the right amount to leave in? yes.

Line 348 - no

At this point the budget increase was at 7.20% with a \$276 tax impact per household. Selectman Galinson suggested that a 7% increase in taxes is high for a resident. There is \$90,000 in a LUCT account which could reduce the tax rate. Selectman Galinson suggested taking the EMS/Fire out of the budget and putting it in a Warrant Article using LUCT fund. Selectman D'Angelo suggested using the funds for the fire station renovations.

Vice Chairman Akillian stated that there are large ticket items that the Board isn't even addressing. The town needs to make up for actions it should have taken in past years. He believes this is a reasonable number based on the fact that the roads and bridges have been neglected for years. He supports staying at the 7.20%, and is not in favor of more warrant articles.

Selectman Galinson believes the budget is too high. Vice Chairman Akillian and Selectman D'Angelo would prefer to use the \$90,000 in the LUCT account on the fire station renovations. Discussion ensued.

Selectman Galinson made suggestions regarding road maintenance and fire/EMS. DPW Director Berry came forward and stated that years ago there was a warrant article to increase funds and it didn't pass. Russ Thomas, Chairman of the Ways and Means stated that before the warrant article for the roads passed, the budget failed. The town is behind on road/bridge repair and needs to do something. Let the voters approve a true article on the roads. Selectman D'Angelo suggested that if we take the \$120,000 for roads out of the budget and add a \$200,000 road warrant article that will bring the increased tax down to 6.18%. The Board discussed what they can and can't do and adjusted the numbers. Administrator O'Mara stated that the Recreation Department truck will be purchased this year so can be taken out of the budget.

Chairman Brew stated that, in his view, the budget was still too high, but there's nothing obvious to cut. Selectman Grella mentioned the LUCT fund and the fire personnel and gear. Selectman Galinson stated that there will be some savings when the departments are re-organized and that should cover outfitting the fire personnel. The fire chief stated it costs \$3,000-\$3,500 to outfit one fire person. Selectman D'Angelo feels the budget is still too high and suggested using a single capital reserve to pay for the fire renovation and gear and to use the LUCT fund. Russ Thomas again mentioned doing a warrant for the roads and having the voters raise the line item for FY'16. Chairman Brew asked Administrator O'Mara to speak to Town Counsel to find out what is legally possible. Selectman Galinson suggested reducing the roads budget from \$150,000 to \$70,000 and EMS/Fire to \$80,000 and use the LUCT \$90,000 LUCT funds to supplement. Vice Chairman Akillian is not in favor of cutting so far back. The budget makes sense if one takes a close look at what it takes to run a town. Selectmen Galinson and D'Angelo are in disagreement. Regarding fire department wages, Vice Chairman Akillian prefers to stick with the decisions they made last year with those salaries. Colleen Lynch of Ways and Means read a past Warrant Article. The language of the article was discussed. Russ Thomas again suggested getting town approval to increase the FY'16 budget.

Chairman Brew suggested the Ways and Means Committee meet before next Monday to come up with

suggestions. Administrator O'Mara feels it will be possible for the Board to conclude its work on the budget next Monday, and clarified that January 12, 2014 will be the public hearing for the budget and the bridge bond. Administrator O'Mara handed out a packet of articles. The BOS discussed the language within the document and made edits.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding the repairs needed for bridges and the budget for the work to be done. DPW Director Bruce Berry came forward. There is a bridge bond that needs voter approval. Director Berry indicated that bond is for two additional bridges; not the current three bridges that have been studied for repair/rebuilding. Director Berry confirmed that the State needs to see that 20% of the money needed to fix the bridges has been raised before the town can get on the list for State support.

The Board discussed whether they would change the wording of the current bond to be more generic so that the additional bridges can be incorporated, or if there will need to be another bond. The Board also discussed if the bond amount would be for the whole amount, or just the 20% deposit. Director Berry stated that it takes about a year to complete the design work before a bridge is ready to be constructed. Engineering costs are about 20% as well. The Board decided to ask for a bond for \$2.2M to include the work for two additional bridges, as well as the engineering and deposits for each.

VI. **Right to Know Requests – None**

VII. **Non-Public Session 91-A:3 II (c)- None**

VIII. **Adjourn**

Vice Chairman Akillian moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:54 p.m. Selectman D'Angelo seconded.  
Vote 5-0