

## **AMHERST TOWN WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE GUIDELINES**

To: Town of Amherst Ways & Means Committee Members, 2016-2017

Fm: Steve Coughlan, Amherst Town Moderator

Date: 14 June 2016

Welcome aboard to our new members! And to those members who are returning, welcome back! Thank you to ALL for your willingness to stand up and work on behalf of the town citizenry.

Some guidelines are offered to ensure your success as a team. These apply as you work together in your day-to-day involvement with the Board of Selectmen (BoS), Town Administrator (Jim O'Mara), and the Town of Amherst department heads (Fire, Police, EMS, Recreation, Library, etc):

1. The Ways and Means Charter is to examine and report on all appropriations and finances of the Town of Amherst relative to the upcoming town budget and related warrant articles.
2. Good communication is paramount to your team's effectiveness. No one likes surprises!
3. Learn from the Board of Selectmen exactly how they would like to work with you, especially when an issue or potential misunderstanding is apparent.
4. Agree on the information you both seek, and agree to action items for which both Ways and Means and the BoS agree to be responsible.
5. Comprehend the meaning, both long-term as well as short-term. Ask questions to understand the potential for risk, cost, benefits, et cetera. Remember that you will be educating your W&M peers ... and the voters.
6. Although you are on the Town of Amherst W&M Committee, there are two other committees with similar functions – the Amherst School District W&M Committee and the Souhegan Cooperative High School Advisory Finance Committee. It is important that liaison be established all around -- although each Committee operates independently, the recommendations EACH Committee makes affect the pocketbooks of ALL citizens. Communicate!
7. As individuals, whenever a committee member speaks, they must always ensure their comments reflect the verbalized and agreed-to thinking of his or her committee member peers. Letters to the Editor or social media posts that you send as a private citizen are fine... however, if you add Ways & Means to your name and it is YOUR opinion and not that of the Committee, this suggests that it is the opinion of the Committee when it is, in fact, NOT the Committee's opinion.
8. NOTHING beats a well-informed W&M Committee, one that has "done their homework" and is perceived as credible by ALL because "you have the facts." Nothing is more embarrassing than to be caught short. Get the information you need first... ensure you have the complete and correct information... before going public with a position that could be potentially uninformed.
9. Each meeting you have with a Department Head or any Town official should be an amicable discussion. Your responsibility is to understand, to learn, to ask questions, and be perceived as professional in all of your interactions. The Committee should be seen as cooperative and not confrontational, as I expect those with whom you interact to be. Your role is to review the budgets/warrants, and make recommendations to the citizens of Amherst, based on our informed understanding of the facts. What makes the most sense short- and long-term insofar as budget expenditures, warrant articles, and perceived revenue expectations? That is the recommendation that you are asked to provide the citizens.

## WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE GUIDELINES [continued]

10. Minority opinions should be welcomed and encouraged. At town meeting, I will be sensitive to, and WILL ask for, minority opinions should W&M wish to provide such.
11. W&M Committee members are expected to attend ALL meetings. It is understood, however, that business conflicts, illnesses, et al, will arise. Your courtesy to advise your chairperson of any absences is appreciated.
12. W&M Committee members will want to attend a reasonable number of BOS meetings in addition to committee meetings. ALL members should plan to attend BOS budget-focused meetings.
13. Consider spending a half-day or so with those town departments with which you are involved. A great way to "be" there and to really learn what's happening... by listening.
14. If you run into a logjam, seek the problem and not the symptom. All big problems have ALWAYS started out as small problems!
15. Ways and Means' charter is to advise and recommend. Its purpose is not to legislate, make amendments to the Town Warrant, or drive budget policy.
16. PRESS RELATIONS -- It is suggested that one person be the spokesperson for the Committee. Insure the **Cabinet, Amherst Citizen** and any other press that becomes available know the committee's thinking and recommendations. Do remember, however to be "objective." The quickest way to get into trouble is to be subjective.
17. POSTING -- all meetings at which a Quorum of Ways and Means committee members will attend must be legally posted 24 hours prior to the meeting. The town administrator and his assistant (Mary Guild) will be willing to help with this. **The Posting Requirements, Meeting Conduct, and Minutes of the Meetings are subject to Revised Statutes Annotated of New Hampshire Chapter 91-A.**
18. MINUTES -- Minutes of each meeting should be provided to the town administrator's assistant (Mary Guild) at Town Hall within 48 hours of your meeting. Although the minutes may need to be "reviewed and approved" at the following meeting, it is okay to insert "minutes, as taken, will be formally approved and/or amended at the next meeting, with acceptance/amendments so noted in subsequent minutes."
19. If in doubt, ask! The Moderator's role is one of being available for non-legal counsel on "how to" best accomplish your task. I SHOULD not (and will not) impose my will on the Committee as to how to vote for or against a budget item, warrant article, etc. W&M is a committee that answers to the town citizenry consistent with the enabling Town Meeting article from 1931 - not the moderator. Your chairperson is encouraged to call me at any time if I may be of service.

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*Best Wishes for a Successful Year!*