

Town of Amherst, NH
WAYS & MEANS COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES
2 Main Street
Monday, November 9th, 2020
6:00 p.m.

PRESENT

- Lisa Eastland
- Danielle Pray
- Matt Seiler
- Scott Tuthill
- James Kuhnert
- Bill Loscocco
- Lori Mix (Alternate)
- Cheryl Eastman (Finance Director)
- William Stoughton (Conservation Commission)
- Rob Clemens (Conservation Commission)

ABSENT

- Sarah Bonnoit (Alternate)
- Mike Parisi

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Minutes of the 10/26/2020 meeting were approved as circulated
- Motion to approve by Bill, seconded by Scott, with unanimous vote
- Minutes, as taken, will be formally approved and/or amended at the next meeting, with acceptance/amendments so noted in subsequent minutes.

CALL TO ORDER

- Meeting began at 8:50 PM

AGENDA

Item #1 : Citizen Comments

- No citizen comments (none in attendance)

Item #2 : Conservation Warrant Article Update

- Rob Clemens and Bill Stoughton updated the Committee on the proposed warrant article from the Conservation Commission
- Both are confident the wording can be fixed to address legal concerns mentioned in the Board of Selectmen (BoS) meeting
- The warrant article is based on the “Pelham model”, which was approved by the Department of Revenue Administration two years ago
- The warrant article will need 60% approval to pass, as it relates to bond issuance
- If the warrant article is rejected by a close margin, the Conservation Commission will try again next year
- A \$1 million acquisition would obtain almost 100 acres at current market prices for open land in town
- Currently, a 20-year tax free bond issuance would pay an average of 1.67%
- Lisa requested Cheryl to calculate the property tax impact of a \$1 million acquisition as a basis for analyzing the warrant article
- Rob reiterated that acquisitions are intended to have public access, but occasionally land is purchased for habitat preservation
- In response to a question of maintenance costs from Lisa, Rob stated that cash outlays for conservation land is low even when there is public access. Maintenance costs are typically limited to signs, invasive plant control, and bridges.
- Current funds for the Conservation Commission come from LUCT (Land Use Change Tax) funds
- Lisa warned that the Joint Facility Advisory Committee has been discussing very large potential bond issuances to go before voters, and this may impact all warrant articles on the ballot

Item #3 : Discussion of Proposed Budget and Warrant Articles

- Lisa asked how Animal Control and Health and Human Services (HHS) line items are spent exactly to the dollar in the budget each year, and Cheryl stated that this is because those funds are transferred and managed separately
- It was noted that \$1 line items in the budget are superior to \$0 items, because \$0 items mean voters approve no money be spent for that item
- The Computer Capital Reserve Fund will not be on the ballot this year due to a sufficient fund balance
- W&M members stated that various departments have computer line items in their budgets, and inquired about a computer purchasing plan that could be created for the town
- Danielle stated that the \$1000 item for community outreach could be removed from the budget since this was created and managed by Mary Guile (spelling?) and she is no longer with the town
- Bill stated that he feels Ways and Means members should look deeper than just year-over-year spending changes during their meetings with the departments. Focusing on changes from last year does not give the entire picture
- Jim requested that W&M find a per-capita benchmark for spending by the various departments
- Lisa shared her research into spending for libraries from neighboring towns. Milford spends \$800k for their library, and Hollis spends \$320k, while our budget is \$1 million
- It was discussed that the jump in Library funding a few years ago occurred because the BoS reduced the budget by an amount that was not approved by the Library Board of Trustees, and this amount had to be added back
- Matt noted that after looking closely at the Library budget, the only places that could be meaningfully cut are circulation and payroll.
- Lisa stated that circulation and foot traffic is down, but the Library budget does not reflect this

- Realistically, the Library Budget would be something that the voters could only address through their selection of Library Board of Trustee members at election time
- During a discussion about increases in health insurance costs by the town, Cheryl informed us that the town is in a risk sharing pool
- W&M members were in general agreement that the move to fund the police station renovation budget overage from the unassigned fund balance was a good idea.
- Lori is glad to see the unassigned fund balance used for something, since she believes the amount in this fund is more than healthy
- Cheryl noted that the unassigned fund balance may be close to \$6 million this year

Item #4 : Questions, Comments, and Concerns

- Lisa reminded us that the final W&M votes must be in by December 14th

NEW BUSINESS

None

NEXT STEPS

- Cheryl to calculate the property tax impact of a hypothetical \$1 million acquisition based on the Conservation Commission Warrant Article

ADJOURNMENT

- Meeting adjourned at 10:10 PM

NEXT MEETING

November 23rd, after the BoS Meeting