

Select Board's FY10 Department Head Budget Hearings
Saturday, October 25, 2008

Department: **CONSERVATION**
Department Head: **David Ziomek**

Each Department Head should plan to provide a concise written "Overview" in electronic form covering the issues/questions listed below to John Musante and Maria Racca by 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 22. *Please use this worksheet and insert your answers in italics below each question.* Save file to **J:\Budget\10.25.08 SB Budget Hearing** --any questions, please contact Maria Racca at x3218. We will review and distribute to the Select Board in advance of Saturday's meeting.

1. Briefly describe your department's recent accomplishments and the negative or positive effects of budget increases/decreases on services/programs over the past three years (FY 07, FY 08, and FY 09).

Accomplishments:

- *Assumed a lead role in the comprehensive (administrative) reorganization of the Planning, Conservation and Inspection Services departments.*
- *Worked collaboratively with many departments to initiate the use of new MUNIS permitting software.*
- *Coordinated efforts to bring all three departments together on the 2nd floor of Town Hall (ongoing).*
- *Completion of multiple open space projects as supported by the Conservation Commission including but not limited to the following: Smith, Cows, Tietjen(12/31/08) and East Leverett Road.*
- *Worked closely with the (former) Amherst Farm Committee to assist in the creation of an Agricultural Commission.*
- *Supported the Agricultural Commission in their effort pass a Right to Farm bylaw in Amherst.*
- *Increased outreach to Amherst farming community with creation of spring and fall Farmers' Forums.*
- *Created Farming in Amherst Website.*

- *Worked collaboratively with the Hitchcock Center to expand and improve the ADA nature trail at Larch Hill.*
- *Organized numerous events to promote energy efficiency in Amherst including the annual Renewable Energy Fair in October.*

Budget Impacts:

- *The single most important effect from budget reductions was the elimination of \$12,500 for our seasonal staff. The loss of this funding has had a profound impact on our ability to maintain trails and Puffer's Pond.*
2. List any FTE that has been budgeted within current appropriations but is vacant. Indicate how long each position been vacant, and the expectations for those positions going forward? (e.g., currently advertising, expect to cut, etc.)
 - *There are currently no vacancies in the department.*
 3. List any grant-funded positions or programs that are at risk if town funding decreases or is not available.
 - *NA*
 4. List any increased fees, whether the increase has covered what it was hoped to cover, and whether the increase has decreased participation. Also list any new or increased fees that could be considered given MA law limitations.
 - *Wetlands filing fee levels are currently being reviewed by staff in consultation with the Conservation Commission and may result in recommendations for an increase. A survey of what other local towns charge will serve to inform this work.*
 - *The Director of Conservation and Development and the Town Manager have committed to a study of any/all fee-based concepts for support and maintenance at Puffer's Pond. A report to the Select Board on this issue is due in January 2009.*
 5. List all the Town Manager-appointed and Select Board-appointed committees/boards you provide support for, and the approximate number of meetings per month and hours per month spent on committee/board support.
 - *The Conservation Department has primary staff responsibilities for the following committees: Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission, Public Shade Tree Committee, Energy Task Force and the Kendrick Park Committee.*

- *The Director of Conservation and Development works closely to coordinate town efforts with the Director of the Planning Department, Building Commissioner, LSSE Director, Health Director and the Superintendent of Public Works on complex projects that involve multiple departments and many areas of expertise.*
 - *Staff in Planning, Conservation and Inspection Services are required to attend numerous public meetings each month. It is not uncommon for the Department Heads in this Functional Area to have 2-3 meeting per week on average throughout the year. Work in support of committees and boards takes up a significant amount of staff time each month.*
6. List any functions currently performed by volunteers that sometimes need to be covered by paid staff, and conversely, paid staff functions that might be covered by volunteers.
- *The Conservation Department has always relied heavily on volunteers to assist with trail and conservation land management projects. When all three departments are moved to the 2nd floor of Town Hall we anticipate using volunteers to help with the meeting/greeting and reception functions at the new central administration counter.*
7. List three cuts in FY 10 services that would least affect your core functions (note: these cuts can include services to other departments or town functions in addition to services the public sees).
- *Any additional cuts to the Conservation Department would result in the loss of core functions. In fact, the \$12,500 cut two years ago significantly reduced the capacity of the department to maintain the land around Puffer's Pond and the more than 80 miles of trails throughout Amherst.*
8. List at least one area where efficiency might be improved for FY 10.
- *The merger of Planning, Conservation and Inspection Services will provide staff in these departments with a centralized administrative system including reception, scheduling and computer support (Web, word processing, MUNIS permitting).*

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Department: PLANNING
Department Head: Jonathan Tucker

**PLANNING DEPARTMENT
OVERVIEW**

1. Briefly describe your department's recent accomplishments and the negative or positive effects of budget increases/decreases on services/programs over the past three years (FY 07, FY 08, and FY 09).

Accomplishments:

- *Completion of the multi-year Planning Amherst Together community master planning process.*
- *Successful development and adoption of several ground-breaking economic development zoning amendments at the Fall 2007 Special Town Meeting, facilitating the Lord Jeffery Inn renovation/expansion and the New England Environmental 'green building' development.*
- *Facilitation of the Kendrick Park and Pomeroy Village streetscape projects.*
- *Participating in a comprehensive reorganization of the Planning, Conservation, and Inspections departments (ongoing).*
- *Maintaining a high level of quality and accessibility to citizens in the development permit review process.*

Budget Impacts:

- *The Planning Department FY07 budget was only 0.01% higher than the FY05 budget two years previous—a static budget in the face of increasing demands and short-staffing.*
- *The FY08 PD budget represented a 2.5% decrease from FY07, and involved the loss of personnel funding (cutting intern hours), removal of committee funding (Planning Board, DRB, Historical Commission), and removal or reductions in funding for numerous departmental lines (office supplies and equipment, photography, in-state travel, professional training, organization dues, publications, subscriptions, etc.).*
- *The FY09 PD budget was a 0.3% increase over FY08 and managed to retain professional salaries, in part by filling vacant positions at lower levels. Lost funding for personnel, board/committee activities, or departmental functions was not restored.*

2. List any FTE that has been budgeted within current appropriations but is vacant. Indicate how long each position been vacant, and the expectations for those positions going forward? (e.g., currently advertising, expect to cut, etc.)

There are no vacant positions in the Planning Department.

3. List any grant-funded positions or programs that are at risk if town funding decreases or is not available.

For several years, the Planning Department has been too short-staffed to pursue more than 1-2 grants/year, and usually only in concert with or in support of the Conservation Department. Any decrease in town funds for the department risks its ability to pursue, obtain, and manage grant funds to help to bolster the overburdened property tax base. More than ninety-six percent (96.21%) of the Planning Department budget consists of personnel. The FY09 budget included only \$11,065 in non-personnel costs. Any meaningful reduction in funding would mean a loss of personnel. Since hiring an Associate Planner in September, the Planning Department has finally had the personnel time to apply for grants. Two grant applications were filed in September and October. Two more are in development for November and December. Without personnel, the ability to access and administer non-town grant funds for this functional area (planning & conservation) will be severely hampered.

4. List any increased fees, whether the increase has covered what it was hoped to cover, and whether the increase has decreased participation. Also list any new or increased fees that could be considered given MA law limitations.

The Planning Department regularly reviews the fee schedule for permit applications with its permitting boards, and has increased those fees several times in the last 5 years. Since all permit application fees must by law be directly associated with and traceable to the cost of processing applications, there is little room for increasing fees further. Given the difficult economic circumstances for businesses and property owners, any significant increase in permit fees might also have a depressive effect on development activity.

5. List all the Town Manager-appointed and Select Board-appointed committees/boards you provide support for, and the approximate number of meetings per month and hours per month spent on committee/board support.

The Planning Department provides staff support for the following Town boards/committees or other bodies:

Primary Staff Support

Permitting Bodies – Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, Design Review Board, Historical Commission, Amherst Redevelopment Authority.

Others – Zoning Subcommittee (Planning Board), Disabilities Access Advisory Committee, Town/Commercial Relations Committee, Kendrick Park Committee, History & Aesthetics Subcommittee (Kendrick Park Committee), Comprehensive Planning Committee (recently completed).

Secondary Staff Support

Town Committees – Select Board, Community Preservation Act Committee, Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee, Conservation Commission, Agricultural Commission, Public Shade Tree Committee, Public Transportation & Bicycle Committee, Leisure Services & Supplemental Education Commission, Public Art Commission, Town Meeting Coordinating Committee.

Liaison to Non-Town Bodies

Amherst Housing Authority, Amherst Chamber of Commerce, Promoting Downtown Amherst, Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, Greater Franklin County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) Committee, Valley Development Council (VDC).

6. List any functions currently performed by volunteers that sometimes need to be covered by paid staff, and conversely, paid staff functions that might be covered by volunteers.

In future years, once the three departments (Planning/Conservation/Inspections) have effectively combined their functions, it might be possible to separate off discrete administrative tasks that volunteers could perform, or to use volunteers to greet and provide preliminary assistance to citizens seeking general planning/zoning/conservation/inspections information at the front counter. For now, however, volunteers might in selected circumstances be able to assist with tasks like copying materials for the mailings associated with the numerous board/committee meetings the Planning Department staffs, for Town Meeting, and the like.

7. List three cuts in FY 10 services that would least affect your core functions (note: these cuts can include services to other departments or town functions in addition to services the public sees).

No remaining Planning Department budget lines can be cut without directly affecting core functions—we are already strongly constrained by the current budget limitations. Cutting liaison or staff support functions to ‘non-permit’ boards/committees or non-Town bodies would free up staff time, but would directly affect the Department’s ability to perform its core function. Planning involves considerably more than managing the permit process. An essential part of the function of planning involves remaining in touch with, and helping to coordinate, the current and planned future activity of various elements of the community and its connection to the larger world.

8. List at least one area where efficiency might be improved for FY 10.

As noted, the Planning, Conservation, and Inspection Services departments are moving in together and coordinating our departments’ functions, including administrative activities and permitting. This will take some time to complete and bring up to speed, but the end result will be substantially better coordinated permit review.

Providing professional staff support and administrative assistance to over 50 citizen committees and a 240 member legislative body consumes by far the greatest portion of available Town staff time for many departments. One of the most effective ways to improve the efficiency of Amherst town departments would be to review state law concerning required boards/committees and functions, and then identify, distill, prune, and recombine the public purpose functions of Amherst’s ever-proliferating Town boards/committees into fewer standing committees. Examples: The Public Works Committee could also serve as the Water Supply Protection Committee and Recycling & Refuse Management Committee. The Housing Partnership/Fair Housing Committee also serve as the Committee on Homelessness. The Conservation Commission could serve as the Agricultural Commission and Public Shade Tree Committee. The Historical Commission could serve as the Cemetery Commission. And so forth.

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Saturday, October 25, 2008

Department: INSPECTION SERVICES
Department Head: Bonita Weeks

Each Department Head should plan to provide a concise written "Overview" in electronic form covering the issues/questions listed below to John Musante and Maria Racca by 4:30 p.m. on Wednesday, October 22. *Please use this worksheet and insert your answers in italics below each question.* Save file to **J:\Budget\10.25.08 SB Budget Hearing** --any questions, please contact Maria Racca at x3218. We will review and distribute to the Select Board in advance of Saturday's meeting.

1. Briefly describe your department's recent accomplishments and the negative or positive effects of budget increases/decreases on services/programs over the past three years (FY 07, FY 08, and FY 09).

The positive effects and accomplishments achieved from the budget cuts were the result of careful assessment of our current permitting/inspection process then reviewing and implementing other options that might help to make the permitting/inspections process more efficient. Changes instituted or in progress include:

- a. *Closing to the public on Thursdays to review permits; write up plan reviews, issue permits, review submittals for changes to permits and submittals for construction control jobs. Thursdays the inspectors from our department also meet regularly with inspectors from other departments to review and coordinate between the departments the status of various applications, permits and ongoing or upcoming projects.*
- b. *Re-organizing the Electrical Inspections division of the department*
- c. *Tracking building permit applications and fire department transmittals, initially through excel now through the new permitting system*
- d. *A new permitting system designed to interconnect more departments than the former system*
- e. *The proposal to move our Department in with Planning, Conservation and Zoning*

The negative effects include;

- a. *Delays in the issuance of permits*
- b. *Some delays in inspections – it is often no longer possible to perform an inspection the day it is requested as was the case when we were fully staffed.*
- c. *Rushed plan reviews that often result in more problems being found in the field. When found in the field problems are usually harder and more expensive to correct than when found at the permitting review phase. Issues discovered in the field can also lead to delays in issuance of Certificates of Occupancy and almost always contribute to a negative image for the Departments involved.*

- d. *Less time to spend on zoning issues, both in terms of enforcement and in terms of providing written responses to transmittals; from the Planning Board for site plan review or planning board special permits and from the Zoning Board for special permits or variances. Issues have to be prioritized. As a result Code and life safety related issues take precedence, followed by those items with mandated time limits.*
 - e. *Loss of personnel to other towns or other positions*
 - f. *Loss of morale*
 - g. *Long hours to try to meet state mandates*
2. List any FTE that has been budgeted within current appropriations but is vacant. Indicate how long each position been vacant, and the expectations for those positions going forward? (e.g., currently advertising, expect to cut, etc.)

One Building Official's position is currently open and has been unfilled for approximately 18 months. In FY 08 the position opened at about the same time hiring was frozen. Negotiations with a prospective employee have fallen through and we have currently advertised again.

3. List any grant-funded positions or programs that are at risk if town funding decreases or is not available.

There are no grant funded positions or programs for Inspection Services.

4. List any increased fees, whether the increase has covered what it was hoped to cover, and whether the increase has decreased participation. Also list any new or increased fees that could be considered given MA law limitations.

With the exception of some minor adjustments there have been few fee increases or changes since 2003 since, to date, the Department expenses/services have been covered by permit fees. We will be evaluating the changes to the Electrical Inspections division of the department after 1 year under the new system. One portion of that evaluation will be to ensure that permit fees are still covering the costs to the Town of Amherst. If there are areas where permit fees are not aligning with the costs to the town we will be adjusting those fees. Due to the current economic situation we also plan to review the overall fee/cost picture half way through this fiscal year to see if adjustments will have to be made in other divisions of the Department.

5. List all the Town Manager-appointed and Select Board-appointed committees/boards you provide support for, and the approximate number of meetings per month and hours per month spent on committee/board support.

The Building Commissioner provides direct support to the Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) as staff support at the hearings and meetings of the ZBA. The board meets twice a month for 2 to 4-1/2 hours. If hearings are continued they may meet as often as 4 times a

month, on rare occasions 5 times. In the position of Zoning Enforcement Officer, I also work with staff in the Planning Department on zoning, site plan review, and Historical Commission issues. Some of these meetings are with staff only. Some meetings are with the applicant as well as Planning Department Staff. In these meetings we review issues, determine which areas of the zoning by-law(s) apply and to assess the pro's and con's of various options, including how Building Code or Massachusetts General Laws may impact the various directions a project may take. Inspection Services also helps to provide staff with historical information on projects/parcels.

6. List any functions currently performed by volunteers that sometimes need to be covered by paid staff, and conversely, paid staff functions that might be covered by volunteers.

There are currently no volunteers in Inspections. Sorting cataloging and properly filing information that comes in on a daily basis could be done by a volunteer familiar with the functions of Inspection Services. A volunteer could also take the calls to set up electrical and gas inspections. In the past volunteers have had problems with the data entry and have been used primarily for sorting and filing of paperwork. We have considered taking interns, both from tech schools and the colleges but an intern's position has never been funded.

7. List three cuts in FY 10 services that would least affect your core functions (note: these cuts can include services to other departments or town functions in addition to services the public sees).

The majority of the Inspection Services Department services are State Mandates. Options are to:

- a. *Stop attending ZBA meetings*
- b. *Further restrict the hours the Office is open to the public*

8. List at least one area where efficiency might be improved for FY 10.

Inspection Services has already started to look at improving efficiency through:

- a. *Reorganizing the Electrical Inspections division of the department*
- b. *A new computer program for permit tracking that ties in with Health, Planning, Zoning, Conservation, Fire & DPW*
- c. *Instituting the use of laptops in the field to enter inspections in "real time" for our full time inspectors. If successful this program then may expand to include some or all of our part time inspectors.*
- d. *Combining departments and staff resources with Planning/Conservation and Zoning*
- e. *Efficiency would also improve if there was a way to free up the building officials from some of the data processing/entry portion of the work. If this occurs they could then concentrate efforts on reviews and enforcement. This can only transpire with addition of support staff.*

Inspection Services		FY 06 Actual	FY 07 Budget	FY 07 Actual	FY 08 Budget	FY 09 Budget	Change FY 08 - 09	Percent Change
Personnel Services	\$	306,718	369,223	306,637	355,107	323,785	(31,322)	-8.8%
Operating Expenses	\$	11,786	15,940	29,095	15,940	15,940	0	0.0%
Capital Outlay	\$	6,893	0	16,000	0	0	0	0.0%
TOTAL APPROPRIATION	\$	325,397	385,163	351,732	371,047	339,725	(31,322)	-8.4%
SUPPLEMENTAL INFORMATION								
Employee Benefits	\$	98,299	118,307	118,307	145,015	114,626	(30,389)	-21.0%
Capital Appropriations	\$	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%
TOTAL DEPARTMENT COST	\$	423,696	503,470	470,039	516,062	454,351	(61,711)	-12.0%
SOURCES OF FUNDS								
Building Permits	\$	453,104	340,000	238,627	240,000	247,500	7,500	3.1%
Demolition Permits	\$	1,290	0	1,545	0	0	0	0.0%
Other Permits	\$	53,640	58,500	54,955	58,500	58,500	0	0.0%
Electrical Permits	\$	168,779	105,000	144,973	140,000	140,000	0	0.0%
Certificates of Inspections	\$	39,052	53,000	41,169	40,000	40,000	0	0.0%
Weights and Measures	\$	7,549	5,700	6,407	5,700	5,700	0	0.0%
POSITIONS								
Full Time		6.00	6.00	6.00	5.00	5.00	0.00	
Part Time With Benefits		0.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	
Full Time Equivalents		6.00	6.64	6.64	5.64	5.64	0.00	