



AMESBURY
CITY HALL
62 Friend Street
Amesbury, MA 01913
978-388-8100

Special City Council Meeting Minutes
VIRTUAL MEETING
Tuesday, February 22, 2022
7:00pm

Councilor Wheeler called the meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.

Roll Call was taken, and present were Councilor Frey, Councilor Hickok, Councilor Hogg, Councilor Mandeville, Councilor Stanganelli, Councilor Deschenes, and Councilor Wheeler.

Councilors Lennon and Rinaldi had excused absences.

Communications & Updates-

- The mayor and former CFO Angel Wills gave a presentation on the city's financial condition (see attached presentation).
 - The mayor talked about the budget process this year with department heads and her instructions for capital projects as well.
 - Councilor Stanganelli asked if these slides would be in the budget book. The mayor said that they aren't included in the budget book because that would be for the next fiscal year and this presentation is for this current fiscal year.
 - Councilor Frey asked about the historical excess levy capacity. He said it looks like it has taken a downturn in the past few years and asked if there is any outlook on that going forward. Ms. Wills said it did take a downturn during the pandemic. She said that this would need to be something that was strategically built into the budget process and knows that her and the mayor have looked at that and it was a goal.
 - Councilor Wheeler asked for Ms. Wills to send the City Clerk the presentation for the minutes. He also asked what our new growth was trending at and if it was too early for that information. Ms. Wills said she has not heard from the Assessor's Office yet, but it seems to be a little early in the process. She suggested to circle back with the Assessor in a few months.
 - Councilor Wheeler asked if we have a date for when the capital plan is going to be submitted. Mayor Gove said she was not intending on submitting in separately. She said that department heads are just taking the five-year plan from last year and making sure it's still accurate. She doesn't know if everything will be funded but wants to make sure it's accurate. He asked about the bullet point that said department heads will submit a level funded expense budget, and asked if that is everything except for salaries and benefits? The mayor said yes and that she has asked for a level funded expense budget, but salaries will be discussed later.
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First Readings

2022-023 An Ordinance to amend the City Zoning Bylaw by inserting the previously enacted Short-Term Rental Unit Bylaw into Section XI, Special Conditions, as Subsection U; to update the Zoning Code to change the term Town to City; and rename the Zoning Bylaw as the Zoning Ordinance. – Mayor Sponsor

- Councilor Wheeler explained that this was already referred to committee and given a public hearing date at the February City Council meeting. The Office of Community and Economic Development expressed interest in moving the hearing up. The Planning Board committed to act on the referred material with a recommendation to the Council prior to the March meeting. Councilor Wheeler said a re-vote would be necessary to change the date of the public hearing.

Councilor Stanganelli moved to move the public hearing date of 2022-023 to March 8, 2022. He was seconded by Councilor Hogg. A roll call vote was taken, and it passed unanimously (7 present).

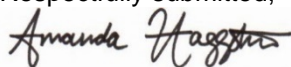
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**2022-028** An Order to request the City Council to authorize the Department of Public Works to overspend the fiscal 2022 snow and ice appropriation of \$250,000. – Mayor Sponsor

**Councilor Mandeville moved to suspend rule 5D and he was seconded by Councilor Frey. A roll call vote was taken, and it passed unanimously (7 present).**

**Councilor Stanganelli moved to refer 2022-028 to the Finance Committee meeting of February 22, 2022, and to set a public hearing date for March 8, 2022. He was seconded by Councilor Hogg. A roll call vote was taken, and it passed unanimously (7 present).**

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Council Mandeville moved to adjourn the meeting at 7:39 PM and was seconded by Councilor Hogg. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously (7 present).

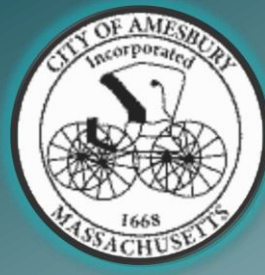
Respectfully submitted,



February 23, 2022

Fiscal Condition

Presented to Amesbury City Council



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FY '22 Year to Date Snapshot

- FY 2022 general fund revenue is showing a steady recovery across the board and is trending above budgeted estimates. Cannabis excise is averaging just under \$40,000 per month which is received from the Commonwealth quarterly.

- Overall, FY 2022 general fund expenditures are trending on budget with the exception of specific known expenditures which will require budget transfers.

- Currently the City has \$153,321 remaining in the Reserve Fund and \$1,978,854 in Certified Free Cash.

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FINANCIAL BENCHMARKS

1. Net Operating Revenues



Consistent revenue growth is one measure of a city's ability to maintain existing service levels in the face of increasing costs. This indicator shows the change in net operating revenues over time. Net operating revenues are calculated by using the total gross revenue available from all sources, less tax revenue raised from a debt exclusion. Revenue raised for the purpose of servicing exempt debt is temporary and tied to a specific use, and so excluding it from this calculation provides a more accurate representation of the revenue available to the city for funding routine public services. Ideally, the annual percentage increase from prior year revenues should be steady, positive, and predictable. A trend of decreasing net operating revenues, after accounting for the effects of inflation, is a warning indicator; if municipal revenues are decreasing, they may soon be insufficient to maintain a consistent level of service. Likewise, a high degree of volatility in the rate of year-to-year change may also be a warning sign. **Amesbury's net operating revenue, adjusted for inflation, has increased on average 1.43% annually.**

2. Economic Growth Revenues as % Total Net Revenue



New growth and certain local receipts are generally responsive to changes in the local economy. Periods of healthy economic activity are often linked to an increase in local economic development, which creates new growth for the property tax levy while also generating increases in permit fees related to new construction and an acquisition of business-related personal property. Additionally, periods of prosperity generally affect the meals and rooms taxes, and make it more likely that residents will purchase vehicles. Conversely, a downturn in the economy may lead to a decrease in these revenue-generating factors. Maintaining a balance between revenues tied closely to the economy and other revenues helps mitigate the effects of economic slowdowns or recessions. Even though new growth is part of the property tax, it is included in this analysis since it is a reflection of new value added to the tax rolls as a result of construction. A declining trend in revenues related to economic growth may indicate that these revenue sources will need to be supplemented or replaced by others in the future. **Amesbury's economic growth revenue, adjusted for inflation, has increased on average 5.77% annually.**

3. State Aid as % Net Operating Revenue



A trend showing decline in state aid as a percentage of total revenue may be considered a warning indicator. **Amesbury's net state aid, adjusted for inflation, has declined from 15.5% of net operating revenue in 2011 to 11.9% in 2022.**

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FINANCIAL BENCHMARKS

4. Property Tax Revenue



A decline in property tax revenues, adjusted for inflation, indicates a city or town may face increasing difficulty funding a consistent level of service into the future. Tax levy growth is attributed both to the 2.5% annual increase in the levy limit allowed by Proposition 2.5, as well as any new growth. **Amesbury's property tax revenue, adjusted for inflation, has increased on average 1.82% annually.**

(a) Levy Limit



The levy ceiling (an amount equal to 2.5% of the community's total assessed value) is a cap on the size of a city or town's maximum allowable levy. Although a community can pass an override or a debt exclusion to exceed its levy limit, it cannot exceed the levy ceiling. If the levy limit calculation produces a number greater than the levy ceiling, the ceiling must be used in its place. If a community cannot increase its levy limit normally, it is said to have reached the "levy cap." When a community hits the levy cap and its levy ceiling is in decline, it becomes progressively more difficult to raise funds from the property tax. This environment also severely hampers a community's ability to expand services or finance large capital projects through an override or exclusions, since the levy ceiling is directly tied to a community's override capacity (the difference between the levy limit and the levy ceiling). **Amesbury's excess levy capacity is currently \$3,270,188 and its override capacity is \$17,305,099.**

(b) Assessed Values



Massachusetts law requires municipalities to establish the full and fair cash value of all real estate as of January 1st of each year. Full and fair cash value is also known as "current market value". Property sales are the primary source for determining property values. Annually, the Massachusetts Department of Revenue certifies each community's valuation and "new growth" or the amount of new construction added to the levy limit. A community's steady increase in total assessed valuation is a favorable economic indicator. **Amesbury's total valuation has increased by 41.59% since 2011 with the primary driver being residential valuations.**

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FINANCIAL BENCHMARKS

5. Uncollected Receivables as % Levy  Favorable

A trend of uncollected property tax receivables greater than 5% of the total annual property tax levy (net of overlay) is a warning indicator. Practically speaking, an increase in uncollected taxes may lead to a decrease in liquidity, introducing some uncertainty as to whether the town will have available revenue to fund its appropriations. **Amesbury's uncollected property tax receivables decreased to 1.8% of the total levy as of 6/30/21.**

6. Operating Expenditures  Favorable


A steep increase in annual operating costs, after accounting for inflation, may indicate that a community's expenses are unsustainable without accompanying revenue increases or budget adjustments. **Amesbury's operating expenditures, adjusted for inflation, have increased on average 1.24% annually.**

7. Personnel Costs as % Operating Expenditures  Favorable


A trend of increasing salaries, wages, and employee health benefits as a percentage of a community's annual operating expenditures may indicate that those costs are rising at an unsustainable rate. As these costs grow relative to the total budget they may crowd out departmental spending on other areas, including routine facility maintenance and necessary capital investment. **Amesbury's personnel costs including benefits account for 62% of the operating budget. The personnel costs as a percent of the operating budget have increased on average .21% annually.**

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FINANCIAL BENCHMARKS

8. Funded Pension Liability  Marginal

A community's funded ratio is the total value of a pension plan's assets weighed against its accrued liabilities. A trend showing the funded ratio decreasing over time indicates a diminishing ability for the community to cover its accrued liability, which may put pressure on the budget as other items are cut to make pension payments. **Although the Amesbury Municipal Retirement Board is only 58.8% funded, they are on target to fully fund its current unfunded pension liability of \$39,858,728 by 2035 as per the state mandate.**

9. Long-Term Debt as % Assessed Valuation  Favorable

Total long-term debt in excess of 5 percent of a community's assessed valuation is generally prohibited under MGL Chapter 44 §10, and approaching this limit is often considered a warning sign by bond rating agencies. Evaluating a community's debt in this way is an indicator of both a community's overall debt burden as well as its effort in consistently investing in its capital assets. While a high debt load may be an indication of fiscal strain, low and decreasing debt may indicate underinvestment in capital assets and infrastructure. **Amesbury's debt over the past 10 years has fluctuated between 1.33% and 2.77% of the City's total asessed valuation with the recent increase due to the Amesbury Elementary School construction project.**

10. Debt Service as % Operating Revenue  Favorable

Annual debt service in excess of 10 percent of net operating revenues may indicate that a community's debt load is too high. A trend of increasing debt load may negatively affect a community's ability to maintain spending on essential services as more revenues must be set aside to service debt. Conversely, a declining trend may indicate that a community is not maintaining investment in its capital assets and is losing the capacity to do so as operating expenses take on a greater proportion of the budget. The community should find a favorable balance between these two extremes, ideally set by policy. **Amesbury's debt is currently 5.74% of its operating revenue.**

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FINANCIAL BENCHMARKS

11. Reserves as % Operating Revenue



Maintaining a healthy level of reserves allows a community to finance emergencies and other unforeseen needs, hold money for specific future purposes, or in limited instances, to serve as revenue sources for the annual budget. Reserve balances and policies can also positively impact a community's credit rating and consequently its long-term cost to fund major projects. Declining reserves as a percentage of a town's net operating revenue is considered a warning indicator by credit rating agencies, and may indicate a declining ability to finance community obligations in the face of an emergency. Reserves below 5-7% of revenues may be considered unfavorable. Ideally, a community's reserve levels should be set by policy. **Amesbury's reserves have increased to 4.02% of its operating revenue. From FY 21 to FY 22 Amesbury's reserves have increased by 2.46%, the largest year over year increase in over 10 years.**

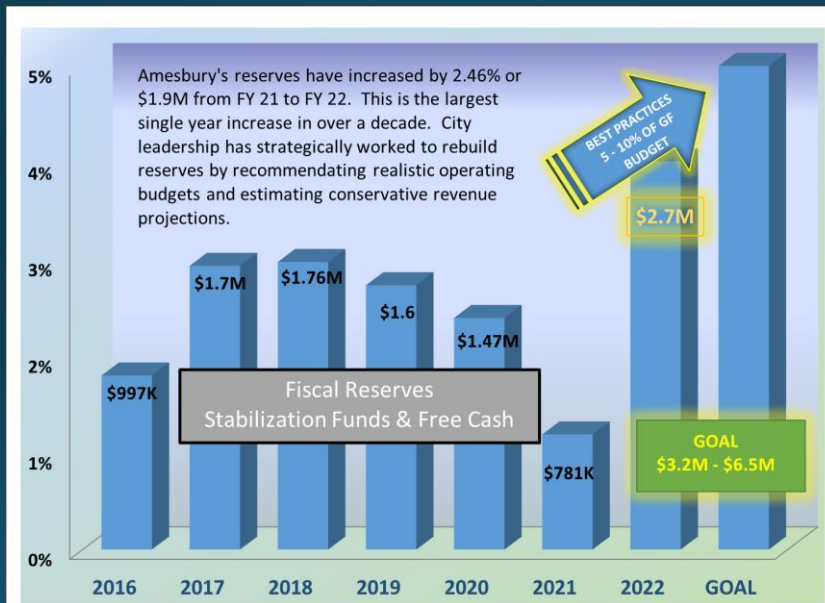
12. Population and Enrollment



A trend of population growth over time indicates an increased burden on government services and should be monitored to better plan for future expenses. As the number of residents increase, there is a greater need for police and fire protection, trash collection, an increase in wear and tear on local roads and infrastructure, and increases in demand for other government services. Additionally, a population increase may also lead to more school-age children and a corresponding uptick in school enrollment, which greatly impacts education costs. **Amesbury's population has increased 6.8% since 2011 while school enrollment has decreased by 15%.**

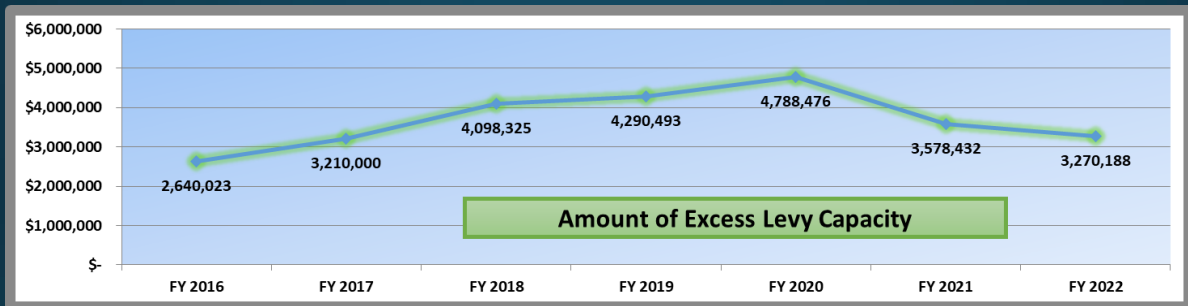
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Stabilization Funds (Reserves)



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Historical Excess Levy Capacity



Excess levy capacity allows a community to have budgetary flexibility, meaning a City does not need to rely on an override for a new budgetary initiative (up to the amount of available excess levy capacity). Excess levy capacity also indicates to bond rating agencies that a community is fiscally stable which contributes to a favorable bond rating.

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Fiscal 2023 Initiatives

Buildings, Infrastructure & Equipment

Headed by the Mayor & CFO, affirm/amend the city wide, multi-year comprehensive capital improvement plan identifying priorities, potential funding sources and future budgetary impacts as well as identifying capital asset annual maintenance costs.

FY '23 Operating Budget

Continue to rebuild reserves, ongoing OPEB funding and conservatively increasing revenue estimates. Make a commitment to funding building and infrastructure maintenance costs.

Manage Tax Burden

Carefully review and manage the fiscal impact to the FY '23 property tax bill throughout the budget process.

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FY '23 Budget Directives from the Mayor

- Advise all departments to provide “level funded” expense budget to begin the FY '23 budget process.
- Request all departments affirm/amend 5-year capital plan.
- Require all “new budget requests” be prioritized and submitted separately for review during administrative budget meetings.
- Require departments to construct a bottom-up budget with supporting department goals, budget narratives and staffing count analysis in addition to the traditional monetary budget request.