

Amherst Taxpayers For Responsible Change Select Board Questionnaire

1. List specific budget solutions, including the amounts for each, for closing the projected FY09 budget gap of \$600,000.

I don't believe it is the Select Board's role to make specific line-item adjustments to the budget. I believe the Select Board should seek the recommendations of the Town Manager, the Superintendent of Schools, and the Library Director regarding such matters, as well as the Budget Coordinating Group. These are the entities with the intricate knowledge of how all the line items interact in the context of the specific departmental and larger budget areas. Having not determined specific policy directives by which to measure such recommendation for the FY09 budget, the Select Board should defer to these recommendations this year, and look to create clear financial policies to guide the Town Manager's budget creation for FY10 and beyond.

2. Some neighboring communities contract out services to reduce their personnel costs. The Amherst Town Manager recently contracted out some of the wiring inspections the Town must conduct.

Given our continuing structural deficit, are you in favor of the Town exploring privatization of some additional Town functions? Yes or No?

Absolutely. We must examine all possibilities for cost savings.

3. Past and future budget projections have shown that health insurance and employee compensation (steps, cost of living increases, longevity benefits) contribute significantly to the on-going structural deficit.

Do you favor reducing future employee compensation rates of growth? Yes or No?

No. Cutting salaries and benefits leads to the most highly-skilled employees seeking work elsewhere. Maintaining the very best employees throughout Town government should be our goal – particularly if we are faced with the potential of having fewer employees overall.

Amherst pays 75% of health insurance premiums while the employees pay 25%.

Do you favor increasing the employee's share of premiums to 30% for those employees earning above \$50,000 and 35% for those earning above \$80,000? Yes or No?

Further premium increases may need to be explored through collective bargaining and with the non-union employees, but I couldn't support the 30% and 35% specified in the question without more information, including the recommendations of those who work most closely with these matters, such as the Finance Director, Human Resources Director, and Personnel Board.

4. Amherst provides ambulance services to five neighboring towns and to higher education institutions. Over the past four years, Amherst taxpayers have subsidized this service in the amount of \$694,658 on average per year.

Do you believe Amherst taxpayers should subsidize ambulance services to other towns and institutions?

I don't consider this to be a "yes or no" question, and I don't necessarily accept the premise of average subsidy amounts. I support the Town Manager's efforts to increase Amherst's revenues from providing these services, but the question of how actual cost is determined is a subject of significant disagreement. Without a concrete notion of cost, there can't be a concrete amount labeled "full reimbursement" or "subsidy." This is a very complicated issue, and we oversimplify it at our peril.

Candidates Name (Print) Stephanie O'Keeffe