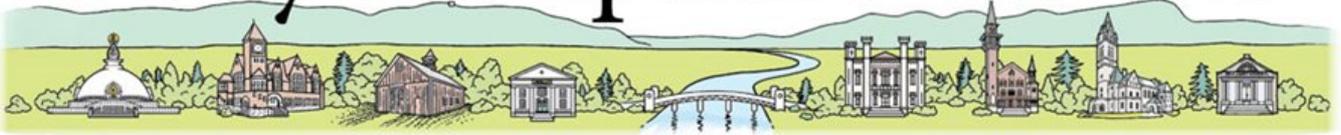


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Amherst adopts wage theft bylaw



Amherst Town Hall GAZETTE FILE PHOTO » [Buy this Image](#)

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AMHERST — Measures to ensure employers in Amherst are following all state and federal wage and tip laws, and that the town is awarding work only to contractors in compliance with these rules, are being enacted by the town. Joining other area communities, including Northampton, Easthampton and Springfield, the Town Council approved two bylaws Monday that aim to protect workers, such as the nine undocumented immigrants who went without pay for several months after hanging drywall at the North Square at the Mill District project in North Amherst in 2019.

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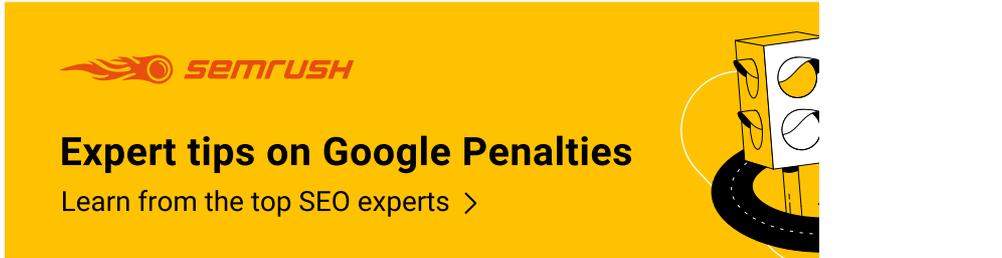
The wage and tip theft bylaw, and the accompanying responsible employer bylaw, both passed unanimously, 12-0, with District 1 Councilor Sarah Swartz absent.

Both bylaws were promoted by the Carpenters Labor Management Program and the Pioneer Valley Workers Center and sponsored by District 1 Councilor Cathy Schoen, District 2 Councilor Pat DeAngelis and At Large Councilor Mandi Jo Hanneke.

The wage theft bylaw, which will be enforced by the Board of License Commissioners, the human rights director and the police department, can include fines of \$300 per violation. The bylaw is in place to make sure that workers are getting at least minimum wage for the work they do in town.

The responsible employer bylaw ensures that Amherst awards contracts for goods and services and public construction, and grants tax relief agreements, only to responsible contractors who are able to certify that they are in compliance with wage and hour laws. The bylaw is enforced through the written contracts when bids are awarded.

In addition, the bylaw includes a clause that promotes a more diverse workforce in Amherst, with the idea that contractors should strive to have 15.3% of hours on a project worked by people of color, 6.9% of hours worked by women and 5% of hours worked by veterans.



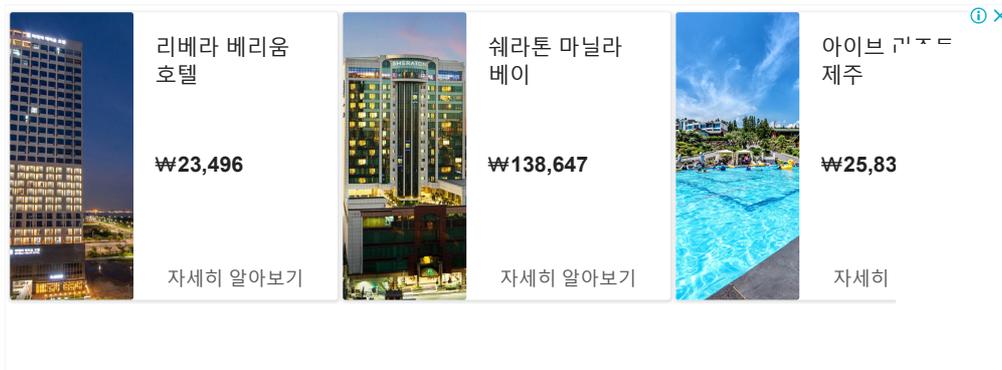
The bylaws have been reviewed by councilors since being introduced last winter. Town attorneys KP Law also examined them.

Numerous residents spoke in favor of the bylaws being adopted before the council vote, with some citing the investigation by the state attorney general’s office completed in April into subcontracting work at North Square. That led to the state office issuing separate citations to Combat Drywall of Billerica and Alvarez Drywall of Manchester, New Hampshire, and the companies were then forced to make restitution totaling \$23,978 and to pay civil penalties of \$19,500.

Isolda Ortega-Bustamante, a member of the town’s Racial Equity Task Force, said the bylaws will ensure that workers at projects like North Square are paid in a timely manner.

Cedric de Leon, director of the Labor Center at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, spoke of the critical need for the bylaws.

“We need laws to deter contractors from ever doing this in our town again,” de Leon said.



Ruthie Weinbaum, an Amherst Regional High School senior, said that victims of wage theft live in the community and many are likely the parents of her fellow students. Having preventive measures in place, Weinbaum said, will give assurance to students that businesses are treating their employees fairly.

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