

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

February 3, 2016

Page 1 of 4

Meeting Date: February 3, 2016

Called to Order: 5:00 PM

Location: 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

Finance Committee Members Present: Michael Naughton, Fred Bowman, and Patricia Pruitt. Chris Menegoni, John Hanold and Greg Garrison were absent. There was NO quorum.

Selectmen Present: Chris Boutwell (arrived at 6:05 PM) and Rich Kuklewicz. Michael Nelson was absent.

Others Present: Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Pipeline Liaison Ariel Elan, Police Chief Chip Dodge and Dispatch Manager Marsha Odle

Reserve Fund Transfer Request

The Selectmen have had a request to provide \$5,000 for additional legal costs in fighting the pipeline. This was discussed at the February 1, 2016 Board of Selectmen meeting.

- A few weeks ago the Selectmen hired an attorney to represent us in an intervention with the Department of Public Utilities (DPU) around a supply path portion of the Berkshire Gas docket with the DPU.
- The questions that we have are: is the additional capacity needed, is the current moratorium necessary, did Berkshire gas have reasonable alternatives?
- The attorney filed a petition on our behalf to find out what Berkshire Gas did or did not do to see how they could supply gas to this region in other ways, and if the pipeline is the best alternative.
- Montague was granted status as a full intervenor. This means our attorney and expert witness are allowed review information that would answer questions about the need for the pipeline. We want to make sure there is really a need in the region for this additional gas supply. A benefactor has stepped forward and agreed to fund the cost of the expert witness to review the documents. This is a cost of \$10,000-\$20,000.
- Montague is one of only a few towns with intervenor status.
- The \$10,000 appropriated at town meeting for legal cost regarding the DPU case has been fully expended, now we need additional funding to continue to move forward with the process.
- The Selectmen authorized a gift account on Monday for Pipeline Intervention expenses.
- The Municipal Coalition Against the Pipeline (MCAP) met last night. MCAP currently has 11 member towns. MCAP passed a resolution to support Montague's effort in the intervention and urge communities to participate in funding the legal costs.
- The timeline is that expert witness testimony is due by February 18th, all other testimony is due by April 11th. Our attorney, if funded, will file a motion for a longer schedule.

- Mr. Bowman asked what additional money would be requested at ATM. Mr. Kuklewicz said we could be looking at \$50,000-\$75,000 in total expenses. Mr. Kuklewicz hopes to have a dollar amount for a special article at ATM within 30 days.
- FERC makes their decision by the end of 2016.
- Mr. Kuklewicz- what's important is that FERC looks at the need for capacity, and considers other alternatives. Infrastructure could result in additional costs to rate payers. Ms. Elan said no matter how much the pipeline costs, all costs will eventually come back to the rate payers.
- FERC just issued 2 decisions that the way FERC defines need is "does the pipeline have enough contracts" with 80-100% subscription. Other community concerns are not used to make FERC's decisions.
- Mr. Naughton wants to make sure we're not duplicating someone else's efforts. He was assured that there is no overlap of effort.
- Mr. Bowman's concern is that the need will continue beyond the ATM.

Minutes

Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 27, 2016.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Police and Dispatch Requests

Chief Dodge presented a complete budget package for Fiscal Year 2017.

- In preparing the budget, Chief Dodge tried to reduce some items to offset contractual increases.
 - The gasoline budget request was cut by \$6,000 to reflect current lower costs with provision for a \$0.50 per gallon increase.
 - Part-time police wages were also reduced by \$8,000. The expenditures in this account fluctuate considerably over time.
- Mr. Naughton noted that the request for Full-Time Wages Overtime is increasing. Chief Dodge noted that last year's request was voluntarily reduced, but it's uncertain whether they can come in under budget in this line item. Overtime is really difficult to budget. There are also contractual issues – in certain situation vacant shifts have to be filled by full-time officers rather than part-time officers. \$140,000 is the Chief's comfort number, but he is only requesting \$120,000. The department still fills vacant shifts with part timers whenever possible.
- At the time the budget was put together it was expected that 3 officers would retire or leave in Fiscal Year 2017. The officer that was considering leaving is now staying. The two retirements are still expected, but not confirmed, and it is uncertain when they would take place.
- One savings in overtime, at Mr. Kuklewicz's suggestion, is sending an officer (who is next in line to be hired full-time) to the academy in March, instead of waiting until an officer actually leaves. This allows the town to avoid paying overtime to fill that officer's shift while he's at the academy.
- A lot of the department's budget fluctuations are due to staffing situations.

- Bowman asked about the salary for the Lieutenant position. Chief Dodge was told that a lieutenant should make 10% more than the top sergeant. Chief Dodge is considering asking Town Meeting approve a pay scale for the lieutenant that mirrors the 4-step scale of the Sergeants and Staff Sergeant rather than the pay scale used by all other non-union staff. The Chief wants the Lieutenant's pay scale to be above the Staff Sergeant and high enough for someone to be willing to take the position given the lack of overtime. The Chief is still going through the promotional process so someone can be appointed on July 1st.
- Mr. Naughton asked if the Lieutenant position was reflected in the budget. The position is not shown separately, but the Chief thinks they'll save money by eliminating a Detective position when the incumbent retires. The intent is that a senior officer with a lot of overtime will move to the Lieutenant position at higher pay but less overtime. In turn, that officer will be replaced with patrolman at step one.
- Ms. Pruitt asked why the Lieutenant needs to be available for overtime anyway. This position is being created, in part, so the town will still have a "chief" when Chief Dodge is away. Nothing will have to wait for his return. When the Chief is at a Chief's meeting the Lieutenant can go to the Catholic Social Ministry's meeting and make decisions on behalf of the Chief. Additionally, currently a Sergeant oversees scene with large scale events, and Chief Dodge, comes in to run command post.
- The insurance expense is for personal injury insurance for the officers. When an officer is out because he was injured on duty, the insurance pays the town for part of that cost. Even with annual budget increases, this account tends to be overspent. Part of the reason for the increasing costs is our experience. One officer only worked 13 months out of 24. The Chief hopes that the rate increases due to loss experience will should taper or fall off once our experience is better.
- The Animal Control Officer budget has no issues. Chief Dodge said we have the best Animal Control Officer ever.
- Ms. Odle's been able to budget conservatively because she's been able to get grants for training.
- The only Dispatch budget increases were step increases and longevity.
- Ms. Odle has been successful in getting two types of grants for the town. The state funds an annual training grant for every eligible town, based on call volume and population. Montague has been getting about \$13,000 each year. This is really a funded mandate that covers training classes and overtime for attending class or shift coverage. \$3,000 of this training grant reimburses the town for our MedCare cost. MedCare comes into play when a dispatcher needs to talk someone through a medical issue. The Town pays an annual fee for MedCare to do this because we only have one dispatcher on each shift, and they have to be available for other calls. A second incentive grant can be used for anything dispatch related – consoles, computers, radios. We've used it for personnel costs since our center is new, but replacement equipment may be needed as time passes. Chief Dodge noted that the Police Department can buy replacement equipment for Dispatch if needed.

Police Additional Requests

- Mr. Boutwell asked about the radio towers. Currently, and for many years, radio transmissions have been spotty or non-existent in certain areas of town. The radio technician went out in a cruiser to check transmissions and noted that we've got a bad situation which should have been fixed years ago. There are three towers available to us. One is in Wendell on Country Hill, and two are in Greenfield at Adams Road and Poet's Seat. All three towers have receiver antenna, but only the Country Hill tower has a transmit antennae. We need another transmit antenna on either Adams Road or Poets Seat. The original request was for \$50,000, and would have been much more if we had needed to build a new tower, but by working through the FRCOG it will cost less. The Chief went to the FRCOG radio committee, to which Montague pays an annual fee for maintenance, and asked for help. Everyone was very supportive and began offering needed items or providing information on where things could be obtained at little or no cost. By the end of the meeting the \$50,000 cost went down to a few thousand because everyone offered to pull in favors and provide most of the equipment. FRCOG is paying fee to test which tower should be used, and which tower has space for racks. The article remains submitted until all of these offers are confirmed, but it is now hoped that the article will not be needed and the small cost remaining can be paid from the equipment account.
- There is a new special article request for \$15,000 for the balance of the cost for a K-9 vehicle. The town has received a grant for \$4,400 for equipment for the K-9 vehicle, and over \$18,000 has already donated. Another fund-raiser is planned, and any additional donations will reduce the cost for the town.

Topics not anticipated within in the 48 hour posting requirements

Next Meetings:

- February 10th – Reserve Fund Transfer Request, Tree Warden & DPW– Operating budget, other requests
- February 17th – WPCF– Operating budget, other requests
- February 24th – Capital Improvements
- March 2nd – GMRSD – last date to change Affordable Assessment amount.

Future Items:

- Discuss how to handle process for the appropriation for WPCF Capital Stabilization Fund, use of revenues from solid waste process.
- Financial Policy regarding annual appropriations to Town General Stabilization Fund/OPEB Trust Fund
- Finalize revenue estimates

Meeting adjourned at 7:58 PM

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Minutes of January 27th
- Police, Dispatch and Animal Control 2017 Complete Budget Package