



Town of Montague
Department, Board, Committee, Commission
BUDGET NARRATIVE

FY 24

Complete this form electronically! Be clear and concise!

Department: Town Clerk Submitted by: Deb Bourbeau

1. Please describe and provide the rationale for any notable changes in your FY24 budget request.

All changes to the town clerk's budget will be because of the new Vote Act passed by the legislature and signed by the Governor this past June.

It will significantly increase all election related line items. Vote by Mail is required for all elections at the town's expense, Early Voting In-Person has been expanded for all Primaries, State and Federal Elections, along with mandatory work weekends and mandatory all day Saturday Voter Registration. Election worker wages, office supplies, printing, postage, and professional/technical line items are to be increased substantially according to the election calendar.

We need to talk about more than just increasing line items – This office now needs a third person. With the burden of early voting by mail and in-person voting has put this office in turmoil and burdened with extra work beyond our regular work hours. Extreme pressure, critical time sensitive deadlines and a labor-intensive workload now renders our office to be always playing catch up with daily, weekly, and monthly tasks. Two people can no longer run the office as efficiently as before COVID. An election does not happen in one day and then it magically disappears the next. One election takes 3 months to prepare for and it now takes a month for an election to be over. It used to be just our local elections were like this – well, now it is all elections. Elections takes precedent in the heat of the moment, but this office still has other jobs and tasks that cannot be put on the back burner. Births, deaths and marriages happen regardless, DBA's need to be issued, the annual town census still needs to be done, dogs need to be registered, ZBA & Planning decisions need to be recorded, town meeting still happens with all the afterwork, bylaws need to be submitted to the AG, public records request still need to be fulfilled; not to mention that our daily load of foot traffic, phone requests and on-line services need to be tended to.

Calendar year 2024 has four elections. The presidential primary, our local election, the state primary, and the presidential election. The presidential primary and the local election fall within FY 2024's budget, while the state primary and the presidential election will fall within the FY 2025 budget. Nevertheless, it will be a full year of non-stop elections and I fear that without additional office support that the office will be burdened to the point of burn out. Having already gone through this during COVID in 2020 – I am not optimistic the office will function at full capacity.

For your knowledge of elections – there is a four-year election cycle that keeps repeating. FY23 had 3 elections, FY24 will have 2 elections, FY25 will have 3 and FY26 will have 1 election – and then it keeps repeating 3, 2, 3, and 1 elections.

- 2. To this point in FY23, have you enhanced or expanded the programs and services you provide, or implemented new tools or technology that you'd like the Finance Committee and Selectboard to know about? Please describe.**

The Town Clerk's office now offers six ways to vote for all elections due to the New Vote Act. The New Vote Act is wonderful for voters as now there are 6 ways to vote, but it is taxing for staff causing us extraordinarily heavy administrative, physical burdens with time sensitive deadlines that forces us to use a fast work-pace and produce a high-volume turnout that most certainly can lead to errors which in turn leads to a mistrust from residents and voters. There are simply not enough hours in the day to accomplish daily tasks anymore never mind the new implemented requirements. The state has been dumping on this office for a while and the time is here for us to ask for help.

- 3. Are there presently challenges to your department's ability to meet its goals and requirements due to its FY23 operating budget? If so, offer any your recommendations you may have for improving the situation in FY24.**

Not to beat a dead horse but, due to the New Vote Act the office needs additional help on a permanent basis to perform all mandated obligations. The office relied on hired help, to get through the implementation of the New Vote Act. We had to close our office to the public to get tasks accomplished to meet deadlines – we should have closed it more, but then the phone rings more with the requests so it is a moot-point. From July through the end of November was crazy busy and it will be this way permanently. It is sink or swim time and I, myself prefer to swim. I don't want to tread water either – we need a real fix for what has been laid upon the town clerk's table. We get so far behind, because something has got to give – only to deal with it later down the line.

On another note, all city and town clerks across the state are facing the same problems. So much so that some cities/towns are refusing to perform certain tasks and obligations in their own offices due to time constraints, only to send customers to surrounding towns. My office was on the receiving end of this this July through November – many of our surrounding towns and cities turned people away from their windows and sent them to Montague. So not only are we doing our own work, but the work of other towns/cities who refuse to.

- 4. Did you receive funding for any special articles in FY22 or FY23? Please list them and share the current status of those expenditures/projects.**

N/A