

Meeting Date: January 20, 2010

Called to Order: 6:01 PM

Finance Committee Members Present: Rob Allen, Andrew Killeen, Michael Naughton and Lynn Reynolds.

Montague Selectmen Present: Patricia Pruitt and Mark Fairbrother

Others Present: Frank Abbondanzio (Town Administrator) arrived at 6:55 PM, Carolyn Olsen (Town Accountant), David Jensen (Inspector of Buildings), Gina McNeely (Director of Health), Jay DiPucchio and Christopher Boutwell (Board of Health)

Budget Hearing – Building Inspector’s Department

- The budget started with FY10 as a base, with elimination of the software maintenance for software since the software is not used.
- General discussion of software issue. The state is now supplying a free software program that the department will be looking into. Mr. Naughton would like to hear the lessons learned from the software at a future time.
- The telephone expenses under level services could be reduced to either \$700 or \$500.
- The travel budget under the 3% reduction scenario was essentially eliminated, with only \$300 left of \$2,030. This is unrealistic and would result in the Building Inspector not being paid for his travel/mileage expenses, but was done to meet the 3% reduction.
- There was general discussion about workload and trends.
- Joining the FRCOG’s Cooperative Inspection Program has been looked into, but they lack the necessary physical space and would have to add staff.

Budget Hearing – Board of Health

- Mr. Boutwell noted that the past year has been very challenging, and that the state has just issued a new manual with 10 new chapters.
- The workload is increasing and they need more clerical staff but they work with what they have because they know the town doesn’t have the money to meet their needs.
- Mr. DiPucchio recognized that all departments are at maximum capacity with few resources. The job of a municipal employee is difficult with a demanding public and reduced resources. With the budget objective of a 3% decrease we’ve done our level best to provide a budget to meet the minimum public safety issues.
- Ms. McNeely noted that there has been an increase in housing issues and complaints, especially regarding a lack of heat and substandard housing. These things ultimately come to the Board of Health, who then order repairs that the owners don’t have the money to make and both parties end up in housing court.
- Mr. Boutwell addressed Mr. Naughton’s e-mail question regarding the possibility of getting health services from the FRCOG. It’ll take at least 2 weeks to get a proposal, but the service they offer is to assist our employees, and is not meant to replace town employees. They don’t have capacity to replace town employees. The cost for health services was \$75 per hour starting with the phone call, including travel time, report

writing, etc. The bottom line is that for the amount of inspections we need we'd have to double our budget to use their services.

- Mr. DiPucchio noted that the Board of Health is a regulatory body, but their real purpose is to work with residents and solve problems. Ms. McNeely does a terrific job doing that, but it's labor intensive for both her and the board members.
- There was a brief discussion about workflow, trends, and records of activities.

Narratives

Mr. Naughton asked if narratives were requested, and noted that many questions raised could have been answered by narratives.

Brief narratives were requested, but not all departments have submitted them at this time.

Budget Hearing – Planning

- Mr. Abbondanzio stated that the Board of Selectmen just hired a Planning Assistant at 19 hours a week for 18 weeks. The total cost of the Planning Assistant is estimated to be \$5000. The plan is to advertise for a full time planner to start in FY11. The Planning Assistant will be able to apply for the full time position.
- The FY11 level services budget includes wages equivalent to what the former full time planner would have been making and the 3% reduction budget shows the position starting at step 10 of the pay scale. This allows for some flexibility if they are able to get a candidate with significant experience. If the new hire does not have experience, they would start a lower step. Step one of the grade would be around \$44,600.
- Mr. Abbondanzio discussed the projects that the Planning Assistant will be working on.
- Mr. Killeen noted that the total 3% reduction was in the full time wages for the new Planner. Mr. Abbondanzio replied that that was the decision he made.
- There was discussion about the Selectmen's decision to go with a part time temporary person rather than immediately hiring a full time person. Mr. Allen suggested we're being penny wise and pound foolish by not hiring a qualified person for the full time position now and questioned the opportunity costs of this decision. Mr. Abbondanzio responded that the Selectmen looked at both options and chose this one.
- Mr. Naughton commented that the expectation is that we're asking departments to cut 3% and see if it works, but at some point that won't work. In this case the salary situation allows that reduction but he thinks it would be good exercise to make 3% reduction using salaries in the level services request. Mr. Naughton also suggested that we may wind up making significant cut in a department rather than the 3% reductions in all.
- Mr. Allen noted that departments offering options of what could be lost with 3% cuts would be useful. That puts pressure on the Finance Committee to make decisions rather than putting the burden on department heads.
- For FY12, Mr. Naughton would like to look at the design of budget forms going out and perhaps revising them.
- Mr. Naughton put out question asked of other departments regarding using the FRCOG for services. Mr. Abbondanzio said that we get a lot of services out of the FRCOG, especially for transportation and brownfields. The FRCOG is heavily involved in energy

efficiency block grants and other projects. If we used them to replace what the Town's Planner does we couldn't afford the fee for service.

- There was additional general discussion of towns working towards shared services.

Mr. Abbondanzio left at 7:35 PM.

Minutes

FC Moved: To approve the minutes of January 13, 2010 as amended.
Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

BOS Moved: To approve the minutes of January 13, 2010 as amended.
Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Preparation for Meeting with DESE –Draft Agenda, Attendance

Mr. Naughton passed out his draft agenda. This is in the minutes file.
There was discussion about details of the agenda and discussion of how the meeting should be run

Updated Affordable Assessment Calculation

- GMRSD has requested the most current version of Montague's affordable assessment calculation with background information this can go on next school committee agenda. Mr. Naughton will prepare and present this.
- Next week's agenda will include a review and update of revenue assumptions for FY11.
- Ms. Olsen reviewed the latest calculation. This document is in the minutes file.

The Board of Selectmen adjourned at 8:18PM

Mr. Singleton will be invited to come to next week's meeting.

Next Meetings: January 27, 2010 at 1:00 PM (DESE)
January 27, 2010 at 6:00 PM

Adjourned at 8:20 PM

Respectfully Submitted,
Carolyn Olsen