

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
February 8, 2012

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Meeting Date: February 8, 2012

Called to Order: 6:04 PM

Location: 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

Finance Committee Members Present: John Hanold, Michael Naughton, and Roy Rosenblatt

Board of Selectmen Members Present: Christopher Boutwell and Mark Fairbrother

Others Present: Frank Abbondanzio (Town Administrator), Carolyn Olsen (Town Accountant), Bob Trombley (Water Pollution Control Facility Superintendent), Eric Meals, John Little, Mike Little, Tim Little, Tina Tyler (Water Pollution Control Facilities Employees) Tom Bergeron (Department of Public Works Superintendent), and Gina McNeely (Director of Health)

Minutes

Board of Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 25, 2012.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 25, 2012.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Board of Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of February 1, 2012.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of February 1, 2012.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Fiscal Year 2013 Budget Discussions

Department of Public Works subsidiary budget within the Water Pollution Control Facility budget.

- Mr. Bergeron stated this funding is for the Department of Public Works to maintain main sewer lines in town including cleaning and repair. Expenses are charged when Department of Public Works employees work on sewer lines and for general maintenance of the sewer system.
- This budget has been at this level for many years. While the entire amount is not usually used, it is requested so that it is available in the event of an emergency. Both Superintendents prefer that the funding level remain.

Water Pollution Control Facility

- Mr. Trombley introduced his entire staff, all of whom are here tonight.

- Mr. Trombley provided an overview of what his department does. The sewer system serves 7200 Montague residents and part of Gill. The sewage from the Millers Falls section of town goes to Erving for treatment.
- The treatment plant receives about 1 million gallons a day and operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- Operators are all required to be licensed by the state. The facility is rated as a Grade 5 during week and a Grade 4 on weekends due to reduced flow. These designations require operators with a Grade 4 license during the week and a Grade 3 license on weekends. Operators are required to have 20 contact hours of annual training to maintain their license.
- There were 9 employees in 1993, and there are currently 6 employees. The Fiscal Year 2013 budget request includes one new full-time position. The supplemental budgets reflect options in personnel, especially regarding operator pay.
- Budget trends over the last three years have allowed a stable residential sewer rate for those 3 years. Some of the savings have been from a reduction in solids handling costs (\$84,000/year), having only one person on call instead of two, and no longer have two people on each call in unless required.
- Mr. Hanold asked about the shift of expenses in the last 18 months. The shift has been to facility costs, and the future focus is in process control, nitrogen reduction requirements, and reducing the annual inflow & infiltration surcharge to the town.
- The Fournier rotary press may allow the town to increase revenues by taking in sludge from other towns. Results from testing have been favorable.
- The plant also just started up their solar hot water heater.
- Mr. Naughton asked about high expenditures for part time and temporary wages and overtime. One temporary employee worked into the fall and this cost was offset by savings in employment services. Part of the overtime cost was driven by pump station issues, which have been remedied, and there was scheduled overtime for the nitrogen reduction program to reduce amount of nitrogen going into the river.
- Mr. Naughton also asked about inflow & infiltration. He has heard that some efforts have been made to reduce it, but are there still things that can be done to reduce it further?
- About 45% of the daily flow is inflow & infiltration (clean water from storm drains, subsurface leaks etc.). The average in New England is 35-40%. There are efforts that can be made to further reduce the percentage.
- Greenfield has a program to replace the sewer pipes that go from the home to the street (with the permission of the homeowner) which eliminates leaks in the line.
- The Combined Sewer Overflow study recommended \$50,000 for smoke testing in certain areas, especially downtown, but even if you remove the water from the system, you still have the question of where will it go. If the water goes onto streets in the winter it will result in ice.
- There's a lot of ground water and residential sump pumps and while you can recognize what's there, there is no real answer to how to fix the problem.

- Montague has 4,100 catch basins, many of which overflow. This would be intensified if all of the inflow and infiltration were fixed.
- Inflow & infiltration is also good for flushing solids through the system. You need to analyze the cost to remove versus the cost to treat.
- Mr. Abbondanzio asked about potential future costs for nitrogen reduction. How much of work is permit driven (required), and are we spending a lot of money when we may not be required to do so? The answer depends on who you talk to. In Massachusetts nitrogen reduction is a concern because of potential suits from downstream states like Connecticut. At some point there will be a limit on nitrogen levels. Because we're on a large river, dilution works in our favor. Montague will probably be seeing limits in the permit after the next National Pollution Discharge Elimination System Permit renewal in October of 2013. Millers Falls may have more stringent limits because they discharge into a smaller river.
- For Fiscal Year 2013, the part-time, temporary wage budget goes to zero, because the work done by those employees will now be done by the new laborer.
- Mid-year expenditures for Other Technical/Professional are high because some of this year's work was not included in budget. The level of effort will not be as high for 2013.
- The current year budget is still on track, although tighter than it has been at this point in past years.

Department of Public Works

- Mr. Bergeron gave an overview the responsibilities of the Department of Public Works, including building maintenance, streets, parks, solid waste and snow removal.
- Solid waste cost for 2013 increases 3% per contract. Collection for both trash and recycling is contracted out.
- Mr. Hanold asked if the DPW is limited in what they can do for buildings and grounds maintenance because of budgeting issues or staffing levels. It's mostly a staffing issue, which is why Mr. Bergeron submitted a supplemental request for an additional groundskeeper. In 2000, the DPW had 20 employees including 3 employees for parks. There is now only one employee for parks. This one employee mows all baseball fields, playgrounds, parks, commons and areas around public buildings, maintains benches, bleachers, and does leaf pickup. In the winter he plows, and then he and 2 other employees stay and clear public sidewalks. There is also one building maintenance employee who is frustrated with amount of work he has. Aging buildings have more issues. Recently the department has spent a lot of time at Strathmore, and the Shea Theater. Sometimes Mr. Bergeron has to pull a laborer off another job to help with building maintenance.
- Another supplemental request is for another mechanic. While some equipment has been upgraded, the current mechanic is overwhelmed with maintenance and issues with newer equipment that takes longer to fix.

- Mr. Bergeron noted that some repair and maintenance budgets are under-spent because no one is available to do the work.
- Regarding issues like painting, the town hall is maintained as well as can be expected for his staffing levels. While Mr. Bergeron can have prisoners do the actual painting, he doesn't want to spend \$1000 for paint from his budget because he may need it for something else. The budget is responsible for several buildings, and it only stretches so far.
- Another issue that has been raised is replacing the flooring for several offices that still have old asbestos tiles. After checking on the cost, it was recommended to encapsulate the old tiles and put new tile over it. But doing this will require most of his crew a full day to clear offices, having someone work on a Saturday or Sunday at overtime to oversee the work, and his crew will have to move everything back.
- The DPW ends up doing work for all departments in town including the school and fire districts, and they work well together.
- Mr. Boutwell asked about condition of fleet and if any surprises are in stores. We have several newer items, including a new loader paid from Chapter 90. Vehicles are okay, but there is a lack of maintenance due to lack of staff, including expired inspection stickers.
- Mr. Bergeron is requesting a new 6-wheel dump truck this year.
- The heavy equipment is not in bad shape, other than oldest bucket truck. The bucket is okay but the truck is starting to go. The oldest loader is a 1997 that is used for plowing.
- Fiscal Year 2013 is last year of lease payments on the current leases. Mr. Hanold noted that he prefers buying to leasing to save money.
- Mr. Rosenblatt asked about the new equipment request. This is a \$100,000 for the discretionary account which can be used for major repairs as well as purchases. Mr. Bergeron noted that this has been very helpful for the department. This account has also paid for pickup trucks.
- Mr. Bergeron noted that the discretionary fund request was reduced to \$50,000 for the current year. This appropriation is sometimes cut in order to get another piece of equipment, but he still needs the full funding.
- Mr. Naughton has heard the need to hire more people and acknowledges that, but we need to consider whether the town can afford to maintain itself and do everything we're expected to do.

Board of Health Issues

- Ms. McNeely provided a list of quarantines, exposures to rabies and animal bites in past years, noting that every report of a bite requires 2 visits.
- The stipends for the inspectors would be in addition to the health inspector wages.
- The supplemental request for a part-time health inspector is for a benefitted employee.

Budget Category for Board of Health

- Ms. McNeely has requested that the budget for the Board of Health be shown in the Public Safety category of the operating budget rather than in the Human Services category.
- The current categories are the result of department numbers assigned by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Uniform Municipal Accounting System. While this categorization is required for state financial reports, it does not require that the same categorization be used for other purposes.
- Ms. McNeely feels that most of what the Board of Health does relates to issues of public safety, and that showing the budget with other public safety areas is a more accurate reflection of the work done. Public health is absolutely public safety and to be grouped with the Council on Aging and Veterans' benefits gives a very different public perception.
- Mr. Boutwell noted that since 9/11, board of health is designated as emergency responder and much of the new workload comes from state emergency management.
- Mr. Rosenblatt also thinks the change in position would help town meeting understand the impact on things like housing issues – get wording from recorder.
- It would improve the public's perception, group the department with other first responders, and has no effect on town recordkeeping.

Mr. Naughton thinks people have made good cases for adding staff, but isn't sure town can afford them.

Mr. Abbondanzio anticipates one more year of austerity before increasing staffing.

Topics not anticipated within the 48 hour posting requirement

Mr. Hanold encouraged everyone to think about the supplemental requests and how approved requests would be placed on the warrant.

List of Documents and Exhibits –

- Minutes of January 25, 2012
- Minutes of February 1, 2012

Next Meetings

- 6:00 PM February 15, 2012 Board of Assessors/Information Technology
Board of Selectmen – various budgets
- 6:00 PM February 22, 2012 Franklin County Technical School, Library
Council on Aging, Parks and Recreation
Supplemental Budget Requests – all departments
- 6:00 PM February 29, 2012 Final Votes Schedules I and II
- 6:00 PM March 7, 2012 Gill-Montague Regional School District

Adjourned 8:15 PM