

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

January 29, 2014

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**Meeting Date:** January 29, 2014

**Called to Order:** 6:00 PM

**Location:** 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

**Finance Committee Members Present:** John Hanold, Michael Naughton, Sharon Kennaugh, Lynn Reynolds and Lisa Adams. Greg Garrison was absent.

**Selectmen Present:** Mark Fairbrother, Michael Nelson and Christopher Boutwell.

**Others Present:** Town Administrator Frank Abbondanzio, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Director of Assessing and IT Coordinator Barbara Miller

**Minutes**

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 22, 2014.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 1 Abstained

Mr. Naughton arrived at 6:01 PM

Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 22, 2014.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Board of Assessors Budget**

The main change in the Assessors' budget request is a \$350 increase in the Travel expense. This increase is due in part to the increased travel needed for data collection for the full measure and list to be done in Fiscal Year 2015 and in part to travel for seminars and workshops. Much of this expense occurs later in the fiscal year.

Ms. Miller was asked about the risk that an adverse Appellate Tax Board outcome will occur by the end of Fiscal Year 2015 and the risk that it would exceed the forecasted overlay amounts.

- The Accountant has included four hundred thousand in overlay for the proposed Fiscal Year 2015 budget, which is similar to the amount we used in Fiscal Year 2014 but is considerably higher than the Overlay amounts of the prior years. Overlay is used to reimburse the taxpayer according to the year the tax was assessed and is not contingent upon the date the case is settled. IE, regardless of whether the Fiscal Year 2014 assessment to FirstLight is decided by the ATB during Fiscal Year 2014 or Fiscal Year 2015, the overlay amount used to reimburse FirstLight will be the amount included in the Fiscal Year 2014 Tax Rate RECAP. There is likely to be additional exposure in Fiscal Year 2015 because the Fiscal Year 2014 case isn't likely be settled before the values are finalized for Fiscal Year 2015. Only time will tell.
- As stated during the Tax Classification hearing, if FirstLight should receive an extremely favorable decision from the Appellate Tax Board (ATB) we will not have enough in overlay to cover it. The potential exposure is over a million dollars, and our budget can't possibly absorb such a substantial increase to the overlay account. The additional amounts included in overlay in Fiscal Year 2014 and proposed for Fiscal Year 2015 will cover up to a nine million dollar valuation adjustment decision by the ATB. If that is not sufficient the Assessors will request special legislation to allow the town to raise the deficit over multiple years and if necessary to allow the town to borrow the funds necessary. Obviously, if there are monies available within the levy limit when the tax

rate RECAP for Fiscal Year 2015 is being completed Ms. Miller will pad the overlay as much as possible but she doesn't think other budgets should be stripped in an effort to sufficiently fund the overlay for a worst case scenario. Ms. Miller is comfortable with the four hundred thousand for Fiscal Year 2015's allowance for abatements and exemptions.

### **Board of Assessors Special Article**

The Board of Assessors has requested \$8,500 to upgrade their assessing software. The upgrade will allow changes to be brought forward to future years which will eliminate the duplication of data entry for preliminary bills. The upgraded software will also run on the terminal server so that the Assessors will be able to provide access to the assessing data to all departments.

Mr. Hanold asked if there was additional need for the upgrade beyond these two items, what caused the increase in the cost from the estimate provided last year and whether at least part of the increase was due to the inclusion of more functionality.

- Unfortunately the initial cost was so much lower last year because Patriot Properties was aggressive in the beginning and priced the upgrade very low to offer an incentive to those interested in committing to the upgrade early. Ms. Miller has been in contact with Patriot and is trying to negotiate with them, since she had not been made aware that the price she was quoted last year was an incentive. The negotiation Ms. Miller is attempting is keeping the cost at \$8,500 but instead of limiting the conversion to three prior year databases, she is asking that they convert all of our prior years. The old data is used quite frequently and is available on the current system so having it available on the new system will be helpful but the cost is \$700 per database. Ms. Miller has provided the documentation on AssessPro 5.0.
- The benefits Ms. Miller is most interested in include:
  - The upgraded software is capable of running on the terminal server and therefore the assessors' office can replace existing workstations with thin client workstations. The Director's workstation is only four years old but the Assessing Technician's is 10 years old and the Assessing Clerk's is 8 years old. The cost of thin client workstations is half that of regular workstations.
  - There are certain things like abatements from the prior year which affect the preliminary bills and must also be on the current database. But there are other changes which only effect the next fiscal year. Due to the semi-annual with annual preliminary bills system, the tax payments and abatement applications are not due until April or May first. The Assessors' office can't wait that long to begin making changes in preparation for the next fiscal year valuations therefore Ms. Miller creates what she calls the ABT database, which is the one used to create the preliminary bills. Ownership changes and abatement valuation changes and some new construction get changed for the preliminary bills but also needs to be changed on the live database. The greatest benefit is that the newer version of AssessPro will allow changes to be made to an older database (the ABT database) and allow the change to be made to a current database at the same time. But if we only want the change made on the ABT database and not on the current one, this type of change can be done as well.

### **Information Technology Special Article**

Ms. Miller was asked if the continuation of the \$8,200 annual appropriation is still adequate for the multi-year plan for IT resources. \$6,200 of the Fiscal Year 2013 special article was spent in Fiscal Year 2014, and there is a balance of \$6,700 in the current article.

Ms. Miller stated that the special article for the IT hardware and software should remain at \$8,200. To date during Fiscal Year 2014 the amount spent on hardware and software is \$7,700; there was money available from the previous year's article and therefore we have just begun to use the article written for Fiscal Year 2014. There are projects yet to do this fiscal year that will significantly decrease the balance of the current appropriation.

Ms. Miller noted that the IT Coordinator Stipend provides for about 1 hour per week of her time but she spends far more than that on computer issues. After Ms. Miller left the meeting, Mr. Naughton said he has noticed that not all minutes on the website are searchable and thinks there could be more oversight and coordination. Mr. Fairbrother and Mr. Boutwell are interested in hearing Mr. Naughton's thoughts. The committees agreed that this was worthy of future discussion.

**MMA Meeting**

Mr. Abbondanzio spoke briefly about the recent Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA) meeting in Boston. The main points he brought back are:

- There is a chance for a modest increase in State Aid to towns, so our currently level funded estimate remains conservative.
- There is some hope for a modest increase in Chapter 90 amounts.
- The State needs to get a grip on the state's OPEB liability for retiree health insurance. One major issue is whether retiree contributions to health insurance can be increased.

**Topics not anticipated within in the 48 hour posting requirements-**

Mr. Abbondanzio distributed copies of the questions to departments and the answers received.

Mr. Naughton said that the GMRSD presented a \$19.75 million budget for Fiscal Year 2015, which the School Committee has not approved.

- The all-funds budget request increased \$664K (3%), the local assessments increased \$800K (9%) and Montague's assessment is \$8,693,882, an increase of \$711K (8%) and is \$445K (5%) higher than the current affordable assessment.
- The Superintendent described the budget as very preliminary numbers reflecting what the district wanted, and indicated that the discussion would move to what they can reasonably expect to get.

Update next agenda to include possible response to the preliminary budget information from GM.

**Meeting Adjourned at 7:07 PM**

**List of Documents and Exhibits**

- Minutes January 22, 2014
- YTD expenses of IT Special Articles
- Finance Committee Questions to Departments and Answer (shown below)
- Information on AssessPro 5.0.

**Next Meetings:**

February 5, 2014	Police/Dispatch budgets, GMRSD briefing
February 12, 2014	WPCF, DPW budgets
February 19, 2014	Libraries, FCTS
February 26, 2014	reserved for snow days

March 5, 2014 GMRSD

**Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Questions to Departments and Responses**

**113 Town Meeting**

The narrative mentions a \$500 increase for prep/ mailing a Town Meeting Handbook but it doesn't show in the (level-funded) request.

That is an oversight. The budget should have been increased by \$500 to reflect this expenditure.

**122 Selectboard**

1. It appears that a Town Administrator's Budget will be printed (\$1500), in addition to the Finance Committee Report (\$280 in Dept 131 and \$300 in Dept 135). What is the expected scope/content of this additional report, and the rationale for two so different printing projects?

There is a \$1,500 line item for printing of the Town Administrator's budget shown as "Other Professional/Technical". We might just want to put it on the website and leave it up to people to read it electronically. I could just limit the number of hard copies to the members of the Select Board and Finance Committee.

The eleven "new initiative" objectives do seem ambitious. You should realized, though, that the preparation of the "Town Administrator Budget" will address multiple objectives. Also, I have some large projects that are near completion and just require follow through. I have also listed objectives that are really "coordinating" in nature. I will be supporting other people in the implementation of important projects. This could require my presence on a planning committee in some cases, or actually taking the lead role in others.

2. Since new staffing is not requested, the list of eleven "new initiatives" in the narrative seems ambitious, unless existing activities are expected to decrease. There is a requested three hours/week increase for the Executive Assistant, but most initiatives seem to involve other parts of this dept's responsibilities. What changes do the Selectboard (via the Town Administrator) have in mind?

The three extra hours of the Executive Assistant are clearly needed to get back to a staffing level that we had before Wendy chose to work fewer hours and spend more time with her family. Her situation has changed and we need the extra hours to get just basic tasks done. A lot of her time is spend just dealing with meeting minutes and licenses.

**135 Accountant**

1. See first Selectboard question.

The \$300 for printing/bookbinding in the Accountant's budget is for binding permanent records.

2. The increase in Office Supplies seem large. Is this a cyclical or replenishment need?

The increase is a request for a new printer (the current printer was purchased 11/16/06 as noted in the lower area of the budget tab.

**141 Assessor**

1. On the Revenue side, the provisions for New Growth and A & E are at least as conservative as last year. Is there any risk that an adverse ATB outcome will:

- a). occur by the end of FY2015, and

- b). Exceed what the forecasted Assessor's Overlay and A & E balances are?

According to the Accountant she has included four hundred thousand in overlay for the proposed FY2015 budget, which is similar to the amount we used in FY2014 but is considerably higher than the Overlay amounts of the prior years. Overlay is used to reimburse the taxpayer according to the year the tax was assessed and is not contingent upon the date the case is settled. I.e. regardless of whether the FY2014 assessment to FirstLight is decided by the ATB during FY2014 or FY2015 the overlay amount used to reimburse FirstLight will be the amount included in the FY2014 Tax Rate RECAP. There is likely to be additional exposure in FY2015 because the FY2014 case isn't likely be settled before the values are finalized for FY2015. Only time will tell.

As I stated during the Tax Classification hearing, if FirstLight should receive an extremely favorable decision from the Appellate Tax Board we will not have enough in overlay to cover it. The potential exposure is over a million dollars, our budget can't possibly absorb such a substantial increase to the overlay account. The additional amounts included in overlay in FY2014 and proposed for FY2015 will cover up to a nine million dollar valuation adjustment decision by the ATB. If that is not sufficient we will request special legislation to allow us to raise the deficit over multiple years and if necessary to allow the town to borrow the funds necessary. Obviously, if there are monies available within the levy limit when the tax rate RECAP for FY2015 is being completed I will pad the overlay as much as possible but I don't think other budgets should be stripped in an effort to sufficiently fund the overlay for a worst case scenario. I am comfortable with the proposal of four hundred thousand for FY2015.

2. On Operating Budget side, the Travel increase seems high relative to FY2014 to-date but similar to FY2013 final. Is this due to a seasonal spending pattern?

The travel spending is seasonal in that the property inspections for building permits are done in the spring and early summer and the annual summer conference of the Mass. Association of Assessing Officers is held in June.

3. On Special Article side, is a continuation of \$8,200 for Computers still adequate for the multi-year plan for IT resources? Unused balance to date is approx. \$7,700.

The special article for the IT hardware and software should remain at \$8,200. To date during FY2014 the amount spent on hardware and software is \$7,700; there was money available from the previous years article and therefore we have just begun to use the article written for FY2014. There are projects yet to do this fiscal year.

4. On Special Article side, would you tell us a little about the need and added functionality of the AssessPro article? I recall you told us last year that it could wait till FY2015, and in the process the request has grown from \$4,400 to \$5,000 to \$8,500. Is this a later quote, or more functionality included?

Unfortunately the initial cost was so much lower last year because “They were aggressive in the beginning and priced the upgrade very low to offer an incentive to those interested in committing to the upgrade early.” I’ve been in contact with Patriot and am trying to negotiate with them, since I had not been made aware that the price I was quoted last year was an incentive. The negotiation I am attempting is the cost at \$8,500 but instead of limiting the conversion to three prior year databases, I am asking that they convert all of our prior years. The old data is used quite frequently and is available on the current system so having it available on the new system will be helpful but the cost is \$700 per database. I’ve attached the documentation on Assesspro 5.0 to this email.

In short the benefits I’m most excited about include:

Its being capable of running on the terminal server and therefore the assessors office can replace existing workstations with thin clients. The Director’s workstation is only four years old but the Assessing Technician’s is 10 years old and the Clerk’s is 8 years old. The cost of thin clients is half that of workstations. Also there are certain things like abatements from the prior year which effect the preliminary bills and must also be on the current database. But there are other changes which only effect the next fiscal year. Due to the semi-annual with annual preliminary bills system, the tax payments and abatement applications are not due until April or May first. The assessors’ office can’t wait that long to begin making changes in preparation for the next fiscal year valuations therefore I create what I call the ABT database, which is the one I use to create the preliminary bills. Ownership changes and abatement valuation changes and some new construction get changed for the preliminary bills but also needs to be changed on the live database. The greatest benefit is that the newer version of Assesspro will allow changes to be made to an older database (my ABT database) and allow the change to be made to a current database at the same time. But if we only want the change made on the ABT database and not on the current one, that can be done as well.

#### **145 Treasurer**

1. Fiscal Year 2014 spending to date on Tax Title work seems modest but the Fiscal Year 2015 request is still \$20 K. Does this reflect new cases or delayed work on existing ones?

By no means has the tax taking process slowed down. In the fall of 2013, we had an additional 17 parcels go into tax title. This brings the total number of parcels in tax title to 30. In Fiscal Year 2014 alone, the Town has taken possession of 2 parcels, and in the beginning of February we are scheduled to take possession of one more.

Because the tax title process moves very slowly through the courts, some years more will be spent in the budget than others. In the spring of 2014, I will take the next step and file a petition to foreclose in land court for an additional 6 parcels. The cost for this is \$515.00 per parcel. This cost does not include any fees that the Attorney charges.

2. Additional P/T Hours appears to be a new request. What is expected to be different in Fiscal Year 2015?

The additional part-time hours only show separately in the budget request. The amount is included in the total part-time wages budget, but broken out in the budget file to provide more information. In Fiscal Year 2011 the part time staff person was working 25 hour per week. When she retired, that position was cut to 21 hours per week. After that time I

would budget an additional amount just in case I needed the extra help during the tax season or if someone was on vacation.

### **151 Legal**

The Board of Health department narrative requests apparently-increased funding from Legal for remediation of substandard housing. The Legal Narrative appears to assume an offsetting reduction in other cases to accommodate this within a flat request. Is this likely/correct?

Mr. Abbondanzio and Ms. McNeely are in total agreement that some legal resources are needed to implement the Attorney General's abandoned buildings initiative. In looking at our legal caseload Mr. Abbondanzio thinks that the Town has resolved, or is close to resolving, some of the more thorny legal cases. This will free up some of the budget for use in the Attorney General's program. This is why the legal budget has not been reduced. Obviously, as soon as anyone says there's capacity in the legal budget, the Town will have new cases to deal with that it did not anticipate.

### **161 Clerk**

There was once some talk about the Clerk needing more safe capacity, but issue has not resurfaced. In the past Mr. Hanold has suggested a coordinated/cooperative plan for adequate storage among Town Hall departments. Since no mention appears for Fiscal Year 2015, has that plan occurred, thus eliminating his earlier concern?

The need still exists for additional storage space that is efficient and provides room for growth or a vault that is fireproof and climate controlled. This not only affects my office, but many other departments as well.

I have been working with Chris Chartrand from King Information Systems, Inc. He has provided me with a legal sized fireproof file cabinet for half the cost of a new one. I bought it second hand from a credit union in Springfield. This will buy me one to two years needed space.

Chris recently came into town hall and met with all department heads that were concerned with the lack of storage space. The departments that attended were the Assessors, Board of Health, Tax Collector/Treasurer, Water Pollution Control Facility, Selectmen's Secretary, Retirement and of course the Town Clerk's office. He is coming to Town Hall February 20<sup>th</sup> to do a walk through, which is a free assessment to determine how best we can acquire more efficient space and future growth. From there an analyst comes to Town Hall for \$505.00 a day to analyze and recommend tools, shelving, databases etc. to achieve a more operable and efficient town hall as a whole or by department. The best estimate from Chris is that this would take 2 to 3 days at the most. From there it is up to us to proceed to maximum storage ability.

I have also looked at other options within Town Hall concerning my office space. My office is just too small for the amount of equipment and records that I must have and maintain that will never go away. I did present an option to Frank. This option would involve trading

offices. Wendy could move into my office and I and my files would move into her office with Mandy and all her files and equipment moving into the connecting conference room. This would be a room where Mandy and I can still work together, but I can have a smaller space unto myself like all the other department heads in the building and work in a more quiet space. This would give us plenty of room for future growth and I could purchase my fireproof cabinets that I so desperately need and also provide the quiet space that I need, but still be present and available to the public. Frank was not thrilled with this idea, because he did not want to lose the downstairs conference room.

So, then I had a second idea. This would involve the Retirement System, which does not fall under the "umbrella" of the Town, to relocate downstairs where SPS was renting space from the Town while working on the bridge or moving to another building such as a school building, etc. This, added to my first option, would allow the town to use the current Retirement office as the downstairs conference room. At one time the Veterans Agent was housed in town hall, but was relocated for one reason or another. I love Shari and I hate to have her relocate, but my back is against the wall and her department is not part of the town. This would give us a conference room on the first floor and solve the space issue. Frank was unsure if it was worth the time, effort, cost and possible hurt feelings that would arise from this proposition.

I am open to any and all suggestions that would allow my office to remain on the first floor of Town Hall.

## **211 Police**

1. Staffing needs some explanation: is GMRSD indeed ending the need for a School Resource Officer at the same time FCTS is requesting one? If so, why the added new position labeled SRO? Won't Doyle simply shift his assignment from Gill-Montague to the Tech School?

The GMRSD gave up their School Resource Officer (SRO) a few years ago due to the expense (I assume). I would love to have a resource officer in the GMRSD and hopefully one day funding will be available to make this happen again. Detective Doyle is not a School Resource Officer. He is currently a Juvenile Detective. At one time he was the SRO but has since had his assignment changed.

The request from the Tech School for a SRO was a complete surprise to me. They are willing to fund this position entirely. We did not end the GMRSD SRO to start the Tech School one. They are two completely different positions. The GMRSD SRO had ended some years ago when an SRO grant ran out, which helped cover the costs of an SRO. This is a completely new idea from the Tech School and because of our current staffing level I can't and don't have the man power to assign an officer to the Tech School to help. That is why they must pay the cost of hiring an additional (16<sup>th</sup>) Police Officer if they want one assigned there.

2. While recognizing that the Tech School is reimbursing the full cost of the SRO (different arrangement from Gill-Montague) and that the revenue appears elsewhere, the cost/revenue figures seem to shift (\$53 K in narrative, more elsewhere) which may be an issue of changing definition of "Full Cost."



The Tech School is paying the "full cost". I could not include and show all of the expenses in my Police budget due to their being no line item to show them. Things such as the town's share of the employee's retirement, Medicare costs, health insurance costs, life insurance, etc. had no place in my budget to show these expenses. However these expenses are listed and covered in a Memorandum of Understanding that we have with the Tech School showing they must pay all expenses and it specifically lists each one.

3. Does the K-9 function follow Officer Dempsey, without impairing his availability for described need for detective activity?

Officer Dempsey's official title at this point has been changed to Detective and this is now his main priority. He will be using his K-9 to help out until a new handler and dog is put into service. Officer Jim Ruddock has been assigned to be the next K-9 Officer replacing John Dempsey. Jim is currently attending training and will have a new dog sometime in February. Once Jim and the new dog are trained, they will become the permanent K-9 Officers. John Dempsey will serve as a backup until his dog is too old to help out. I am told we may get two more years out of John Dempsey's K-9.

4. It appears that Officer Whalley was hired as part of back-fill (for Dempsey replacing Laster replacing LaPointe). Is there any other assignment change in the department that contributes to the staffing/salary changes? Noted greater Community Outreach comments.

Officer Kyle Whalley was hired to replace Officer Chris Lapointe who resigned in November. Our staffing levels have not changed, only assignments. Pay budget should be the same or maybe a little less since Whalley is at a lower pay grade than Lapointe was when he left.

5. With the requested increase in Training are all mandatory and recommended classes being provided or are we still in "catch-up mode"?

We are current with all our training at this point, however this is continuously ongoing. We have to stay up to date and the state mandates when certain training must take place or be completed. We have sent or are sending officers to become instructors in some of the required training areas so that we can do some training in house and hopefully at a lower cost.

We should never have to be in catch up mode again if I do my job correctly.

6. Police Department - I understand the town purchases a new cruiser each year. How many police vehicles do we have at the present time?

We have a Chief's administrative vehicle, 2 unmarked Detective Vehicles, a K-9 vehicle and 5 marked police patrol vehicles.

7. Some narratives lack specific detail on personnel: how many people are in the department, what their job functions are, whether they are full time or part time, etc. Examples include police and DPW.

The Police Department currently consists of 1 Chief, 4 Sergeants, 3 Detectives, and 7 Patrolman. We have 6 part time Reserve Police Officers and are currently in the process of putting 4 more to work to help us.

8. Some narratives lack specifics on measurable performance indicators, including \$\$ collected for various permits, fees, etc. Examples include police, DPW, building department.

Annual Report of the Montague Police Department for the year ending  
December 31, 2013

2011	2012	2013	
15,021	17,049	18,086	Calls for Service
3,868	3,286	2,967	911 Emergency Calls
600	526	454	Persons arrested by the Police
418	355	332	Persons were male, 12 were juveniles
182	171	122	Person were female, 7 were juveniles
607	708	1569	Victims of crime
96	77	70	Restraining orders served
42	15	8	Non criminal Marijuana citations
41	20	17	Alarm by-law tickets
52	62	35	Registered Sex Offenders

**TOTAL REPORTABLE MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS OVER \$1,000 IN VALUE**

2011	2012	2013
144	137	137

**TOTAL REPORTABLE MOTOR VEHICLE ACCIDENTS UNDER \$1,000 IN VALUE**

2011	2012	2013
16	12	20

**TOTAL MOTOR VEHICLES ACCIDENTS**

2011	2012	2013
160	149	157

**INJURED PERSONS**

2011	2012	2013	
20	14	21	Operators
2	0	7	Passengers
0	2	1	Pedestrians
1	1	0	Bicyclist
0	2	0	Motorcyclists
1	0	1	Fatalities
<b>24</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Total Injuries</b>

**MOTOR VEHICLE CITATIONS**

2011	2012	2013
1345 (Fines \$19,630)	1263 (Fines \$14,115)	901 (Fines \$9,528.00)

**FIREARMS REGISTRATION: PERMITS TO CARRY**

2011	2012	2013
162	208	256

**PARKING TICKETS ISSUED**

2011	2012	2013
442 (Fines \$8,600)	496 (Fines \$9,770)	542 (Fines \$10,510)

**HOUSE CHECKS WHILE PEOPLE WERE AWAY**

2011	2012	2013
60	40	71

**SUMMONS SERVED**

2011	2012	2013
355	280	244

**211 Dispatch**

1. It appears that staffing is unchanged, and therefore the sizable increase in salary cost must be due to new Grade assignments per Pay & Class recommendations (assuming these positions are part of TOMEA, and therefore wages are subject to change after mediation is complete?).

We budgeted for an anticipated change in pay due to the Pay and Class study. Currently the union is still in negotiations however we have to anticipate that the contract will be

settled soon and at the very least the Pay and Class recommendations would be implemented. The raises were included in the budget and represent a worst case scenario.

2. The rise in TFFD Shift isn't entirely clear in the narrative. Is the TFFD item an "add" to Dispatch salaries, paid by the Town but offset by revenue from TFFD elsewhere? Reimbursement isn't visible in Town Revenue forecast. Also, Is the actual "add" rising, in terms of either hourly rate or number of hours?

In Fiscal Year 2013 the Turners Falls Fire Dept paid a fee to the Town equal to 50 cents an hour for the dispatchers. This was an "add" or additional pay for the dispatchers for their help with taking Fire calls. We had to add this fee amount to our annual budget however this fee was reimbursed by the Fire Dept. Our budget line item 001-5-212-5146 titled "TFFD Shift" shows this cost. This year the Fire Dept agreed to pay a fee equal to 75 cents an hour. This is listed under the same line item in my Fiscal Year 2015 budget at a higher cost than last year but the Fire Dept will once again reimburse the town for this expense, costing the town nothing for this. The reimbursement from the TFFD is included in the Local Estimated Receipts.

3. Is Training simply occurring in the second half of Fiscal Year 2014, or is there a change in requirements/need (or greater proportion funded by grants)? Do these plans affect the Fiscal Year 2015 request?

The state has changed the dispatch training requirements. Dispatchers are now required to attend training annually and stay current on many aspects of the 911 system. This training will be an expense forever or until the state once again changes the requirements. Without this mandatory training, our dispatchers can't dispatch. All required training has been budgeted for.

4. Some narratives lack specific detail on personnel: how many people are in the department, what their job functions are, whether they are full time or part time, etc. Examples include police and DPW.

Dispatch has 1 Dispatch manager/Chief's Administrative Secretary and 4 full time Dispatchers. There are 3 part time dispatchers.

### **241 Bldg Inspection**

Your narrative mentions the per-inspection rate is unchanged "as outlined in the Selectmen's budget guidelines." Is this satisfactory, in your opinion, and at what point do you expect to request an increase?

The current rate is not really satisfactory, but the budget directions did not allow for an increase. An increase will be requested next year, most likely to \$28.00 or \$29.00 per inspection.

### **420 Public Works**

#### **Solid Waste**

Is the reduction in Solid Waste Removal based on a firm-fixed quote or a variable-cost based on forecasted volume?

The reduction comes from the cost per ton reduction in a new contract from Republic that Mr. Abbondanzio is negotiating.

### **Staffing**

A forecasted retirement did not occur in Fiscal Year 2014, and is provided for again in Fiscal Year 2015. As of January 2015 three workers will have 30 + years service, and four more 25 +; how likely is it that substantially more buy-out and successor-training costs will occur in Fiscal Year 2015?

One employee was to retire in January 2014 and found out in September that he had to stay on until August of 2014 to get his full retirement. As far as we know none these employees will be retiring in Fiscal Year 2015. One employee has talked about retiring for three years now and then claims he cannot afford to so he could change his mind at any time.

### **Non-Salary Operating Budget**

Requested increases generally follow Fiscal Year 2014 experience; is it true -- as in the past - - that overruns in one area can generally be managed by deferred-spending (underruns) elsewhere?

Yes, because we have a bottom line budget.

### **Special Articles**

1. The current balance of the DPW Discretionary Fund is \$53 K or so; what use is expected for the rest of Fiscal Year 2014 and is expected demand in Fiscal Year 2015 closer to \$75 K than \$100 K?

Out of the \$53,000 the DPW will be purchasing a new tractor at a cost of \$25,000 to replace a 1991 that we are now using for snow blowing the town's sidewalks, plus we still have a couple of larger repairs in the works.

2. The Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) is presumably discussing future equipment replacement needs, and Finance Committee would appreciate a word or two about known Fiscal Year 2015 impact as of 12 February, since some could be candidates for Taxation funding rather than Stabilization.

The DPW is only requesting lease payments and no other equipment in 2015.

3. The narrative mentions a variety of possible improvements to Town buildings and facilities (Town Hall insulation, windows and A/C; Park Building bathrooms doors & insulation; sewer-line inspection and possible replacement; needs assessment for Library and Senior Center; etc.) but only the Park bathrooms have been specifically planned -- and they are in the Special Town Meeting warrant, not Fiscal Year 2015 requests. Do you plan to pursue any other of these ideas in Fiscal Year 2015?

More research needs to happen before putting any request in.

4. The narrative and an early CIC packet mentions “New DPW Garage Planning” as part of Industrial Park development, but we have seen no evidence of early spending or study. Do you anticipate Fiscal Year 2015 spending on this? Where is the responsibility for the next steps?

No definitive plans are in place yet and as of now we are still in the discussion phase as far as where we are going with the project.

The responsibility is shared by DPW, Town Administrator, Planning and Conservation and Zoning.

#### **440 Treatment Plant**

##### **Staffing**

1. The operating budget request, as it stands, does not include the grade changes described in Additional Request # 1 (tentatively listed among Special Articles).

An appeal was sent as part of the pay and classification study to the Selectboard previously, unfortunately it was denied.

2. The operating budget request, as it stands, says it does not include the added heads described in Additional Request #2 (tentatively listed among Special Articles). Nevertheless, Nicolas Fisher was recently hired mid-way through Fiscal Year 2014 -- this cost is not visible in Fiscal Year 2015 (unless approval of one of the Request #2 heads is assumed) and no benefit or accompanying-expense (training, uniforms, etc.) is apparent.

The operating budget I provided does not show added staff as the direction to produce the budget stated that we were to use the Town Accountant’s provided information and that any changes were to be requested on supplemental budget forms. Nicholas Fisher was hired as a seasonal worker, 40 hrs. / week. Due to the 40 hour per week schedule we are required to provide medical benefits.

3. It appears that one head in Request #2 is labeled Full Time but will work only 25 hours a week. Is the headcount increase a result of gradually-rising demands that finally reached a critical point for staff-size, or only to comply with a DEP report/directive? If the latter, what will the added personnel actually do that is not being done now?

The request is both as a result of gradually-rising demands due to facility age, added process endeavors and as an effort to comply with the DEP report/directive. Due to the efforts we are making to reduce sludge disposal costs, create more revenue and the DEP concerns I thought it would be beneficial to perform a test of adding staff in the current fiscal year. To that end the seasonal position was approved and a temporary clerical person is also working 20 hours per week. The goal is to determine whether the added help is productive and also an example to the DEP that the Town is responding to their concerns. Using an employment agency and a seasonal worker is less expensive than hiring people full time with all benefits and allows us the opportunity to evaluate the work being done. The employment agency person is performing clerical duties. This

allows the existing Senior Clerk-Assistant Laboratory Technician time to perform more of the lab testing that in turns allows the Senior Operator more time in the field to support the other Operators and to also keep a closer eye on the physical processes of the facility.

4. Are the recommended staff additions and the "significant changes to effluent reduction requirements" mentioned in the narrative a likely condition of our permit renewal?

The recommended staff additions mentioned in the narrative are not a likely condition of our permit renewal, however effluent nutrient reduction requirements may be.

5. How "directive" has the State DEP been about these additions, given that for years it has judged the WPCF on results rather than calculated bodies?

I am not aware at this time of any recommendation by the DEP to the EPA regarding staffing level issues being reflected in the proposed permit. The DEP is asking the Town to explain to them whether the Town believes it can properly operate and maintain all facilities with existing staff or not, how directive they might be depends I would think on our response when the time comes.

6. There is a reference to a Consent Order in the narrative; is this a potential agreement to add 1-1/2 heads or to waive the DEP requirement?

The reference to a Consent Order can be seen as a potential agreement to add 1-1/2 personnel as I feel some increase in staff is inevitable. I would rather have the Town in control and add 1 to 2 personnel vs. 4+ as calculated by the DEP.

7. If Additional Request #2 were approved would the increase in Overtime - Full Time be reduced?

There would be some impact on Overtime-Full Time but the biggest impact would result from completing the process control modification now being designed and constructed.

8. If the staff increase is inescapable in Fiscal Year 2015 this should be moved from a Special Article to Operating Budget.

Yes.

#### **Sludge Reduction/Treatment Services to Others**

1. The narrative says continued efforts for Sludge Reduction depend on staff increase. Would this be covered by the above 1-1/2 head request would it be another addition?

This would be covered by the 1 -1/2 person increase, as long as we can continue to make minor plant modifications.

2. Where does revenue from services to other municipalities appear, as an offset within this department or elsewhere ?

Revenue from services to other municipalities appears in the WPCF Enterprise Account Revenue Budget as item 661-4-440-4248.

### **DEP Revolving Fund/Pump Stations**

1. Is it correct that the total of the \$7 million potential loan award, announced recently, is assured only if a plan to do all pump stations is approved (and that addressing two now and six "later" means a revised, if not entirely fresh, application).

Yes. Should the Town not approve the design and construction of all 8 stations then we would have to reapply. This is the second year in succession that we have applied and been approved, no guaranties year to year.

2. What is the operational risk of breaking the station-replacement into two phases -- recalling the emergency conditions of the current year?

From the perspective of risk analysis the longer you wait the greater the risk of failure even under proper maintenance practices which is another argument for increased staff. The greater number of phases the work is broken into the higher the design & bidding cost relative to construction achieved.

3. Conversely, the narrative notes that new station technology will reduce staffing needs to some extent. Will this soften urgency of staff increases during Phase I (a 2-station replacement)?

No, and in any case we are in need of more hands on deck. Should the DEP require all or most of our pump stations to be inspected daily this means another entire body just for that. Another alternative to one more body for the pump station rounds is the upgrade of the existing telemetry and alarm system for the stations, this would reduce the need for that one personnel because the monitoring and operation of each station can be done remotely allowing the 3 days per week inspection to continue. We have done some investigating in that direction.

### **Non-Personal Services Lines**

1. It appears that the cost for Electricity is rising in Fiscal Year 2014 (the basis for Fiscal Year 2015); is this consequence of process changes, and/or is there an offsetting reduction elsewhere?

Yes, it is the consequence of process changes and yes, there is an offset in budget appropriations line item 661-5-440-5280 where \$200,000 is budgeted and \$5,712 has been spent through December 2013 and in item 5584, Chemicals, where \$32,000 is budgeted and \$1,820 has been spent through December 2013. We are still monitoring electrical use with a desire to reduce.

2. There is spending elsewhere for energy reduction (LED lights).

Yes, a consultant was on site yesterday touring the plant and looking at lighting. We are hoping to obtain support from WMECO to convert to LED where sensible.



3. What drives the increase in TFFD Overhead assessment?

This is for reading of the water meters in Town and the 7 year calculated replacement of handheld meter reading units, probes and software. We have been billed by the Turners Falls Water Department since 2002. The fee also covers investigation into sewer abatement request issues and data for such requested from the district. The increase has been made gradually over the recent 3 years to catch up to covering 50% of the noted costs. We use the water meter reading data for generating the sewer bills.

4. Similar question to earlier one: where does added revenue from others, and cost reductions from process changes, appear in a budget with mostly-rising line items?

I am glad you asked this question, they are not in the budget and that is one of my concerns. I did not know whether they should be reflected in the budget at this time as we are still in a 12 month trial period. It is my thought, that if we do not change, i.e. reduce the solids handling (5280) line item and the chemical line item (5584) but continue to be successful through Fiscal Year 2015 then the saved amount should be reflected in retained earnings when that Fiscal Year closes. Also, should staffing level not increase and/or we lose current personnel then it is doubtful whether the process, sludge and nutrient reduction, can be maintained at which point we return all operations to standard conventional waste activated sludge control. I had a very tough time debating with myself during budget generation due to these concerns. I look forward to discussing this with the Selectboard and Finance Committee to receive direction on a budget and revenue path forward. When that is done I can then make rough sewer rate projections. Keep in mind that historically for each \$10,000 change in appropriations the sewer rates change \$0.045 per thousand gallons.

### **482 Airport**

No narrative has been received.

1. Is anything unusual expected?
2. Has the house been rented, or user-fees risen, to reduce Town subsidy?

### **511 Board of Health**

1. Department narrative requests apparently-increased funding from Legal for remediation of substandard housing. Legal Narrative appears to assume an offsetting reduction in other cases to accommodate this within a flat request. Is this likely/correct?

This question is answered in 151 Legal above.

2. In the Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Statement there is an objective for the Abandoned Housing Initiative. Does the town now own these properties and if so, how many do we own from abandonment?

None of the properties I am currently working on with the AG's office are owned by the town. None of the properties on my radar for the future are owned by the town. **Please note there is almost no financial cost in legal fees to the town for the properties I am working on with the AG's Office.**

3. Also, there is a request for funding from the legal fees budget to remediate substandard inhabited properties. How many properties are there in substandard status?

I have 4 residential properties in mind for receivership in Fiscal Year 2015, all but one is inhabited. The AG's Office will not take on inhabited properties. I have asked that the town fund legal fees so I can pursue absentee/out of town landlords who rent extremely substandard properties. There are other inhabited residential properties that are substandard but I have 4 in mind for Fiscal Year 2015.

### **541 Senior Center**

The rise in custodial services seems to exceed the level of Fiscal Year 2014 spending. What is expected to be different?

We are scheduling additional floor care. As the exercise classes increase both in number of classes and number of participants, we find that the wood floors in our common room require additional attention. Our Fiscal Year 2014 budget for custodial is \$4160 our year-to-date is \$1610 as of the end of December. I project that we will come very close to spending the budgeted amount.

### **630 Parks & Recreation**

1. It appears that the expansion/renovation of Unity Park does not generate additional costs beyond the added Groundskeeper in the Public Works Dept. Is this likely to change in the future?

The department **will** incur additional operating costs as a result of the recent Unity Park improvements. The new water spray unit, for example, costs the department \$1,300 for water usage alone. Currently, Parks & Recreation is covering those expenses through its Revolving Account. When Phase II of the Unity Park Improvement Project is complete and all areas become fully operational, we anticipate additional costs relative to the ball fields (turf management, etc.) and the community garden. Other expenses (spray unit surface painting, hop scotch area, wood chips, etc.) may need to be addressed as capital expenditures every two to four years. At this time our goal is to address all new operating costs (and if possible, capital) through the Revolving Account and other revenue-generating opportunities. If those efforts do not bear profitable fruit, the department will most likely approach the Finance Committee for an increase in its Operating Budget in Fiscal Year 2016 or Fiscal Year 2017.

2. How are P/T wage costs distinguished from Participation-funded expenses?

Summer Playground Staff wages are supported by both the Operating (*P/T Wages Temp*) and Revolving Budget. The Operating Budget typically funds 65% of the total cost of wages for this program, with Revolving making up the difference. This line-item was established to help keep costs down so the Summer Playground Program remains affordable for program participants. Without support from the Operating Budget, a fee increase of \$50.00 per week, per child (minimum) would be needed to cover all wages.

### **610 Libraries**

1. Staffing changes -- additions and replacements -- draw interest. It appears that a new hire is requested for 26 hours per week and two existing assistants will together add 3 hrs/wk, totaling 29 hours per week increase in coverage. [I assume Grade/Step 1-18+ for New Hire should be Grade/Step 1-1). Assuming 26 hours per week is "benefited," was there any interest from other current assistants in increasing their hours, rather than adding most of the increase through a new 20+ hours worker? Or is this a scheduling-driven choice?

I am proposing adding three hours quarterly, not weekly, for the part time library assistants. This is for staff trainings.

We normally have 3 full time and 6 part time employees. Most of the part timers are around retirement age or work multiple jobs. Only one has any interest in a small amount of extra hours. She works at least 4 jobs and has limited availability, especially after school when we are the busiest.

There are other advantages to hiring a new person at 26 hours a week. As I mentioned in my budget proposal, I am striving for consistently high quality customer service and increased technology skills from all of our staff. Employees with multiple jobs can present challenges. They have less flexibility in scheduling and may not always be at their best. For example, an employee who sometimes gets home from bartending at 2 a.m. may have a harder time dealing with difficult patrons the next day and may be less productive.

By offering 26 hours a week, we will have our choice of many overqualified applicants. Even before we recently posted our children's librarian opening, we have been approached by many underemployed library assistants and librarians looking for more work. We will probably end up "stealing" an already trained library assistant from an area library, and may end up hiring someone with an MLS degree. Hiring an experienced and educated library assistant will cut down dramatically on the training time and improves the odds for consistent, high quality customer service. Our current automated circulation system is cumbersome and "buggy." It takes people a long time to get used to it, let alone utilize all of it's capabilities. Recent library school graduates are also highly trained in a wide variety of technology applications. Those skills would be extremely useful in our libraries and are currently lacking in the staff. By offering 26 hours a week, we are more likely to retain experienced employees far longer than if they are given fewer hours and not offered benefits. Frequent staff turnover is disruptive and inefficient.

2. The narrative says two assistants intend to retire before much of Fiscal Year 2015 has elapsed, yet their positions are still forecasted at Grade/Step 1-18+ for the year.

I left the two probably retiring library assistants in the budget at their current pay levels on Sue SanSoucie's advice. She suggested it is better to keep them in the budget until they are really gone. She said you never know what will happen, and it is best to be prepared. One of the individuals plans to leave in the next few months, but there are complicated outside factors involved and the date is uncertain. The other keeps pushing back the date. It was this summer, now it's "once the staffing has settled."

**840 Intergovernmental**

The Solid Waste District assessment is per their letter; what is the basis for other assessments, are they likely to change during the cycle?

Mr. Abbondanzio replied that the largest assessment, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), had not been finalized when the 840 budget was submitted. The estimate received from the FRCOG is a very conservative one.

**Specific Projects**

**Montague Center School**

1. If the developer is awaiting approval from the state on the sprinkler system, has the developer been in contact with the town as to whether this approval has come or not?
2. How long will the town be allowing the developer before the building goes back on the market?
3. What costs will the town incur while this is still being decided?

**Saint Anne Rectory**

Due to the zoning issues on this property and since the owners are at odds, is there any thought to requesting the court for, at least, this portion of the case to be settled so the town can properly zone and renovate this building?