

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

November 4, 2015

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Meeting Date: November 4, 2015

Called to Order: 6:00 PM

Location: 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

Finance Committee Members Present: John Hanold, Fred Bowman, Patricia Pruitt, Michael Naughton, and Chris Menegoni. Greg Garrison was absent.

Selectmen Present: Chris Boutwell, Rich Kuklewicz, and Michael Nelson.

Others Present: Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen and DPW Superintendent Tom Bergeron

Minutes

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of October 21, 2015.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of October 21, 2015.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Department of Public Works

Mr. Bergeron was present to provide information about the DPW and answer questions prior to the budget process.

- Mr. Bergeron has been Superintendent for almost 12 years.
- The DPW has 17 employees: 1 superintendent, 1 foreman, 1 office manager, 2 mechanics, 1 custodian, 1 building maintenance worker, 2 groundskeepers, 6 truck drivers and 2 heavy equipment operators.
- The DPW is in charge of:
 - Maintaining roads, buildings, Veterans' Park, and sidewalks
 - Maintain all equipment
 - Oversee curbside trash and recycling pickup
 - Operating the Transfer Station
 - Installing catch basins, drain pipes and main sewer lines
 - Responding to calls of blocked sewer lines
 - Street sweeping
 - Oversee all town construction projects (road and building)
 - Inspect sewer connections by private contractors
 - Issue a variety of permits
 - Snow and ice removal
 - Catch basin cleaning
 - Maintaining all main sewer lines (gravity fed, not force mains)
 - Painting traffic lines and crosswalks
 - Tree issues
- There are almost 40 miles of sewer lines and 109 miles of road in town.

- The DPW helps every public department in town, including the Montague Center Fire District, Turners Falls Fire District and Gill-Montague Regional School District.
- The DPW puts up holiday lights and flags for Memorial and Veterans Day.
- The 2 groundskeepers, plus one summer employee, mow 20-25 acres. This includes the grounds around all Town-owned buildings as well as all town parks and other properties. The groundskeepers also maintain Unity Park, all ball fields, drain areas, and trees (plant, trim, cut down).
- These maintenance needs have increased significantly, especially with the improvements at Unity Park.
- During the winter these employees are responsible for sidewalk clearing/shoveling after plowing, adding 4-5 hours to their day during snowstorms, plus re-cleaning, sanding and salting.
- The regular road crew paints lines, puts up street signs, does roadwork, moves furniture, adjusts the town hall temperature, puts together and moves office furniture for town departments and maintains all signal lights,
- All DPW employees except the office manager plow in the winter. The foreman is called by Police Department when sanding needs to start.
- DOT laws require 8 hours off after a 10 hour day, but we don't have the staff to allow this. When plowing, the department assigns two trucks in Montague Center and part of Greenfield Road, two in Millers Falls and Lake Pleasant, three on top of the hill/Montague Rd area to Millers Falls Road, one on Millers Falls Road, two in downtown, one in the Patch, alleys and parking lots. This puts a lot of miles on vehicles, usually doing at least four passes on each road.
- In 2004 there were 20 employees. The Town laid off four, then added one in January of 2014. The department is designed for 22 employees. Sometime in 1990s there were over 30 employees.
- The department is always very busy. Mr. Bergeron checks on the employees daily as does the foreman, in addition to spending time with each contractor working in town. Mr. Bergeron determines whether changes are allowed for various projects and helps contractors with issues that needed resolution. Mr. Bergeron gave examples of how the DPW helped out contractors with town trucks and drivers to save money and get work done on time (e.g., the Millers Falls Road stabilization project).
- Mr. Bowman is concerned that some of the recent projects had major problems, sometimes because the engineering is off or things like test holes weren't made. "Outside engineers are not familiar with the geology in the town. Looking at upcoming projects, let's be sure the engineering is right even if it costs more money."
- Mr. Kuklewicz noted that the Selectmen have requested Weston & Sampson to meet to resolve the Millers Falls Road issue.
- Mr. Bergeron noted the issues and additional expenses for the Greenfield Road project.

- The DPW deals with all HVAC systems in town buildings. Their biggest issue is with Public Safety Facility, even though the building is only 5-6 years old. The DPW has a \$14,000 HVAC line item, and \$7,000 has been spent since July 1st on the police department system.
- Mr. Naughton asked if there are lessons to be learned regarding the police building issues. Mr. Bergeron noted that the building is very high-tech and has a very complex HVAC system with a lot of electronic parts, and staff doesn't always have the expertise to deal with those issues. There are more electrical issues that require an electrician.
- By comparison, the Town Hall boiler, which was criticized for costing \$153,000 eight years ago, has had only a few problems and is easy both to maintain and switch from air conditioning to heating.
- Mr. Bowman asked about the Shea's roof unit and roof. The roof unit needs to be replaced but it's hung up on design issues. One issue is that there's not enough money. Mr. Bowman asked why we don't just appropriate more money. Mr. Bowman strongly feels that we should spend more money and do it right the first time, instead of patching, and still not having a satisfactory resolution.
- Mr. Bergeron noted that the last 2 tenants have not taken care of the Shea building. The town has had to replace steel doors with steel casings because kids were hanging off of them.
- The Colle has calmed down, but there is a call at least once a week for maintenance or repair by the DPW.
- Mr. Kuklewicz stated we need to take a good look at our buildings and what is required to properly maintain them. We need a plan to make sure we take care of our buildings. Leases need to be reviewed regarding various responsibilities for maintenance.
- Mr. Bowman said we need a maintenance plan for buildings, but first you need an assessment, which will require hiring a consultant. After the assessment, you prioritize.
- Mr. Menegoni suggested having an engineer as a town employee who would look after the town's needs.
- Building Inspector David Jenson was present briefly and said an assessment is fine, but we know what we need. What we lack is the manpower to provide adequate maintenance. We have one person to deal with all the buildings, and he has to figure out where the money will come from before he can do anything. There is bureaucratic inefficiency, lack of staffing.
- Mr. Bergeron noted that there are lot of leaks in the town hall annex, but because the flat roof is too expensive to fix, and they can only patch and hope for the best.
- Mr. Jensen said that buildings need their own budget and asked why it is such a challenge to get money out of that account.
- Mr. Hanold summarized that Mr. Bergeron doesn't have enough people or money to do everything he's asked to do.
- Mr. Bowman suggested if the school needs plowing, they should find the money to do it and the town should not be doing it. Bergeron noted that the Town owns

the elementary schools, and we contractually have to take care of them. Issues happens when the school is unable to do the work and wants an instant response from the town. Mr. Bergeron is willing to do some work for the schools, but on his own schedule.

- Mr. Hanold revisited that the DPW maintains the main sewer lines, which are gravity fed. Force mains and pump stations are maintained by the WPCF.
- Mr. Bergeron discussed the Chapter 90 funds, which are administered by the state. Montague usually gets between \$350,000 and \$400,000 per year. This money can be used at Mr. Bergeron's discretion for a variety of things like sidewalks, roads, vehicles over 5 tons, and salt sheds. It's primarily used for repaving roads. Working from an evaluator's 2005 report, he's tracked all of the paving done and the costs, prioritized based on need and condition of roads. Our roads are so out of shape they usually require a leveling coat first, which is more expensive.
- Mr. Hanold asked if he thinks he's making any progress against the backlog. Mr. Bergeron says there's been some progress. 3rd street was done 13 years ago and is starting to show wear. His plan is to mill and resurface several downtown streets this year.
- Chapter 90 can pay for sidewalk work, but it has to go out to bid because replacements have to be ADA compliant and are more expensive.
- Mr. Bergeron has used Chapter 90 for equipment because the town has no money, but he would prefer to use it for roads. The DPW equipment is in pretty good shape. The oldest regularly used truck is a 2005.
- Mr. Hanold has a provocative question. Given that the equipment is in pretty good shape, and his budget is deficient in money and people, what other restrictions does Mr. Bergeron have when looking at what is needed to be done? What else gets in the way – regulatory issues, the town garage - what are the biggest limits? Mr. Bergeron said that the two mechanics still have to creep under vehicles because they have no lifts. The facility itself is probably 85 years old. There's only one furnace for the whole building, so when a door is open to the garage, his office is 95 degrees. The whole building is dirty and out of compliance. There are no showers, wash bays, storage areas for oil and flammable things, or female bathrooms. Employees have free access to all offices and there are no facilities for food preparation or storage.
- There are possibly two employees retiring in the next few years.
- Mr. Bergeron will be requesting two new employees, primarily for tree work. The town's trees are in very poor shape. We have the equipment, but not the people. These employees would also plow and shovel in the winter.
- Mr. Naughton wanted to hear about things that aren't being done. Building maintenance and tree work have been mentioned. Mr. Bergeron replied that the roads are in relatively good shape, but some work like cleaning ditches is not being done now because other things have taken priority. Mr. Bergeron feels the biggest issue is building maintenance. The Parks division had five employees before we had Pesky Park and the additions to Unity Park. We had one person for a long time, and now have two, but they only have a month that they can do tree

work. Mr. Bergeron feels this division should be back up to at least four people. The shrubbery in parks needs attention as does the streetscape in Miller Falls. And an additional buildings maintenance employee is also needed.

- Mr. Naughton would like, when we start the budget season, to hear some ideas on how we can fix these things. We need to be moving in another direction. We started out the year saying let's ask for a level services budget, but Mr. Naughton doesn't feel that level service budgets are appropriate in all cases, especially this one. We need to work on how to reallocate funds so that we can do the things we've talked about.
- Mr. Hanold noted we'll be hearing similar reports from the Police and WPCF.
- Mr. Nelson asked about the sidewalk appropriation and asked if Mr. Bergeron would be asking for an increase in that as well. Mr. Bergeron hasn't asked for that because you can only hear "no" so many times. What he really needs are employees.
- Mr. Bowman said he doesn't want to see increases to the DPW budget taken from other departments.
- Mr. Hanold noted that Mr. Bergeron sends workers out to haul gravel for contractors, which means other things don't get done. If things got done last year under budget, then it's erroneously assumed that the department doesn't need more money.
- Mr. Bergeron appreciates the opportunity to explain what the DPW does, the constraints they're working under and why they can't do everything that people want them to do.

Set Next Meetings: December 2nd and 9th.

- Meet with Police and WPCF to discuss maintenance and improvement needs.
- Discuss how to handle process for the appropriation for WPCF Capital Stabilization Fund, use of revenues from solid waste process.
- Review current revenue assumptions for Fiscal Year 2017. VERY preliminary affordable assessment estimate is \$8,750,000.
- Financial Policy regarding annual appropriations to Town General Stabilization Fund

Meeting adjourned at 8:05 PM

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Minutes of October 21st