

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

February 10, 2016

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**Meeting Date:** February 10, 2016

**Called to Order:** 5:00 PM

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

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

**Selectmen Present:** Rich Kuklewicz and Michael Nelson. Chris Boutwell was absent.

**Others Present:** Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Pipeline Liaison Ariel Elan, Tree Warden Mark Stevens, DPW Superintendent Tom Bergeron, David Detmold, Jean Hebden, Sita Lang and Michael Marcotrigiano.

### Minutes

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 27, 2016.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

### Reserve Fund Transfer Request

The Selectmen have requested a Reserve Fund Transfer of \$5,000 for additional legal costs related to Montague's status as an Intervenor regarding the Kinder-Morgan pipeline proposal. This work is all for independent fact-finding. Information was provided last week, but there was no discussion. Mr. Naughton provided a brief recap.

- Mr. Hanold asked for confirmation that an additional \$50,000-\$75,000 will be requested at the Annual Town Meeting. This was confirmed.
- Mr. Bowman requested additional information prior to Town Meeting.

Finance Committee Moved:

To transfer \$5,000 from the Reserve Fund to Montague Pipeline Intervention Legal Expenses.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Note:** Previously submitted questions and answers for the Tree Warden and DPW Superintendent are at the end of the minutes.

### Tree Warden Budget and Stipend Requests

- Mr. Stevens said the downtown area between L and Seventh Streets contains 744 trees, and only 8% are in rough shape. This information is from a result of a tree study done by the FRCOG.
- All of the trees planted in the current fiscal year were paid for from the Memorial Tree fund. \$2,427 has been spent, leaving an available balance of just under \$2,000.
- Mr. Stevens said more trees have been planted than removed.
- A lot of trimming has been done this winter due to the mild weather.
- Mr. Bergeron noted that in good winter weather much of the DPW crew goes out to help Mr. Stevens with the trimming and stump grinding.

- Paying outside companies to grind stumps was getting too expensive, so a new stump grinder was purchased from the DPW Equipment account. Other recent DPW purchases for tree work include a new brush chipper that will take an 18” piece of wood and a 52’ bucket truck, both of which save the town in contractor costs. Mr. Bergeron wants to get a small backhoe with tractor so the Tree Warden won’t tie up the regular backhoe when planting trees.
- The town also saved money this year by grinding wood chips rather than buying bark mulch for Avenue A. Because it’s double-ground, this mulch can also be used at Unity Park.
- The relationship between the Tree Warden and the DPW was described:
  - The DPW has a dedicated voice mail line for calls to the Tree Warden, although the Tree Warden also receives calls at home.
  - Residents call the Tree Warden about trees on town property that need attention. Calls are also received from Police when limbs are down and blocking roads, but they are a DPW issue, and DPW employees remove the limbs from the roadway and chip them.
  - The Tree Warden examines the tree in question and determines whether it is damaged or healthy. If the tree is damaged, the Tree Warden, with the help of DPW employees or outside contractors, will trim or remove the tree. (If DPW employees are needed, the Tree Warden requests their use from the Working Foreman). If the tree is healthy, not creating a hazard to public safety, and someone wants it removed, a tree hearing is required. Sometimes this occurs when tree roots get into sewer lines. This is usually because a break in the sewer line causes a leak. In Montague, homeowners are responsible for sewer lines from the house to the main sewer line under the road, so in these instances Mr. Stevens will not remove the tree at town expense.
    - A tree hearing must be posted for at least 14 days, including two notices in the newspaper. The notice must include the location of the tree and the type of tree. Mr. Stevens usually posts hearings for 30 days to provide additional notice to interested parties.
    - The tree hearing is the opportunity for members of the public to find out why removal of is requested, and express any concerns.
    - The Tree Warden then makes the decision on whether to remove the tree. If the tree is removed, the work is either done by the DPW or outside contractors, depending on whether the DPW has the necessary equipment.
    - Sometimes the resulting wood is left for the homeowner, but generally there is not much wood left at end of the process, and the wood is chipped and the stump ground.
  - After winter storms, electric companies will send bucket trucks in to cut downed branches, but it’s the DPW employees that remove the branches.
  - The DPW can decide on its own to trim trees, but Tree Warden approval is required for cutting down and planting trees.
  - The intention is that replacement trees are planted whenever a tree is removed, but this has been difficult to comply with in practice due to funding constraints, the cost of trees, and the lack of available DPW employees to do the work.

Replacement trees are too large for one person to plant, and a DPW backhoe is used to dig the holes.

- Mr. Naughton said the Tree Warden stipend had been discussed, and there was concern that giving the Tree Warden a raise would make his pay comparable to Selectmen. Mr. Naughton also noted that most elected positions are paid a pittance for the time they put in.
- Mr. Bowman noted that this is something small enough for people to get their minds around. Town meeting members need to know what is done, and this needs to be better explained.
- Mr. Bergeron said that Mr. Stevens' attendance at meetings, training and tree hearings, is done outside of town time. At the same time, the DPW pays for all his equipment and supplies out of the DPW budget.
- Mr. Kuklewicz asked if any preventive work can be done, especially on mature trees. Mr. Stevens said that some preventive work has been done in various areas of town.
- Mr. Kuklewicz wonders if there are programs available to create a multiple year plan for tree maintenance. Considers it's important to maintain the trees that we have.
- Mr. Stevens may be able to spend the rest of this year's budget on planting new trees.
- Ms. Hebden asked about a specific tree, located where a restaurant opened, that has disappeared without a hearing. The Selectmen were asked to have the tree trimmed because limbs were blocking the view of traffic. When Mr. Stevens was trimming the tree, it was found to be irreparably damaged and it was removed.

Mr. Kuklewicz left at 6:38PM and the Board of Selectmen's meeting adjourned.

- Mr. Detmold spoke in support of the excellent work the Tree Warden does with limited funds. Mr. Detmold noted that the DPW has lost staff, but not responsibilities, and there's a limit as to how long that can be done.
  - Feels tree planting has not always been at the top of the list.
  - Would like to see the town have a more deliberate process so town meeting can weigh in on it.
  - Supports DPW request for more personnel.
  - Has a brief statement from The Montague Energy Committee, which passed the following motion on February 2, 2016:

The Montague Energy Committee supports Town funding to expand street tree planting across Montague's five villages, especially to replace more recently removed street trees. From an energy perspective, trees are known to save cooling costs for buildings directly shaded by them, to lower summer temperatures in urban environments, and to help reduce the impacts of global climate change by removing carbon from the atmosphere. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, "air temperatures directly under trees can be as much as 25 degrees Fahrenheit cooler than air temperatures above nearby blacktop."

- Supports separating line items for tree removal and the purchase of trees.

- Noted that the airport is willing to offer land for a tree nursery, and the Franklin County Tech School (FCTS) is willing to have students maintain and water trees. These trees would be available at low or no cost to contributing towns. The question of care during critical summer months was raised, and Mr. Detmold feels that citizens are willing to help the DPW or FCTS establish and maintain a tree nursery.
- Is concerned that the FRCOG study will become the baseline of what constitutes a healthy population of trees in Turners Falls, and noted that many beloved downtown trees have come down in recent years. In 1983 the town replanted more than 190 trees along Avenue A alone, of which 60 are now gone, excluding those lost for development.
- Supports increasing the budget for advertising for tree hearings – a practice that used to be followed much more rigorously in the past than it is now in the removal of trees – in hopes that the public would have more of a chance to weigh in before trees are removed.
- Feels that a small expenditure of money would go a long way to improve the quality of life for many people.
- Mr. Bergeron stated that if volunteers want to help, what's really needed is watering after the planting. That could be easily done downtown, and if other people would offer in other areas, this would save a great deal of the Tree Warden's time.
- Mr. Stevens said that hiring two additional groundskeepers would dramatically help in this area. Mr. Bergeron would like them to spend most of the summer trimming trees while others do parks and lawns. In winter they would help clearing sidewalks.
- Pros and cons of volunteers were noted. Mr. Bowman said there is a huge liability risk without the appropriate liability waivers.
- Jean Hebden asked to acknowledge that Detmold's been watering trees in Peskeomskut Park for over twenty years and as well as providing additional care.
- Mr. Stevens would like a budget just for maintenance of new parks, streetscape planters, much like the DPW Discretionary Account, which would act as a rainy day fund.

#### DPW Budget

- Mr. Bergeron said that the additional parks, sidewalks and buildings now owned by the Town create more maintenance needs without the resources to take care of the properties.
- Mr. Bowman said that the lack of building maintenance goes back to when resources were lost and now we're paying for it. It is time to convince the tax payer to up the tax rates. Mr. Hanold asked if he's advocating an override. Mr. Bowman replied that we need to spend money while things are cheap.
- Mr. Naughton said that Town Meeting's been given the indication that cuts to requests would be OK, and now we're seeing the effects. Trees and building maintenance are two of the affected areas.
- Mr. Stevens noted that at one time the town hall had its own janitor.

- Mr. Naughton noted that we already talked to Mr. Bergeron last fall, and questions and answers have been received.
- Mr. Bergeron noted that in addition to the two groundskeepers he asked for, he is also asking for another building maintenance person. The DPW has lost 5 people since he's been here, and not all of these have been replaced. Building maintenance has become a struggle for one person because of required inspections, meeting contractors, issues at the Colle Building and Shea Theater, and dealing with Strathmore.
- Mr. Bergeron stated that getting this additional staffing is really critical, and the groundskeepers will be kept busy in the winter as well as in the warmer months. There's just more maintenance to do.
- Mr. Bergeron was asked if any special treatments would be needed for the skatepark. This is unknown at this point. If it was treated, that will probably need to be redone in ten years.
- Mr. Bergeron noted that the Shea roof and air conditioner replacement could cost \$500,000.
- The proposed DPW building can be set up to have solar panels on the roof. Mr. Bergeron would like gas heat in the building, but this is unlikely due to the moratorium on new connections. His next choice is oil, with gas lines near the building so a switch could be made later. The building will include new truck washers, as required by DEP.
- Ms. Pruitt asked if the Selectmen would be recommending the new employees. This has not been discussed.
- Mr. Hanold asked what the discretionary fund would be used in the near future. Mr. Bergeron said that there are new federal standards for road signs, and he would like to purchase a sign making machine at a cost of about \$18,000. With this machine, the town can reuse existing signs and recover them with appropriate materials. The town has over 4000 road signs, plus street signs.
- The DPW Discretionary Accounts have recently paid for a \$30,000 stump grinder and a \$5,000 trailer for the Tree Warden. It will take about \$80,000 to bring the balance to \$100,000.
- The pickups are in good shape, but Mr. Bergeron will possibly look for a 1 ton dump truck next year to replace the oldest comparable truck.
- Ms. Pruitt commended Mr. Bergeron for diligent use of the discretionary funds in replacing all the creaking old trucks and diversifying the vehicles.
- All pickups and one ton trucks are now gas, not diesel. They were having problems with diesel engines.
- Mr. Naughton said that while it is not the job of the Finance Committee to manage the department, as a Finance Committee and Town Meeting member, he encourages Mr. Bergeron to not be shy about asking for more resources when they are needed.

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

- Mr. Naughton noted that the governor has released his budget, which indicates our state aid should increase about \$40,000. He's been told that this will likely

pass, as state aid numbers requested by the Governor have, historically, not been reduced. Mr. Naughton requests that next week's agenda include an item to consider revising our revenue estimates. He noted that this could trigger a revised affordable assessment, and that the GMRSD is currently looking at a \$100,000 shortfall. Ms. Olsen will also review local receipt estimates.

**Next Meeting:**

- February 17<sup>th</sup> – WPCF– Operating budget, other requests; Revenue Estimates
- February 24<sup>th</sup> – Capital Improvements
- March 2<sup>nd</sup> – GMRSD
- March 9<sup>th</sup> – FCTS, Final Vote Schedules I & II
- March 16<sup>th</sup> – Use of Reserves
- March 23<sup>rd</sup> – CIC
- March 30<sup>th</sup> – Vote all appropriations and funding sources,

**Future Items:**

- Discuss how to handle process for the appropriation for WPCF Capital Stabilization Fund, use of revenues from solid waste process.
- Financial Policy regarding annual appropriations to Town General Stabilization Fund/OPEB Trust Fund
- Finalize revenue estimates

**Meeting adjourned at 7:55 PM****List of Documents and Exhibits:**

- Minutes of January 20<sup>th</sup>
- Previously submitted questions and answers - below

**299 TREE WARDEN:**

- 5253 Tree Planting/Removal - Can we have statistics for how many trees were removed, and how many planted during FY2015 and (expected) FY2016? What are the expectations for FY2017?  
In FY2015, 70 trees were trimmed, 12 were removed, and 30 planted. For FY2016 it's expected that 24 trees will be cut down and 30 planted, with the same numbers estimated for FY2017.
- Additionally, there were 2 tree hearings in FY2015.
- Almost all of this work was done by DPW employees, contractors did a couple.
- No analysis has been done about how much Tree Warden work was done while working for the DPW, but it's likely to be all.
- No analysis has been done on how much time was spent on Tree Warden duties.

**190 PUBLIC BUILDING UTILITIES:**

- Some accounts are level-funded, while others show increases of various sizes. Can we get a brief explanation of the rationales behind these choices?

CO Answer: Generally speaking, if the FY16 budget was higher than the prior year actual and the extrapolated estimated cost for FY16, no change was made. If the FY16 budget was lower than the prior year actual and the extrapolated estimated cost for FY16, it was increased for FY17. But I would questions the budgeted amounts for 5211-211, 5211-424, 5211-652, 5214-192, and 5214-652.

DPW Answer: 211 was level funded because the end of December amount spent was 18,598.26 putting it on line with the budgeted amount. 424 same as 211. 652 same as 211. 192, 652 could be decreased.

#### **420 DPW:**

- 5132 F/T Wages O/T - Expenditures in FY 2013 - 2015 are well below the requested amount -- please explain why the request is not lower  
It was lowered by \$2000 for FY17. Overtime is an unknown entity and the feeling is to have an adequate amount budgeted to avoid a need for extra funding at the end of the year.
- 5243 HVAC R&M shows a 29% increase - please explain  
The increase is due to the aging system at the DPW and the increased repairs on the Police Department's systems.
- 5315 Other Professional and Technical - Expenditures in FY 2013 - 2015 are well below the requested amount -- please explain why the request is not lower  
The cost to line all the town roads is a constant increase each year.
- 5245 Vehicle R&M shows a 40% increase - please explain  
Cost for work not able to be done at the DPW has increased steadily the last few years. For the first half of FY 16 we have spent half of the budget of \$20,000.
- 5481 Gasoline - Expenditures in FY 2013 - 2015 are well below the requested amount -- please explain why the request is not lower  
Carolyn posts the receipts from other departments to this line item.
- 5482 Diesel - Expenditures in FY 2014 - 2015 were considerably above the requested amount -- please explain why more was not requested  
Some of the outside departments are no longer using our pumps and with current prices it was felt level funding would be adequate.
- 5484 Parts & Accessories shows a 25% increase - please explain  
The cost of parts has increased, as of 12/15 we have spent 30,591.44 of our 48,000 dollar budget.
- 5530 Public Works Supplies - Expenditures in FY 2013 - 2015 are well below the requested amount -- please explain why the request is not lower

Cost of material has increased and as of 12/15 we have spent over half of the 58,000 we budgeted for FY 16.

**423 SNOW:**

- Please explain the increases in 5533 Sand and 5590 Plow Items  
Costs of both items are increasing so the budget was adjusted to meeting these increases.