

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND SELECTMEN MEETING

January 4, 2017

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Meeting Date: January 4, 2017

Called to Order: 6:00 PM

Location: 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

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

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

Others Present:

Montague: Town Administrator Steve Ellis, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, and Police Chief Chip Dodge

Gill-Montague Regional School District (GMRSD): Superintendent Michael Sullivan, GMRSD School Committee Members Jane Oakes, Valeria Smith and Sandy Brown,

Gill: Administrative Assistant Ray Purington, Selectman John Ward, Finance Committee Members Claire Chang and Valeria (Timmie) Smith and observer Paul Newell

Other: Miranda Davis from The Recorder

Valeria Smith publicly declared that she serves on both the School Committee and Gill Finance Committee and has been cleared by the state Ethics Commission to do so.

Recording

The Finance Committee Chair announced that the meeting is being recorded by MCTV, and this is a duly posted meeting of the Montague Finance Committee and Montague Selectboard with a quorum of each body present. The meeting was also posted for the GMRSD School Committee, but no quorum of that body is present.

Minutes -

Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of December 7, 2016.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of December 14, 2016.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 1 Abstained

School Resource Officer at Gill-Montague

- MGL Chapter 71 Section 37B, effective July 1, 2015, requires every town, subject to appropriation, to appoint a School Resource Office. There are differing interpretations as to the specific requirements and application of the law and its waiver process.
- Superintendent Sullivan has received a letter from the General Counsel of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education summarizing that “absent an appropriation (presumably by the Town), the school district may employ one or more school resource officers, but is not required to do so.” This indicates that there is no issue of non-compliance with the law if there is no School Resource Officer for the GMRSD.

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- Chief Dodge provided the history of the school DARE officer, benefits of that relationship between the students and the Police Department, the ending of that funding. Chief Dodge is strongly in favor of having a School Resource Officer (SRO) at the GMRSD. Some of his reasons are:
 - A lot of issues requiring the presence of police officers at the schools could be prevented by having a SRO.
 - It's been proven that presence of a SRO officer is a deterrent for both behaviors and unwanted visitors.
 - Juvenile Division Assistant District Attorney Caitlyn Rock supports the SRO position.
 - The goal is to not have juveniles arrested and going to court.
 - Franklin County Technical School Superintendent Rick Martin said the whole atmosphere at the school has had a positive change since the SRO has been working there, and that the SRO is missed by the staff when absent.
 - Many students who act up have mental health issues, but even they understand the presence of a SRO. Students have no fear of going to principal's office but there is a fear of being taken away by police.
 - Chief Dodge's interpretation of the law is that we are required to appoint a SRO for the GMRSD unless both he and the Superintendent jointly request a waiver. Unless he is ordered to do so, Chief Dodge will not submit a waiver.
 - Chief Dodge agreed that his understanding is that if we do not appoint a SRO, no one will come after us legally or financially.
- Chief Dodge noted that the only two school districts in the area currently without a SRO are GMRSD and Mohawk.
- Superintendent Sullivan thinks it's important for people to know he'd be happy to work with the police or have an officer on site. However, for the district to meet the preliminary affordable assessment limit, the district will already have to make hundreds of thousands of dollars of reduction from the current level of services without considering the addition of a SRO.
- Chief Dodge reviewed his understanding of how some local towns fund their SRO:
 - The Frontier RSD SRO also goes to Deerfield Academy. The cost is split between the school district, school and Deerfield.
 - The Pioneer RSD splits the cost of their SRO 50/50 with the Northfield. Northfield Police Chief Robert Leighton said that the cost is split because the town gets the services of the SRO as an additional officer during the summer and school vacations.
 - Chief Dodge noted that a Montague/GMRSD SRO can also go to the Gill Elementary School with the blessing of Gill Police Chief David Hastings.
- If a SRO is appointed to the GMRSD, the preliminary options for funding the position are:
 - Fully funded by Montague
 - Fully funded by the GMRSD. It was noted that this would essentially result in the position's funding being split approximately 85/15 between Montague and Gill.
 - Equally split funding between the town and district. It was noted that this would essentially result in the position's funding being split approximately 92.5/7.5 between Montague and Gill, and that the only winner in this option is Gill.
 - Ms. Olsen estimated that 7.5% of the full cost of a SRO would be approximately \$5,000.
 - Mr. Naughton clarified that this would not be an additional cost to Gill as it would be part of their share of the assessment.

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- Mr. Hanold asked if the SRO would do any tasks of guidance employees. Superintendent Sullivan said that the school would not be shedding any responsibilities to the SRO but that the relationship work by a SRO would be helpful.
- Mr. Bowman is in favor of a SRO, but is concerned about the cost.
- Mr. Kuklewicz offered the following observations:
 - He has seen and heard many positive benefits of the SRO at the FCTS.
 - The FCTS pays for an entry level officer, not the actual SRO employee.
 - Mr. Kuklewicz believes that cost of SRO belongs to the district.
 - Mr. Kuklewicz would rather explain why we spent money on a SRO rather than have to explain why we didn't spend the money.
- Ms. Brown spoke as individual rather than as a School Committee member:
 - Ms. Brown interprets the DESE letter's statement that "no waiver is needed" as saying that no waiver is ever needed.
 - Ms. Brown noted that with Student Mediation and the school's partnership with various social services, there is already a lot of interchange with local agencies. She would rather have students feel they can help one another and prefers the idea of working within the school.
 - Ms. Brown does not want a police officer in the school implying that discipline is needed. She would rather have officers involved with the social agencies than with students.
- Mr. Ward noted that Sandy Hook was invoked, wants to dispel that idea, and does not want that specter to influence the discussion. Mr. Ward noted the following:
 - The school already has procedures in place for defusing situations.
 - The SRO will not be a uniformed police officer with utility belt, but will wear khakis and a golf shirt, and the SRO would call the station if a situation warranted it, but there is no shortage of on-site people already able to make that phone call.
 - Having a SRO will not allay another Sandy Hook. If we have one SRO in the district we don't know when or where a situation would arise, so the SRO may not even be at site of an incident.
- Mr. Hanold noted that the SRO seems to be seen as a need by police, but not uniformly needed by school representatives.
- Neither Chief Dodge nor Superintendent Sullivan can absorb the cost of a SRO except by making additional budget cuts elsewhere. Chief Dodge said that if he could afford a SRO for GMRSD, he'd have one there now.
- Mr. Naughton clarified that his perspective is that the burden on tax payers is same with or without a SRO as the same total amount of money is available. Without an override, a SRO means that a comparable reduction must be made elsewhere.
- Mr. Naughton asked if it would be possible for one SRO to be shared between the FCTS and the GMRSD. Chief Dodge replied that he already asked the FCTS that question and they are not willing to share the SRO.
- Mr. Hanold's concern is the issue that funding a SRO will result in something else being unfunded. The Town taxes to capacity, so if this approved in the school budget, unless the affordable assessment changes or town meeting approves an amount greater than the affordable assessment, something for the school will be eliminated. If the SRO is funded by Montague, \$65,000 will not be available elsewhere in the Town budget.
- Ms. Chang is concerned that no job description has been made available.
- Mr. Menegoni is concerned that the individual appointed be the best fit for the position.

- Mr. Garrison pointed out that legislation defined the job description as law enforcement and security services to schools.
- Chief Dodge added that the position is a police officer who becomes a community member of the school. The actual duties are determined over time depending on the needs of the school. The SRO improves the learning environment by reducing or eliminating distractions. There is also training specific to juveniles and school settings. The SRO is not there for security – the SRO calls the station if officers needed.
- Superintendent Sullivan added that they de-escalate situations, implement restorative practices, use non-confrontational methods, and assist with truancy and attendance.
- Mr. Ellis wants to make sure that the job description and integration with the district gets most out of the position, the vision is shared, and the execution makes the best possible use of the SRO. There will be a trade-off somewhere if SRO added, so we must know that we'll get the most from this. Mr. Ellis requested a clear statement of job duties to communicate to the public what their investment will look like.
- Ms. Oakes, speaking as individual and teacher, stated that when Detective Brown was the DARE officer the obvious benefit was trust and respect. Having a police officer engendered trust and respect from both students and families; it's difficult to quantify but very real.
- Mr. Hanold proposed that the district budget for a SRO and determine if they can do so within the affordable assessment. It seems to be agreed that Montague Police will select and supervise the SRO.
- Ms. Smith questioned the amount of time a SRO actually works for the school, given the 180 day school year, and how this should impact the question of allocating the cost. Mr. Kuklewicz said that the officer billed is a lower paid officer than the SRO, which offsets the additional cost for the extra days.
- Mr. Naughton volunteered to coordinate additional scenarios between Superintendent Sullivan, Chief Dodge, and Mr. Ellis. Mr. Hanold happy with that as long as there is enough of a directive for people to prepare budgets, and wants to make sure that a SRO is not in two budget or none, unless the decision is made not to pursue the SRO.

Review Fiscal Year 2018 budget requests and narratives.

Mr. Naughton noted that only 6 narratives were received and he has a number of questions for various departments that might have been answered by narratives. Mr. Naughton is particularly interested in what each department's plans are for Fiscal Year 2018.

Mr. Naughton asked about the criteria used to place specific costs in the Shared budget. Ms. Olsen answered that there is not a hard and fast rule, other than that the purchases benefit multiple departments. Ms. Olsen added that the Shared department was created when fixed costs that benefited the entire town, or at least multiple departments, were moved from individual departments where the presence of those costs made it difficult or impossible for a department to absorb requested budget reductions.

The decision of where to budget the new permit software's ongoing support will be an agenda item next week.

Mr. Hanold suggested asking for narratives, but also asking providing him with specific questions that he will combine and send on to departments.

Mr. Bowman asked about the oil tank removal at the schools and whether the GMRSD has waiver for the removal deadline of Aug 2017. It is the Town's responsibility to remove the tanks as they are on town property. Mr. Ellis will follow up with DPW Superintendent Bergeron.

Consider Cut-Off date for Revenue Estimate adjustments

The implications of whether or not to continue updating revenue estimates and incorporate them as available sources for fall Special Town Meetings were discussed.

- Updating the revenues may provide for additional resources for fall appropriation needs, but could also result in Town Meeting members assuming that the revenue estimates will change and therefore voting ATM appropriations in excess of recommended amounts. This has both the risk that the excess revenue needed will not be available, and that confidence in the Finance Committee's estimates and recommendations is eroded.
- If revenue estimates are set prior to the ATM, (and also prior to the date that the GMRSD has to present their final budget to the School Committee), there will not be additional "taxation" revenue available for fall appropriations, but additional revenues will essentially be captured in the following year's Free Cash amount. This method also eliminates some confusion, the risk of Town Meeting members being overly enthusiastic in their estimates of funding available at the ATM, and the question of whether the GMRSD Affordable Assessment should be increased after the District has approved their budget.
- Mr. Garrison prefers setting revenue estimates and budgets and carrying through with those numbers.
- It was noted that this is much like the case with school districts where, if their revenues exceed their estimates, their spending is still restricted by the budget approved by the member towns.

Finance Committee Moved:

To freeze revenue estimates prior to the final date that the final affordable assessment calculation must be communicated to the GMRSD in order for them to meet that budget goal within their own deadline for a final budget, and further that those total revenue estimates shall not be adjusted for use at a fall Special Town Meeting.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

To freeze revenue estimates prior to the final date that the final affordable assessment calculation must be communicated to the GMRSD in order for them to meet that budget goal within their own deadline for a final budget, and further that those total revenue estimates shall not be adjusted for use at a fall Special Town Meeting.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Topics not anticipated within in the 48 hour posting requirements – none

Next Meeting Dates:

January 11, 2017 IT, Treasurer/Debt, review Capital Request, Preliminary Use of Reserves

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January 18, 2017	Town Clerk, Schedules I & II, Minimum wage and Poll Workers/Park & Rec summer help
January 25, 2017	Libraries, Feedback from Building Maintenance Study
February 1, 2017	Police, Dispatch, Benefits, General Insurance, Intergovernmental
February 8, 2017	Planner, Public Works
February 15, 2017	WPCF, and STM Issues (if STM planned)
February 22, 2017	FCTS, Initial meeting with CIC
March 1, 2017	GMRSD
March 8, 2017	Town Administrator, final votes Schedules I & II (if not done earlier)
March 15, 2017	Final Revenue Estimates, final Affordable Assessment due, Preliminary Budget Recommendations, March 22, 2017 Final meeting with CIC
March 29, 2017	Draft warrant to KP-Law, Review Special Article Requests
April 5, 2017	Draft Finance Committee Report, vote on Special Article requests
April 12, 2017	Revise Finance Committee Report and Policy Actions
April 19, 2017	Final votes, reconsiderations, approve Finance Committee Report
May 3, 2017	Any pre-Town Meeting actions needed
May 6, 2017	Annual Town Meeting
May 10, 2017	Any post-Town Meeting actions needed

Meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- December 14, 2016 Minutes
- Letter from DESE attorney regarding requirement to appoint a SRO.

Minutes Approved January 11, 2017

John Hanold, Finance Committee Chair

Richard Kuklewicz, Selectboard Chair