

FINANCE COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2019 at 6:00 PM
62 5th STREET, TURNERS FALLS, MA
MEETING MINUTES
Page 1 of 3

Finance Committee attendees: Christopher Menegoni, Frederic Bowman, Greg Garrison, Jennifer Audley (Chair), John Hanold. (Richard Widmer was absent.)

Others attendees: Mike Naughton, GMRSD superintendent Michael Sullivan, Town administrator Steve Ellis, Gill-Montague Regional School Committee chair Jane Oakes, GMRSD director of business and operations Joanne Blier, Town accountant Carolyn Olsen, Jeff Singleton, Selectboard member Mike Nelson, and from Montague Community Television, Mike Smith

The chair opened the meeting at 6:04pm, and announced that the meeting was being recorded by MCTV No one else recorded the meeting. The recording made by MCTV is available at: <https://vimeo.com/363568812>

Presentation on the Affordable Assessment

Jen Audley provided background for the presentation:

In 2010, leaders from Gill, Montague, and Gill-Montague Regional School District collaborated to craft the “Compact for Funding Education,” an agreement to approach the allocation of local funds to our regional school district in a new way. Representatives from the MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and our state legislators at the time supported this joint agreement. As we approach the 10-year mark on implementing our “Affordable Assessment” approach, we invited Mike Naughton to reprise and update a presentation he created for the civic leaders group in October 2017 so we could have an opportunity to reflect on how it has worked and what has gone differently than we anticipated.

Mike Naughton is a long-time Finance Committee member who stepped down from the committee at the end of FY19. He served on the oversight group that initiated the process that led to the Compact and on the technical panel that developed it. The other members of the technical panel were Jeff Singleton and Tupper Brown.

Mike Naughton reviewed the draft document he’d prepared for this meeting, called “The ‘Affordable Assessment;’ A History and Update,” which includes 5 pages of narrative, a copy of “Table B,” a companion document to the Compact which contains revenue and budget projections for FY10-FY15, a table of updated figure for FY11-FY20 and several graphs showing actual v projected figures and enrollment trends over the past decade. All of these documents, as well as the Compact itself, and an updated version of “The ‘Affordable

FINANCE COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2019 at 6:00 PM
62 5th STREET, TURNERS FALLS, MA
MEETING MINUTES
Page 2 of 3

Assessment;" A History and Update," will be posted at <https://www.montague-ma.gov/p/1425/Funding-Education>.

Jeff Singleton offered some observations and left the meeting for another commitment. Jen Audley read aloud this comment from Tupper Brown:

“In my view the most important thing about what we achieved ten years ago is the political settlement represented by the Compact itself. The relationship between the School Committee (and District) and the towns changed literally overnight from adversarial to cooperative, and amazingly it has stayed that way ever since. In this context the institution of the affordable assessment calculation I've always considered a relatively minor detail. The really important thing was getting everyone, including DESE and the legislators, to sign on to a joint plan as evidenced in an actual written agreement - called the Compact - with the intention of making it work.”

In the discussion that followed, numerous people described the positive effect the Affordable Assessment approach has had on the annual budget process for the towns and the district, as “more collaborative,” “trusting,” “increased stability,” and “reducing uncertainty.” No votes were taken, but there was a clear consensus in the room for continuing the agreements described in the Compact.

Finance Committee Minutes of September 11, 2019

Jen Audley suggested including the URL for MCTV’s recording of a meeting to the minutes, and the committee supported that idea.

The committee voted unanimously to approve the 9/11/19 minutes (prepared by Mr. Hanold), with that addition.

Town Accountant’s report: Nothing to report at this time.

Requests for future agendas: None

Training opportunities and meeting invitations:

- Oct 3 in Greenfield - Budget and Tax Recap workshop by the Division of Local Services. Meeting announcement was shared. Jen Audley plans to attend.
- Oct 9 in Greenfield - Upper Pioneer Valley Veterans’ Services District meeting – meeting materials were shared.

FINANCE COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2019 at 6:00 PM
62 5th STREET, TURNERS FALLS, MA
MEETING MINUTES
Page 3 of 3

- Oct 26 at Bridgewater State University – Massachusetts’ Association of Town Finance Committees annual meeting. Agenda and meeting details were shared. Jen Audley plans to attend.

Topics not anticipated within the 48 hour posting requirement:

Jen Audley observed that the materials mailed to Town Meeting Members in advance of the Oct 2, Special Town Meeting did not include information about the funds available to appropriate or the recommendations voted by the Finance Committee, the Selectboard, or the Capital Improvements Committee. (Historically, Town Meeting members have not been provided that information prior to a fall Special Town Meeting.)

Steve Ellis and Michael Sullivan participated earlier this evening in a conference call hosted by State Senator Jo Comerford’s office that briefed municipal and district leaders on the Student Opportunity Act, which proposes to operationalize the Foundation Budget Review Commission’s recommendations for addressing systemic inequities in how the Commonwealth funds public education.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45pm.

Materials associated with this meeting:

- Compact for Funding Education: Gill-Montague Regional School District (Nov. 2010) and Table B: Budget and Revenue Projections (Oct 2010)
- “The ‘Affordable Assessment’: A History and Update” (Sept 2019)
- Minutes of the September 11, 2019 meeting of the Montague Finance Committee

Minutes prepared by Jen Audley.

Next Finance Committee meeting dates: Oct 16; Oct 30; Nov 6; Nov 20; Dec 4; Dec 11

(This committee typically meets on Wednesdays at 6pm in the upstairs conference room at Town Hall.)