

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
UPSTAIRS MEETING ROOM, 1 AVENUE A, TURNERS FALLS, MA
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 7, 2020
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The Chair opened the meeting

#1 Meeting was opened at 6:01 PM by virtual attendance via ZOOM Meeting

- **Finance Committee members participating remotely:** Jen Audley, Fred Bowman, Greg Garrison, John Hanold, Chris Menegoni and Francia Wisnewski
- **Others participating remotely:** Town Administrator Steve Ellis, (6:07) Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Dir. Of Assessing Karen Tonelli, and Finance Committee candidate Jennifer Waryas.
- The Chair announced that the meeting is being recorded by the Town of Montague via Zoom. Remote participation for both members and the public was provided by Zoom. The link to the Zoom recording is <https://vimeo.com/470618544> .

#2 Approve Meeting Minutes

- The revised minutes for the meeting on September 30, 2020 were distributed in advance and accepted.

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve minutes of September 30, 2020

Vote: Menegoni–Aye, Bowman-Aye, Wisnewski-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Audley –Aye

#3 Prepare for FY21 Tax Classification Hearing

- Ms. Tonelli described the process used to assess market values. The State prescribes that valuations be equitable across each property type and recognize sale experience. Montague uses a CAMA (Computer Assisted Mass Appraisal) software package to collect the data used.
- The valuations are adjusted annually, based on twelve defined neighborhoods. It lags current data by about a year.
- Every town goes through revaluation and certification by the Massachusetts Department of Revenue every five years, including examination of procedures and office records.
- Actual visits to properties occur every ten years. A taxpayer can protest the assessment at any year by assuming the burden of proof that the assessor's data is incorrect.
- The sequence of events leading up to the Tax Classification Hearing begins with selected site visits in the winter and spring followed by data analysis in the

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summer and an estimate of New Growth in the fall. The Tax Classification Hearing is generally held at a Selectboard meeting in late October and covers three districts (two fire districts and one lighting district) and the Town. The approved tax rates form the basis of tax bills mailed in early December by the Treasurer.

#4 Town Accountant and Town Administrator Updates

- Carolyn Olsen: The department spending report, as of the end of the first quarter, shows no surprises or concerns.
- Steve Ellis: No news, beyond an update on collection rates. 90% of property taxes and 99% of personal property are paid, to date, quite similar to recent years, due in part to good communication and attention from the Treasury staff.

#5 Prepare for Fall Special Town Meeting (October 13, 2020)

- The Warrant, Motions and Background Information were sent out last week by Wendy Bogusz.
- Jen Audley assigned responsibility for initial explanation of the finance articles on the Warrant:
 - Art. 1 Changes to FY21 budget. Ellis & Olsen will begin, and Finance Committee will endorse the article prior to Town Meeting discussion.
 - Art. 7 Financial Policies. Audley will describe the five funds, and delegate follow-up questions to Committee members.
 - Art. 8 Cannabis. Hanold will speak.
 - Art. 9 Reserve Fund. Garrison will speak.

#6 Discuss Draft Financial Management Policies

- Some comments were received during the week. Mr. Ellis is also working to harmonize our human resources policies. That effort will involve bargaining-unit discussion, and was suspended in recent months as COVID-19 demands have arisen. Montague has few people in most departments, and relies on board/committee support to ease management succession.

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- Discussion revolved around the provision of varied scenarios to department heads and the Town Administrator at the start of the budget cycle, and requesting continued sharing of comments with Ms. Audley.

#7 Finance Committee Vacancy

The second candidate has decided to pursue other committee opportunities. Jennifer Waryas is interested in joining our committee and will send a letter of interest to the Moderator. The Committee supports her application and Ms. Audley will communicate that to the Moderator.

#8 Topics Not Anticipated, or Proposed for Next Meeting

- Ms. Audley mentioned a request from State Sen. Jo Comerford for public input to educational funding; a mailing will be circulated after this meeting.
- Special Town Meeting will be 6:30 PM on October 13,2020 in the new Public Works Garage
- The next Committee meeting will be October 28, 2020

#9 Motion to Adjourn

Finance Committee Moved:

To adjourn at 7:34PM.

Vote: Menegoni–Aye, Bowman-Aye, Wisnewski-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye,
Audley –Aye

Respectfully submitted by John Hanold

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Tonelli explanation of property codes