

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
UPSTAIRS MEETING ROOM, 1 AVENUE A, TURNERS FALLS, MA
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28, 2020
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The Chair opened the meeting

#1 Meeting was opened at 6:00 PM by virtual attendance via ZOOM Meeting

- **Finance Committee members participating remotely:** Jen Audley, Fred Bowman, Greg Garrison, John Hanold, Jennifer Waryas, Francia Wisnewski (6:05), and Chris Menegoni, **(6:10)**
- **Others participating remotely:** Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Jeff Singleton
- 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/473287844>.

#2 Approve Meeting Minutes

- The revised minutes for the meeting on October 7, 2020 were distributed in advance and accepted.

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve minutes of October 7, 2020

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

#3 Town Accountant Updates

- Carolyn Olsen: Her preliminary look at FY2022 indicates that Montague does not appear to have an initial problem.

#4 Recap of Association of Town Finance Committees Annual Meeting

- John Robertson predicted no 9C cuts for FY2021, but expects FY2022 to be a challenge because of COVID-19. FY2021's final budget is expected to be set by end of the year – not unprecedented, but unusual.
- John Coderre emphasized the importance of Financial Policies in years of “financial distress,” but his town, and his personal activity, is larger than in Montague.
- Given Montague's success in increasing our reserves in recent years, we may want to consider drawing on them in the next years.

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- Ms. Audley noted that Montague has a thin management team with minimal back-up: one accountant, no Facilities Manager, etc. Nevertheless, without more funding an expansion in staffing will be difficult. The Financial Policy working group is working to clarify the responsibilities so informal understanding is documented.

#5 FY2021 Annual Budget

- The Committee recognized that Montague ended FY2021 with substantial reserve-fund balances. Ms. Audley noted that directing some of these funds to capital needs would be likely in the next couple of years.
- Mr. Garrison forecasted that capital planning now in work will result in attention to the Libraries, especially the main Carnegie. Substantial needs have also been identified in the Water Pollution Control Facility, and there are some overhanging needs in Montague's elementary school buildings that were deferred in the course of responding to COVID-19 demands.

#6 Review Preliminary Calendar – FY2022 Annual Budget

- Ms. Audley presented a draft calendar, based on the calendar that resulted from the FY2021 cycle. It would be posted on the town website, and would be general enough to allow flexibility but clear enough to allow public understanding and participation.
- The key date in early December is the issue of the Town Administrator's Kick-off Letter to department heads, presenting spending-increase guidelines and instructions on proposing innovations.
- Since Brian Beck is new to the Gill-Montague Superintendent job, it seemed desirable to invite him to our November 18th meeting to explain the concept and calculation of the Affordable Assessment.

#7 Discuss Funding Goals for FY2022

Ms. Audley shared the **Funding Goals** statement of the Committee's Report to Town Meeting Fiscal Year 2021, which was similar to prior years, and asked for suggested changes. Mr. Hanold observed that the three listed goals are still valid, however, the "additional accomplishments" (budgeting \$300,000 Excess Capacity and eliminating a subsidy from Free Cash to fund the Operating Budget) are worth considering for change or continuation. Ms. Wisnewski proposed some response to COVID-19 challenges, and

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Ms. Audley said that our goals might include “no increase in the tax rate” and any lower spending that might result. No decision was made at this time.

#8 Topics Not Anticipated, or Proposed for Next Meeting

- Mr. Singleton requested the Finance Committee’s support on the matter of reducing the Police budget and re-allocating savings elsewhere. Ms. Audley responded that the first step would be for interested voters to contact the Police Chief, and failing that the Town Administrator, and failing that the Finance Committee, and finally Annual Town Meeting. Mr. Singleton replied that he did not feel he was being properly represented by our Committee.

Mr. Garrison said the work plan was the first step, and the budget would be an outgrowth of it. Discussion covered the role of Finance Committee vs. town staff, and our role as analyst vs. initiator of changes in departmental operations. There was agreement that specific publicity on how to offer resident input into the budgeting process was desirable, and Ms. Waryas offered to help Mr. Singleton write an article; Mr. Singleton said that due to his strong personal feelings about the matter, he was not allowed to write his mandate as a REPORTER staffer precluded his writing this type of article.

No action was voted at this time.

- No suggestions for next meeting’s agenda.
- The next Committee meetings will be: November 18, December 2, and December 16, 2020 (tentatively)

#9 Motion to Adjourn

Finance Committee Moved:

To adjourn at 7:41 PM.

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

Respectfully submitted by John Hanold

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Draft FY2022 Budget Development Calendar

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- Expanded Summary of Changes in Fund Balances