

FINANCE COMMITTEE & CEMETERY COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES
UPSTAIRS MEETING ROOM, 1 AVENUE A TURNERS FALLS, MA
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2020
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#1 The Chairs opened the meeting.

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, and Chris Menegoni
- **Absent:** Francia Wisnewski (excused)
- **Cemetery Commission members participating remotely:** Judith Lorei, Annie Levine, and Jeri Moran
- **Others participating remotely:** Selectboard Chair Rich Kuklewicz, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Town Administrator Steve Ellis, DPW Superintendent Tom Bergeron, and Director of Assessing Karen Tonelli
- 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 <https://vimeo.com/481487680>

#2 Presentations by Departments

- Cemetery Commission: Judith Lorei reviewed the Commission's proposal to add Highland Cemetery to the roster of town-owned cemeteries. The Highland Cemetery is considerably larger than the other town-owned cemeteries and is not full. The main change is that the Commission's work would expand from passive maintenance of largely-full cemeteries to active maintenance and sales, including Green burials. A summary of annual recurring revenue and operating expense was presented. Forecasted revenue from plot sales would be identified separately from general funds and would probably be adequate to match forecasted fixed expenses. (Perpetual-care administration is a minor consideration; interest earned is not adequate for care.) Mr. Ellis confirmed that Town Meeting would have to accept the property and approve the Cemetery Commission's annual operating budget.
- Department of Public Works: Tom Bergeron reported that grounds maintenance needs have increased, citing upkeep of town parks and park improvements, and deferred tree trimming that has become a safety concern. He asks for 2 added heads, preferably with CDL licenses. Estimated per-person cost is \$40,000 plus \$20,000 for basic benefits. He does not consider the Town's expectations to be excessive, but overtime is growing and we are also behind on tree planting. No added DPW equipment is needed; small trucks would be available.
- Assessor's Office: Karen Tonelli reports that Laura Arruda will retire at the end of November, but she wishes to prepare the FY2022 budget request at her current staff level while evaluating how to reorganize the department. Cross-training has been adequate, but FY2022 is a revaluation year and a significant software upgrade will be necessary soon. She will likely submit a revision to her department's FY2022 budget request before Annual Town Meeting. Mr. Ellis has been kept aware of her evaluation effort and supports this process and timeline.

#3 Updates: Town Accountant and Town Administrator

- New Growth has been established at \$404 K for FY21, reflecting a combination of commercial, residential and utility upgrades. This figure is considerably higher than our initial

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estimate, and as in recent years, most of the unanticipated New Growth is attributable to increases in the assessed value and improvements to personal property this year by utility companies. Building permits for the current calendar year include several new residential properties that will contribute to New Growth in FY22, but continued increases in Personal Property are not assured or predictable. The Tax Classification hearing on November 23 could result in a slight reduction in the residential rate, depending on a separate decision on Excess Capacity. Mr. Ellis intends to propose an increase in Excess Capacity from \$300 K to \$509 K, in part to ease the immediate impact on taxpayers and in part to preserve a cushion for future years' capital needs and lay groundwork for the town to have the option of funding capital projects without borrowing.

- The FY22 budget instruction memo has been issued to department heads, requesting level-services operations budget, by December 15. A 3-6% reduction should be contemplated, but not submitted at this time. The police chief has indicated that he intends to submit a budget request that restores the funding originally requested for FY2021.
- A survey will be sent to Town Meeting members to help determine whether a remote Special Town Meeting will be attempted this winter— several articles are becoming urgent. Mr. Kuklewicz reacted positively to a suggestion about holding a series of meetings. An alternative to address attendance concerns could include reducing the quorum requirement for an in-person meeting. Ellis observed that in towns that have held remote town meetings during the pandemic, attendance has been robust.

#4 Review Narrative Description -- FY2022 Budget Development Process.

- A revised Description was presented and accepted without further suggestions, and will be posted on the town website. Concerns about the early December meetings being over-scheduled will be addressed.

#5 Discuss Outreach to Town Meeting & Residents

- Ms. Audley proposes sending a one-page summary to residents as part of a broader mailing to describe the budget process. Ms. Waryas suggested a graphic version, and Ms. Audley will work with her to create one for future use.

#6 Approve Meeting Minutes October 28, 2020

- This topic will be deferred to December 2.

#7 Highlights from Association of Town Finance Committees 2020 Annual Meeting, Parts 2 & 3.

No discussion. Prior to the meeting, Mr Hanold circulated a summary of both sessions and Ms. Audley shared the presenters' slides and links to the recordings.

#8 Topics Not Anticipated, or Proposed for Next Meeting

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- No suggestions for next meeting's agenda, beyond revisions discussed earlier.
- The next Committee meetings will be: December 2, 9 and 16, 2020.

#9 Motion to Adjourn

Finance Committee Moved:

To adjourn at 8:00 PM.

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

Respectfully submitted by John Hanold

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Handout from Cemetery Commission
- Budget Instruction Memo
- Revised FY2022 Budget Development Process
- Hanold summary of ATFC webinars #s 2 & 3