

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
UPSTAIRS MEETING ROOM, 1 AVENUE A, TURNERS FALLS, MA
WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16, 2020
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#1 Meeting Opened

The Chair opened the meeting at 6:00 PM by virtual attendance via ZOOM Meeting

- **Finance Committee members (remotely):** Jen Audley, John Hanold, Greg Garrison, Fred Bowman, Chris Menegoni, Franca Wisnewski (arrived 7:05), and Jennifer Waryas

Others participating remotely: Town Administrator Steve Ellis and Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen.

The Chair announced that the meeting is being recorded by Carolyn Olsen and MCTV via Zoom. Remote participation for both members and the public was provided by Zoom. The link to the Zoom recording is <https://vimeo.com/495852946>.

#2 Approve Meeting Minutes December 2 and 9, 2020

The minutes were accepted without corrections.

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve minutes of December 2, 2020

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

To approve minutes of December 9, 2020

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

#3 Updates from Town Administrator

- Mr. Ellis reported that documentation of current policies by the Financial Policies group is continuing, with ten ready for review by the working group, two in second-draft, and several in earlier stages. Ms. Audley has not been an active part as yet, and the Finance Committee will not review them until later in the process, which may be complete by March 2021.
- Work by the Financial Forecasting group has been suspended until Gov. Baker's initial budget proposal in late January 2021.
- The Special Town Meeting warrant is in process, including consideration of a voter-ID program to enable validation in a remote-meeting context. It will focus on urgent matters such as the purchase of property near the airport and upgrade of chlorination equipment at the Water Pollution Control Facility (WPCF) in response to EPA requirements. The Finance Committee will review it after the Capital Improvements Committee, probably after December 23.

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#4 Operational Changes w/ FY22 Financial Implications

- Ms. Olsen has begun investigating the replacement of our current IT consultant with either a full-time employee or an established outside service. The challenge is adequate response to the expanded role of Information Technology across multiple locations of town operations.
- The draft Human Resources policy and staffing additions to the Selectboard department, will not result in action in FY2022, in view of COVID and other priorities.
- The WPCF Superintendent, Assessor, and Treasurer are considering staffing changes in response to retirements and resignation. Budget requests will change as their work is completed.

#5 Orientation to FY22 Budget Workbook and Planning for Review of Requests

- Ms. Olsen described the uses and interlocking nature of the annual budget file, which will be continually revised during the budget season. Department submissions are included in the initial version distributed this week by Ms. Olsen. Place-holder amounts are included pending firmer versions yet to come.
- Ms. Audley raised for discussion the issue of posting the budget file on the town website. Ms. Olsen recommended referring to it, but not posting it, since it will change regularly and is quite large. Town residents will be advised to direct questions to Ms. Olsen.
- Ms. Olsen observes that the file is only a working document until a number of assumptions and funding decisions are made.
- In describing how they use the file, Mr. Bowman emphasized the heavy impact of labor costs, and his concern about protecting the reserve balances. Ms. Wisnewski is aware of the public's view of the budget. Ms. Audley sees the budget process as a vehicle to educate the public on how departments perform their rolls in town. Mr. Garrison compares the budget requests to the mandate given to the departments. Mr. Hanold starts from the Working Budget Detail page to the individual budget tabs and the Narratives to highlight which ones should be the subjects of hearings. Mr. Menegoni pays attention to the Narratives and cautions any increase in staffing.

#6 Discussion of FY22 Revenue Estimate and Implications for Funding Goals

- The initial budget file was available only briefly before this meeting, so member impressions are only preliminary. Several members mentioned that Montague is fortunate to be in sound fiscal shape, with reserve funds that can be drawn upon if desired.

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- Ms. Wisnewski would like a repeat of last year's joint meeting with legislators Blais and Comerford.
- Ms. Audley notes that lower Free Cash generated in FY21 and reduced State Aid in FY22 mean we should moderate spending increases; she awaits the recommendations of the Capital Improvements Committee. Mr. Hanold feels that we should consider tapping General Stabilization, and revisiting our assumptions on use of Excess Capacity, in order to increase the Affordable Assessment calculation for Gill-Montague beyond a level 1.1%.

#7 Topics not Anticipated and Suggestions for Future Agendas

Topics anticipated for December 21 Agenda (Selectboard Meeting)

Airport Purchase

Topics anticipated for January 6 Agenda

- Members to come prepared with questions for department heads, and candidates for formal hearings
- No unanticipated topics were raised.

#7 Adjournment

Finance Committee Moved:

To adjourn at 7:57 PM

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

Respectfully submitted by John Hanold

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Preliminary FY2022 Budget file dated December 15 2020