

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND SELECTBOARD  
MEETING MINUTES

1 AVENUE A, TURNERS FALLS, MA  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 24, 2021

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Meeting was opened at 6:01 PM by remote participation via Zoom

- **Finance Committee members:** Jen Audley, Greg Garrison, Fred Bowman, Jennifer Waryas, and John Hanold.
- **Absent:** Chris Menegoni, Francia Wisnewski,
- **Montague Selectboard members:** Rich Kuklewicz, Michael Nelson, and Chris Boutwell
- **Others:** Town Administrator Steve Ellis, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Director of Assessing Karen Tonelli, Treasurer Eileen Seymour, and Town Clerk Deb Bourbeau

The Chair announced that the meeting is being streamed and recorded by the MCTV and asked if anyone else was recording the meeting. Ms. Olsen is also recording the meeting. Remote participation for both members and the public was provided by Zoom. The link to the recording is <https://vimeo.com/528821093>.

### **Review of FY 2022 Budget Requests**

#### **Assessors (Department 411)**

Ms. Tonelli presented her staffing plan for FY2022, in which she and the Assessing Technician will share the field inspections and office work. A contracted Field Inspector (17 hours per week, in the Professional Services line) will work May – September during the busy season for residential inspections. The rising share of special cases (cannabis, solar panels, and utility assessments) makes this feasible; Ms. Tonelli will return to the Committee if it does not work out.

Ms. Waryas asked for clarification of an earlier comment concerning obsolescent software in the office, and was told this will also be addressed in the future after the current revaluation year is complete.

Finance Committee Moved: To approve the Assessor's FY22 budget of \$179,952.

Vote: Audley-Aye, Waryas-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, and Hanold-Aye

#### **Treasurer (Department 145)**

Ms. Seymour presented her staffing plan for FY2022, which features an Assistant Treasurer position, which is being posted per union agreement. This would constitute an upgrade from a present position, and involve re-allocation of duties between the Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer to enable the assistant to perform broader duties and to free Ms. Seymour to attend to other Town priorities.

Finance Committee Moved: To approve the Treasurer's FY22 budget of \$229,184.

Vote: Audley-Aye, Waryas-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, and Hanold-Aye

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**Town Clerk (Department 161)**

Ms. Bourbeau proposed a re-grade of her assistant to match her increasing responsibilities. This will align the assistants for the Clerk, Treasurer and Planner at the same grade. Mr. Hanold suggested that in view of changes over recent decades in the complexity of the elected positions (Treasurer and Clerk) and the advisability of a broader selection pool, that the Selectboard consider beginning the steps to securing Town Meeting support for making the positions appointive.

Finance Committee Moved: To approve the Clerk's FY22 budget of \$155,379.

Vote: Audley-Aye, Waryas-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, and Hanold-Aye

**Town & WPCF Benefits (Departments 910 & 661-910)**

The Committee was assured that these departments are estimated properly, with current or best-estimated headcount, family status, and plan rates.

Finance Committee Moved: To approve the Town Benefits FY22 budget of \$2,397,861.

Vote: Audley-Aye, Waryas-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, and Hanold-Aye

Finance Committee Moved: To approve the WPCF Benefits FY22 budget of \$270,333.

Vote: Audley-Aye, Waryas-Aye, ski-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, and Hanold-Aye

**WPCF: Subsidiary Public Works (Department 661-449)**

This department allows DPW employees to work on WPCF tasks (maintaining sewer lines under their responsibility) and be funded by sewer users. The amount has not changed in recent years, but the actual effort varies on an as-requested basis.

Finance Committee Moved: To approve the WPCF Subsidiary DPW budget of \$50,800.

Vote: Audley-Aye, Waryas-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, and Hanold-Aye

**Capital Improvements Committee Report**

Mr. Garrison observed that the CIC has improved in recent years in forecasting and planning the capital needs of Montague and the Gill-Montague School District. Nevertheless, the lack of a Town Engineer hampers our ability to fully specify and oversee projects. Three Special Articles in question create small replenishable funds to allow rapid response to unforeseen urgent needs that must be addressed in order for work to continue. Several examples of such needs were mentioned, and discussion of the need for a Town Engineer or Facilities Manager followed.

Project and Bid Cost Overruns Fund	\$25,000
Unexpected Survey and Engineering Fund	\$25,000

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Unsafe/Unhealthy Building Fund \$25,000

On Ms. Audley's suggestion a vote on the Articles will occur next week.

**Water Pollution Control Facility: Inflow & Infiltration**

Ms. Olsen and Ms. Audley described the character and history of this portion of sewer charges that are borne by the town rather than by sewer users. Efforts to identify and eliminate these flows are funded by the DPW Subsidiary portion of the WPCF budget. The calculation is complex and yet approximate -- it is intended to cover flows to the Treatment Plant that cannot be traced to a user (cracked pipes allowing inflow, metered differences between Millers Falls and Erving, etc.). The figure has not diminished over time because the elimination of one inflow often results in another being identified.

**Mechanics of Balancing the Budget**

Ms. Olsen shared her proposal for balancing the budget, which has been discussed with other town staff. Highlights are:

- Reductions totaling \$64,899 in the Public Building Utilities (190) and Solid Waste (433). These lines are components of the DPW budget and the proposal to cut them has been discussed and accepted by that department. The expenses in these accounts are mostly based on estimates of future bills, and will not compromise the DPW's capacity to provide service to the town.
- Retained Earnings for the Water Pollution Control Facility would be transferred to WPCF Capital Stabilization. (no budgetary impact)
- No appropriation in FY2022 from Taxation to General Stabilization. Our present balance exceeds the minimum specified in our Financial Policies and is sufficient for three years of likely needs.
- Except for the appropriation to General Stabilization, all allocations prescribed by our Financial Policies would be made (including use of the Tech School Stabilization Fund).
- Appropriation of the DPW Discretionary Fund would come from Taxation, and purchase of a replacement dump truck from Free Cash.
- The three small CIC-endorsed projects discussed earlier barely meet the capitalization threshold, and would come from Taxation.
- The four Gill-Montague projects, some of them deferred from last year's Annual Town Meeting, would come from Town Capital Stabilization. Mr. Hanold asserted that these should come from GMRSD Capital Stabilization, to the extent possible. (After the meeting Ms. Olsen provided support for her position, which was fully satisfactory.)

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Mr. Ellis expressed his support of the proposal's decisions and rationale. The result of this proposal is a Free Cash balance with which to provide for uncertainties in FY22, Town General and Capital Stabilization balances each exceeding \$1,000,000, and Stabilization balances for each school districts exceeding \$100,000. The budgeted revenue exceeds budgeted expenses by about \$9,000.

The proposal is open for consideration and alternatives; members are asked to bring their concurrence or suggestions next week.

**Review of Board Of Health Request (Department 511)**

Ms. Olsen reported that a reduction of \$7,000 in this budget was recommended as part of her proposal, based on a lesser increase in the hours of a public health nurse. The requested increase was from 4 hours/week to 12; the proposal is for 8 hours/week and was offered after discussion with department head Daniel Wasiuk. At the time of the meeting, the Board of Health and Mr. Wasiuk had not yet endorsed the proposal.

**Preparation for Meeting on March 24**

Mr. Ellis reported that the Selectboard has delayed Annual Town Meeting to dates during the week of May 17 -23, depending on whether it is held remotely or in an outdoor location, and to move municipal elections to June 22. This affects the timeline for preparing our Report to Town Meeting and contributing to the Background Information. Ms. Audley hopes to reduce the frequency of meetings between now and Annual Town Meeting.

**Updates from Town Administrator and Accountant**

Mr. Ellis and Ms. Olsen had no updates to report.

**Topics not Anticipated in Last 48 Hours**

No news was shared.

**Agendas for Future Meetings**

**March 31** – Balancing the budget, recommendations for capital special articles

**April 14 (tentative)** – First Draft of Report to Town Meeting, including Background Information and recommendations on articles not already addressed.

**Adjournment**

Finance Committee Moved: To adjourn at 8:13 PM.

Vote: Audley-Aye, Waryas-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, and Hanold-Aye.

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Selectboard Moved: To adjourn at 8:15 PM

Vote: Kuklewicz-Aye, Boutwell-Aye, and Nelson-Aye

Respectfully submitted by John Hanold

**List of Documents and Exhibits:**

- FY2022 Budget requests
- Report of Capital Improvements Committee
- ***FY22 Budget File 2021-03-24A Balanced. Xlsx***
- Calculation of Pollution Facility Inflow & Infiltration: Olsen Notes (from Budget file)
- Tentative Timeline for Annual Town Meeting in mid-May: Audley Notes