

MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Final Minutes
Wednesday, September 15, 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

This meeting was held via Zoom and recorded: <https://vimeo.com/606135213>

PRESENT: Jennifer Audley, Chair; Christopher Menengoni, Frederic Bowman, John Hanold, Francia Wisnewski, Jennifer Waryas and Greg Garrison, members.

OTHERS PRESENT: Carolyn Olsen, Town Accountant, Steve Ellis, Town Administrator, Chris Williams, Chief of Police, BettyLou Mallet, Scribe.

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Jennifer Audley, Chair. She announced that the meeting is being recorded by MCTV as well as Carolyn Olsen.
2. Jennifer Audley (JA) stated the main items of business in tonight's discussion are the financial articles appearing on the Special Town Meeting (STM) which will be held on October 14, 2021 in the Turners Falls High School auditorium. The timeline was shared by Steve Ellis, the FinCom will review articles tonight and make recommendations on September 22. There are 18 articles on the warrant at this time, however some appear to be housekeeping and may not need much discussion. JA read each of the 18 articles and asked for the FinCom members to make note as to which ones they would like to address at tonight's meeting.

Chris Williams, Police Chief, was in attendance at tonight's meeting and therefore, Article 17 was brought to the forefront for discussion. Article 17 reads: ***To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, borrow or otherwise provide the sums of \$29,000, or any other amount, for the purpose of increasing the FY22 Dispatch Budget, or pass any vote or votes in relating thereto.*** Chief Williams spoke with the FinCom explaining the past several years with the employment of dispatchers that is now in what he is calling "emergency status" being down 2 dispatchers. He also explained that Montague and Greenfield man their own dispatch and he does not want the control of 911 dispatch to change over to another town. FinCom members John Hanold, Greg Garrison, Fred Bowman and Jennifer Waryas voiced their concerns to Chief Williams about the importance as well as difficulty filling the dispatch positions with the right skilled individual and that it is not just about the financial piece. Steve Ellis spoke about the charts/graph shown to the Committee and that Montague falls within the middle of the pay scale. Members of the FinCom expressed the need for more discussion with the Chief on this important topic. The Montague Board of Selectmen have already negotiated and signed an MOU with the NAGE union agreeing to the increase in the wages for the Dispatch position.

JA then polled the FinCom members on the importance of other articles they'd like to discuss at tonight's meeting. She brought Articles 8, 9 and 14 to the forefront for discussion.

Article 9 reads: ***To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, borrow or otherwise provide the sum of \$114,382, or any other amount, for the purpose of purchasing and setting up a robotic sewer camera and anything incidental or related thereto, or pass any vote or votes in relation thereto. This would be funded from Free Cash.*** GG stated that the Capital Improvement Committee (CIC) had reviewed the request today and had concerns. There needs

to be more information about training, warranties and the equipment being used. This article will not be discussed further by the FinCom until the CIC has completed its review and made a recommendation.

Article 8 reads: ***To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, borrow or otherwise provide the sum of \$135,000 or any other amount for the purpose of implementing the Montague City Road Flooding Relief Project, or pass any vote or votes in relations thereto, This would be funded from Free Cash.*** GG and Steve Ellis spoke to the committee about this article. It is to stop the constant flooding on the Montague City Road. On a number of occasions, it floods, it is blocked off and diverted and this happens due to the fact that the draining next to the road is on the same level as the road. This request is for funds that would allow us to use FEMA monies that must be utilized this year. The Town Planner has sought state funding for this project and been told it is not available. COVID Relief Funds may also be used to fund this project.

Article 14 reads: ***To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, borrow or otherwise provide the sums of \$45,000, or any other amount for the purpose of repairing and painting exterior siding of the Council on Aging building, and any costs related thereto, or pass any vote or votes in relating thereto. This would be funded from a combination of a previous appropriation and Free Cash.*** Steve updated the FinCom members that this would allow exterior work to the entire back of the building and two sides. More problematic areas will undoubtedly need to be done and that the Town hopes to receive a final figure next week. JA anticipates that Town Meeting members will have questions about this as it is the latest in a series of capital requests for repairs to this building, including several that have expanded in scope. FB stated that the building was built in the 1800s and that older buildings need more care than new buildings.

Article 15 reads: ***To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, borrow to otherwise provide the fums of \$100,000, or any other amount, for the purpose of replacing the 5th Street Pedestrian Bridge and any costs related thereto, or pass any vote or votes in relating thereto. This would be funded from Free Cash.*** Steve noted that everyone is aware that the Town received a large grant to remove the old bridge and replace with a new one. Issues have now arisen in the replacement. Complications include sink holes that are appearing in the parking lot. Engineers have designed a more robust system but it needs to be treated with great caution due to being next to the canal. It is slated to go out to bid on September 21, 2021. Steve spoke of the need of a secondary mechanism in place should all bids come in higher. It will be discussed at Monday's Select Board meeting.

Article 11 reads: ***To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, borrow or otherwise provide the sums of \$200,000, or any other amount, for the purpose of increasing the WPCF Capital Stabilization Fund, or pass any vote or votes in relating thereto. This would be funded from WPCF Retained Earnings.*** JA said that the sewer rate hearing was held on Monday and the increase was 4.3% without using retained earnings. JW asked the committee how they can rationalize the increase with the public in a positive, helpful and useful manner.

JA left the meeting at 7:37 p.m. and the meeting was then Chaired by Greg Garrison, Vice Chair.

Article 12 reads: ***To see if the Town will vote to transfer from Free Cash the sum of \$500,000, or any other sum, to the Town Capital/General/OPEB Stabilization Fund, or pass any vote or votes in relation thereto.*** CO said policy is greater than 3% to be used for Capital items or put into stabilization funds. This article is to recommend how much of the certified Free Cash balance (approx. \$1.3 million)

to allocate to reserve funds: General Stabilization, OPEB and Capital Stabilization. Policy recommends allocating about \$675,000 to capital uses, including capital requests at the fall and winter STMs, and the ATM in the spring. CO recommendation is to allocate \$250,000 to capital stabilization and \$250,000 to OPEB at the Fall STM.

Article 4 reads: ***To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate, transfer from available funds, borrow or otherwise provide the sum of \$1,300, or any other amount for the purpose of increasing the Fiscal Year 2022 Finance Committee budget to allow for clerical assistance to take minutes, or pass any vote or votes in relation thereto.*** JH asked the general question to those attending tonight how other departments/committees take the minutes of their meetings. Steve stated that some committee members take their own minutes, the Select Board has a secretary to take their minutes, Steve stated he takes the minutes for Capital Improvements. Each department is staffed differently. GG said that the FinCom covers more important and timely notes and that the content is quite important and therefore, it was thought to have an outside contractor to take the minutes.

As there were no other articles at this time to be discussed, GG asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. FB seconded. Roll call vote to adjourn – JW, aye; FW, aye; JH, aye; FB, aye; GG, aye; CM, aye. The meeting adjourned at 7:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

BettyLou Mallet
Scribe

Meeting Materials – <https://montague-ma.gov/d/5472/Finance-Committee-Meeting>

Finance Committee Approved: 09/22/2021