

MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Final Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, February 16, 2022, at 6:00 p.m.

This meeting was held via Zoom and recorded: <https://vimeo.com/678487978>

PRESENT: Jen Audley, Chair; Gregory Garrison, Vice-Chair; John Hanold, Chris Menegoni, Fred Bowman and Francia Wisnewski, members; BettyLou Mallet, scribe.

OTHERS PRESENT: Carolyn Olsen, Accountant; Steve Ellis, Town Administrator; Walter Ramsey, Montague Planning; Rich Kuklewicz, Montague Selectboard Chair; Wendy Bogusz, Executive Assistant; Ariel Elan and Mike Naughton, Town meeting members.

ABSENT: Jennifer Waryas

1. CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER – The meeting was called to order at 6:01 p.m. by Chair, Jen Audley. The meeting is being recorded as well as aired on MCTV. Roll call vote on members present – Gregory Garrison, here; John Hanold, here; Francia Wisnewski, here; Chris Menegoni, here; Jen Audley, here; Fred Bowman arrived shortly after the roll call.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT – JA stated that she received and shared with the FinCom members, written comments that were submitted from Jane Alessandra and Mike Naughton. These emails are included in the list of meeting materials below as well as on the calendar event section of the home page of the Town’s website. Ariel Elan spoke in support of Steve Ellis’ proposal for the Assistant Town Administrator as well as a part-time clerical position in the Selectboard’s Office. She believes Steve and Wendy know what is needed within the office and also agrees with Jane Alessandra’s written comments. Mike Naughton added that there are basically two issues before the Town; the workload that is currently being handled by the Selectboard’s Office and how best to handle that work. He does not disagree that the office has a great deal of responsibility and is overwhelmed by the amount of work. He feels that there should be more discussion regarding this proposal.

3. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES – February 9, 2022 – The Finance Committee received and reviewed the draft minutes of the meeting on February 9, 2022. There was no discussion. **On a motion by GG and seconded by FB, the minutes were approved as written. JH, aye; CM, aye; FB, aye; FW, aye; GG, aye; JA, aye.**

4. FY23 BUDGET INVESTIGATION -

JA showed on the screen for the members and audience to review, the overview of FY23 requests from departments in the General Government category. (see meeting materials below) She named Selectboard, Planning, IT, and MEDIC as requests she anticipated would be discussed in more depth this evening. She asked the FinCom members if there were any questions or topics to add to the list. No further requests received therefore, the discussion began on the FY23 budget for the Selectboard’s Office.

SELECTBOARD’S BUDGET

Steve created a PowerPoint presentation that was shared on the screen which described the FY23 Office Budget Request Strategic Staffing Proposal to Advance the Community Interest. He stated that his

mission is to advance the community's interest. The presentation described the employment in the Selectboard's Office (SBO) and the charges for each position. The office needs to make strategic investments, create better strategic planning and manage outside investments. He showed the scope of the responsibilities with the budget, managing employees, buildings, and infrastructure. He feels the time is now to present the needs in increase the staff within the SBO as there is a lack of time to research, pursue, implement, and manage many grants while the resources are available; important work related to governance, policy, financial planning, and professional development has been either unaddressed or stalled.

To solve the problem, Steve feels the possibilities are to consider hiring staff, securing a vendor or inter-agency agreement to meet the needs of the functions within Human Resources, Facilities Management, IT, Procurement, Grant Making and Engineering. He feels the best practice is to hire a full-time Assistant Town Administrator for Development, Facilities, and Infrastructure as well as a 20 hour/week clerical support position to maintain the current workload as well as take on new responsibilities within the SBO.

Steve explained that the Assistant Town Administrator would be a managerial position, non-union, and broadly available to the Town's goals and priorities. The efforts within the SBO with the Town Administrator/Assistant Town Administrator would not be duplicated and Steve feels they would enhance the Department's support and coordination.

Steve stated that Wendy spends much of her time on the clerical responsibilities which can be shifted to the 20 hour/week clerical position. Duties such as licensing/permitting, contracts and record keeping, paperwork processing and meeting organization of materials, filing and digitization of records can all fall under the clerical duties as well as this individual can be a floater during peak demand for other offices.

Steve showed a division of duties for the TA/ATA position; stated he'd like the applicant to have a master's degree and the responsibilities will be used to develop a job description. The ATA position would reduce the burden on the Treasurer/Collector staff through Human Resources, increase grant resources and constituent support.

The timeline implementation, if approved at the ATM, would be to finalize the position and agreement in May/June; establish office space, post, and hire for the Clerk (union) and ATA (non-union) in July/August. Sept/Oct on board staff to address any resulting gaps and Nov/Dec to develop a strategic plan for the SBO operations, prioritize work and start making things happen. Steve stated that there is an excellent internal candidate that and that individual will go through the full and open process.

Questions/Discussion for this proposal -

Rich feels that Steve covered the proposal very well. The Selectboard has been talking about this need for several years. Rich stated that the workloads of other Boards in town have trickled down to the TA's Office; the Human Resource piece has placed a lot of demands on that office and the current staff cannot take on much more.

FW asked Rich questions regarding deliberations and how other department heads were included. Rich stated he had discussed this with Steve and the Board as well as one-on-one. He stated the process is not finalized but as there is an internal candidate, it would open another position within the Town Hall. The hiring of this position will be done through the public interview process.

CM stated that the process presented falls in line with the Planner's Office over the years when expanding their staff. One of the important pieces of the proposal was to bring in outside funding to help facilitate in the town. He knows it is not easy to complete the process however he has a concern on the salary of the ATA. He is in favor of this proposal; hiring and expanding this scope of work is necessary for the Town to improve.

Walter Ramsey works closely with the TA's Office. He supports the proposal and feels that it will help the Planning Office. Wendy B. thinks the proposal is a good idea and will help the department.

FB likes the idea and feels that if something is not done, it will affect the industrial and cultural growth of the town. He feels the town has come a long way and needs to keep growing.

GG has had many conversations about this position related to the CIC and how the work done effects the overall financial plan. He supports this proposal due to the loss of missed opportunities in grant writing, adopting the financial policies as well as moving forward from economic stagnation to projects brought to the forefront such as school's infrastructure.

JH explained his cautions regarding this proposal to be the need for more time to discuss, the added expense, the likelihood of obtaining a candidate with a master's degree and concern with that level of position and what tone it would give to the current office staff.

FW asked why the TA provides Human Resource information and Steve stated as the TA, his position is Personnel Director, Procurement, and ADA Director as well as Human Resources.

JA stated that it is clear that the Selectboard endorses this position. The FinCom is providing enough support for this proposal to be brought forward to the Annual Town Meeting where it will be the elected representatives to decide. After the STM, Steve would like to open the idea to the Selectboard to hold a forum in mid-March for town meeting members to join in a conversation and exchange ideas.

JH agrees that more information is needed between now and when the proposal comes before the town for a vote. He feels the idea of having an open forum is very important.

JA stated it is very important for the town to expand its management capacity at the top. She feels the proposal enhances the leadership in the SBO and would like to see Steve and Wendy have the ability to work at the top of their game. She supports the proposal primarily as a way to address future planning in issues that are critical to the town. She feels the town has a lot going for it and would be a better place if there were more people in the executive administrative office working to their full capacity.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

CO receives a stipend as IT Coordinator with the support of hardware/software and overseeing the IT contract with Suzor IT. She states the Town has now been migrated to Office 365, Suzor continues to make upgrades and provides support. The Town is saving money using Suzor IT. She also feels that Steve's proposal to have a part-time clerical position in-house would be helpful with posting on the website, the meetings and the minutes, which will help to keep the public up to date.

SPECIAL ARTICLES

The FinCom read the conservation fund request and asks Walter to tell a bit more about the trust. Walter stated it has been supported by the Town for about 40 years. The town put 36 acres in town conservation and drew down the balance on the trust. The Conservation Commission is now looking to build the balance back to \$50,000 in \$10,000 increments. These funds are specifically used to place land into conservation. Walter stated for every figure the town has placed in this fund, outside sources have been utilized via State/Federal/Land conservation funds.

There are two roof projects that will be discussed in March. GG stated the CIC looked at the Town Hall roof and discussed all available options. They considered a metal roof but at this time, do not have an idea as to the true cost. So, the CIC recommended today to move forward with the asphalt shingles. The amount requested includes decking and the small roof. They have good quotes on the Shea Theater roof which includes the large HVAC unit. He stated they are not sure of the resources required to relocate the duct work to complete the roof. The roof quote is adequate and has been vetted and is comfortable to have the work done including the relocation of the HVAC unit.

JH asks if the contingency in the amount approved is adequate with the issues that have come up with the Shea? GG stated this is the smaller roof where the HVAC and duct work is relatively new, and he feels it is adequate as it is only the duct work that needs to be moved.

CM asked the differences in the cost between the metal roofing and the asphalt roof replacement of the Town Hall and the time span. Steve stated the metal roofing company came through with the pricing of 2.5 percent the construction costs for the metal roof but do not have a final quote. He believes the CIC looked at the potential costs and feels it is the right way to go.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS TO DATE AND NEXT STEPS

JA spoke about the process going forward. Next week, GG will be Chairing the FinCom meeting where the last portion of the budget investigation will include the operating budgets of the Town's two enterprise funds: Airport and Water Pollution Control Facility. Also included in the discussion on 2/23: members will have the opportunity to volunteer to be the spokesperson for the FinCom to answer questions regarding the financial articles on the March 3 Special Town Meeting warrant. The milestones to keep in mind is that the FinCom will reconvene with the Selectboard in March. The FinCom will not meet the week of the Special Town Meeting although will convene with the Selectboard at their February 28th meeting with the Franklin County Tech School presentation for their budget. There are also practice meetings to prepare for the Special Town Meeting on March 3rd. The FinCom will meet again on March 9 and invite the Selectboard to come to that meeting however it is also the night that the Franklin County Tech School votes on its budget and therefore, Rich Kuklewicz will likely not be able to attend this meeting. She would like the committee to come to the March 9 meeting prepared to vote on groups of departmental budgets that were agreed upon as well as on specific budgets where there was some debate. Finance Committee members should also come to the meeting on March 9 with proposals for how to reduce the spending from taxation so that taxation funds can be held in reserve for COLAs in union negotiations. Firmer figures will be provided before the meeting, so the FinCom know how much to cut.

March 16 the FinCom will hear from the CIC with the Selectboard and expect to vote on the capital requests. March 23, need to balance the budget, finalize the recommendations, allocations to reserves and what will be written in the Finance Committee's Town Report. The end of March and beginning in April voting on the actual motions on the ATM and writing the report.

6. TOPICS NOT ANTICIPATED – There were no other topics to discuss.

On a motion by FB and seconded by GG, the meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m. FB, aye; JH, aye; CM, aye; FW, aye; GG, aye; JA, aye.

Respectfully submitted,

BettyLou Mallet
Scribe

Meeting materials are linked here: <https://montague-ma.gov/d/6572/Finance-Committee>

[Finance Committee 2022-02-16 Agenda](#)

[Public comments for 02-16-22 Finance Committee meeting](#)

[Town Dept requests for 02-16-22 FC meeting](#)

[q and a on General Govt topics for FC 02-16-22](#)

[Selectboard staffing proposal presentation](#)

Montague Finance Committee Vote: 02/23/2022 (4 aye, 1 abstention)