

MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE AND SELECTBOARD

Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 30, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.

This meeting was held via Zoom and recorded: <https://vimeo.com/694391743>

PRESENT: Chair Jen Audley; Vice-Chair Gregory Garrison; John Hanold, Jennifer Waryas, Chris Menegoni and Francia Wisnewski, Finance Committee members; Selectboard Chair Rich Kuklewicz and Selectboard Vice-Chair, Chris Boutwell (arrived around 6:10).

OTHERS PRESENT: Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen; Town Administrator, Steve Ellis; Ariel Elan, public; BettyLou Mallet, Scribe.

1. CALL MEETING TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 6:00 p.m. This meeting is being held via Zoom and aired on MCTV as well as recorded by MCTV. All members of the Finance Committee are in attendance.

2. REVIEW OF MEETING MINUTES: MARCH 23, 2022

The members of the Finance Committee received and reviewed the March 23, 2022 minutes. There was no discussion. **On a motion by JH and seconded by GG, the minutes of March 23, 2022 were approved as written. JH, aye; GG, aye; CM, aye; JW, abstained; FW, aye; JA, aye. (5 aye, 0 nay, 1 abstention).**

3. REVIEW OF DRAFT MOTIONS AND BACKGROUND FOR 05/07/2022 ANNUAL TOWN MEETING

All members received a copy of the draft motions for the annual town meeting scheduled for March 7, 2022 as well as a draft copy of the background information that is provided to the town meeting members. The FinCom is asked to review each motion along with the background information provided and some votes may be taken.

JH asked if the Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) report will be part of the handout. GG stated a summary of the 5-year plan will be provided to the town members rather than a full report. The CIC's report on capital requests for FY2023 will be included in the ATM meeting materials.

Before reviewing each motion and subsequent background description, JA would like the committee to consider the question of "the author" of the background information that accompanies each motion. Most of the background information in the town meeting warrant is authored by the requester and edited by CO. The FinCom has sometimes also contributed in a significant way to writing and editing the background information. This year she proposes that the committee act as an additional set of eyes for that aims to identify important information to be captured, but not taking on writing or editing of the background. She would rather have the committee focus their energy on the development of the Finance Committee Report.

At 6:15 p.m., Rich Kuklewicz called the Selectboard meeting to order. CB, present; RK, present. The Selectboard members will not vote on recommendations this evening and wait until all 3 members of the Board are present.

The FinCom will review each article that requires recommendations. They will begin with Article 3.

ARTICLE 3 – Airport Fuel Revolving Fund – The Committee did not have any questions regarding the article or the background information. **JA made a motion to amend Section 7 of Article H of the Town of Montague General Bylaws to create a new Airport Fuel Revolving Fund. Seconded by JH. No discussion. JH, aye; FW, aye; JW, aye; GG, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 4 – Amending the Classification Plan by adding Assistant Town Administrator, Select-board Administrative Assistant and WPCF Laboratory Manager.

The FinCom wishes to defer a recommendation vote on this article until the background information has been finalized.

ARTICLE 5 – To fix salaries of elected officials as required by law for fiscal year beginning July 1, 2022. All of the stipends are listed for the elected officials and the background information provided is based on last year and updated for FY23. JH asked about the vacancies of Tree Warden and Moderator. CO stated that the Tree Warden position is not vacant, but Tom Bergeron is trying to recruit for the tree warden and that Deb Bourbeau's office is trying to recruit for the Moderator position, **JA made the motion to accept Article 5 as written and seconded by GG. No discussion. GG, aye; FW, aye; JW, aye; JH, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 6 – To fix salaries of appointed officials as required by law for fiscal year beginning July 1, 2022. The background information is similar to last year's information with adjustments to reflect the current year. No discussion. **JA made the motion to accept Article 6 as written and seconded by GG. GG, aye; FW, aye; JW, aye; JH, nay; CM, aye; JA, aye. (5 aye, 1 nay). Motion carries.**

ARTICLE 7 – Town Operating Budget for \$11,176,944

JA reviewed with the Committee the background information which follows the format from last year showing increases greater than 15% as well as the decreases. JW asked if the FinCom approves the operating budget, it is also approving the ATA position. JA explained to the FinCom if you do not support some element of the town operating budget, you should consider whether you feel your concern is significant enough to keep you from supporting the budget as a whole. Members may support the article as a whole and still have reservations about some elements of it. **JA made the motion to approve the available sum of \$11,176,944 for the maintenance of several departments of the Town to be funded with \$11,176,930.80 to be raised from Taxation and \$13.20 be funded from the Transportation Infrastructure Receipts Reserved for Appropriation. Seconded by GG. GG, aye; FW, aye; JW, nay; JH, nay; CM, aye; JA, aye. (4 aye, 2 nay).**

CO asked if those who voted nay could provide a bit of background information for their decision. RK does not believe it has been past practice to provide information regarding individuals' reasons for dissent. JA suggests submitting a sentence or two as a whole and not from the individuals who voted against. JH stated he will speak up at Town Meeting. CO just thought by submitting a few sentences regarding the reasoning would answer questions before town meeting. JW and JH gave a brief description of their thoughts to CO and she will include that with the background information for this article. CM said he shares JH and JW thoughts regarding this article but feels the decision should be made on the town meeting floor. RK notified the Committee that a public forum will be held on April 11 with a full hour dedicated to a presentation and discussion regarding the ATA position.

ARTICLE 8 - \$2,872,377 operating the WPCF.

JA stated the background information is brief and CO stated she will send more detailed information for the Committee to review. The question was raised by FW about the number of Superintendents listed in the budget. JH stated the information does not spotlight the amount coming from taxation. In response to the question about superintendents Steve stated that last year, former superintendent Bob Trombley was brought in as a consultant due to the opening of Chief Operating Officer and the difficulty finding a qualified candidate to fill the position. Bob's last day is today, March 30, 2022 and the WPCF Foreman position begins March 31, 2022. JW asked for more information regarding the Superintendent's position and the financial components for the last two years. CO will provide the information and submit to the Committee. **JA made the motion for the FinCom to recommend approval of the WPCF operating budget in the sum of \$2,872,377 with \$266,439 to be raised from Taxation and \$2,605,938 to be raised from Sewer User Fees, seconded by GG. GG, aye; JH, aye; FW, aye; JW, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 9 - \$49,500 for the Colle Building operations, maintenance and debt service

This article is straightforward and background information sufficient. No discussion. **JA made the motion to recommend Article 9 in the amount of \$49,500 funded from Colle Receipts Reserved for Appropriation. Seconded by GG. FW, aye; JW, aye; GG, aye; JH, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 10 – Turners Falls Airport Operating Budget \$316,015

The Committee asked for updated background information from Bryan Camden. **JA made the motion to recommend the Turners Falls Airport Operating Budget in the sum of \$316,015 to be funded from Airport Revenue, seconded by GG. FW, aye; JH, aye; JW, aye; GG, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 11 – Franklin County Technical School District Assessment \$1,029,566

JA suggested that the district review the background information to support this request. **JA made the motion to approve the request from the Franklin County Technical School District Assessment in the sum of \$1,029,566 to be funded from Taxation, seconded by GG. GG, aye; JW, aye; FW, aye; JH, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 12 – Gill-Montague Regional School District Assessment \$11,341,466

The Gill-Montague Regional School District's background information and assessment follows a formula from previous assessments. The district also typically provides additional background in a separate handout. **JA made the recommendation to accept the assessment of Gill-Montague Regional School District in the sum of \$11,341,466 funded from taxation. GG seconded. GG, aye; JW, aye; JH, aye; FW, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 13 – Supplementing Waidlich Conservation Fund - \$10,000

This was requested by the Conservation Commission with the funding source from Free Cash. **JA made the motion to recommend the supplemental request of \$10,000 for the Waidlich Conservation Fund, funded from Free Cash, seconded by GG. GG, aye; CM, aye; JH, aye; JW, aye; FW, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 14 – Smith Vocational Student Tuition and Transportation - \$45,000

JA stated the background information provided is adequate. JW observes that the costs for one student to attend are considerable and suggests advocacy to change the rules that result in this cost being borne by the town. RK stated this student is enrolled in criminal justice and FCTS does not offer that in their curriculum, therefore the town pays for the student to attend Smith Vocational. JH asked if the amount

is a flat rate or could the amount vary? CO stated the tuition amount is set by the Department of Education every year and the transportation could change (for instance when the student is of age and driving their own vehicle.) **JA made the motion to recommend Article 14 in the amount of \$45,000 for a student to attend Smith Vocational School including transportation to be funded from Taxation. Seconded by GG. FW, aye; JW, aye; CM, aye; JH, aye; GG, aye; JA, aye.**

ARTICLE 15 – DPW Discretionary Funds \$100,000

This Article will be placed on hold until next week. Steve stated Tom Bergeron will be attending Monday's Selectboard meeting regarding this article request.

ARTICLE 16 - \$130,000 WPCF Back-Up Generator

JA stated the background information for this request has been generated from the CIC report. **JA made a motion to recommend Article 16 in the amount of \$130,000 for a back-up generator for the WPCF to be funded from the WPCF Capital Stabilization Fund. Seconded by GG. GG, aye; JH, aye; CM, aye; FW, aye; JW, aye; JA, aye.**

The Selectboard adjourned at 7:15 p.m. CB, aye; RK, aye. Selectboard meeting adjourned.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINANCE COMMITTEE' REPORT TO TOWN MEETING

JA explained that one of the Finance Committee's responsibilities is to write a report on the budget to present to the town for Town Meeting. This 10-page document includes a letter of process, introduction, funding goals, revenues, expenditures and a conclusion. There is a fairly short timeline to produce this information in order to have a draft for review next week. The Committee discussed different parts of the 10-page document and what section they are available to work on. JA will revise the "Dear Town Meeting Members" letter. JH will work on the Introduction, Funding Goals, Accomplishments and the Conclusion. JA suggested as accomplishment items such as financial policies and limited spending from taxation which allowed the town to have excess capacity for several years. FW and JW will work together on Revenue and Expenditures as well as Introduction and Conclusion. JH invites members to email him by Sunday evening at 6:00 p.m. with any information they would like him to include. JA added the progress in having a 5-year capital plan and a 5-year financial forecast are accomplishments worth noting. For revenue, GG suggests adding grants that the town successfully receives as an accomplishment. Steve and CO will discuss with JW the specific grants the town receives. FW suggested other forms of reporting from other departments such as the Health Department writing about the pandemic or a letter thanking Fred Bowman for his service on the Committee. JA stated the Expenditure section highlights the Town Departments and FW will include this information in her writings in Expenditures. CO is asking for all of this information to be submitted to her by Monday.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINANCE COMMITTEE SEATS AVAILABLE FOR FY23

JA opened the discussion stating that FW had suggested that the Committee discuss changes coming since Fred Bowman resigned and her term ends at the end of June and she is not requesting to be reappointed. She turned the discussion over to the Committee for their thoughts. JH has reached out to several individuals requesting to become a member of the Finance Committee but no prospects at the moment. He emphasized the importance of this as it will be a committee of 5 members with a quorum of 3 as well as a new slate of officers.

FW is aware of the vacancy being 2 months away and asks GG, who is Vice-Chair, his thoughts of becoming Chair. GG stated he cannot effectively fill the role of Chair as many times, for long periods of time, he is not available. He will continue to participate in the Committee as often as he can both physically and remotely but will not accept the position of Chair.

JA stated she had made it clear in July that she was stepping down from the Committee at the end of her term this year and that it was not a sudden decision. She has been documenting the tasks she does as Chair and as a member for other members to utilize when she will no longer be a member. She proposes the reorganization of the Committee prior to the end of the fiscal year. If desired, she will step down as Chair in May and stay on as a member through June 30 which will give the next Chair the additional time for the transition.

JW stated the leadership is a concern of hers and is very important. She would like to find ways to encourage folks to participate. She would like to discuss how to recruit folks who have knowledge of municipal government.

JH would like to bring the attention of the Committee back to the fact that there will be a 5-member committee and the fact that JH and GG will not be chair and that sharpens the concern of what to do for the future of the committee. CO suggested to think about the 126 elected town meeting members who may have an interest in becoming a member and to include information about the available seats in the report.

JH proposed to run a newspaper ad. JW asked about past use of digital format, the radio or even posters to advertise the openings on the Finance Committee. The current budget does not have a line for advertising, but they can draw from Reserves.

The Committee was told there is \$458 left in the current year budget which is enough to pay for the Scribe for a few more meetings. JH proposed to place a 2 week ad in the Montague Reporter and will look into the cost. JH will contact the Montague Reporter to place an ad.

6. FUTURE AGENDA REQUESTS AND TOPICS NOT ANTICIPATED

JA stated BettyLou Mallet requested to be placed on the April 13th agenda to check in with the Committee about continuing with her contracted position as Scribe as well as discuss any changes in her method of minute taking.

7. UPCOMING MEETING DATES

April 6, 2022 – Finish voting recommendations and background information, review draft report

April 13, 2022 – BettyLou Mallet, approval of Finance Committee Report

8. ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by GG and seconded by JH, the Finance Committee adjourned the meeting at 8:10 p.m. GG aye, CM, aye; JH, aye; FW, aye; JW, aye; JA, aye. Meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
BettyLou Mallet
Scribe

Materials: Draft ATM Warrant 05-07-2022

Draft ATM Motions 05-07-2022

Draft Motion to Approve ATM

Advertisement from Town of Montague re Finance Committee Opening

Finance Committee Approved: 04/06/2022