

MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Wednesday, December 11, 2024 at 6:00 PM
This meeting was held via Zoom and recorded:
<https://vimeo.com/982262386>

Finance Committee Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Finance Committee members present: Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp, Vice Chair Fred Bowman, Clerk Chris Menegoni and members Francia Wisnewski, John Hanold

Finance Committee members absent: Jennifer Waryas

Others present: Town Administrator Walter Ramsey and Town Accountant Angelica Desroches

The meeting was recorded by MCTV as well as by Angelica Desroches

Meeting minutes:

Mr. Bowman moved to approve the minutes of November 6, 2024. Seconded by Ms. Wisnewski and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye, Hanold – Abstain, Menegoni – Not present

Reserve Fund Transfer Smith Vocational Transportation

- Ms. Desroches presented that there is a predicted shortfall in the Smith Vocational special article due to the budgeted transportation rate of \$75 a day and the actual rate of \$200 a day. Reported that it was \$400 a day at the beginning of the year until it was discovered by the Town Administrator and he worked with the school to renegotiate a lower rate. Currently requesting a partial transfer of \$12,500 to cover the deficit until the winter STM when another vote will be made to request the remainder of the deficit predicted at 20,550.
- Mr. Hanold asked why there is no request for the full amount of the deficit.
- Ms. Desroches stated that the reserve fund does not have enough in its balance currently, so the goal is to be able to pay bills until the STM in the winter.
- Ms. Bell-Upp made a motion to approve the transfer of \$12,500 from the reserve fund to account number 001-5-950-5300-035 for the purpose of Smith Vocational transportation. Moved by Mr. Hanold. Seconded by Mr. Bowman and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni—Not present

FY26 Budget Discussion

- Mr. Ramsey stated that the plan for this year is to mirror the process of last year's budget process. The Selectboard has been meeting with departments to discuss staffing changes or expansion of services. The current requests are based off the request for no

expansion of services. The budget is also without a COLA increase since the Town is currently negotiating with the three unions for next year.

- Mr. Hanold wanted more information or a presentation about the wage and class study that was performed last year so there can be a better understanding of the financial ramifications of the results. Mr. Ramsey reported that he would be willing to give a presentation on that at the next meeting.
- Mr. Ramsey informed the Finance Committee of the personnel changes that have been presented to the Selectboard.
 - The Council on Aging is requesting an assistant to help the current Director meet the needs of the programming that she is currently offering. Reported that her part-time hours do not allow her to meet the full needs of the department and the community. Mr. Hanold wants to make sure that the current Director is not going beyond her role to meet the needs of the community and wanted to make sure that the expansion is still within the goals of the department.
 - Mr. Ramsey reported that another staffing change is from the Library who is looking to implement two new positions and wants to upgrade the staff that are currently a grade A to a grade B, but that this change is under the purview of the Selectboard and is being considered as part of the wage and class study. Mr. Ramsey reported that the Cemetery Commission is requesting changing the cemetery paid position from a per burial to a stipend position. Mr. Hanold reported that while this is a financially neutral change, he is concerned about the future ability of the cemetery receipts reserved to fund the position and doesn't want to set up something that will require the Town to subsidize burials of the future. Mr. Menegoni reported that the proposal seemed like it was based off current revenue production and appeared to be sustainable in the future.
 - Mr. Ramsey reported that the Farmers Market is looking to add an assistant so that the staff can take off some of the Saturdays of the Farmers Market season.
- Mr. Ramsey reported that another increase that was requested from the Selectboard office is to increase the streetscape maintenance expense line so that the Town can hire a professional to maintain the planters on Avenue A to keep them consistent and well maintained to help improve business and appeal to downtown. Mr. Menegoni wanted to make sure that business input was going to be included in that decision as the planters are in front of their businesses.
- Ms. Bell-Upp relayed that the Town Clerk narrative appeared to state that the department is struggling and wants to know if it is a financial need in the office. Mr. Ramsey reported that the department has received an extra office space and an extra position in the last two years and so far they have not completed their move or filled the position. Mr. Hanold stated that with FY26 being a one election year it seems like a good year for the office to stabilize and utilize the tools and finances they have been provided. He had concerns with putting too much money into the problem without knowing what the true source of the issue is. Mr. Bowman reported that times have changed and that we are not aware of what each department's current jobs and responsibilities are. And that things have changed a lot in his time with the Town and he wanted to make sure departments are funded so they have the tools and salaries to do their jobs.

- Finance Committee selected departments they would like to meet with to ask further questions based on a consensus of the members. They chose the following departments: Library, Cemetery, DPW, Town Clerk, Council on Aging, Clean Water, Airport.
- Ms. Desroches reported the only changes to the revenue projections have been an adjustment to FY25 actual new growth. Mr. Hanold accepts the choice of \$200,000 FY26 projection for new growth if it represents Ms. Tonelli's agreement and desire to make sure it is sustainable. Ms. Desroches stated that it will be reviewed on a yearly basis.

Updates from Town Administrator

- Mr. Ramsey reported that the winter STM needed to be moved to February 12, 2025. Asked the Finance Committee if that was reasonable given that most of the articles are routine yearly requests. Mr. Hanold reported that the Committee is there to support the Town so they are ready to do what is needed of them.

Next Meetings

- January 8, January 15, January 22: Wage and Class study, STM articles, meet with departments for FY26 budgets

Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting:

- Ms. Bell-Upp reported that Kristi Bodin resigned from the Finance Committee. Affirmed the need to start recruiting and filling the position.

Adjournment

Mr. Bowman makes the motion to adjourn at 7:22 PM. Seconded by Mr. Hanold and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye, Menegoni - Aye

Respectfully submitted,
Angelica Desroches

Documents and exhibits:

Minutes of December 11, 2024