

MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Wednesday, January 15, 2025 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 member Francia Wisnewski

Finance Committee members absent: Jennifer Waryas, John Hanold

Others present: Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, Town Accountant Angelica Desroches, MCTV Dean Garvin, Judith Lorei from Cemetery Commission, COA Director Roberta Potter, Airport Manager Bryan Camden

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

Meeting minutes:

Mr. Bowman moved to approve the minutes of January 8, 2025. Seconded by Mr. Menegoni and approved.

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

FY2026 Cemetery Budget

- Ms. Lorei gave an overview of the FY26 budget changes including the staffing change request that the sexton change from being paid per burial rate to a stipend. This is a new position and over the year it seems that the per burial payment does not accurately reflect the work of the sexton. The increase in pay for the stipend position is to be paid out of the cemetery receipts reserved account so it will have no effect on the Cemetery's budget from the Town.
- Ms. Bell-Upp asked if the current revenue spike is going to be a short-term surge? And if it is possible to pay the sexton a fee based on sales of plots? Ms. Lorei stated that there is a lot of interest in green burials and that she does not foresee this being a short-term surge. The idea of charging a fee at the sale of the burial plots is not how any other cemetery handles the fee structure, and it does not appear to be an industry standard, so she was not in favor of that model.
- Mr. Bowman questioned what the yearly sales were, and Ms. Lorei reported for the last 18 months they have sold 54 plots with around \$44,000 in revenues.
- Ms. Wisnewski gave a statement of support for the sexton position being a stipend noting that the list of duties of the sexton seems extensive even for the stipend rate of \$200 a month.
- Mr. Ramsey stated that the sexton position is still new to the Town so he expects there to be follow-up and review of how the position is paid in the years to come as the position develops.

FY2026 COA Budget

- Ms. Potter gave an overview of her FY26 budget with a focus on the request for the part-time staff member. Work at the COA has expanded over the years past the allotted time for her position, which is part-time at 21 hours per week. The Montague COA is the lowest staffed COA in the area. Aging is becoming more complex as most of the world has moved to online access only and the aging population is not keeping up. Ms. Potter also thinks that departments should not have only one staff member, and that redundancy will ensure the department's success.
- Ms. Bell-Upp inquired as to whether there is another agency that should be covering the services that the COA is currently providing. Ms. Potter stated that she is not aware of anything. Not everyone is eligible for LifePath, some of the younger population can utilize CSO. Currently the COA does partner with as many agencies as possible to take the lead on some of the goals and education opportunities. The goal of COA is to keep elderly at home as long as possible through education and socialization. Ms. Potter also believes that in the future some of these issues will be solved as the generations who have grown up with computers and internet will be able to navigate more easily and internet should be more accessible in the future.
- Mr. Ramsey questioned whether the EOEA grant can be used to pay for part of this position. Ms. Potter was hesitant about fully funding the position from the grant but stated that some of the position could be charged to the grant.
- Ms. Wisniewski requested more information about the number of individuals and the ages that the COA serves. Ms. Potter did not have exact numbers, but she estimated that 550 to 600 unique visitors come in a year with over 200 people coming in at least once a week. The current age is 60 and over to which Montague has around 1,970 residents that fall in that age bracket.
- Ms. Wisniewski and Ms. Potter discussed the COA usage of volunteers to help fill in the gaps and keep the COA operating. There are 5 receptionist volunteers that work at the desk regularly each week and over 14 other volunteers that do at least 10 hours per month filling in other ways.

Recommendations of STM financial articles

- Mr. Camden discussed his request for STM. The article has a single funding source which is airport retained earnings. 7,000 of the retained earnings is to go to the part-time intern line. Unfortunately, there were no qualified candidates at the FCTS this year so they kept on part-time help from last year at a higher rate. 13,000 is to go to the building and grounds line. The cost of building materials is still expensive and while they try to do most projects in-house there was electrical and plumbing work that had to be contracted out. 4,000 was to equipment repair and maintenance, some of the upkeep of the airport equipment was needed this year to keep the airport operational.
- Mr. Menegoni asked for more information on the electrical and plumbing work. Mr. Camden answered that the electrical was for repair to the Pioneer hangar's electrical panel for the door and bringing that up to code. The plumbing was switching the system

from an unknown leech field to a raised storage tank that connects to the Town sewer lines to prevent future sewer issues and major costs.

- Mr. Menegoni questioned whether the driveway project and the minisplit project would have any additional cost to the taxpayers. Mr. Camden assured Mr. Menegoni that those projects would not have additional costs associated.
- Article 6:
 - Ms. Bell-Upp **MOVED:** That the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$24,000 for the purpose of supplementing the FY25 operating budget, with \$7,000 going to Airport PT Intern, \$13,000 to the Airport Build and Grounds, and \$4,000 to the Airport Equipment Repair and Maintenance accounts, said sum to be raised from Airport Retained Earnings. Seconded by Mr. Bowman.

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

FY2026 Airport Budget and Funding Options

- Mr. Camden went on to give an overview of the FY26 budget. The salary lines have been increased due to one full-time employee requiring his contractual step increase. With Mr. Camden's position the Airport Commission has recommended he be moved from an hourly position to a salaried position. The increase they are recommending is from an E10 to a F3 which brings him closer to being in line with other department heads but is still significantly lower than the recommendations of the wage and class study. Mr. Camden reviewed other minor shifts in his expense lines with most of them being level funded.
- Ms. Bell-Upp raised the question of how long the airport will need to be subsidized by taxation. Mr. Camden was positive about the discussions he has been having with Eversource about updating the electrical grid around the airport so that the solar farm can come to fruition. He believes that by the FY27 budget planning season there will be more information about the timeline of the solar project.
- Mr. Bowman inquired about the effects of the FCTS airport program on the airport. Mr. Camden informed the Finance Committee that it has caused an increase in revenues for the lease of space so that is positive. He also reported that the high school is now only one of five in the nation to have this program so that is a major appeal for the airport and the school.
- Ms. Wisniewski wondered what Mr. Camden is doing about creating more Town engagement before Town meeting. Discussed that the Town meeting is usually full of many questions and concerns and is hoping to mitigate those before the meeting. Mr. Camden stated that he is open and available to questions from the public. He is available by phone and email and if there is enough interest he can host a Zoom meeting before the Town meeting to answer questions.
- Mr. Bowman stated that the Town cannot afford to shut down the airport. He also supports the airport because it is such a huge asset to the area. If Franklin County suffered an emergency it would be one of the few ways supplies could reach the area.
- Ms. Bell-Upp encouraged Mr. Camden to lead with the revenue growth and positive movement towards the solar project at the meeting. Mr. Ramsey discussed that Mr.

Camden is always pursuing other revenue growth options and that he does work closely with him to work on ways to mitigate the cost to the taxpayers.

Updates from Town Administrator

- Mr. Ramsey informed the Committee that the Selectboard has been hearing personnel proposals for the FY26 budget but that there are no formal recommendations yet. More to come in the next few weeks. Union negotiations have started with all 3 unions. Hoping to be close to finalizing contracts before the budget is closed to make sure the costs can be accounted for accurately. On Monday the CWF updated the Selectboard that the Millers Falls overage fee came in significantly higher than budgeted and anticipated. Fixed the major Millers Falls leak has not yet been realized due to the timing of the billing cycles. Hoping to see the effect of that fix soon. Mr. Menegoni requested more information about what the costs savings would be from that fix.

Next Meetings

- a. 1/22/25 – 5:30 start time Library, CWF
- b. 2/5/25 Meeting with SB and GMRSD

Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting:

Currently the Finance Committee is looking to recruit a new member. There is some progress so hopefully some more information on that in the next few weeks.

Adjournment

Mr. Bowman makes the motion to adjourn at 7:13 PM. Seconded by Mr. Menegoni and approved.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Angelica Desroches

Documents and exhibits:

Minutes of January 15, 2025