

**JOINT MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE, SELECTBOARD, AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, March 12, 2025 at 6 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.

Selectboard Vice-Chair Matt Lord called their meeting to order at 6:01 pm.

**Finance Committee members present:** Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp, Vice Chair Fred Bowman, Jennifer Waryas, Leigh Rae, Chris Menegoni, Francia Wisnewski, and John Hanold

**Finance Committee members absent:**

**Others present:** Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, Assistant Town Administrator Chris Nolan-Zeller, Town Accountant Angelica Desroches, Gregory Garrison – CIC, Ariel Elan – CIC, Matt Lord – Selectboard, Chris Boutwell – Selectboard

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

**FY26 Capital Improvements Report:**

- Mr. Garrison gave an overview of the capital requests for FY26. He stated that most of the capital items are on the 5-year capital plan. He highlighted the few items that are not. The first is the CWF mini excavator for \$60,000, which would allow them to continue to complete projects in-house. The next one was the Oakman Street slope stabilization, which is an area that has been washing away and needs \$60,000 for the engineering costs and the rest will be done in house. The next one is the Meadow Road guardrail replacement for \$200,000 to replace guardrails along the road that are rotten out. The last two are Selectboard requests for the FRTA bus stop improvements and the Montague Center Complete Streets project. The FRTA bus stop is to cover a funding shortfall of \$60,000. Complete Streets is to cover \$91,200 in design work for the Montague Center project. The largest of the projects that were on the 5-year capital plan is the Phase 2 Sewer Collection System Rehabilitation for \$3,000,000 which will be an ongoing project and will most likely be bonded. DPW is requesting the replacement of four additional vehicles, a 10-wheel dump truck, a dump truck, a camera van, and a pickup. The CWF is requesting two generators and two thickened sludge pumps.
- Ms. Bell-Upp requested more information about the debt split for the Phase 2 Sewer Collection system. Mr. Ramsey answered that the proposal is a 60/40 split with 60% of the debt to the Town which is the proportion of the project that is based on the part of the system that is combined sewer and drainage, which the Town has always taken financial responsibility for.
- Ms. Rae asked questions regarding what an enterprise fund is and what the Town total debt is. Mr. Lord discussed that there is no set or written-down policy for how capital expenses are paid for in the sewer enterprise fund. Mr. Ramsey and Ms. Desroches responded to Ms. Rae that total debt is \$16.8 million in total debt with a large drop off when the public safety complex payments drop off the debt schedule.

- Ms. Wisniewski wondered what the effect of federal funding cuts would have on this capital plan. Mr. Ramsey reported that the funding for the projects would be mostly Town funded and the ones that do have alternate funding are from the state.
- Capital Improvement Committee calls meeting to order at 6:22 pm.
- Mr. Garrison reviewed balances in the capital stabilizations and future capital requests. A lot of the future capital needs seem to be more on the school side and that after this year a lot of the DPW requests will be satisfied.
- Ms. Bell-Upp questioned whether funding the larger DPW trucks is necessary this year. Mr. Garrison answered that there is a long waiting time for ordered trucks and that there is fear of expenses due to breakdowns and downtime. Mr. Hanold commented that he was surprised at how many trucks are on the schedule but that the age of these trucks shows that they are near their end of life and that if the funding is available this year, then we should go on the waiting list for these vehicles now. Ms. Elan gave her agreement to Mr. Hanold with the uncertainty of the future and the timing, she also added that the parts might not be available to repair the trucks anymore.
- Mr. Lord asked Mr. Nolan-Zeller if there is any possible grant funding coming to help offset costs for the trucks. Mr. Nolan-Zeller reported that he only knows of a possible green communities grant to help with the pickup truck to replace with an electric pickup truck.
- Mr. Garrison gave an update that the 5-year capital plan is expanding to include roads, pipes, guardrails, culverts, bridges, and such. With these changes the plan is becoming more comprehensive and sometimes overwhelming with what the Town has as assets that need to be maintained.
- Ms. Elan wondered if the Town is still pursuing grants given the current climate. Mr. Nolan-Zeller and Mr. Ramsey reported that they continue to apply for grants and explore all funding issues.
- Ms. Rae wondered if there was any more discussion or possibility of including engineering costs for the Book Mill area in the Complete Streets design request. Mr. Lord would like this to be included in the next capital improvement cycle. Mr. Ramsey stated that he is looking into options to see if he can move this forward.
- Mr. Lord inquired as to what the cannabis tax revenues have been so far for FY26. Ms. Desroches reported that so far in FY26 the Town has collected \$72,000 in the first two quarters.
- Ms. Waryas wants to understand more how the capital improvement plan affects the taxpayers. Ms. Desroches reported that the debt payment would be \$21 per year for a \$300,000 home. Mr. Hanold discussed that this year there is enough free cash to fund the projects, so we should put that money to work instead of holding off to keep us from having to play catchup again. Mr. Garrison added that the funding source for these articles is money that is already available, so it does not have an impact on taxpayers.
- Ms. Bell-Upp shared that she thinks the Meadow Road guardrail project seems less flushed out and not complete. The funding source seems mixed and the fact that it is an estimate and not a quote makes her lean towards voting no. Mr. Lord agreed with this and stated that he wants this to probably come from the increase in Chapter 90 funds. Mr. Ramsey reported that he spoke with Mr. Urkiel and that the guardrail replacement is a new plan for DPW and he would not be surprised if it wasn't funded. Mr. Nolan-Zeller shared that the guardrails that are rotted out are on a road beside the Connecticut River and that the safety concern is keeping vehicles from ending up in the river if hitting them.

## **FY26 Capital Requests and Recommendations:**

- **CWF Used Mini-Excavator for \$60,000**
  - Move to recommend \$60,000 for the purchase of a used mini excavator, to be raised from CWF retained earnings. Mr. Bowman seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **CWF Portable Emergency Generator and Lake Pleasant Station Generator for \$67,800**
  - Move to recommend \$67,800 for the CWF portable emergency generator and Lake Pleasant station generator, to be raised from CWF retained earnings. Mr. Bowman seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **CWF Thickened Sludge Pump Replacement for \$104,000**
  - Move to recommend \$104,000 for the CWF thickened sludge pump replacement, to be raised from CWF retained earnings. Mr. Hanold seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **Phase 2-Sewer Collection System Rehabilitation for \$3,000,000**
  - Move to recommend \$3,000,000 for the Phase 2-sewer collection system rehabilitation, to be raised from to be raised from long-term debt. Mr. Hanold seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Nay, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **DPW 10-Wheel Dump Truck for \$365,000**
  - Move to recommend \$365,000 to purchase and equip a 10-wheel dump truck, to be raised from Free Cash. Mr. Bowman seconded.
  - Mr. Menegoni reported that this year the DPW performed very well this year in true New England weather without the current ordered 10-wheel dump truck delivered, so he sees that the DPW could function without this additional truck and so he will be voting no for this truck. Mr. Ramsey informed us that from his discussion with Mr. Urkiel that this truck would be his priority over the other dump truck. Ms. Bell-Upp and Ms. Wisnewski reported that they would like more information before voting yes.
    - Bell-Upp – Nay, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Nay, Rae – Aye, Hanold – dropped call, Menegoni – Nay, Wisnewski – Nay
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **DPW Dump Truck for \$325,000**
  - Move to recommend \$325,000 to purchase and equip a dump truck, to be raised from Town Capital Stabilization Fund. Mr. Bowman seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Nay, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Nay, Rae – Nay, Hanold – dropped call, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Nay
    - Boutwell – Nay, Lord – Aye
- **DPW Camera Van for \$70,000**

- Move to recommend \$70,000 to purchase and equip a camera van, to be raised from to be raised from Free Cash. Mr. Bowman seconded.
  - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – dropped call, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
  - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **DPW Pickup for \$65,000**
  - Move to recommend \$65,000 to purchase and equip a pickup, to be raised from to be raised from Free Cash. Mr. Bowman seconded.
  - Mr. Menegoni recalled that the current truck was reported to be in good condition and that it is to be replaced by grant funds. Mr. Nolan-Zeller reported that this funding needs to be in place to apply for the grant in the next year.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – dropped call, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **Oakman Street Slope Stabilization for \$60,000**
  - Move to recommend \$60,000 for the engineering and supplies needed for the stabilization of the Oakman Street slope, to be raised from Free Cash. Ms. Waryas seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – dropped call, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **Meadow Road Guardrail and Culvert Work for \$200,000**
  - Move to recommend \$200,000 for the replacement of guardrails and repair to culvert on Meadow Road, to be raised from Free Cash. Mr. Hanold seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Nay, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Nay, Rae – Nay, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Nay
    - Boutwell – Nay, Lord – Nay
- **DPW Discretionary Account for \$36,470**
  - Move to recommend \$36,470 for the DPW Discretionary Account, to be raised from Taxation. Mr. Hanold seconded.
  - Mr. Lord requests a change to the discretionary in which the DPW should be able to ask for trucks and that if this is only for emergency repairs it should be different. Ms. Rae agrees that there is a lot of money for the DPW this year. Ms. Waryas would like to see more planning and following procedure of asking for what they need. Mr. Ramsey shared that this is inclusive of a cut from \$100,000 to \$75,000 this year. Mr. Hanold reminded everyone that this is not supposed to be for a new truck but is to replace broken equipment and allow the DPW to have a quick turnaround in getting back up and running. Ms. Wisnewski would like to see this moved into his budget. Mr. Lord would also like to see him adjust his budget to move this line item into his budget.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Nay, Rae – Nay, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Nay
- **Alley and Non-Chapter 90 Road Paving for \$30,000**
  - Move to recommend \$30,000 for the paving of alleys and other non-chapter 90 eligible roadways, to be raised from Free Cash. Mr. Hanold seconded.

- Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
- Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **Millers Falls Library Storefront Renovation for \$39,000**
  - Move to recommend \$39,000 for the renovation of the Millers Falls Library’s storefront, to be raised from Free Cash. Ms. Waryas seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **Unity Park Playground Improvement for \$125,000**
  - Move to recommend \$125,000 for the replacement of the ground covering and slide at Unity Park, to be raised from Free Cash. Ms. Waryas seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **FRTA Bus Stop Improvements for \$60,000**
  - Move to recommend \$60,000 for improvements to the FRTA bus stop at Industrial Boulevard and Millers Falls Road, to be raised from Cannabis Impact Fee Stabilization. Ms. Waryas seconded.
  - Mr. Nolan-Zeller gave an update to say that this is the cheaper plan at this time, and he stated that there is a more expensive option and since the money is available he inquired if the Committee could consider it. Mr. Menegoni also stated he is interested in looking at the higher amount. Mr. Lord replied that they are looking at other funding options and he would like to move forward at the \$60,000 and if they cannot find other funding sources then they can reconsider.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye
- **Montague Center Complete Streets Design for \$91,200**
  - Move to recommend \$91,200 for the design work for Complete Streets approved project at Montague Center, to be raised from Free Cash. Mr. Hanold seconded.
    - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye
    - Boutwell – Aye, Lord – Aye

Ms. Elan commented that she was surprised that both larger trucks were voted down. Ms. Bell-Upp stated that this is not set and that the committee plans on revoting it when they have Mr. Urkiel in attendance at the next meeting.

Selectboard adjourns their meeting at 7:41 pm.

CIC adjourns their meeting at 7:42 pm.

#### **Updates from Town Administrator:**

Canal District Stabilization article request coming. This article is for the demolition of the Strathmore pedestrian bridge. There are utilities on the bridge that need to be abated and capped.

**Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting:**

- Ms. Wisnewski questioned whether a Finance Committee member can be on the Assessor hiring committee at this time and for updates regarding the hiring process. Mr. Ramsey responded that the committee has already be established at this time with a mix of staff, Board of Assessor, and a member of the community.
- Ms. Bell-Upp raised the issue with the SRO being cut from the school budget. Ms. Desroches reported that this is not a cut on the expense side of the Town budget, but a revenue cut for the Town.

**Next Meetings:**

- a. 3/19/25 – FCTS, SB/FC reconciliation, vote remaining articles
- b. 3/26/25 – FC Final Votes and report
- c. 4/2/25 – FC Reviews background
- d. 4/9/25 – FC report complete

**Adjournment**

Ms. Waryas makes the motion to adjourn at 7:54 PM. Seconded by Mr. Menegoni and approved.  
Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye,  
Wisnewski – Aye

Respectfully submitted,  
Angelica Desroches

**Documents and exhibits:**