

MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Wednesday, March 26, 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 6:01 PM.

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

Finance Committee members absent: Jennifer Waryas

Others present: Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, Town Accountant Angelica Desroches, Rich Kuklewicz – Selectboard, Bryan Camden – Airport Manager, and members of the Airport Commission

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

Meeting minutes:

Mr. Hanold moved to approve the minutes of February 26, 2025, March 12, 2025, and March 19, 2025. Seconded by Mr. Bowman and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Rae – Aye

FY26 Airport Budget Discussion and Vote:

- Ms. Bell-Upp opened by saying that the revenues of the Airport have been increasing as requested but that they have been paired with increasing costs as well. This results in a budget that is like last year's.
- Mr. Bowman questioned the effect of the Technical School's new airport program on the airport. Mr. Camden was expecting to see an uptick in business because this is 1 of 4 programs of its kind nationwide. He expects more visits and tours as a result.
- Mr. Hanold inquired about the revenues of the airport. Mr. Camden stated that the current revenue number he is using is based on long-term leases and that there are revenues not factored into the budget to prevent a revenue deficit like in previous years.
- Mr. Camden gave an overview of the expenditure increases he is expecting including electricity, equipment repair/maintenance, and building grounds. There is also an increase in wages that resulted from the wage and class study. With the Airport Manager position being upgraded to be closer in line with other department heads. Mr. Hanold expressed concern with how tight the department budgets. Mr. Camden agreed and outlined expenses he defers and pointed out that most departments in the Town have a special reserve fund for emergencies but not the airport.
- Mr. Ramsey presented a 10-year analysis of the airport funding. It showed that in FY16 the Town funded 30% of the budget and interestingly in FY26 the funding is 30% still. The budget has grown during this time due to Pioneer aviation, an increase in pay to the Airport Manager and the addition of an assistant.
- Ms. Rae brought up the point that the airport is a facility, and she was surprised to see that there is no reserve or room for emergencies in the budget for such a large facility. Mr. Camden

agreed and stated that his reason for not asking for one is that he is the one that must get interrogated at town meeting and that he would not ask for one unless he had full support of Selectboard, Finance Committee, and Capital Improvement Committee.

- Mr. Bowman highlighted the importance of the airport for the safety of the county in case of emergency.
- Ms. Wisnewski commented that she believes that coming together with transparency and the common goal can help to build a better plan for the airport.
- Mr. Ramsey reported that the Selectboard plans on having quarterly check-ins with the airport to see how the operations are going and to help build a long-term plan.
- Ms. Bell-Upp stated that at this point it is late in the budget process to try to increase the airport budget. There are no funding sources available. To which Mr. Hanold agreed we need to support the budget as it is then and support Mr. Camden at the town meeting.
- Mr. Hanold called the question.
 - Move to recommend an Airport operating budget of \$425,732, with \$23,372 to be raised from the Town Sale of Real Estate, \$99,396 to be raised from Taxation, and \$302,964 to be raised from Airport Revenues. Mr. Hanold seconded.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Rae – Abstain, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Abstain, Wisnewski – Aye

Free Cash Updates, Discussion, Vote Recommendations

- Ms. Bell-Upp reported that there is still over \$250,000 left in free cash after all the votes have been settled. She proposed moving money into Town Capital Stabilization, GMRSD Stabilization, and OPEB, like the way the Kearsarge lease revenues are handled.
- Mr. Hanold supported putting more money into capital than OPEB because the OPEB liability is gradually growing and will be, while the capital needs are more immediate.
 - Ms. Bell- Upp moved to recommend appropriating the sum of \$200,000, with \$100,000 going to Town Capital Stabilization, \$50,000 going to GMRSD Stabilization, and \$50,000 going to OPEB Trust, said sum to be raised from Free Cash. Mr. Menegoni seconded.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Remaining Articles Discussion, Vote Recommendations

- **Airport Fuel Revolving Fund**
 - Ms. Desroches stated that the revolving fund spending cap needs to be raised due to the increase in fuel costs over the past few years. This year the airport is coming close to the cap.
 - Ms. Bell-Upp move to recommend amending Section 7 of Article II of the Town of Montague General Bylaws, pursuant to the provisions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 44, Section 53E½, by establishing a new annual spending limit of \$200,000 for the Airport Fuel revolving fund for the Fiscal Year beginning July 1, 2025, which such expenditure limit to be applicable for each fiscal year until such time as Town Meeting votes, prior to July 1 for the ensuing fiscal year, to increase the same. Mr. Bowman seconded.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

- **Keith Footbridge**

- Mr. Ramsey presented that the foot bridge is being removed over the canal. The bridge has utility lines on it and these were found to have asbestos. The funding of this project is to come from the Canal District Stabilization Fund.
- Ms. Bell-Upp move to recommend appropriating the sum of \$67,900 for the purpose of abating and removing utilities from the Keith footbridge over canal, including all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from Canal District Utility Improvement Stabilization.

Mr. Bowman seconded.

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

- **Schedule I and Schedule II**

- Ms. Desroches discussed that the Schedule I and Schedule II voted last week need to be voted on again because there was a decision to step back the changes on the appointed official's portion of the schedules to give more time and consideration to the wage and class changes.
- Move to recommend Schedule I Elected Officials as presented. Mr. Bowman seconded.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Abstain, Wisnewski – Aye
- Move to recommend Schedule II Appointed Officials as presented. Mr. Bowman seconded.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Abstain, Wisnewski – Aye

Updates from Town Administrator:

- Planning a pre-town meeting and decided on the date of April 29th at 6pm. It would be via ZOOM and streamed on MCTV. Promoted by website, newspaper, and Town's social media.

Executive Sessions

- Executive session in accordance with G.L. c.30A, §21(a)(3) to discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining relating to the 2024 Pay and Classification Study, if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body and the chair so declares.
- Executive Session in accordance with G.L. c. 30A, § 21 (3) To discuss strategy with respect to litigation with FirstLight Power, Inc. if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares.
 - The Chair deems that holding these discussions in an open session would be detrimental to the Town's position.
 - Move to open executive session. Mr. Bowman seconded.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Rae – Aye, Hanold – Ayes, Menegoni – Abstain, Wisnewski – Aye

Respectfully submitted,
Angelica Desroches

Documents and exhibits: