

MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Wednesday, September 24, 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.

Finance Committee members present: Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp (left meeting at 6:30pm), Vice Chair Fred Bowman, Jennifer Waryas, Francia Wisnewski, Leigh Rae, Josh Bell (6:02)

Finance Committee members absent: Chris Menegoni

Others present: Town Accountant Angelica Desroches, Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, Chief Assessor Adam Tocci

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

Meeting minutes:

Mr. Bowman moved to approve the minutes of September 10, 2025. Seconded by Ms. Wisnewski and approved unanimously.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Rae—Aye

Kearsarge PILOT:

- Mr. Tocci gave a brief overview that Kearsarge is looking to enter a 16-year PILOT for its two solar array and properties that they own outright versus the ones they have built on Town property. Ms. Rae wondered if the arrays that were built on Town property could ever be part of a PILOT and Mr. Tocci relayed that the personal property could be part of a PILOT in the future but that they are not currently asking for that.
- Mr. Tocci discussed why the PILOT has a 1% vs 2.5% escalator built into it like most solar PILOTs. He stated that the starting principal balance was higher than when the negotiations started so they lowered the escalator but ultimately it resulted in a higher overall value than when they had the lower principal payment with the 2.5% escalator.
- The next question Mr. Tocci answered was regarding whether we were undervaluing our solar capacity. To answer this Mr. Tocci compared the starting value for Gill's 2.7-megawatt facility PILOT, which was \$16,000 year one. Montague's 2.6-megawatt facility PILOT agreement was for \$47,000 in year one. He also stated that Montague came in around \$17,000 per megawatt, Woburn was \$16,000 per megawatt and Plympton has \$13,000 per megawatt. Montague comes in comparable if not above most of the other comparable Towns.
- Mr. Tocci went over the refund risk for Montague if Kearsarge wins the tax appeals. He stated that in the current appeal cases Montague faces close to \$60,000 to \$70,000 in overlay exposure.
- Another question the Finance Committee had was why the PILOT was negotiated at 16 years. Mr. Tocci discussed that solar equipment generally has a useful life of about 20 years, so the PILOT is currently set to cover until the end of the useful life of the equipment on the property.

Ms. Rae questioned whether the land or the personal property held most of the value of the tax bills. The personal property comes in around twice the value of the land, but of course this can change based on the property and facility.

- Mr. Tocci overviewed the tax implications for residents. He used fiscal year 25 as an example and stated that we billed them \$50,000 but the PILOT comes in at \$46,000 so the \$4,000 is what is spread amongst all the other taxpayers of Montague. It is a much smaller PILOT than FirstLight.

Fall Special Town Meeting Articles:

- Mr. Ramsey reviewed the financial articles that are currently in the warrant.
 - Article 1 is prior year bills of \$19,559 which were mostly caused by staffing changeover in offices of the Town which it is being suggested to come from Free Cash.
 - Article 2 appropriates the cable access money from Comcast to pay to MCTV.
 - Article 3 approves year one funding for the union agreement with the police unions. The total cost is \$95,100, which is suggested to come from Free Cash. This contract covers shifting them to the new salary chart and adding longevity to the police unions.
 - Article 4 covers the costs of shifting the unrepresented employees to the new wage and class salary chart that the rest of the Town is on. The cost is \$26,990 with \$2,485 suggested to come from sewer retained earnings and the remainder from Free Cash.
 - Article 5 is the funding for the insurance premium mid-year increase of 20% above what was increased in the spring. This is estimated at \$274,600 with \$24,000 coming from sewer revenues and the remainder from taxation. Ms. Waryas questioned if the Town could negotiate freely with insurance. Mr. Ramsey discussed that it is an open market for the Town, and they are exploring at least 3 or 4 other options including the GIC, but it all takes a long time. Ms. Rae questioned if this will likely impact fiscal year 2027. Ms. Desroches responded that it is likely and that is why the suggested financing source as taxation to cushion some of the impact to next year.
 - Article 6 is a request from the Department of Public Works to rehabilitate two culverts on South Street which will complete all work on that street. The requested amount is \$50,000, which it is suggested to come from Free Cash.
 - Article 7 is a repeat of an article from the Annual Town Meeting. It requests increasing the airport fuel revolving fund again. This time the increase is to \$350,000. The airport is seeing much more traffic and fuel stops so purchasing fuel to fill the tanks is going to exceed the current level of \$200,000.
 - Mr. Ramsey gave a brief overview of two financial adjacent articles. The first is accepting the HERO act to increase the veterans' exemptions. The finance committee seemed receptive to this and stated that the 50% number shows a good faith effort. The second article is to accept the 6% local option room occupancy tax. The Finance Committee requested more time to think about this tax with questions later. These two articles the Finance Committee does not directly vote on, but the Selectboard wanted the Finance Committee's opinions on the percentages.

Updates from Town Administrator

- Mr. Ramsey reported that the date of the Six Town Regionalization vote is set for Tuesday, November 18th. Mr. Bowman stated that he thinks this should be done as a district vote if it

does not pass. He stated that town by town vote doesn't usually work because if one town votes it down it doesn't pass. The Franklin County Tech school had to go to a district vote because it did not pass the town by town votes multiple times. Ms. Wisnewski inquired as to whether the students, families, and staff of the school have been surveyed to see how they feel about this regionalization. Noted to follow up with Ms. Bell-Upp about this question at a later time.

Next Meeting dates/topics:

- October 1 – Vote STM articles
- October 15 – Pre-town meeting at 6pm
- October 22 – Special Town Meeting at 6:30pm
- November ? – Capital Improvement Committee

Adjournment

Mr. Bowman makes the motion to adjourn at 7:01 PM. Seconded by Ms. Waryas and approved.

Rae – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Bell – Aye, Waryas – Aye, Wisnewski—Aye

Respectfully submitted,
Angelica Desroches

Documents and exhibits: