

MEETING OF MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, December 17, 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, Vice Chair Fred Bowman, Francia Wisnewski, Leigh Rae, Chris Menegoni

Finance Committee members absent: Jennifer Waryas, Josh Bell

Others present: Town Accountant Angelica Desroches, Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, Selectboard Member Marina Goldman

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

Meeting minutes:

- Mr. Bowman moved to approve the minutes of November 19, 2025. Seconded by Mr. Menegoni and approved.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye, Rae—Aye, Menegoni – Aye

FY27 Budget Discussion:

- Mr. Ramsey gave an overview of the FY27 budget. He stated that the departments were requested to provide a level service and level service minus 2% budget. At this point in the process, he is looking to the Selectboard and Finance Committee to give opinions on which budget they would like to proceed with. Mr. Ramsey reiterated that the budget has a shortfall of around \$200,000 with a budgeted excess capacity of \$1.1 million so it is not a true deficit. He outlined that there are some assumptions that we are still waiting for true numbers including a 20% budgeted increase on health insurance and we won't know that true increase for a couple of months. He also discussed ways we could balance the \$200,000 shortfall. He mentioned addressing and altering our reserve policy for this year.
- Ms. Rae inquired about where the reserve balances are on the materials. Ms. Desroches directed her to the financial policy tab which gives the reserve balances as of the end of FY25. Ms. Rae wondered about the 20% estimate for health insurance. Ms. Desroches stated that looking at the market range for increases for other health insurance groups this increase is at the high end so by estimating this high we are hopeful that it will come lower and make the budget balance easier. Mr. Ramsey also reported that he was in an insurance meeting earlier and that after the 40% increase in insurance that Montague had this fiscal year the insurance company states that we are now on par with the market.
- Ms. Wisnewski questioned whether Mr. Ramsey needed a decision on the 2% reduction budget and he responded that it would be helpful, but it is not required. It would be helpful to know a consensus or feelings about the two budgets. Ms. Wisnewski stated that she has some questions after seeing the budget around salary increases and fairness across females and

males. She also questions whether some smaller departments can handle the 2% compared to other departments that have discretionary funds. Given those questions she did not feel ready to give a decision today.

- Ms. Bell-Upp stated that she thinks a 2% budget cut makes sense but also recognized that it might not be realistic for some departments and that those can be scrutinized later in the process.
- Ms. Rae shared that she thinks 2% might not be drastic enough. Although she does agree with both Ms. Wisnewski and Ms. Bell-Upp that some departments can't do the 2% she is concerned about FY28 and FY29.
- Ms. Bell-Upp changed the topic to what departments the Finance Committee would like to bring in to have these discussions with. She mentioned the Clean Water Facility, Airport, and the school. Ms. Rae mentioned wanting the Police and Department of Public Works as well. Ms. Wisnewski added the Assessor, Town Clerk, Library, Treasurer, and Public Health. Ms. Bell-Upp mentioned the Finance Committee's goal to have less meetings and Ms. Wisnewski stated she sees this as an opportunity to ask questions to help benefit the public.
- Ms. Wisnewski asked Mr. Ramsey and Ms. Desroches to put some context as to what saving excess capacity means and what it would cost to tax to the levy limit. Ms. Bell-Upp stated that there are lots of large building projects coming down the pipe and that the excess capacity has been saved to accommodate those projects. Ms. Desroches stated that the \$1.1 million in excess capacity if taxed would cost the average Montague taxpayer \$200 more on their taxes a year. And that would put strain on future years by keeping Montague accountable to the 2.5% tax increase, which can be difficult in years of large costs increases. Ms. Rae inquired about the plans to bond in future years. Ms. Desroches answered that the plan of the excess capacity was to save room for bonding by moving more debt into the levy to have more non-excluded debt. This would help raise our financial standing.

Updates from Town Administrator

- Mr. Ramsey updated that the Franklin County Technical School has released the numbers on their MSBA new school project and that Montague's contribution is estimated to be \$1.1 million for 30 years. The vote for that project is district wide.
- Mr. Ramsey gave an update that the Gill Montague School District was accepted into the MSBA program for a new elementary school project to combine the two elementary schools. He expects funding for the feasibility study will need to be decided by next fall.

Next Meeting dates/topics:

- January 7, 14, 21, and 28 agendas to be determined.

Adjournment

Ms. Bell-Upp makes the motion to adjourn at 6:53 PM. Seconded by Ms. Rae and approved.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Angelica Desroches

Documents and exhibits: