

MEETING OF MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, January 28, 2026 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 6:05 PM.

Selectboard Chair Matt Lord called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM.

Finance Committee members present: Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp, Josh Bell, Leigh Rae, Chris Menegoni

Finance Committee members absent: Jennifer Waryas, Francia Wisnewski

Selectboard members present: Matt Lord, Rich Kuklewicz, Marina Goldman

Others present: Town Accountant Angelica Desroches, Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, Director of Libraries Caitlin Kelley, Police Chief Jason Haskins

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

Meeting minutes:

- Ms. Rae moved to approve the minutes of January 21, 2026. Seconded by Mr. Menegoni and approved.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Rae—Aye, Menegoni – Aye

FY27 Budget Discussion with Director of Libraries:

- Ms. Kelley began the discussion with highlighting concerns about where she cut the budget for the 2% reduction. The oil heat line is of specific concern given how cold this winter has been.
- Ms. Bell-Upp inquired about how difficult it is to keep the library staffed with all the staffing turnovers. Ms. Kelley stated that she has had some difficulty with turnover, but she is hopeful that with the recent hire being approved at midgrade it might be helpful in retaining them.
- Ms. Rae wanted to begin the discussion about the upcoming capital project for the new library building. Ms. Kelley stated they will have estimates on February 4th and then on February 11th the library building and trustees will decide on which alternate to go with. Ms. Rae inquired if there was a general ballpark of the dollar figure. Ms. Kelley stated that the costs are somewhere between \$9 million and \$11 million for the town share. She also stated that it is still early for her to release numbers without knowing the exact state share yet, but she will know in two weeks and will share at that time. Mr. Ramsey discussed that internally the town has been working on projections and that it will be ready to share on February 11th. Ms. Bell-Upp questioned whether the landscaping or sidewalk work could be covered under Community Block Grants. Mr. Ramsey replied that it would be difficult to line up a separate contractor with the timing.
- Mr. Lord discussed that in the FY27 budget cut scenario there was a cut that would have an impact on the outdoor tent rental and that in previous years that was funded by the Community Development discretionary. Ms. Kelley stated that that was in fact true in previous years. He then stated that maybe that is something the Selectboard will have to take into consideration going into budget deliberations.

FY27 Budget Discussion with Police Chief:

- Mr. Haskins stated that since he just started a couple months ago the budget that was submitted was created by the previous chief. Mr. Ramsey added that there are staffing changes that are not currently in the budget that is currently being discussed but that in the next few

weeks that budget will be firmed up as the personnel movements are more finalized. He also added that there is currently a bid out for IT support so that line might have to be adjusted accordingly as well.

- Ms. Rae observed that over the past years the police budget seems to be trending up, and she is wondering if there are ways to be leaner and maintain public safety. Mr. Haskins replied that since 2020 policing as a profession has fallen out of favor. He estimated about a 75% decrease in applicants and that the quality has declined as well. To continue to attract qualified candidates most communities have started to raise salaries to be more competitive.
- Ms. Goldman asked Mr. Haskins to elaborate on the accreditation and certification process. Mr. Haskins responded that there are two levels with accreditation being the highest level. It is a measure of the practices the police department is using and holding them to higher standards. He stated that he believes that the police departments are going to be pushed to be certified in the next few years.
- Ms. Goldman questioned whether the Chief has begun to look at regionalization of the dispatch services given that the dispatch budget is a little less than half a million dollars. Mr. Haskins discussed that he is always in favor of collaboration and regionalization. He also stated that regionalization is always on the plate.
- Mr. Lord asked Mr. Haskins if the new officers that are being hired are in the current staffing budget. Mr. Haskins stated that they are in the budget but that there are going to be some promotions to fill the vacant detective and lieutenant positions that will require some shifting in the budget. Specifically, he would like to see the detective budgeted more in the D9 and D10 range. Mr. Lord if the decrease in part-time wage line is related to being fully staffed and Mr. Haskins stated that yes, once he is fully staffed, they will need the reserve officers less.
- Mr. Lord wondered about decreasing the Training Overtime line with the current staffing changes. Mr. Haskins did say this cut was not his favorite given there is a shift back to more in person trainings.
- Mr. Haskins highlighted a few other areas that he is concerned about cutting. He discussed that the cut to vehicle maintenance makes him nervous with it costing \$8,000 to repair water pumps in vehicles. He would rather have the cut to vehicle repair and building repairs be out of the academy line because he does not see the need to send two officers to the academy next year.
- Mr. Lord questioned whether the tax dollars going to personnel are going to be used to coordinate or support ICE. Mr. Haskins responded that the department must follow the law, but that they are not immigration enforcement. He would prefer to be community based and have community conversations.
- Ms. Rae wondered if Mr. Haskins was able to start to implement the use of civilian workers to help mitigate the personnel costs. He stated that he currently has an intern from Smith Vocational helping with some office related tasks as part of his work co-op. He is also utilizing dispatchers to help with the backlog of office work.
- Ms. Bell-Upp inquired as to whether the schools are planning on reimbursing the SROs this coming year. Mr. Haskins stated that he is unsure if Gill-Montague School District will be able to at this time but will know in the next few months. And he also knows that the Franklin Tech School is asking for assistance with reimbursement this year. Both schools are interested in maintaining the program, but both are facing difficult budget years.
- Ms. Bell-Upp raised a question about the request for a second cruiser. Mr. Haskins reported that at this time the department has one car from 2016 and five cars from 2017. All these cars have over 140,000 miles except for one. The average life of a police cruiser is 100,000 miles so they

are beyond their useful life currently. Mr. Kuklewicz questioned whether they have been able to update the vehicle inventory list and he stated he is disturbed to hear this report since there has been a cruiser in the budget every year. Mr. Haskins responded that they are in the process of gathering information for the inventory list and the costs. Mr. Ramsey discussed reaching out to CIC to possibly get an article together for the FY27 capital year.

- Ms. Bell-Upp stated that she heard there are some building needs. Mr. Haskins discussed needing dispatch consoles which were quoted at \$250,000. He also said that the geothermal system is going to need close to \$30,000 to repair as well.

Updates from Town Administrator

- Mr. Ramsey reported that the FRCOG assessment increased 8% this year. And that there is an updated budget with the new wage changes that were voted at the previous Selectboard meeting. He also reported the possibility of a Smith Vocational student for next year's budget.

Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting

- Ms. Desroches reported that the state funding and assessment numbers were released today and it was \$3,000 lower than what she had estimated in the budget.

Next Meeting dates/topics:

- February 5 – Gill-Montague Regional School District
- February 11 – In person meeting to discuss financial forecasting, large projects and FY27 budget
- February 18 – TBD
- February 25 – Selectboard budget recommendations
- March 4 – Vote Schedule I and II and non-CIC articles
- March 11 – CIC/FC/SB Capital requests, CIC report, and votes
- March 18 – SB/FC reconciliation and vote remaining articles
- March 25 – FC final votes
- April 1 – Review backgrounds and begin FC report
- April 8 – FC report finalized
- April 29 – FC Annual Town Meeting prep
- May 2 – Annual Town Meeting

Adjournment

Mr. Kuklewicz makes motion to adjourn at 7:10 PM. Seconded by Ms. Goldman and approved.

Kuklewicz – Aye, Goldman – Aye, Lord – Aye

Ms. Rae makes the motion to adjourn at 7:10 PM. Seconded by Mr. Bell and approved.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Angelica Desroches

Documents and exhibits: