

MEETING OF MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 6 PM

This meeting was held in person and recorded:

<https://vimeo.com/982262386>

Finance Committee Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM.

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

Finance Committee members absent: Jennifer Waryas, Francia Wisnewski

Others present: Town Accountant Angelica Desroches, Town Administrator Walter Ramsey

The meeting was recorded by MCTV.

Meeting minutes:

- Ms. Rae moved to approve the minutes of February 5, 2026 and February 11, 2026. Seconded by Mr. Bell and approved.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell – Aye, Rae—Aye, Menegoni – Aye

FY27 Budget Discussion with Selectboard Recommendations:

- Mr. Ramsey gave an overview of where the FY27 budget is at following the most recent Selectboard recommended budget. He highlighted the overall goal of the budget this year was to maintain level services with also maintaining financial stability going into uncertain years. The Selectboard budget is recommending a level service budget minus 2%. The budget is balanced with minimum use of excess capacity. Recent updates to the budget were increases in the police budget for tasers (\$10,000) and an IT services (\$17,000), the reduction of FCTS School Resource Officer (-\$12,000), repurposing old special articles (\$306,122), new police special articles (cruisers, HVAC system, and miscellaneous police equipment), and health insurance is now locked in at 16% increase. The total budget is up 5.6% from FY26 with an average single family tax impact of \$170. Part of the way the budget was balanced was a temporary pause on the annual stabilization transfers out of taxation. Mr. Ramsey reported that there is currently \$649,500 in capital requests this year with no large vehicles or construction being proposed. At the end of the budget there is currently \$292,392 remaining in free cash that the Finance Committee can designate to stabilization funds. The Clean Water Facility budget has increased 2.7% but the taxation portion of their budget has decreased close to \$200,000 due to inflow and infiltration systems being repaired. The Airport budget is increasing 5.6% with a similar tax support level to FY26. This year's budget is using \$124,540 in excess capacity which is less than last year's usage of \$342,400. Remaining excess capacity is \$980,328.
- Ms. Rae inquired if there have been any changes to the airport budget given that the Finance Committee noted that it might be too tight of a budget. Ms. Bell-Upp replied that at this time there have not been changes but that she agrees that the airport needs more funds. She discussed wanting to develop a system to help decide the taxation portion for the airport and to increase support for them as a department.
- Ms. Bell-Upp wondered if the police department could do a deeper dive into their budget to see if there is anything that they can cut to offset the things they added.

- Ms. Bell-Upp and Ms. Rae reiterated their support to making sure the airport is funded to a level that seems more adequate to the needs of the operations. They want to see more realistic support for them and the capital that is at the airport.
- Ms. Rae discussed that she has had a chance to tour the police department and see what Chief Haskins has been working on. She also stated that most of the budget is salary related. Ms. Bell-Upp wanted to know if there were opportunities for a reduction as well. Mr. Ramsey offered to follow up on that for Finance Committee.
- Ms. Bell-Upp inquired about when the CIC is going to look at the cruiser's statuses. Mr. Menegoni reported that so far, they have approved of the two cruisers this year and that they have requested 6 over the next three years. It was discussed that Chief Haskins had an impressive amount of data that shows the fleet and the status of the vehicles.
- Ms. Rae wondered if the IT contract increases and the tasers were in the leases and contracts line of the police budget because that line increased so much. Ms. Desroches stated that it was and that there was also an initial increase that was started by the previous Chief. Ms. Desroches also discussed that this year they are almost over budget on that line due to the recent IT changes that the department is currently going through to get their systems up to date. Mr. Ramsey discussed that the department has been short staffed for the last few years and that some maintenance and such has been deferred. The current budget is trying to get the department back to the standard it needs to be at. Ms. Bell-Upp wanted to make sure that the as we are filling vacancies now that it won't raise the budget. Ms. Desroches stated that the vacant positions are currently budgeted at top step to accommodate for the transitions to those positions.

Gill Montague Regional School District Budget and Affordable Assessment:

- Mr. Ramsey reported that the school affordable assessment has been set at \$13,120,375, which is a 3.61% increase from last year. The school currently reports have a \$1.6 million deficit that they are working on making cuts to meet.
- Mr. Menegoni questioned how much of the \$1.6 million school deficit is going to be operating. Ms. Bell-Upp suggested that Mr. Menegoni look at the school committee meeting from last night to see where they are suggesting the cuts. Mr. Menegoni expressed concern that the school is not going to be able to provide level services with this affordable assessment. Ms. Bell-Upp discussed that the Town is willing to help the school with free cash if they can find appropriate articles to pull out of the budget that are one-time costs that do not impact Gill with the affordable assessment. Ms. Desroches reported that there is probably a pending article from the school, but that they are waiting to see what they can pull out, that is not a shared cost with Gill and is a one-time appropriate cost.

Next Meeting dates/topics:

- 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

Topics not anticipated

- Mr. Ramsey shared that the Town has taken receipt of the new 10-wheeler after a long wait.
- Two new possible Finance Committee members introduced themselves and expressed their interest in joining.

Adjournment

Ms. Rae makes the motion to adjourn at 7:08 PM. Seconded by Mr. Bell and approved.

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

Respectfully submitted,

Angelica Desroches

Documents and exhibits: