

MEETING OF MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Wednesday, April 1, 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 6:00 PM.

Finance Committee members present: Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp, Chris Menegoni, Leigh Rae, Josh Bell, Stuart Mieher (6:02)

Finance Committee members absent: Emily Siegenthaler, Francia Wisnewski

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

The meeting was recorded by MCTV.

Meeting minutes:

- Mr. Menegoni moved to approve the minutes of March 25, 2026. Seconded by Ms. Bell-Upp and approved.
 - Bell-Upp – Aye, Bell —Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Rae – Abstain

Review of Motions and Background

- Mr. Ramsey reported that the warrant has been reviewed by the Selectboard and is set to be finalized next week. He offered explanation as to the grouping of the articles. Ms. Bell-Upp stated the grouping made sense so that department heads can present all their requests at once.
- Request to have all acronyms spelled out for new members.
- Discussion around the police department background to include more explanation of how last year's budget decreased, so this year is making up for some of that. Questions about why there was such a large increase in the contracting line and making sure there was additional description of that with the addition of the IT consultant and taser contract. Discussion around how last year's budget did not include the FY26 wage increases since those were voted for in the fall.
- Ms. Rae wanted to add more description about the large increase in the dispatch budget. The increase was all wages that were based on the contracts negotiated but FY26 did not have the wages in the budget line because they were voted as a special article.
- Request to add more information in the background about the Assistant Mechanic position at the CWF. Additional information about the cost savings of doing work in-house and not contracting it out.
- Ms. Bell-Upp inquired as to whether the alleyway paving is a temporary article. She stated that after they catch up with paving they will probably need to start back at the beginning of the cycle. Mr. Ramsey discussed that it could be argued it will be an operating cost in the future, but that for now it is part of a 5-year plan to get back on track.
- Regarding the background of the library, the Finance Committee felt there will be enough information with the other handouts and the information sessions. Ms. Bell-Upp and Ms. Rae both wanted to know if there could be an additional piece of information about what the tax savings will be with the police station and Gill-Montague debt payments coming off in coming years to help offset the cost of the library. General discussion on using gift revenue and stabilization to possibly offset the cost of the borrowing.

- Ms. Bell-Upp suggested revamping and streamlining the transfer to reserves article since we are not following our usual funding guidelines this year. Mr. Ramsey reported that one of the Selectboard members had a dissenting vote on this article around the free cash to OPEB because he wanted to keep the free cash available for other future costs. Ms. Desroches reported that funding OPEB liability helps with bond ratings because it is one of the factors that they take into consideration in the bond ratings.

Review draft of Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting

- Discussion around the description of the Assistant Mechanic position about how it is not just for succession planning but is also a key cost saving position to help the department do more maintenance in house and save contracting out costs.
- Ms. Bell-Upp inquired about why the SRO was not included in the local receipt budget. Ms. Desroches reported at the time the revenues were locked in at the end of February it was still undecided. This can be added to the local receipt budget before the tax rate is set in December depending on how the funding/staffing of the school plays out over the summer.
- Ms. Bell-Upp discussed that they wanted a more positive approach to the airport and their revenues. She reported that the solar project is a thing of the past and that the Finance Committee is more supportive of the budget and that there is a taxation portion to funding it. This is what they want to reflect in the report this year.
- The Committee had a conversation around the new lottery enrollment system at the Franklin County Tech School. This change is going to result in an internal policy change for how the Finance Committee does their early estimates for the assessment to avoid having to use large portions of the stabilization in future years.
- Ms. Bell-Upp and Mr. Miehler both reported that the paragraph on the town not being able to meet the future costs of infrastructure needs seemed ominous and maybe too negative with how far the Town has come in the past few years. The Town has put a lot of money into updating equipment and getting deferred maintenance caught up. They wanted a more positive note about the progress that was made with an understanding that there will always be more infrastructure repairs needed in the municipality.
- Mr. Menegoni reported that he has concerns about how the schools are being funded and that it does not seem to be getting the same resources as other departments. They are facing staffing cuts this fiscal year and other departments are not. Ms. Bell-Upp added there are concerns with state aid formulas and there is a lot of advocacy going on at the state level with changing those formulas. Ms. Rae added that this discussion is a much larger discussion that goes beyond the Finance Committee's scope alone.

Updates from Town Administrator

None reported.

Topics not anticipated in 48 hours

None reported.

Next Meeting dates/topics:

- April 8 – FC report finalized
- April 29 – FC Annual Town Meeting prep
- May 2 – Annual Town Meeting

Adjournment

Ms. Rae makes the motion to adjourn at 7:20 PM. Seconded by Mr. Miehler and approved.
Bell-Upp – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Bell – Aye, Rae – Aye, Miehler – Aye

Respectfully submitted,
Angelica Desroches

Documents and exhibits: