

**SPECIAL TOWN MEETING
TOWN OF MONTAGUE
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
October 1, 2015**

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- ARTICLE 1.** **Increase Article #23 of the May 2, 2015 Annual Town Meeting.** This is the IT Discretionary account. Ms. Miller kept the appropriation to \$8,200 per year because she had promised to keep costs to that level. Unfortunately, this has led to delays in replacing equipment, and there was an unanticipated need to replace the backup system used to backup the town's file servers. Replacing the backup system and a file server that can no longer have its warranty extended will use up the existing balance of the IT Special Articles. The cost to replace the e-mail server (which was purchased in 2008), including software and user licenses will cost about \$10,500 – more than the annual special article. Replacing the backup system and software will cost another \$3,300. There are approximately 9 workstations that were originally planned to be replaced in Fiscal Year 2015 **or prior**. These computers are all at least five years old. At an estimated cost of \$600 per replacement, it will take an additional \$6,300 just to replace these computers. We also need a small amount for miscellaneous items – cables, UPSs, etc. Approving this article will allow the town to catch up on needed equipment purchases. It is hoped that this one-time infusion will allow the town to get by with only a modest increase in the annual appropriation starting in Fiscal Year 2017.
- ARTICLE 2.** **Triennial Revaluation of Property.** It is time for the state-mandated triennial revaluation. This process includes not only the revaluation of all real and personal properties in town, but also associated costs such as interim year valuations, utility appraisals, consulting fees, and legal costs to defend cases at the Appellate Tax Board. This is historically funded from excess overlay, and the Assessors have released \$63,000 of unneeded overlay from Fiscal Year 2004 through Fiscal Year 2008 to Overlay Surplus for this purpose.
- ARTICLE 3.** **Sheffield Boiler.** There has not been enough time to put any state grants in place or do the overall evaluation needed before replacing any boilers at the Sheffield School. In the meantime, the current system needs repairs so that the heat will work during the current school year. We are requesting that the funding come from the Town General Stabilization fund because this was the funding source for the original article.
- ARTICLE 4.** **Reduce Sewer Rates.** The town has traditionally used a portion of Sewer Retained Earnings to reduce the sewer rates. This year we are requesting to use \$100,000 (about 44% of the total Retained Earnings) to offset sewer rate increases.
- ARTICLE 5.** **Increase WPCF Capital Stabilization Fund.** Last year Town Meeting authorized a new WPCF Capital Stabilization Fund so that the town could put money aside to be used towards significant capital needs in the coming years. This year we are asking that \$100,000 be added to this fund.

ARTICLE 6. Increase Town Share for AIP 17. Article 4 of the May 3, 2014 Special Town Meeting appropriated \$8,334 from Airport Retained Earnings for the town share of the Airport Improvements Project 3-25-0032-17 (AIP 17). Afterwards, parts of an earlier project (AIP 16, partially funded with \$12,500 from Retained Earnings, the unused portion of which was returned to Retained Earnings) were moved to AIP 17. Since AIP 17 underwent several reiterations with varying shares of federal, state, and local funding, it was decided to wait until the funding had been settled before asking for any additional town share to complete AIP 17. Now that the project has been bid and awarded, we know that the local share will increase by \$4,856, or just under half of what it would have cost if the same work would have been done as part of the earlier project. This will be funded entirely from Airport Retained Earnings at no cost to the taxpayers.

ARTICLE 7. Town Email Addresses for Town Board & Committee Members. This would allow the town to purchase additional licenses so that town board and committee members can have town e-mail addresses that they could access through the internet. This would provide e-mail addresses that are separate from personal e-mail accounts that would be used only for town purposes.

ARTICLE 8. Veterans Benefits. The town pays state-mandated benefits to qualified veterans and surviving spouses. 75% of these costs are reimbursed to the town in the following year as part of State Aid. The Fiscal Year 2016 budget was estimated based on the caseload in late 2014. The current caseload is higher, and an additional \$18,000 is needed based on current costs.

ARTICLE 9. Cable TV Contract. The last special article funding the legal costs for the cable contract negotiations was depleted in Fiscal Year 2015. The process is not yet completed, and additional funds are needed. Any funds not used will be closed when the final contract is approved.

ARTICLE 10. Library Access Repairs. There are repairs needed to the ramp and exterior stairs at the Carnegie Library, and the exterior stairs at the Montague Center Library. The edges of the ramp have broken off, exposing the rebar which is rusting out. The crumbling concrete will be cut off and replaced. Several of the steps in front of the Carnegie have crumbling edges and are also undermined. Both situations are safety hazards. If not addressed quickly, the ramp will need to be completely replaced. The front stairs at the Montague Center Library are mostly granite, with concrete patchwork which is uneven and broken in spots. The concrete back stairs are badly cracked and the edges are also disintegrating. All of these areas have been patched annually by the DPW, but each year the patches fall off and the damaged areas grow. The breakdown of the expected costs are \$5,035 for the ramp at the Carnegie Library, \$4,000 for the stairs at the Carnegie Library, \$5,000 for the stairs at the Montague Center Library, and \$965 for any unexpected costs that might be incurred.

ARTICLE 11. Library Brickwork Repair. There are bricks falling from the Montague Center Library and repairs need to be made before someone is injured. The brick cornice over the right side entrance needs immediate repair. The mortar is very

soft and bricks are falling from a high elevation. This appropriation will only cover immediately needed repairs.

ARTICLE 12. DPW Preliminary Design. This article will advance planning for a centralized public works facility on municipal land in the vicinity of the existing salt shed off Sandy Lane. The resulting product will be an architect’s budgetary estimate, site assessment and preliminary schematic design based on space needs. The study will be presented to Town Meeting when complete. The current 56 year old highway garage and offices at 500 Avenue A is beyond its useful life. The scope of work will include an assessment for reuse of the existing garage as municipal cold storage as well as study for the separation of transfer station facilities from the DPW, as required by Department of Environmental Protection. The Capital Improvements Committee is unanimously in support of this article.

ARTICLE 13. Pipeline FERC Technical Assistance. This article will provide the Town with legal representation and technical assistance throughout the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s (FERC) multi-year permitting process for the proposed Kinder Morgan/Tennessee Gas Pipeline that bisects Montague for 4.7 miles. The scope of services will be managed by the Franklin Regional Council of Governments under advisement from the Regional Pipeline Task Force: a multi-town consortium. Montague’s expected contribution would be \$13,750 assuming at least 4 affected communities participate. This effort is a strategy to MITIGATE the community impacts (economic, water, open space, public safety, etc) of the proposed pipeline. See Article 14 for a complementary strategy to BLOCK to the proposed pipeline.

ARTICLE 14. Pipeline DPU Legal Representation. Article 29 of Annual Town Meeting on 5/2/2015 resolved to ban “fracked gas” pipelines in Montague. The petition called upon the Selectboard to “reiterate its opposition to the pipeline and not allow it within Montague’s borders”. This article will provide the town with the means to take action to BLOCK the Kinder Morgan/Tennessee Gas pipeline through participation in a regional coalition of affected towns in Western Massachusetts. Specifically it will allow the town to intervene in proceedings before the Mass Department of Public Utilities and related court actions.

ARTICLE 15. Millers Falls Church Street Re-Zoning. This amendment to the Montague Zoning Map would redistrict approximately 0.7 acres at 5-7 Church Street from Public-Semi Public to Neighborhood Business. The subject area, know formerly as St. John’s Church and rectory, is completely surrounded by the Neighborhood Business district. This is a citizen initiated petition from property owner Richard Widmer. The Planning Board held a public hearing on 8/25/2015 and subsequently made a unanimous recommendation to support the zoning map amendment.

ARTICLE 16. Set Up and Fund an Other Post Employment Benefits Trust Fund. Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB) is health and life insurance for retirees. Currently we just pay the costs as they occur, which increase each year. But, much like retirement benefits, these should be funded as benefits are earned, during the work period of each employee, to avoid huge cost increases in future years. While the town is not yet obligated to start funding, it is strongly recommended by our auditors and general financial guidelines to start funding for these future costs. The two methods currently available for this purpose are a special purpose stabilization fund or a trust fund. The trust fund is strongly preferred, because even a special purpose stabilization fund can have its purpose changed by a vote of Town Meeting. By establishing this trust fund and funding it annually, it will put us on the path to future financial health. The current plan is that when the retirement system is fully funded (currently expected to happen in 2026), the annual amount that the town is paying toward the unfunded retirement liability will be used to fund the unfunded OPEB liability, thus minimizing the impact on the town budget. Using \$250,000 from Free Cash for this purpose would leave \$250,000 for use towards the Fiscal Year 2017 budget and an additional \$58,000 for needs during Fiscal Year 2016.

ARTICLE 17&18 Rescind Unused Balances. These three articles rescind the unused balances of Articles 14 of the September 12, 2013 Special Town Meeting (related to the Industrial Park Sewer Emergency) and Article 21 of the May 2, 2015 Annual Town Meeting (to maintain the Montague Center School Building prior to its sale).

ARTICLE 19. Reduce Minimum Size of Finance Committee. This would approve the original wording proposed in Warrant Article 12 of the Special Town Meeting of February 28 2013. That Town Meeting amended the proposed wording to set a higher minimum membership, which was not met during the summer of 2015. As a consequence the committee was unable to perform its functions on the Town's behalf. There have been regular efforts in recent years to enlist applicants for this committee, but the higher minimum has proven impractical. Approval of this change would help ensure that there is always a functioning Finance Committee to meet the town's needs.

ARTICLE 20. Dog Shelter Lease. This would authorize construction of a new regional dog shelter adjacent to the Public Safety Complex, with frontage on Turnpike Road. The lease would be for up to ten years. The Construction, staffing, and maintenance to be entirely supported Franklin County Sherriff's Office and the Friends of the Franklin County Regional Dog Kennel.

ARTICLE 21. Create Municipal Light Plant. This Article is the first of two obligatory votes to allow the Town to create a Municipal Light Plant (MLP). According to the town attorney, an MLP is the required instrument to receive and distribute funds available from the Massachusetts Broadband Initiative. These funds would be used for a pole survey, the necessary precursor for a privately funded and operated broadband service. The MLP would then oversee the implementation and operation of the private broadband service. The town would be responsible for the town attorney's fees in setting up the MLP. Subsequently, any operational costs of the MLP would be funded as part of the monthly cost of the service to the subscribers.