

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES
UPSTAIRS MEETING ROOM, 1 AVENUE A, TURNERS FALLS, MA
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2020
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The Chair opened the meeting

- Meeting was opened at 6:00 PM in the Upstairs Meeting Room
- **Finance Committee members present:** Jen Audley, Greg Garrison, John Hanold, Chris Menegoni, Shauna Wallace, and Francia Wisniewski. Fred Bowman was absent.
- **Selectboard members present:** Chris Boutwell, Rich Kuklewicz and Michael Nelson
- **Others present:** Town Administrator Steve Ellis and Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Town Clerk Deb Bourbeau, Assessor Karen Tonelli, GMRSD Superintendent Michael Sullivan and GMRSD Director of Business and Operations Joanne Blier
- The Chair announced that the meeting is being recorded by MCTV and asked if anyone else was recording the meeting. No one else was recording the meeting. The recording is available at <https://vimeo.com/387445431> (part 1) and <https://vimeo.com/386984469> (part 2)

Minutes

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 15, 2020.

Vote: 6 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Town Administrator's Report – Steve Ellis wishes to notify the public that there will be a design public hearing focused on the General Pierce Bridge Reconstruction Project on February 4th at the Shea Theater. There had been a misreport by the Greenfield Recorder that this bridge was expected to be completed at the end of calendar year 2020 when in fact it is supposed to be a multi-year project that significantly impacts travel into and out of our community. If you would like to hear the story from Mass DOT architects, design, and implementation teams the doors open at 5:30PM. MCTV will also be collaborating with the Shea Theater to broadcast this event.

Town Accountant's Report

Carolyn Olsen provided handouts of preliminary Cherry Sheets for the town and both school districts. The final FY21 budget has been received from the Franklin County Solid Waste Management District. There were no changes.

Special Article Request from Town Clerk: Voting Booths

Town Clerk Deb Bourbeau commented that Montague's current voting booths are cumbersome and old. The current booths consist of narrow wooden cubbies held up by wobbly saw horses. The main reason for the request is that the current booths are not ADA compliant. The proposed new booths are round tables that have cross sections to provide 4 polling stations with an ADA compliant shelf.

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On February 6th there will be an all-day training for election workers on how to use the new tabulation machines so everything will be ready in time for voting. Deb Bourbeau will also put a video on the website to instruct the public on how to use the new machines. There will also be one in the hallway of Town Hall for anyone who wants to see the machine in person and get accustomed to it prior to voting. Deb Bourbeau notes that the technology behind our new optical scanners should not need to be upgraded for a long time. An added benefit of the new scanners will be that they will allow results to be available more quickly after the election.

This request will be on the warrant for the Winter Special Town Meeting on March 5; if it is approved the new voting booths would be used for the first time at the Town elections in May.

Clerks FY21 Budget

Deb Bourbeau explains that the Town Clerk's budget fluctuates due to the number of elections held. She anticipates this coming year will hold many elections and a high voter turn-out whereas next year is expected to have fewer elections and lower voter turn-out.

Deb Bourbeau informs us that the only time we are allowed to alter the number of precincts is the year after the federal census, one of which is occurring in 2020. In early 2021 we will be sent the census data and Deb Bourbeau will review the results. Our current population is about 8,500. MA general law states that you are supposed to have 3,000-4,000 people in each precinct, so technically we only need 3 voting precincts but our current Town Meeting Act states that there are to be no less than 5 and no more than 10 precincts. Reducing the number of precincts would mean a reduction in the budget of the Town Clerk as she would need less staff and materials to run the elections. Deb Bourbeau would like to propose reducing the number to 3 precincts in 2021, with voting to take place in the upper meeting room of Town Hall, the Senior Center, and the public safety complex.

Non-Capital Special Article Request from Assessors: Utility Valuation

Karen Tonelli reports that FY21 will be the 3rd year in a 3-year plan to have George Sansoucy evaluate the value of electric and gas utilities. Previous practice was that the utility companies would report their valuations at net-book value to the assessors and that would be their values. This meant if they had poles and equipment over a certain age they were not reporting any value for those items. The state will now require municipalities to obtain a formal valuation; we engaged the consultant to build a model with the hope that these valuations may be done in house in the future, but that issue will have to be revisited in the future given the effort involved.

There was discussion about whether the annual cost of valuing gas and electric utilities should be made part of the operating budget, but no decision was reached.

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FY22 will be a revaluation year. For revaluations, we hire a consultant to value the hydro facilities. Karen Tonelli had asked for \$50,000 last year at the May 2019 annual town meeting and we still have those monies to use for that purpose. The estimated cost is about \$35,000. In the past we had an agreement with Gill that Montague would pay 90% of the cost of both the assessments and any legal costs, and Gill would pay 10%. Current discussions on FY22 will possibly split the cost 50/50 between Gill and Montague.

Recommendations for allocating \$800,000 recently released to Overlay Surplus

The Montague Selectboard and Finance Committee and the GMRSD have a collective understanding that the sum of \$800,000 recently released to overlay surplus are one time funds that should be used for one-time expenses.

The history of the GMRSD Stabilization Fund, and past payments in excess of the Affordable Assessment, and previous reimbursements of excess Excess and Deficiency funds were discussed to see if they should impact the current situation. John Hanold offered a memo outlining the thinking behind his proposal to allocate 100% of the overlay surplus to the Town Capital Stabilization Fund. Several people stated that the town was responsible for the elementary school buildings in town, and we would continue to fund needed repairs and maintenance within our overall capacity, regardless of whether those projects were funded from the GMRSD Stabilization Fund or the Town Capital Stabilization Fund. Others suggested there was a simplicity in allocating 48.5% of the Overlay Surplus to the GMRSD Stabilization Fund as well as a certain symbolism. Steve Ellis and Greg Garrison both spoke to the issue that \$800,000 is a drop in the bucket of what is needed to rehabilitate any town building, and that a single roof can cost over \$1M.

The GMRSD brought samples of a property assessment and long term planning report that the Mohawk Trail Regional School District commissioned a few years ago. Investing in something like this would help them plan and prioritize capital improvement and maintenance projects going forward.

After lengthy discussion it was concluded that, regardless of which stabilization fund the monies end up in, it is an earmark of what the funds should be used for rather than a firm commitment. Town Meeting still reserves the right to spend monies out of any stabilization fund however they deem fit.

Finance Committee Moved:

To allocate \$800,000 from Overlay Surplus into the Town Capital Stabilization Fund.

Vote: 6 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

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Select Board Moved:

To allocate \$800,000 from Overlay Surplus into the Town Capital Stabilization Fund.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Discussion: FY21 Annual Budget Requests

General Government

We reviewed the following budgets as presented: 113 (Town Meeting), 122 (Selectboard), 131 (Finance Committee), 132 (Reserve Fund), 135 (Accountant), 141 (Assessor), 145 (Treasurer), 151 (Legal Counsel), 155 (IT), 159 (Shared Costs)

We received written responses to requests for further information from the Accountant, Treasurer, and IT Administrator. There were no additional questions or concerns.

No requests for future agendas.

No Topics not anticipated within the 48 hour posting requirements.

Upcoming Finance Committee Meeting Dates *(subject to change):*

January 29; February 5, 12, 19, 26; March 4, 11, 18, 25

Meeting was adjourned at 8:16PM

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Minutes of January 15, 2020
- Warrant articles for Voting Booths and Utility Valuation Services
- Requests, narratives, and Q & A for departments on agenda
- John Hanold's memo on Allocation of Overlay Surplus
- Sample Property Condition Assessment & Long Range Planning for Mohawk
- Update on GMRSD CIC projects

Respectfully submitted by Shauna Wallace