

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
REMOTE VIA ZOOM, 1 AVENUE A, TURNERS FALLS, MA
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 2021

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Meeting was opened at 6:00 PM by virtual attendance in the in Upstairs Meeting Room

- **Finance Committee members participating remotely:** Jen Audley, Fred Bowman, Greg Garrison, Chris Menegoni, Jennifer Waryas, Francia Wisnewski, and John Hanold
- **Selectboard members participating remotely:** Chris Boutwell (arrived 7:00)
- **Others participating remotely:** Town Administrator Steve Ellis, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, and Public Works Superintendent Tom Bergeron
- The Chair announced that the meeting is being streamed and recorded by the MCTV and asked if anyone else was recording the meeting. No one else was recording the meeting. Remote participation for both members and the public was provided by Zoom. The link to the recording is. <https://vimeo.com/510948915>.

Approve Meeting Minutes

February 3, 2021

Finance Committee moved: To approve the minutes of February 3, 2021 as submitted.

Vote: Audley –Aye, Hanold-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas –Aye, Wisnewski - Aye

Updates from Town Administrator and Town Accountant

Mr. Ellis reported that the packets for the Special Town Meeting on February 25 have been mailed to Town Meeting members. Notices by email have been sent, where possible, and a request made for “tech buddy” support to members who may benefit from it.

Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Development

Review of budget requests: (423) Snow & Ice, (433) Solid Waste, (299) Tree Warden, (190) Utilities, (420) DPW Combined (including 192 Public Buildings, 422 Construction & Maintenance, and 652 Parks), (480) EV Charging Stations, (294) Forest Warden, (840) Intergovernmental, and (630) Parks & Recreation.

Snow & Ice (Department 423) Discussion centered on Mr. Bergeron’s purchasing of salt & sand as his budget allows, his practice of budgeting conservatively to protect against unexpectedly severe needs, and increasing the budget each year because he understands this to be a requirement for the town to remain eligible for state and federal emergency funds.

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Finance Committee moved: To approve the Snow & Ice Fiscal Year 2022 Budget of \$287,050.

Vote: Audley –Aye, Bowman-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas –Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Solid Waste (Department 433) In reply to Ms. Waryas' question on negotiation positions, Mr. Bergeron described the environment for Solid Waste services as either a three-year commitment or the acceptance of multi-town agreements based on limited bidders.

Finance Committee moved: To approve the Solid Waste Fiscal Year 2022 Budget of \$664,796.

Vote: Audley –Aye, Bowman-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas –Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

EV Charging Stations (Department 480) In response to a question, Mr. Ellis said that there has not been high patronage, to date, of the charging stations. Ms. Wisnewski asked where the stations are located. FirstLight owns the one at the Discovery Center, the Airport has one, and the Town has two, one on 2nd Street and one on 6th Street. It was mentioned that increased public awareness of them should improve future use.

Finance Committee moved: To approve the EV Charging Station Fiscal Year 2022 Budget of \$6,000.

Vote: Audley –Aye, Bowman-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas-Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Utilities (Department 190) The DPW receives and pays the bills for utilities in several town-owned buildings (Town Hall, DPW, Landfill, street lights, and Parks & Recreation. The WPCF, Airport, Soldiers Memorial, Libraries, Colle, and Senior Center utilities are in their own budgets for various reasons). Mr. Bergeron reported that the new garage building is working well, but that billing and usage issues for electricity still need resolution. There was some interest in budgeting less conservatively, but also recognition that the array of buildings and weather uncertainty are worth considering.

Finance Committee moved: To approve the Utilities Fiscal Year 2022 Budget of \$134,745.

Vote: Audley –Aye, Bowman-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas –Aye, Wisnewski - Aye

Tree Warden (Department 299) Mr. Hanold's phone call with Tree Warden Mark Stevens was discussed, along with Mr. Bergeron's assessment of the backlog of tree work. The Tree Warden's budget includes funding for tree planting and the use of outside contractors for tree removal and trimming, and the Tree Warden believes it is sufficient. Mr. Bergeron has indicated that the backlog of trees needing trimming, as well as the number of larger trees

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requiring outside expertise for removal, are part of the reason for his request for added staffing for the Parks Department. The Tree Warden, who is also one of the three staff members in the DPW's Parks Department, was on medical leave for an extended time in the past year, and the number of new trees planted was significantly below goals set for this year.

As tree work is a component of the DPW's argument for adding staff to its Parks Department, the Finance Committee chose to defer voting on this request.

Department of Public Works -Combined (Department 420) Mr. Bergeron reminded the Committee that his department's span of responsibility includes 109 miles of roads and 63 miles of sewer-line, as well as custodial services and maintenance of numerous buildings, mowing and relining fields in parks, and responding to emergencies such as the recent embankment failure on Millers Falls Rd.

Mr. Bergeron and the Committee discussed at some length his staffing needs, both the two retirements he expects (one administrative and the other from Parks), which he has budgeted for in Fiscal Year 2022, and his assessment that his department does not have the capacity to keep up with the volume or nature of tasks being asked of them by the town. He feels that the leave-time the Parks Department experienced in the past year highlights, but does not eliminate, the need for added help. As examples, Mr. Bergeron indicated that he did not have sufficient staffing to clear snow from sidewalks as promptly as the Library director would prefer, or to trim trees, as that is a two-person job and thus difficult to schedule when the Parks Department has only 3 employees. He noted that the recent renovation of Rutters Park in Lake Pleasant had considerably increased the amount of attention that park requires from the DPW, and that the Airport's proposal to expand its property could result in more assistance needed from the DPW at their facility. Mr. Hanold noted that even though the Airport has indicated that it will pay for services from the DPW, time that DPW staff spent at the Airport was time that they would not be available for work on other tasks.

The proposal is to expand the Parks Department by adding two additional heads. Mr. Garrison asked what the long-term expectations of the two new members would be, and Mr. Menegoni questioned whether this was a response to "catch-up" needs vs. long-term use. It was pointed out that the Selectboard, acting as the Personnel Committee, should take action on the staff increase and Mr. Boutwell said they have not discussed the matter. Mr. Hanold urged prompt attention to this, in view of the time remaining in the budget cycle. The Committee chose to defer a vote on the DPW combined request until the Selectboard makes a recommendation.

Ms. Audley asked Mr. Bergeron to confirm that he and the office manager were unable to identify any opportunities for reductions or savings on the expense side of his budgets. Mr.

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Bergeron said that his preference was to err on the side of ending the year with unspent funds, which would “go back to the town.”

Discussion of the DPW’s capital requests will be held on March 17, when the Capital Improvements Committee presents its recommendations.

Forest Warden (Department 294) No questions were raised.

Finance Committee moved: To approve the Forest Warden’s Fiscal Year 2022 Budget of \$1,710

Vote: Audley –Aye, Bowman-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas –Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Parks & Recreation (Department 630) No questions were raised. Members commended Director Jon Dobosz on his creative redeployment of his budget in response to COVID-19 circumstances.

Finance Committee moved: To approve the Parks & Recreation Fiscal Year 2022 Budget of \$147,344.

Vote: Audley –Aye, Bowman-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas –Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Intergovernmental (Department 840) Mr. Hanold asked if updated assessments from elements of the Franklin Regional Council of Governments were available, and Ms. Olsen reported that they were and that she updated the budget file accordingly.

Finance Committee moved: To approve the Intergovernmental Fiscal Year 2022 Budget of \$111,609 (revised down from \$116,389).

Vote: Audley –Abstain, Bowman-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas –Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Mr. Ellis asked to be excused at 7:40, since the remainder of the agenda was business specific to the Committee.

Review Draft of Finance Committee’s Draft Report to Town Meeting

Ms. Audley presented her draft of this report, which was sent out prior to the meeting. Mr. Hanold suggested the deletion of two words and the committee commended Ms. Audley on producing a clear and concise report.

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Finance Committee moved: To approve the draft Calendar Year 2020 Finance Committee Report.

Vote: Audley –Aye, Bowman-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Hanold-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Waryas –Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Topics Not Anticipated within 48 Hours and Requests for Future Agendas

The Franklin County Tech School has issued their budget document, which is being discussed tonight, and the Gill-Montague Regional School Committee has issued their updated Fiscal Year 2022 budget document last night. The Tech School assessment for Montague is expected to be substantially less than we had anticipated, but the calculation of state aid to Gill and Montague results in a \$66K gap for the district. This shortfall is being addressed between now and their appearance at our March 3 meeting.

Agendas for Future Meetings

February 17 – Water Pollution Control Facility and misc. others

February 24 -- Police and Dispatch, Assessor, and final New Growth and Revenue

March 3 – Gill-Montague Regional School District and Franklin County Technical School

Adjournment

Finance Committee Moved: To adjourn at 7:50 PM

Vote: Audley –Aye, Hanold-Aye, Garrison-Aye, Bowman-Aye, Menegoni-Aye, Wisnewski-Aye, Waryas –Aye

Respectfully submitted by John Hanold

List of Documents and Exhibits:

- Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Requests
- Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Narratives
- Hanold notes on phone conversation with Tree Warden
- Audley draft of Finance Committee's contribution to the 2020 Annual Report