

MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE
Final Minutes
Wednesday, December 15, 2021

This meeting is being held remotely and recorded at <https://vimeo.com/mctvchannel17/657254561>

PRESENT: Jen Audley, Chair; Greg Garrison, Vice-Chair; Fred Bowman, John Hanold, Jennifer Waryas, Chris Menegoni and Francina Wisnewski (6:03 p.m.) members; Carolyn Olsen, Town Accountant; Steve Ellis, Town Administrator; BettyLou Mallet, Scribe.

- 1. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m.** This meeting is being recorded by Carolyn Olsen as well as aired on MCTV. All members present.
- 2. Approval of the minutes from 12/08/2021** – The members received and reviewed the draft minutes of December 8, 2021. No discussion. **On a motion by JH and seconded by GG, the minutes were approved unanimously. JH, aye; GG, aye; JW, aye; FB, aye; CM, aye; JA, aye.**
- 3. Update from Town Administrator and Town Accountant** – CO did not have any updates to share with the Committee.
Steve Ellis had a few items:
 - It is unlikely to have the figures of what the Government aid will be until after the first of the year.
 - The Selectboard held the Town of Montague's FY22 Tax Rate Classification hearing on Monday. The process is delayed this year because it's a revaluation year for Montague and the DOR is short staffed. From this standpoint, there is still one more district hearing for rate setting, then everything goes to the DOR to be approved before the bills are created. The hope is that the DOR will have it turned around within a few days. It is the hope to have the bills out by next Wednesday. If they are not sent out by January 1st, there may be some consequences, but it is not a major issue. The Committee did not have any questions.
- 4. Status of FY23 Budget Request from Town Departments and Committees** – The budget requests from departments and committees were due on Monday. CO created and submitted the first draft of the budgets to the FinCom, the Selectboard, and the Town Administrator for their review. The Committee is asked to refer to the yellow tab which is the Working Budget with Funding Detail. It gives an idea of what the budget will look like in terms of revenues and expenses.
- 5. Discuss FY23 Annual Budget Development Process** – This meeting's agenda provided links for the members to access which gave an overview of the budget process in prior years and allow them to think about, and discuss in the future, what they envision the budget development process to look like as well as what is important and what they wish to keep the same or perhaps do differently.

GG reviewed the attachments and feels what has been done in the past flows very well. The FinCom should meet with the WPCF and school committees. JH agrees with GG and feels it is important to spend time with those departments as there are a number of changes.

JA asked the committee if they should ask the Selectboard to come to a meeting to have conversations about adding staff or hold off until the Selectboard has made a decision. Perhaps give the Selectboard a deadline on submitting their recommendations on all staff change requests so that the FinCom can move forward.

FW stated that last year's budget process was a lengthy one due to having the meetings on Zoom. She sees that there seems to be a shift in staffing within the Town Hall, restructuring is needed due to the Town growing, and that the staffing capacity is in need of increasing due to upcoming projects. She suggests a comparison be done with other towns in the area that are similar to Montague. JA also agrees with FW and that it would be interesting to take the time to see what similar towns are doing. This information can be found on the Local Services website.

JA said that having the Selectboard meet with the FinCom each week to discuss budgets takes a great deal of time for all participants. She wonders if the Selectboard could endorse a preliminary budget including a few key points and then forward on to the FinCom to then begin the process.

The Selectboard will be meeting on January 3, 2022. This will be posted as a joint meeting between the Selectboard and the Finance Committee so the two committees can discuss this year's budget development process. JA will prepare a proposal for the others to respond to. The Finance Committee will then meet on Wednesday, January 5, 2022.

JW spoke on the idea of engaging the public in the budget process. She is open to ideas on how to get the public more involved and how to get the word out that the budget season is beginning. She wishes to encourage the public to be involved. The FinCom discussed possibly having a time for public input at a few meetings and named several ways of doing that. Although they encourage public participation, they also need to use the time in the meetings to focus and discuss the budgets.

One other thought about the budget process is to possibly review requests in groupings such as General Government, Public Safety, etc.

JA asks the FinCom members to each create a list of which budgets they feel are important, which are noncontroversial and can discuss rather quickly and which they have very few questions on. These will be discussed at the January meeting.

6. **Discussion of Reserve Funds Policy** – JA apologized to the Committee as she linked the incorrect information for the committee for tonight's discussion. As the committee does not have all the materials needed, tonight's discussion will be held at a future meeting.
7. **Agenda requests and topics for upcoming meetings.** JA would like to have budget materials printed out and available for members as well as public to have in hand for the upcoming budget discussions. CO will wait for the YTD figures and then will print these and have them available.

January 5, 2022 is the next FinCom meeting at 6:00 p.m. January 3 is the joint meeting with the Selectboard.

On a motion by FB and seconded by GG, the Committee voted to adjourn at 7:14 p.m. CM, aye; JH, aye; JW, aye; FW, aye; GG, aye; FB, aye; JA, aye.

Respectfully submitted,
BettyLou Mallet
Scribe

Finance Committee Vote: January 5, 2022