

**MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
**Wednesday, July 12, 2023 at 6:00 p.m.**  
**This meeting was held via Zoom and recorded:**  
<https://vimeo.com/844775981>

Finance Committee Vice Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

**Finance Committee members present:** Vice Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp, Clerk Fred Bowman, and members John Hanold, Chris Menegoni, and Jennifer Waryas

**Finance Committee members absent:** Chair Francia Wisnewski, member Greg Garrison

**Others present:** Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen. Town Administrator Steve Ellis was unable to attend due to other pressing matters.

The meeting was recorded by MCTV as well as by Carolyn Olsen.

**Meeting minutes:**

Mr. Hanold moved to approve the minutes of June 14, 2023, and July 5, 2023. Seconded by Ms. Waryas and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, and Waryas – Aye

**Transfers:**

Chapter 44 Section 33B Transfer

The lease of land for a solar array was intended to be completed in time for the first quarterly payment to be received in FY23. Due to an unavoidable delay in executing the contract, this payment will not be received until FY24. This leaves the Airport with a revenue deficit that must be provided for, either by this transfer, or an appropriation from Free Cash at the fall Special Town Meeting. The Selectboard approved this request on Monday, July 10, 2023.

- Mr. Menegoni asked if and when the money would be reimbursed to the Town. Ms. Olsen explained that Enterprise Funds can only reimburse the General Fund for capital expenses, and the reimbursement must occur within 2 fiscal years after the expense was incurred. Mr. Menegoni is very concerned about the amount of money the airport has required both this year and last year, as he keeps hearing that they're going to be fully self-supported. Mr. Menegoni also expressed frustration that the conversations at Town Meetings and Finance Committee meetings have implied that the additional funds provided to the Airport by the Town would be reimbursed at some point, and this feels a bit like a bait and switch.
- Mr. Hanold noted that the revenue shortfall was through no fault of the Airport and is inclined to approve the request, even without a mechanism for repayment.
- Ms. Waryas asked if there was some accountability to make sure the Airport meets its revenue goals as provided in their annual budget and feels it's important to recognize that the funds the Town is providing cannot be reimbursed.

Mr. Bowman moved to approve a Chapter 44 Section 33B transfer of \$47,000 to from the General Fund Health Insurance budget (001-5-910-5174) to Transfer to Airport Enterprise Fund (001-5-994-5964). Seconded by Mr. Hanold and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – begrudgingly Aye, and Waryas – Aye

#### **Plan for Stipend Review:**

##### **General Comments on Stipends in General:**

- Ms. Waryas asked when people get stipends, and if there was some sort of checklist used to determine what qualifies a position for a stipend. Not having this makes it hard to decide who gets what when. Ms. Olsen provided her understanding that generally stipends are paid to elected board members who have town-wide policy making decisions, these being the Selectboard, Board of Assessors, and Board of Health. Their policies affect pretty much everyone, whereas the Parks and Recreation Commission only impacts Parks and Recreation. Stipends are also given to other elected officials that have a specific task, such as the Moderator and Tree Warden, and previously the Town Clerk and Treasurer/Tax Collector. Then we also pay to people who have other types of jobs, specifically inspections, but also things like Emergency Management Director and Forest Warden which are also jobs but don't necessarily fit into a pay scale that we have for our other employees, which is why they have a stipend. In reference to an earlier conversation which asked if we're paying them for what they're doing or is it an honorarium, she would posit that there's a split between the two. People who work on boards or in positions that don't have an hourly component, it's a little more on the honorarium side, which is intended to reimburse them for their time and effort, but not necessarily to its true value. Whereas people like electrical inspectors, the barn inspector, and the animal inspector are expecting to be paid for the cost of their service and their cost to do the job. Then you have a few oddball things like the IT Coordinator and the Police IT Administrator which are instances that people already working for the Town are taking on an additional job responsibility that, if not done by an employee, would be a typical stipend position for which it would be too hard to find someone to do just that work when it's needed.
- Ms. Waryas is concerned that if our motivation for providing stipends is to get more people to want the positions it might not be the right philosophical approach.
- Mr. Bowman said a stipend is a payment for doing that job, that's what it is. Mr. Bowman thinks inspectors should be paid a wage and not a stipend, and we should look at other positions and whether they should be taken off of the stipend chart and paid a wage.
- Ms. Olsen asked if the intent was to thoroughly review and evaluate each position again, or to just adjust the stipends for changes occurring since 2019. Members seemed to agree with this intention.

##### **GMRSD School Committee Stipends:**

Chapter 70 requires that stipends for school committees in districts must be approved by all member towns and the amounts are set by the towns in the district. There were no representatives of the GMRSD to speak on this matter.

Ms. Waryas stated from experience that being on the School Committee is a lot of work, and generally involves being on sub-committees, which can involve several meetings a week for an extended period of time. There's a large learning curve.

Mr. Bowman noted that his past experience was that this position involves a great deal of time, and noted that many younger people, especially those with children, are less able to participate because of both the time involved and the need to provide for childcare.

Mr. Hanold moved to support a stipend for School Committee members. Seconded by Ms. Waryas and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni –Aye, and Waryas – Aye

### **Town Stipends:**

- Mr. Bowman stated that if we use a Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA), we have to do it every year or you'd have a much larger increase every third or fifth year.
- Mr. Bowman is also concerned that with the potential for a future state minimum wage of \$20 per hour we need to make sure that people are sufficiently paid so that we don't end up paying less than minimum wage. This is why we need to look at each job description to see exactly what each does.
- Mr. Bowman is concerned about having large increases every five years.
- Ms. Bell-Upp asked why the 5-year period was chosen. It was thought to be a good starting point during the 2019 discussion.
- Ms. Bell-Upp asked who was in favor of an annual COLA. Mr. Bowman is in favor, but then the conversation veered.
- Mr. Hanold agrees that annual payments should be evenly divisible by the number of payments made.
- Mr. Hanold doesn't think we're paying by the hour for anyone other than the building inspectors, and he's happy to pick a flat dollar amount for them and continue on. With the exception of those, he thinks trying to figure out how many hours each person spends on the position is an exercise in futility.
- In terms of an annual adjustment or periodic evaluation, Mr. Hanold would prefer a periodic evaluation. He noted that COLA adjustments have a lot of variance and doesn't think most of these positions are subject to the same economic forces that COLAs are intended to cover.
- Mr. Hanold thinks the first decision should be whether we want to make a periodic adjustment or an annual COLA adjustment. Mr. Hanold added that while you could consider the COLA in the review, you would not necessarily need to pin it to that.
- Ms. Bell-Upp noted that we could account for the COLA during the periodic review. Mr. Bowman asked if that three-year review would reflect the current year's COLA or the total for the previous three years. The intent would be to make the adjustment reflect the three years of COLAs.
- Ms. Waryas asked if there could be criteria for unique situations, such as extreme inflation, that could allow the stipends to be reviewed earlier than scheduled. She supports a framework but wants to remain nimble to adjust when needed.
- Mr. Hanold's email also asked if we want to consider reimbursement of expenses such as transportation and childcare in setting stipends and Ms. Bell-Upp thinks the answer is "no,"

and asked if all committees have budgets for training and travel. Ms. Olsen replied that all budgets that support committees can reimburse members for training and travel, but noted that reimbursement for childcare would not be allowable per se. A stipend amount could be set using that consideration but would be the same for each member of the group regardless of who might incur that expense.

- Another question is whether we want to consider other towns for compatibility. Given that stipend amounts vary considerably from town to town, the consensus was that it wasn't necessary unless somehow required to validate our decisions.
- Ms. Olsen noted that if the premise of the committee is that you're just going to adjust the current stipend amounts based on changes in the position and changes in the economic environment, it seems unnecessary to look at other towns. You only have to determine the inflation value and, if the work has changed, the value of that work.
- Mr. Menegoni proposed a 10% increase every three years and just leave it at that, with additional adjustments for changes in the position when needed. Ms. Olsen noted that this option would certainly simplify things.
- Ms. Bell-Upp asked if the 8% COLA was unusual, and what a typical COLA was. Ms. Olsen noted that it varies a lot and also depends on which source you're using. Ms. Olsen added that a 10% increase every three years would sometimes be higher than the cumulative inflation rate for the period, would also sometimes be lower, and over the really long term would probably be fairly close to actual inflation.
- Mr. Hanold would like to avoid over-complicating this.

Mr. Hanold moved that the Finance Committee propose a 3-year review cycle for stipends which would contemplate changes in responsibilities and in the economic environment, seconded by Ms. Waryas and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, and Waryas – Aye

- Mr. Hanold prefers a broad percentage rather than the granularity of a specific annual COLA.
- Ms. Olsen noted that the survey about changes in responsibilities was sent out 3 weeks ago to 25 people but she has only received responses from 5 people for a total of 7 positions. She does not have time to chase down responses to the survey and assumes that if they haven't responded, nothing has changed. This assumption was accepted by the committee.

Mr. Hanold moved that the Finance Committee propose a \$45 per inspection rate for the part-time inspectors for FY25, seconded by Ms. Waryas and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, and Waryas – Aye

#### **Future meetings –**

- July 26<sup>th</sup>, continue stipend review process
- August 9<sup>th</sup>, continue stipend review process

**Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting** – There was interest in more information about the time requirements of the barn and animal inspector and what counting animals entails, so Ms. Olsen will request that information.

**Finance Committee Adjournment**

Mr. Bowman makes the motion to adjourn at 7:10 PM. Seconded by Ms. Waryas and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, and Waryas – Aye,

Respectfully submitted,

Carolyn Olsen

Documents and exhibits:

Ch44 S33B Transfer Request for Airport

E-mail content regarding School Committee Stipends

Hanold email with proposed stipend review process

## REQUEST FOR MGL CHAPTER 44 SECTION 33B TRANSFER

Request is hereby made for the following transfer in accordance with Chapter 44, Section 33B of the Massachusetts General Laws. MGL Chapter 44 Section 33B allows budgetary transfers between appropriations in the last two months of a fiscal year, and the 1<sup>st</sup> 15 days of the following fiscal year (for the preceding fiscal year), by the selectmen with the concurrence of the finance committee.

Transfer Amount Requested: \$47,000

Transfer From:

Acct#	Title	Current Balance
<u>001-5-910-5174</u>	<u>GF Employee Health Ins</u>	<u>\$109,336.12</u>

Transfer To:

Acct#	Title	Current Balance
<u>001-5-994-5964</u>	<u>Transfer to Airport Ent Fund</u>	<u>\$0</u>

Reason for request:

- The solar lease was intended to be in place with the first quarterly payment received in FY23. Due to an unavoidable delay in finalizing the contract, the first payment of \$59,500 will not be received until FY24.
- Actual revenues for FY23 were budgeted at \$336,015 (including the reserve fund transfer), but only \$288,970.95 was received, leaving a shortfall of \$47,044.05. Since the budget only has a remaining balance of \$360.40, there will be a revenue deficit which has to be funded either with this transfer or from an appropriation at the fall STM before the FY24 tax rate can be set.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Officer/Department Head

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### ACTION OF SELECTMEN

Date of Meeting: 7/10/23 Number present & voting: \_\_\_\_\_

Transfer approved in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Transfer disapproved: \_\_\_\_\_

Chairperson \_\_\_\_\_

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### ACTION OF FINANCE COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting: 7/12/23 Number present & voting: \_\_\_\_\_

Transfer approved in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Transfer disapproved: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson, Finance Committee

Email from Heather Katsoulis:

Good afternoon Carolyn,

Is the following enough info to get on the FinCom agenda? Thanks! H

Per MGL Ch71 Sec 52, I wish to initiate the process of requesting a stipend for the School Committee chairperson.

School committee chairpersons play a vital role in the district's education system, overseeing the budget and policies, making important decisions, and ensuring the smooth operation of schools. Given the significant responsibilities they bear, it is reasonable to argue that school committee chairpersons should receive a modest stipend for their service.

The role is time-consuming and demanding. These individuals invest substantial effort in agenda planning, leading meetings, reviewing policies, analyzing budgets, addressing community concerns as well as engaging in regular union negotiations. The responsibilities often extend beyond regular working hours and may require significant personal sacrifices. By providing a modest stipend, it acknowledges and compensates for the additional time and effort they dedicate to their role.

Additionally, a modest stipend can contribute to the overall stability and continuity of school committee leadership. By offering financial compensation, it reduces the likelihood of turnover and encourages experienced individuals to remain in their positions for longer durations. Continuity in leadership allows for the development of long-term strategies, fosters institutional memory, and promotes effective governance.

Providing a modest stipend to school committee chairpersons is a justifiable and beneficial practice. It acknowledges their significant responsibilities, attracts diverse candidates, enhances professionalism, and ensures stability in leadership. By recognizing the value of their contributions (particularly in the current climate of open and uncontested seats), we can foster a strong and effective education system that prioritizes the needs of students and communities.

Thank you for your consideration,  
Heather Katsoulis

Email from Joanne Blier regarding School Committee Stipends

Hi Steve,

Brian and I had discussed school committee stipends recently as well. It has been difficult keeping the 9 seats on the committee filled and we thought the addition of stipends (for all seats) could help.

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Joanne

Joanne Blier  
Gill-Montague Regional School District  
Director of Business & Operations  
35 Crocker Ave  
Turners Falls, MA 01376

(413) 863-3251

**From:** StevenE - Montague Town Administrator <[StevenE@montague-ma.gov](mailto:StevenE@montague-ma.gov)>

**Sent:** Thursday, May 11, 2023 9:17 AM

**To:** Brian Beck <[brian.beck@gmrds.org](mailto:brian.beck@gmrds.org)>; Joanne Blier <[joanne.blier@gmrds.org](mailto:joanne.blier@gmrds.org)>

**Cc:** [hkljgk@gmail.com](mailto:hkljgk@gmail.com); Francia Wisnewski <[francia.e.wisnewski@gmail.com](mailto:francia.e.wisnewski@gmail.com)>; CarolynO-Montague Town Accountant <[CarolynO@montague-ma.gov](mailto:CarolynO@montague-ma.gov)>; Tracy Rogers ([administrator@gillmass.org](mailto:administrator@gillmass.org)) <[administrator@gillmass.org](mailto:administrator@gillmass.org)>

**Subject:** Request for School Committee Chair Stipend

Hello Brian and Joanne

I wanted to share that Heather Katsoulis contacted my office with interest in pursuing a stipend for the School Committee Chair position. She has requested to be on an upcoming Finance Committee agenda and that committee next meets on June 14. I will defer to Francia as to whether she has a place for the conversation on that particular agenda. Coincidentally, the FC plans to review Town stipends this summer.

Note statutory guidance relative to stipends. It appears this would necessarily require consideration by both communities, so I am also bringing Ray into the loop.

[MGL Ch71 Sec 52](#)

**Section 52: Compensation of school committee members**

Section 52. The school committee shall serve without compensation, except that a member of a school committee of a city, town, regional school district or superintendency union may be compensated for his services by a majority vote of the city council in a city having a Plan D or Plan E charter; in a city not having a Plan D or Plan E charter by vote of the city council, subject to the provisions of the charter of such a city; in a town by a majority vote at a town meeting; and in a regional school district or school superintendency by a majority vote of the voting member towns authorized at their respective town meetings, the amount of such compensation, in each case, to be set by the respective cities, towns or groups of towns. No member of a school committee in any town



shall be eligible to the position of teacher, or superintendent of public schools therein, or in any union school or superintendency union or district in which his town participates.

Steven Ellis  
Montague Town Administrator  
1 Avenue A  
Turners Falls MA 01376  
(413) 863-3200 x110

Email from John Hanold regarding schedule to deal with stipends:

I've continued to think about the initial stipend discussion at our 14 June Finance Committee, and want to offer a suggested schedule for our action over the next month or two. The goal would be to propose to the Selectboard our suggested schedule by mid-September. I think the main issues are pretty clear, and would like to settle them so this not linger into our Fall calendar.

#### **REQUEST OF OLSEN-WISNEWSKI**

- \* Is this a schedule you would present to the Finance Committee?
- \* What alterations would you suggest for Finance Committee consideration on 12 July?

#### **DECISIONS I'D SUGGEST FOR 12 JULY**

1. Do we wish to use a cost-of-living approach or a periodic-review approach in the future?  
If COLA, what basis and how often? Implement annually or less often?
2. Do we want to change the duration of our proposal from 5 years to a shorter period?
2. Do we want to consider "reimbursement of expenses" (i.e., transportation, childcare) in setting stipends?  
If reimbursement, what expenses to include and how to evaluate?
4. What other towns or cities do we want to consider for compatibility?  
Data is spotty in Franklin County: Deerfield, Northfield, Sunderland, Orange. Add Belchertown, Amherst? Others?
5. Are there any **new** positions proposed?
6. Is stipend-level a tool for recruitment of members?

#### **TENTATIVE SCHEDULE FOR LATER ACTION**

##### **On 26 July**

- \* Olsen pursue more answers to prelim. survey of "what's changed" and time spent.
- \* Finance Committee set recommended FY2025 stipends for misc. positions for which answers have been received
  - [Moderator, Bd of Registrars & Clerk: already set at ATM May 2023]
  - [Farmers Market & Hearing Officer: already set at ATM May 2023]
  - Gas-Electric-Plumbing-building inspections (per visit)
  - Barn and Animal Inspections
  - Forest Warden

##### **On 9 or 16 August**

- \* Discuss responses to survey (Board and non-Board)
- \* Finance Committee set recommended FY2025 stipends for various non-Board positions
  - Tree Warden
  - Emergency Service Director
  - IT Coordinator/Administrator, Town & Police

##### **On 6 September**

- \* Continue discussion of survey responses
- \* Finance Committee set recommended FY2025 stipends for various Board positions
  - Selectboard — Chair and Members

Bd of Assessors — Chair and Members

Bd of Health — Chair and Members

- \* Send schedule of recommended FY2025 stipends to Selectboard for review

13 September

- \*Selectboard discuss and send suggested alterations to Finance Committee for consideration

15/20 September

Finance Committee considers SB comments and settles on final version

- \* SB final vote on its final version