

JOINT MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE AND CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS COMMITTEE

Wednesday, January 10, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.

This meeting was held in person and with public participation via Zoom and recorded:

<https://vimeo.com/901733945>

Finance Committee Chair Francia Wisnewski called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Finance Committee members present: Chair Francia Wisnewski, Vice Chair Dorinda Bell-Upp, Clerk Fred Bowman and members Greg Garrison, John Hanold, and Chris Menegoni

Finance Committee members absent: Jennifer Waryas

Others present: Town Administrator Steven Ellis, Assistant Town Administrator Walter Ramsey, and Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen

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

Capital Improvements Committee Chair Greg Garrison called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM

Capital Improvements Committee members present: Greg Garrison, Chris Menegoni, and Ariel Elan

Meeting minutes:

Mr. Garrison moved to approve the minutes of December 13, 2023. Seconded by Mr. Hanold and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman- Aye, Garrison – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Capital Improvements Committee FY2025 Requests

Mr. Garrison reviewed the CIC Capital Requests Report.

Beginning with the projects that will be on the warrant for the March 14, 2024 Special Town Meeting:

- **New DPW Skid Steer - \$90,000**
The DPW has borrowed the Airport's Skid Steer for most of the summer and found it so useful for mowing around the solar installation on the burn dump and other projects that it makes more sense for them to have their own and keep the Airport's available for Airport needs. It would be used primarily for mowing but will also be used for landscaping and excavating. Questions were raised about what accessories are included in the cost, and clarification will be provided. The request was moved up to the STM to allow availability for the next mowing season.
- **Replace Ferry Road Culvert - \$222,800**
The current asbestos culvert would be replaced with a precast concrete box culvert that will meet Massachusetts Stream Crossing Standards. The work will improve riverine habitat along the Sawmill River and reduce localized flooding. This is an engineered project, but the work will be done by the DPW. This has been moved up to the STM because the box culvert itself will have to go out to bid and be ordered soon to be available for installation this summer.

Projects for the May 4, 2024 Annual Town Meeting include:

- Montague Center Pump Station Rehab \$283,800
The pump station is quite old, but rather than spending \$1M to completely replace it , the CWF plans to refurbish it by replacing all components, including generators and pumps, rehabbing the well, and repairing the structure itself.
- DPW Discretionary Account \$100,000
This is the annual appropriation into this account and will be reduced. The new amount will be \$100,000 minus the balance in the account on March 1st.
- Replace DPW 10 Ton Trailer- \$40,401
The current trailer is almost 40 years old and is not capable of holding the new asphalt box used for road repairs.
- Town Hall Parking Lot Rehab - \$275,000
This project would remove the Butler Building, removing the current asphalt, regrading, and repaving the whole parking area around Town Hall. It will provide safety improvements along with much-needed additional parking spaces, including parking for local residents . The job is too large for the DPW and may be eligible for some CDBG Block Grant funding.
- Alleyway Paving - \$30,000
This would allow the DPW to repave the First Street alleyway, as this project is not eligible under Chapter 90.
- Manhole and Sewer Pipe Re-Lining - \$78,500
This was originally a larger project but has been reduced to the most critical repairs. 5 manholes in Turners Falls and Millers Falls that currently allow large amounts of stormwater infiltration would be relined along with about 360 feet of asbestos sewer pipes that are starting to fail. This is the first appropriation of approximately 5 annual appropriations to address this issue.
- New Main Branch Library Feasibility Study - \$150,000
This appropriation is required for application to the MA Library Building Program and would fund the planning and design phase of the Massachusetts Public Library Construction Program. The ultimate goal is to either expand the Carnegie Library or build a new main library with over 67% of eligible construction costs covered by state funding. If Montague does not receive this funding, the appropriation would not be used. Library Director Caitlin Kelley and Library Trustees Chairman William Quale would be happy to meet with the Finance Committee regarding this project.
- Hillcrest Paving and Sidewalks - \$100,000 (detailed quote forthcoming)
Ms. Bell-Upp is concerned that the current plan is unsafe.
- Hillcrest Cafeteria Reconfiguration - \$40,000 (detailed quote forthcoming)

- Sheffield Main Office Reconfiguration - \$20,000 (detailed quote forthcoming)
- Conservation Trust - \$10,000 -This is an annual appropriation to increase the Henry Waidlich Conservation Trust Fund.

Capital Improvement Committee Adjournment

Mr. Menegoni makes the motion to adjourn at 6:48 PM. Seconded by Ms. Elan and approved.

Elan – Aye, Garrison – Aye, Menegoni – Aye

Review Monthly Reports – There were no questions.

Budget Calendar

The current draft calendar was reviewed.

Department Budgets

The Finance Committee will meet with Police/Dispatch, DPW, CWF and Airport departments. No other departments were deemed to require a meeting. Questions for individual departments can be sent to Ms. Olsen, who will get responses and provide the answers to the committee.

The Selectboard budget will be amended and resubmitted after Mr. Ramsey's contract as Town Administrator is negotiated and final costs for FY25 are known.

Mr. Ellis noted that there are significant issues with Airport revenue, specifically the solar lease revenue. The interconnect requirements of the utility are now about 4 times the expected costs and at this point we do not foresee this solar project moving forward . The Selectboard will take a fair amount of time next Tuesday to begin the conversation, which is expected to continue over the following two meetings. There are some really big decisions to be made on this issue, and there will be difficult discussions and Finance committee members are encouraged to attend the meeting on January 16th.

This meeting will also discuss the proposed Collections System Laborer position and moving from evolving practice to actual policy relative to funding collection systems improvement. Mr. Ellis asked if the Finance Committee wanted to make it a joint meeting. No one requested this.

Reserve Fund and Finance Committee Budgets

The committee reviewed the budget forms and decided to reallocate some funds within the Finance Committee Budget.

Mr. Hanold moved to increase Dues by \$15, Travel by \$25 and eliminate the Other Professional amount, leaving a final budget of \$600. Seconded by Mr. Bowman and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman- Aye, Garrison – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Mr. Hanold moved to level fund the Reserve Fund Budget at \$50,000. Seconded by Mr. Bowman and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman- Aye, Garrison – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisnewski – Aye

Collection Systems Cost Allocations

Mr. Ellis explained that the critical question for the community is how to proceed with funding the collections system maintenance given that the practice for funding this has evolved over the last 12-18 months. Historically there was a small subsidiary budget, funded by sewer user fees but under control of the DPW, that mostly dealt with emergency expenses like sewer clogs and fixing the vacuum truck. The main function of this program has dramatically increased, and the Selectmen placed certain expenses that historically would most likely have been funded at least 50% by sewer user fees in the town budget last year.

This is a major long-term policy decision for the Town. The Selectboard is positioned to make immediate decisions on its recommendation for which expenses will be funded in the general fund or enterprise fund. This will be deliberated on January 16th, including both the current Collections System Lead Operator and the proposed Collections System Laborer positions and, if there is time, potential special articles. In the long term we need a thoughtful policy including how we view the extent of the combined system. The Selectboard will welcome Finance Committee input and engagement.

Updates from Town Administrator

Most updates were covered under preceding topics, but Mr. Ellis noted that the Governor's recent 9C budget cuts have no known impact on any programs affecting Montague.

Topics not anticipated within 48 hours of posting: none

Finance Committee Adjournment

Mr. Bowman makes the motion to adjourn at 7:21 PM. Seconded by Mr. Menegoni and approved.

Bell-Upp – Aye, Bowman- Aye, Garrison – Aye, Hanold – Aye, Menegoni – Aye, Wisniewski – Aye

Respectfully submitted,
Carolyn Olsen

Next Meeting – January 17, 2024

Documents and exhibits:

Minutes of December 13, 2023

CIC Capital Projects Request Summary