

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
September 11, 2013

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Meeting Date: September 11, 2013
Location: 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

Called to Order: 6:00 PM

Finance Committee Members Present: John Hanold, Michael Naughton, Greg Garrison, Lynn Reynolds and Lisa Adams (left at 6:15 PM)

Selectmen Present: Christopher Boutwell, Michael Nelson and Mark Fairbrother (left at 6:15 PM).

Others Present: Town Administrator Frank Abbondanzio, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, GMRSD Superintendent Michael Sullivan, GMRSD School Committee Chair Joyce Phillips, Jane Oakes (GRMSD School Committee), Claire Chang and Valeria Smith (Gill Finance Committee), Ray Purrington (Gill Administrative Assistant) John Ward, Randy Crochier and Ann Banash (Gill Selectboard), Jeff Singleton and John Reynolds (Montague Town Meeting Members), Paul Nowill (Gill), Patricia Pruitt (Montague Reporter)

Minutes

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of August 28, 2013.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of August 28, 2013.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 1 Abstained (did not attend)

Gill Selectmen called to order at 6:05 PM.

Gill-Montague Regional School District

The focus will be on the new Superintendent's plans for the district, as well as what plans or oversight to which the district is subject.

- Mr. Sullivan has an interest in developing a strong relationship between the school district and the towns. Dialogue and transparency are important.
- Some items of wider interest include:
 - District Accelerated Improvement Plan and other initiatives.
 - The district has left the Level 4 status imposed by the state.
 - While this does indicate improvement by the district in many areas, there is still a lot of work to be done to reach the goal of all students succeeding at a very high level.
 - The Accelerated Improvement Plan commits to the same types of improvement initiatives as in prior years. There are 15 initiatives under the Fiscal Year 2014 Improvement Plan.
 - Technology capacity will enable almost 50% of students to be on computers simultaneously.

- Capital improvements needed include replacing a boiler at the Sheffield School, which will be on the agenda for tomorrow's Montague Special Town Meeting. The district is also are looking at roofs, doors, floors and building security.
 - The Fiscal Year 2012 audit noted a need to plan for future health insurance costs per GASB 45.
 - The committees and the general public are invited to the September 24th and October 8th School Committee meetings where The Management Solution (TMS) will be presenting information at 7:15 PM on the district budget components. Ms. Chang asked if we would be full participants. Ms. Phillips noted that it was a School Committee meeting, and that TMS was doing the presentation for them.
 - The Fiscal Year 2015 budget process will begin in late fall. Mr. Sullivan wants to get an early start and have a collaborative process.
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- Mr. Hanold asked about computer inventory and costs associated with planned improvements. Mr. Sullivan will try to prepare some figures.
 - Ms. Reynolds asked about the development of the new program for student retention. Mr. Sullivan said that a new counselor was hired at the high school last year to support students in danger of dropping out of school. There was a reduction in the drop out rate.
 - Mr. Naughton asked if there was a plan to attract resident students to the district. This is bullet number one of the Improvement Plan.
 - Mr. Hanold asked about future plans to reverse the district's net 'choice out' status. Mr. Sullivan hopes to collect some data about why students choose to leave the district. Mr. Naughton has heard that a great many students from Montague choice out to Greenfield and vice versa.
 - Mr. Garrison reviewed the Capital Improvements Committee (CIC) process where the school district presents their list of priorities to the CIC, and the CIC reviews them and works to plan the projects as funds are available according to overall priorities of the town.
 - Mr. Abbondanzio requested that the School Committee nominate to the Moderator a representative to the Capital Improvements Committee.
 - Mr. Hanold asked if there were any known major impacts expected to affect the Fiscal Year 2015 budget. Mr. Sullivan thinks staffing levels will be about the same, and there will be a significant reduction in the amount of one grant, but nothing large scale that he's aware of at this point.
 - Mr. Naughton suggested adding to Mr. Sullivan's bullet points:
 - The financial viability of the district
 - The ability of the towns to fund the district's needs

In recent years, Montague has looked at their revenue forecast in December to estimate the amount that can be dedicated to the GMRSD assessment. Montague tries to give the district this estimate prior to the district's January 31st preliminary budget deadline to provide them information on what the town considers to be an affordable assessment.

Mr. Hanold presented the “Proposed budget and assessment formats for GMRSD”, noting that it was a draft form resulting from prior year conversations about what budget information the towns were looking for from the district. Mr. Sullivan also brought a budget sheet in from Management Solutions to demonstrate an option to see if it would be useable. Mr. Hanold was excited to see the similarities between the options.

Mr. Hanold reviewed Montague’s budget timeline and asked if it was comparable to Gill’s. Ms. Chang said that Gill has been willing to follow Montague’s needs regarding financial situations because Montague tends to be earlier in doing their budget process, and also due to Montague’s larger proportionate share of the assessment cost. Mr. Hanold invited Gill to Montague’s budget hearing with the GMRSD.

Ms. Reynolds requested adding to the 5th bullet under item E: add budget drivers.

Mr. Naughton, following up on Mr. Sullivan’s budget handout, noted that last year we went through a process of asking for information but not feeling that we received what was requested due to communication shortfalls. Mr. Naughton thinks it would be helpful this year to come up with an earlier request and offered to work with the district to create the requested items in the desired format.

Mr. Singleton advocated for a consistent set of documents to be used throughout the budget process. Mr. Singleton asked that a single document of budget drivers be provided and considers it to be vital in understanding the budget.

Mr. Hanold thanked everyone for attending and participating, noting that there was an impressive turnout.

Topics not anticipated within in the 48 hour posting requirements - none

Next Meetings:

September 25, 2013

Meeting Adjourned at 7:55 PM

List of Documents and Exhibits

- Minutes August 28, 2013
- Proposed budget and assessment formats for GMRSD
- Bullet points for discussion from Mr. Hanold
- Handouts from Mr. Sullivan