

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

April 2, 2014

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Meeting Date: April 2, 2014

Called to Order: 6:00 PM

Location: 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

Finance Committee Members Present: John Hanold, Sharon Kennaugh and Michael Naughton. Lisa Adams arrived at 6:05 PM. Lynn Reynolds and Greg Garrison were absent.

Selectmen Present: Mark Fairbrother and Christopher Boutwell. Michael Nelson arrived at 6:21 PM.

Others Present: Town Administrator Frank Abbondanzio, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Gill-Montague Regional School District Superintendent Dr. Michael Sullivan, Gill-Montague Regional School District School Committee Chair Joyce Phillips, and Mark Chapulis from The Management Solution

Minutes

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of March 26, 2014.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 1 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of March 26, 2014.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Gill-Montague Regional School District

- On March 11, 2014 the Gill-Montague Regional School District School Committee voted a budget and a Montague assessment of \$8,247,826. Cuts were made to the March 5, 2014 proposed budget in order to meet Montague's preliminary Affordable Assessment amount.
- After this vote, the Finance Committee revised its revenue estimates, which resulted in a higher Affordable Assessment of \$8,293,458.
- The question at hand is which amount to show on the Annual Town Meeting warrant.
- Dr. Sullivan reviewed his handouts, which included current budget information. The newest budget proposal includes a \$100,000 reduction in revenue from the School Choice revolving account, increases the use of Excess & Deficiency by \$150,000, and increases expenditures by \$102,211. Using more Excess & Deficiency and less School Choice is more in keeping with historical trends and helps prevent a repeat of having too much in the Excess & Deficiency account.
- Mr. Naughton noted that the local budget has gone up, primarily by shifting expenses from the School Choice revolving fund, and asked the significance of the changes other than the funding sources. Mr. Naughton questioned whether expenses that can be appropriately funded from other sources should have been moved to the local budget.

- Mr. Hanold asked the status of the most current number. This budget will be presented to the School Committee on April 8th for approval.
- Montague's Town Counsel has advised that there is no legal issue prohibiting the district to present a higher assessment than previously voted, as long as certification of the final budget is received by April 30th.
- The main point of the supporters of the lower assessment is that Finance Committee presented a preliminary Affordable Assessment amount in good faith, the School Committee voted this number in accordance with their process, and they presumably felt it was adequate for their needs.
- The main point of the supporters of the higher assessment is that the School Committee was asked to meet our Affordable Assessment. After the School Committee made cuts to meet the original Affordable Assessment, the town increased that amount, and fairness requires use and support of the higher number.
- Ms. Kennaugh feels we should support the most recent Affordable Assessment. If that number had gone down we would have expected them to reduce their budget. If the number went up, we should expect the district budget to reflect that.
- Ms. Adams is in favor of the more recent number, and is pleased with the items that were restored to the budget.
- Mr. Naughton said that, since there are no legal issues involved, he has no problems with the more recent figure. However, the town is going out of its' way to give the district as much money as they can and Mr. Naughton is disturbed by some press coverage and comments that have been reported which give the impression that the districts' need to reduce staff was the result of town's hard line attitude to our Affordable Assessment which is a complete misreading of the situation, in his opinion. The Town should not be bashed for not being able to meet all of the school's needs, and the original Affordable Assessment was known at the beginning of the district's budget process.
- Dr. Sullivan said it's important to separate the media from the administration. He feels the process has been transparent and fair. The District needs to first determine their needs and then how to meet them. Dr. Sullivan noted that no one from the administration has spoken against the town.
- Ms. Phillips noted that the School Committee has no control over editorials. The School Committee's focus has been that any cuts made be the least harmful to the children.
- Mr. Hanold noted that the way that the original budgets are presented in January sets the stage. When the original district budget is a "what we want" budget, it gives the impression that the school is asking for much more than the town can afford. Then later cuts can leave people thinking that the reductions are cuts into what is needed rather than cuts of what is desired.

Finance Committee Moved:

- To recommend \$8,293,45 for the Fiscal Year 2015 Gill-Montague Regional School District assessment, to be raised with \$125,000 from Free Cash and \$8,168,458 from Taxation.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

- To recommend \$8,293,458 for the Fiscal Year 2015 Gill-Montague Regional School District assessment, to be raised with \$125,000 from Free Cash and \$8,168,458 from Taxation.

Vote: 2 In Favor 1 Opposed 0 Abstained

Reconsider Special Articles

Skateboard Park

For the Skateboard Park project, the grantor agencies require that the full cost be appropriated by the town, with the understanding that the total cost to the town will be reduced by grants. So the article will be for \$400,000 (possibly a lower amount at Town Meeting).

Finance Committee Moved:

That the Finance Committee reconsider their recommendation for the Skateboard Park Project.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Finance Committee Moved:

That the Finance Committee recommend \$400,000 be appropriated for the Skateboard Park Project, to be funded from Long Term Debt.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

That the Selectmen reconsider their recommendation for the Skateboard Park Project.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

That the Selectmen recommend \$400,000 be appropriated for the Skateboard Park Project, to be funded from Long Term Debt.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Mr. Naughton asked Ms. Olsen to come up with guidelines on wording for articles that are only partially funded by the town. When does the town have to appropriate the whole amount, and when can the town just appropriate the town share?

Soil Stabilization on Millers Falls Road

Finance Committee Moved:

That the Finance Committee reconsider their recommendation for the Millers Falls Road Soil Stabilization Project.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Finance Committee Moved:

That the Finance Committee recommend \$81,679 be appropriated for the Millers Falls Road Soil Stabilization Project, to be funded from Long Term Debt.

Vote: 4 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Mr. Abbondanzio provided an update on the WPCF Screw Pumps. Mr. Trombley now believes that the town will get another 4-8 years of use from them before they must be replaced.

Selectmen Moved:

That the Selectmen reconsider their recommendation for the Millers Falls Road Soil Stabilization Project.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

That the Selectmen recommend \$81,679 be appropriated for the Millers Falls Road Soil Stabilization Project, to be funded from Long Term Debt.

Vote: 3 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Mr. Fairbrother left the meeting at 7:05 PM.

Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting

Mr. Hanold previously e-mailed his first draft to the Finance Committee. Numbers will be edited to reflect final budget votes. Input was requested.

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

Meeting Adjourned at 7:10 PM

List of Documents and Exhibits

- Minutes March 26, 2014
- Comparison of GMRSD Budgets and Assessments presented at various times
- GMRSD Assessment sheet received 4/1/14 showing 3.5.14 date, and Montague assessment of \$8,293,458.
- Fiscal Year 2015 budget handout from GMRSD.

Next Meetings:

April 9, 2014 Reconsider any previous budget votes; review Report to Town Meeting