

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING

February 4, 2015

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**Meeting Date:** February 4, 2015

**Called to Order:** 6:00 PM

**Location:** 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

**Finance Committee Members Present:** John Hanold, Sharon Kennaugh, Michael Naughton, Lynn Reynolds, and Greg Garrison.

**Selectmen Present:** Mark Fairbrother and Christopher Boutwell. Michael Nelson arrived at 6:15 PM.

**Others Present:** Town Administrator Frank Abbondanzio, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, Director of Assessing/IT Coordinator Barbara Miller, Director of Parks and Recreation Jon Dobosz, DPW Superintendent Tom Bergeron, John Reynolds, and John Burek

**Resignation:** Lisa Adams has resigned from the Finance Committee, effective today.

**Minutes**

Finance Committee Moved:

To amend the minutes of January 28, 2015 by deleting the duplicative second sentence of the third bullet on page 2.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 28, 2015 as amended.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

Selectmen Moved:

To approve the minutes of January 28, 2015 as amended.

Vote: 2 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Board of Assessors Fiscal Year 2016 Budget**

Additional Information:

- The first year's maintenance is usually included in the cost of the software, but Ms. Miller asked that it be broken out and is budgeted separately.
- Tax Collector Patty Dion has informed Mr. Hanold that the new software would eliminate duplication of effort. Her office will no longer have to manually post abatements, but receive an electronic file that will automatically post abatements to their software.
- John Reynolds suggested that Ms. Miller contact the Franklin County Technical School for recommendations for other IT consultants.
- Ms. Miller would be happy to have someone else take over the IT responsibilities, but noted that if that happens, she will no longer be available for assistance.
- The WPCF Superintendent is interested in joining with a shared IT person. The Police Department is less interested because they have an officer who handles their needs. Ms. Miller expressed concern that the Police Officer performing IT

functions may be working now but she does not feel it should be the long term plan.

- If an IT person were shared with the Gill-Montague Regional School District, it would likely be the IT Director himself, as he informed Ms. Miller that his technicians do not have network experience.
- Ms. Miller expressed concern that if Horace Moody agrees to continue as our consultant, we may be addressing the issue of whether he will continue as our consultant every year.
- Mr. Naughton's preference would be to remove the IT Coordinator responsibilities from Ms. Miller, not because he doesn't think that she's doing a good job but because a) he thinks there are better uses of her time and b) the job seems to be growing in time requirements and complexity.

Previously sent and received questions and answers (answers underlined):

Department 141 Core

We are recommending the inclusion of the POINT Abatement software in this department as a Capital Outlay, in view of its modest size. It seems simpler than putting it in a Special Article for separate debate.

On the other hand, the annual software maintenance for POINT seems a large expense (nearly half the cost of the initial software purchase); is the joint benefit to Assessment and Treasury a long-lasting one, and is it financial or time-saving or some combination?

Point Software has a fully functioning application which links directly to the Tax Collection Software which will save time in both the Assessing and Tax Collection Departments. The Approach application currently being used is a very old and unsupported version. Conversion to a newer version of Approach would require the purchase of Approach and the conversion would be time intensive as the old and new versions differ considerably.

The only workstation with Approach is eight years old, and putting Approach on a new workstation would require purchasing the newest version and recreating the abatement application within the newer version. As I understand it there is no quick and easy way to convert our files from the very old version of Approach to a new version.

The requested application from Point Software is a fully functioning application which will be linked to the Tax Collector software thereby reducing the workload for abatement processing in both the Assessing Department and the Tax Collector's Office.

Discretionary Account and IT Duties

1. Would you comment briefly on the spending in this year from the Discretionary Fund, and your plans for Fiscal Year 2016. Will the familiar \$8,200 be the appropriate figure for your forecast?

We have two servers running on Server 2003 operating systems (very soon this will not be supported by Microsoft); these must be replaced soon. To date in Fiscal Year 2015 I have been using the remainder of the Fiscal Year 2014 Discretionary Fund Account. I will be purchasing an exchange server and a workstation soon which will use nearly all of the Fiscal Year 2015 funds. Early in Fiscal Year 2016 we will need to purchase another server, at least one workstation and two WYSE units. Each server purchase requires software purchases as well. Most of our workstations are still running on XP (no longer supported by Microsoft) we are working toward upgrading some of those to WYSE units or to use the current workstations as thin clients. This is not feasible for all workstations. Some departments use software which does not lend itself well to a terminal server environment. I would like to increase the discretionary fund to \$10,000 but I made a promise to the taxpayers a few years ago that the terminal server purchase would allow the discretionary fund to continue to be funded at \$8,200 for the foreseeable future. I'm trying to keep that promise. The discretionary fund could stay at \$8,200 if we change our backup procedure to a cloud based system. I'm looking into the cost for that. It would be an additional line-item in the IT annual budget.

There is another issue that should be addressed. The town hall electrical infrastructure is not sufficient for the current work environment and that situation will continue to worsen as needs increase. We currently find ourselves using network switches to extend the network to multiple users in offices where an inadequate number of network ports exist. Multiple printers and workstations are currently running off one network port which causes service interruptions. These interruptions are a problem for the direct user, the IT Administrator and everyone within shouting distance of the employee who is experiencing the interruption. A very rough estimate to improve this situation is 10 to 15 thousand dollars. It is difficult to say all that would be needed, but at least twenty more network drops.

A concern which likely falls under the purview of the Department of Public Works is that the voltage in Town Hall seems to go below 110 volts. The battery backups for brief moments are being called upon to power their respective pieces of equipment. This is exacerbated by the number of items plugged into the battery backups which are also serving as extension cords to a single electric outlet. There are tests to determine the voltage coming into the building and to each outlet within the building over a period of time; this should be the starting point to determine the severity of the issue. I do not know how much it will cost to rectify this situation; whether our DPW could perform the tests or if a professional electrician should be called in to evaluate the situation.

2. Concerning the stipend for Information Technology Co-ordination: The request is for a figure higher than that of the Boards of Health, Selectmen and Assessors, for whom the stipend is their only compensation. What is the rationale for the request?

I will begin by pointing out the difference between the IT Administrator position and the Boards you referred to when comparing the stipends. The Board of Health has the Health Director, Health Clerk, Health Inspector and Nurse. The Select Board has the Town Administrator and Executive Assistant. The Board of Assessors has the Director of Assessing, Assessing Technician and Assessing Clerk. These are Boards. Boards are filled by persons choosing to exercise their civic duty by serving the citizens of their town. These board members have staff to do the majority of the grunt work, clerical or otherwise. The IT Administrator is the person doing all the management, clerical and low tech duties of the IT department, listening to all the complaints, fixing all the minor issues (often caused by user error or the lack of infrastructure cited above), answering all the “how do you do \_\_\_\_\_” in word/excel/email/website etc., coordinating the needs of the departments with the availability of the IT Consultant, administering the budget, planning the future, the list goes on endlessly. Everything IT goes thru the IT Administrators eyes, ears and hands at one point or another.

3. Does IT co-ordination and planning activity extend beyond normal working hours?

Sometimes the IT work extends beyond the normal working hours. Often it is just 15 minutes to half an hour while the IT consultant finishes up a project. This occurs less frequently now because much of the IT consultant work can be performed remotely. Also the level of trust has increased to a point where the IT consultant is allowed to remain in the building after I leave. I frequently skip lunch. This is not directly due to IT activity, but the IT activity takes up a great deal of my time and therefore my Assessing responsibilities are completed when I might otherwise be taking a lunch break.

4. Similar issue: would you elaborate on the impact of meeting IT needs on the Assessor's duties?

The IT Administrator’s work frequently interrupts the Director of Assessing duties and it can happen anytime throughout the day. Every single employee in town hall (and many of the off-site departments) has a computer workstation on their desk and I answer to every one of them. I often feel that people think I’m the Director of IT, not the Director of Assessing. That my main responsibilities are the IT work since the Assessing responsibilities are foreign to them and have so little direct effect on their jobs, but that is not the case. Every time someone has a problem they call me and I get up from my work to assist them. Often it only keeps me away from my desk for 10 or 15 minutes but it might happen several times in a day; different people, different issues, but everyone’s problem is an emergency to them. Then I get back to my desk and have to re-immense myself into the work I was involved in. Assessing is complicated work, requiring concentration and attention to detail; mistakes can cost the town money. Sometimes I ask people to wait if I’m in the middle of something, but that means they are not getting any work done while they wait for me and I am mindful of that as well.

The constant interruptions are but a small part of the IT Administrator's responsibilities. As with all departments there is a budget to prepare and to be tracked when fulfilling the needs of all the town departments. I've done my best to implement a replacement schedule which is subject to the availability of the IT consultant and requires preparation of purchase orders, receipt of the purchased equipment, payment of the invoice, coordination between the IT Consultant and the department for installation of the new equipment. Then I have to respond to the questions after installation when something doesn't "look the same as it used to". I field sales calls, and spend time discussing with the IT Consultant the future direction of the IT department, since it is an ever changing environment.

The IT Administrator's work is going to be more complicated in the future as the current IT Consultant; Horace Moody of Moody Consulting is planning to retire soon. He is giving serious consideration to semi-retiring and keeping Montague as a client but until that decision is made I'm spending a great deal of time trying to determine the best course of action for the town as far as the IT Department is concerned. I've had brief discussions with the Town Administrator in this regard. I have been in contact with Michael Sullivan, School Superintendent, and William St. Cyr the Network Manager, both of the Gill-Montague Regional School District to discuss the possibility of a shared employee. I'm working with Akuity Technologies to determine if their services could fill the future IT needs of the Town of Montague. I have and will continue to contact surrounding communities to ask how they handle their IT needs. I've discussed the situation with Chief Dodge and Robert Trombley to consider the possibility of a combined fulltime IT position. Regardless of which direction we go, the responsibilities of the IT Administrator are almost certainly going to increase in the coming fiscal year. The volume of work and responsibility beyond Fiscal Year 2016 will depend entirely upon the decisions made in regards to the IT consultant. If we hire a shared employee with the school then the responsibilities will likely remain as they are currently. If we hire a shared employee with the WPCF and Police then the IT Administrator may not be necessary. If we choose to use an outside firm as a consultant, either the IT Administrator responsibilities will increase, or the cost for the consultant will increase. I'm still waiting for a solid quote from Akuity.

5. We recall that the location of the servers, more than your own interest, was a factor in the Assessor continuing to carry this responsibility. What alternative locations (and equipment relocation costs?) would you expect if the town re-looked at this?

I wish to clarify that the decision for the Assessor to take back this responsibility was prompted by the departure of the Town Planner, Dan LaRoche. When Joanne Greenleaf retired, Dan was put in charge of IT. After I began working in Montague and realized the current status of IT, I offered to assist Mr. LaRoche because I had previous IT experience, it was not part of the negotiations when I agreed to the salary

offered by the town initially and it was intended to be me assisting him by taking care of the paperwork for him. The servers were housed in a coat closet at the time.

Back to the question of re-locating the servers; it would not be necessary or reasonable to re-locate the servers. The server room is temperature controlled and provides a secure environment. I've given the idea careful consideration and the back door to the Director's office could be moved inward to meet the wall of the Server Room. The current door into the server room could be moved to open into the side wall of the room. This door would be just outside the men's room door, it might be necessary to move the light switch in the server room but other than that I think the work could be done by our DPW, since they built the server room initially.

### **Parks & Recreation Fiscal Year 2016 Budget**

#### Additional Information:

- Mr. Hanold asked if the new expense allocation between operating budget and revolving funds will affect the fee structure. Mr. Dobosz said that some of the larger programs have their fees adjusted as needed on a regular basis. Some, like programs that use the pool, may increase now that pool expenses will be allocated to the specific program, but he does not expect the allocation of expenses should have a major impact on these fees.
- In terms of park maintenance, the Parks and Recreation program maintains the ball fields, but general mowing is done by the DPW. The facilities repair and maintenance line item in the Parks and Recreation operating budget would cover the costs of the Unity Park spray feature, and ball field maintenance by an outside contractor. Replacement of playground surfaces has been paid out of both budgets in the past, but will now be in the Parks and Recreation budget.
- Mr. Bergeron feels the roles are properly defined, and noted that his staff is not able to groom and line the fields any more because of staff and time constraints.
- Mr. Naughton asked if there was an actual list of responsibilities. There is not anything written down, but in general the DPW fixes the swing sets, takes care of the parking lot, and does general mowing. Mr. Naughton suggested that the responsibilities of each department be documented in writing.

Previously sent and received questions and answers (answers underlined):

1. The revised distinction between Operating Budget and Revolving Fund spending seems to be based on a reasonable concept. However, we urge you and Carolyn to distinguish clearly, from the outset, what is in each group.

The basic explanation would be that *revolving* expenses are payments made for the benefit of a specific, fee-supported program. Ideally; expenses incurred from a particular program/event are paid for through the revenue generated from that program/event (or, the fees/charges acquired by the participants/users pay for the expenses); depending how you wish to look at it. Expenses would include items like advertising, part-time/seasonal staff, referees and officials, charges for pool use, and

supplies and equipment for programs such as t-shirts, uniforms, arts & craft supplies, etc.

*Operating* expenses are those that benefit the department as a whole, but cannot easily be allocated to specific programs. They contribute to the general function (or operation) of the department. Items include most wages, general office expenses (copier, toner, paper, etc.), internet usage, building and facility maintenance (turf/ballfields, water spray unit), seminars & conferences to help maintain current certifications, as well as membership dues.

2. Related question: your narrative mentions a new line for park maintenance. What is done out of this budget that differs from the responsibilities of Public Works (their dept 652 Parks, which includes two heads and groundskeeping supplies)? Have the boundaries of responsibility been consciously set among you, Tom Bergeron, and the Selectboard?

I have not discussed the relationship between "652 Parks" line-item and our proposed "Facilities & Parks R&M" with either Tom Bergeron or the Selectboard. As stated in our previous discussion with the Finance Committee, *Facilities & Parks R&M* line-item would primarily address costs associated with turf management (fertilization, aeration, etc. from an outside contractor), as well as the operation of the water spray unit at Unity Park. The *Facilities & Parks R&M* line-item would also allow us the flexibility to address other, un-anticipated facility-related concerns if they present themselves.

3. We have move the purchase of playground surface material from a separately-discussed Special Article to a line in your operating budget. The cost is relatively small, and likely to recur regularly as a normal maintenance matter.

I discussed this matter with the Parks & Recreation Commission, and we feel this is a sound recommendation by the Finance Committee. We have five playgrounds that currently have wood fiber surfacing, which needs to be replenished on a regular basis. My estimate is that a 4 - 5 year cycle would be adequate for each play area. Having this item in our Operating Budget would ensure we meet that schedule.

4. Is it possible to get year-to-year participation numbers by program for Fiscal Years 2013 - 2015 (part-year?)

<u>Program Enrollment</u>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Adult Co-Ed Softball League	8 teams	7 teams	n/a
ARC Babysitting Course	11	18	n/a

Bluefish Swim Team:

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING  
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Winter	57	52	57
Summer	23	28	n/a
Tee Ball	52	39	n/a
Youth Baseball	22	20	n/a
Youth Basketball:			
<b>Program Enrollment</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
K-2 Intro	20	16	20
3/4 Travel	10	16	20
5/6 Travel	20	26	10
Eggstravaganza	Hundreds of	people	n/a
Football	12	0	0
Open Swim	346	317	n/a
Scarecrow/Pumpkin	n/a	n/a	n/a
Sawmill River 10K Run	165	164	176
Youth Soccer:			
K-2 Intro	24	28	24
3/4 Travel	8	12	20
5/6 Travel	0	0	0
Girls Softball:			
Rookie Team	21	12	n/a
Senior Team	15	16	n/a
Summer Playground	421	420	439
Tennis:			
Fall	n/a	6	6
Summer	0	9	n/a

**DPW Fiscal Year 2016 Budget**

Additional Information:

- Bids for salt and sand are awarded in October of each year.
- \$100,000 is requested for the Discretionary Account because that is how it was set up at the beginning.

- The DPW Subsidiary account
  - Is used for emergency repairs and replacements of sewer lines. Parts for the sewer vacator truck are also charged here.
  - Mr. Bergeron usually determines when these funds are used. Mr. Trombley will occasionally ask to use these funds for manhole repair and replacement.
  - Mr. Hanold asked what has lead to the underutilization of this account. The answer is that there haven't been emergencies that require it. Mr. Hanold asked if there was a standard practice. Sewer related items are charged to the subsidiary budget.

Previously sent and received questions and answers (answers underlined):

Snow/Ice

Though we would not want to count on it, we know that over-spending on Snow & Ice can be dealt with after the end of the fiscal year. If budget constraints occur, what is your comfort level with no-increase over the Fiscal Year 2015 budget?

We can live with it, but the increases we included are for the salt and sand. We do not know the prices from year to year, and if they increase beyond the budgeted amount it will lead to over spending. As of now we have an estimate of \$59,743 left for additional expenses in Fiscal Year 2015. Depending where the rest of this winter goes we may need to ask for more.

Solid Waste

1. When will our contract-price for Solid Waste Removal be settled?

We are now in a new three year contract which started in July of 2014.

2. Does experience through part of Fiscal Year 2015 indicate a lower request is possible?

No

Discretionary Fund

1. The Capital Improvements Committee may cover similar ground, but we'd like a summary of what the unspent balance in the Discretionary Account is, and what major purchases or repairs you spent money on this year.

The remaining balance for Fiscal Year 2015 is \$34,437. Detail is attached.

2. Looking forward, what similar purchases or repairs - not appropriate for your operating budget - you now foresee.

None are anticipated, but if enough is left at the end of the fiscal year I may purchase a pickup truck to replace one that's on its last legs.

Sewer Projects

Bob Trombley has referred to discussing with you what tasks will be funded from his “DPW Subsidiary” department. His narrative seems to indicate the activity here will be greater than the small amounts of earlier years. Does your planning for staff include a common plan for work on sewer lines?

This money is in place for emergencies, such as an unexpected broken line, and some maintenance. My understanding that this money is not for general repair.

Public Works Core Departments

1. We recognize that turnover has probably helped keep you total request low, but the total expense section is growing noticeably. Several lines - Parts & Supplies, Other Professional & Technical, etc. - seem higher than the Fiscal Year 2015 budget or year-to-date spending would explain. Your Narrative mentions these, but doesn't tell why. Please tell us more.

The Parts and Supplies line item is increased to reflect current costs of these items. The largest of the Other Professional and Technical expenses is line-painting, which is almost \$20,000 per year. This line item also covers the cost for county bid participation (almost \$3,000), and any costs to pay others who do work for us. For Fiscal Year 2015 this includes \$3,642 for fill removal.

2. Given the pattern of fuel prices in the current year, is there room to level-fund Utilities, here and elsewhere in Town departments?

The only way we could reasonably reduce these budgets would be if we had hard information that fuel prices would remain at current levels, and I think this is very unlikely. Fuel bids will be awarded in June.

3. Do you expect the release of more Chapter 90 money from the State to change your work on other projects in Fiscal Year 2016?

No.

**Response to request from Jeanne Golrick**

The attached letter was discussed.

Finance Committee Moved:

To authorize the chair to sign and send the attached letter to Ms. Golrick.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed 0 Abstained

**Topics not anticipated within in the 48 hour posting requirements**

1. Letter from Gill Board of Selectmen to the Gill-Montague Regional School Committee supporting the continuation of the Compact (attached).

- Mr. Naughton would like the Finance Committee and Selectmen to send similar letters to the Gill-Montague Regional School District's School Committee and Superintendent Sullivan.
  - Mr. Naughton volunteered to draft a letter.
  - The Finance Committee will meet at 6:15PM on February 18<sup>th</sup> before the Special Town Meeting to review and approve the letter.
2. Mr. Naughton noted that the MA Town Clerk's Association has an award for the best town clerk, who must be nominated by the Board of Selectmen.
  3. Mr. Abbondanzio reported that a member of the Shea Theater Board informed him that as of July 1<sup>st</sup>, they will no longer be able to pay their utility bills, and the board member suggested re-wording the lease to end on June 30<sup>th</sup>. There is currently a Request for Proposal regarding future use of the building.

**Meeting adjourned at 8:00 PM**

**List of Documents and Exhibits**

- Minutes for January 28, 2015
- DPW Discretionary Account Expenses (below)
- Letter to Ms. Golrick (below)
- Gill Letter regarding Compact (below)

**Next Meetings:**

February 18, 2015	Brief meeting before the STM to approve letter
February 25, 2015	Libraries, FCTS, CIC, (John and Sharon will be absent)
March 4, 2015	GMRSD, Selectmen and Miscellaneous Departments
March 11, 2015	Final Use of Reserves, Final Schedules I and II
March 18, 2015	Special & Annual Town Meeting Special Articles
March 25, 2015	Vote Budget with sources of funding
April 1, 2015	Draft Finance Committee Report to Town Meeting
April 8, 2015	Revenue updates
April 15, 2015	Final votes/re-votes for recommendations, final report

DPW Discretionary Account Expenditures

001-5-950-5420-010 #17 5/5/12 DPW Equip/Repair      **FY13 Appropriation Spent FY14**  
Appropriation Total 17,478.05

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Vendor Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>
07/18/13	#32 replace various seals	Ford of Greenfield	1,163.18
07/24/13	hydraulic leak	CN Wood Co. Inc.	1,477.00
07/24/13	roller with foldable rops	Tri-County Contractors	14,559.60
07/24/13	2010 Focus	Brattleboro Ford	<u>278.27</u>
Expenditure Total			17,478.05

001-5-950-5420-016 S #18 5-4-13 DPW Equipment      **FY14 Appropriation Spent FY14**  
Appropriation Total 75,000.00

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Vendor Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>
07/24/13	2010 Ford Focus	Brattleboro Ford	14,117.73
08/29/13	Cross Country Model 48RTR	Tri-County	2,486.00
03/06/14	utility tractor with cab, snow	Deere & Company	21,471.50
05/15/14	60" rotary broom,thatcher,blad	Deere & Company	<u>4,844.28</u>
Expenditure Total			42,919.51

001-5-950-5420-016 S #18 5-4-13 DPW Equipment      **FY14 Appropriation Spent FY15**  
Appropriation Total 32,080.49

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Vendor Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>
08/25/14	2015 Ford F250 cab, chassis	MHQ Municipal Vehicles	23,151.00
09/11/14	Paint Truck 2014 Ford	Liebenow Auto Body	1,978.11
09/18/14	05 Ford Diesel Diagnosis	Ford of Greenfield	4,203.78
10/09/14	gateshydsetup partial	Carquest of Greenfield	<u>2,747.60</u>
Expenditure Total			32,080.49

001-5-950-5420-021 S#19 5/3/14 DPW Equipment      **FY15 Appropriation Spent FY15**  
Appropriation Total 75,000.00

<u>Date</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Vendor Name</u>	<u>Amount</u>
10/09/14	gateshydsetup partial	Carquest of Greenfield	330.91
10/30/14	Komatsu loader, balance	CN Wood Co. Inc.	27,445.00
12/04/14	fisher sander	J C Madigan Inc	5,100.00
12/04/14	14.0 cu ft drop spreader	146Supply Center	3,936.80
12/18/14	generator,compressor,pump,wash	Falcon Power or Zach Thone	<u>3,750.00</u>
Expenditure Total			40,562.71

Jeanne A. Golrick  
11 W. Main Street  
Millers Falls MA 01349  
2015

4 February

Subject: **Topics of Which the Finance Committee Should Be Aware**

References:

1. **Your Letter and Meeting Attendance – 21 January 2015**
2. **Finance Committee Reply 8 October 2014**
3. **Your Prior Letter 24 September 2014**

Dear Ms. Golrick –

During your attendance at our recent meeting, and in the letter you provided (ref. 1 above), you wished to bring two issues to our attention (in case we were not aware of them), and remind us of a third, which was the subject of your earlier letter and our response (ref. 2 and 3 above). You did not ask for a specific answer but our responses to your issues are presented below.

#### **Copy of Contract with Erving for Sewer Services**

We have been aware that such a contract exists. During the past couple of years we have encouraged the Board of Selectmen, in their role as Montague's Sewer Commission, to establish an agreement which ensures continuing treatment of Millers Falls wastewater and provides a basis for their assessment to Montague. It is our understanding that the current agreement establishes Montague as a customer/user of the Erving treatment plant, and not as a jointly responsible and liable co-operator (my terms). The agreement forestalls the significantly more expensive alternative of expanding Montague's wastewater plant to provide treatment of Millers Falls' effluent.

Our Committee's role in this situation is to maintain general awareness of the negotiation process and to ensure that the resulting assessment was appropriately included in recommended budgets presented to Montague's Annual Town Meeting. We are satisfied that this was done.

#### **Legal bills Incurred by the Town**

You did not pose a specific question on this topic but did provide a summary of bills (primarily from Kopelman & Page, PC), by month and by main topic, for the eight months ended February 2012. The attached correspondence indicates that you had asked for a copy of the contract between Montague and that firm, and that the Selectboard stated no contract exists. You made your request to the appropriate body and received an answer, so no further explanation seems needed.

It is not within our Committee's authority to tell the Selectboard how to spend the Legal budget, nor to offer an opinion on the appropriateness of the expenditures. Our role in this situation is to ensure that appropriate and responsible amounts are part of the budget recommended to Annual Town Meeting, and that any over-budget requirements (incurred or expected) are authorized by appropriations (Special Town Meetings) or

covered by Reserve Fund transfers. Our preference between these two sources is to obtain broad support from Town Meeting members, rather than using Reserve Fund transfers, to maximize their awareness of legal actions.

**Whispers of an Upcoming Special Town Meeting Again**

Prior years' experience indicates that Special Town Meetings commonly occur between Annual Meetings. Our previous letter (ref. 2) dealt with this subject at some length (see particularly the section **Practices Specific to Montague**), and the Town Administrator's response to your recent letter during our 21 January meeting repeated the important points. The articles on the warrant for the STM on 18 February fit within the first three examples in that section. Our Committee, as a body, is satisfied that Special Town Meetings are not called unless needed; even if that were not the case we have no authority to block them.

Very Truly Yours,

John T Hanold, Chair  
For Montague Finance Committee  
1 Avenue A  
Turners Falls MA 01376

February 4, 2015

TOWN OF GILL

M A S S A C H U S E T T S



[www.gillmass.org](http://www.gillmass.org)

January 28, 2015

Gill Montague Regional School Committee  
35 Crocker Avenue  
Turners Falls, MA 01376

Dear Members of the School Committee:

At their meeting on January 26<sup>th</sup>, the Gill Selectboard was informed of a remark reportedly made by the Chair at a recent School Committee meeting. During a discussion of next year's budget and Town assessments, there was a statement along the lines of "The Compact has expired." – a reference to the Compact for Funding Education that was created in 2010.

While the original Compact provided the frameworks of a financial plan only through the current year (FY 2015), we believe the cooperative budgeting and regular discussions brought about by the Compact were generally successful, and that the Compact should not be abandoned.

It is worth noting several successes that are at least partially attributable to the balance, deliberation, and budgetary frameworks provided by the Compact. Last year, both Towns voted for District assessments higher than what was called for by the Compact. In the years since the Compact was adopted, voters at Town Meeting have overwhelmingly approved the District's assessments, sometimes even unanimously. District-wide meetings to adopt a budget have become a thing of the past. The Towns and District have demonstrated an ability to work together on financial matters, which certainly played a key role in the State's willingness to remove the District from Level 4 status.

Within the Compact, Paragraph 3 allows for change, should there be a feeling that some part of the Compact is broken or no longer serves the original intent: "Recognizing that a multi-year program is always subject to future events, it is agreed that any party may propose changes in the Table B plan if it feels assumptions are no longer viable or core projections are no longer realistic. Proposals will be evaluated by all parties with the goal of reaching consensus on a revision of the long term plan, if necessary."

The Gill Selectboard continues to support the Compact and finds any pronouncement of the Compact's demise to be somewhat troubling. We hope there is still support within the School Committee for the partnering and cooperative process that it established.

Sincerely,

Gill Selectboard

Ray Purington, Administrative Assistant

Cc: Michael Sullivan, Superintendent