

## MONTAGUE FINANCE COMMITTEE

**Final Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, February 9, 2022 at 6:00 p.m.**

**This meeting was held via Zoom and recorded: <https://vimeo.com/675724312>**

**PRESENT:** Jen Audley, Chair; Gregory Garrison, Vice-Chair; John Hanold, Jennifer Waryas and Francia Wisnewski, members; BettyLou Mallet, scribe.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Carolyn Olsen, Accountant; Steve Ellis, Town Administrator; Chris Williams, Police Chief; Marsha Odle, Dispatch Manager; Daniel Wasiuk, Health Department; Melanie Zamojski, and Michael Nelson, Board of Health; Ariel Elan, resident.

**ABSENT:** Fred Bowman and Chris Menegoni

**1. Call the Meeting to Order** – The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by Chair, Jen Audley. The meeting is being recorded as well as aired on MCTV. Roll call vote on members present – Gregory Garrison, here; John Hanold, here; Jennifer Waryas, here; Francia Wisnewski, here, Jen Audley, here.

JA read the guidelines of tonight's meeting as shown on the agenda with timelines and open time for public comment. There will be limits placed on discussions however the meeting may be extended due to the discussions at hand.

### **2. Public Comment**

JA read written comments submitted by email from Ian Tapscott and Ya-Ping Douglass, w which are included in the list of meeting materials below.

Ariel Elan stated that she listened to what both Ian and Ya-Ping wrote and she will get in touch with them as it is difficult for her to hear their differences and share with them her opinion as to what is going on in Montague. Ariel stated that she feels that Chief Williams has brought forth to the public and shown what is needed to keep up the excellent practices that are being administered within the department.

### **3. Approval of the Montague Finance Committee Minutes from February 2, 2022**

The Committee members received and reviewed the minutes of February 2, 2022. **On a motion by JH and seconded by GG, the minutes were approved as written. There was no discussion. JH, aye; GG, aye; JW, aye; FW, aye; JA, aye. Approved unanimously.**

### **4. FY23 Budget Investigation**

JA explained the items on tonight's agenda for the operating budget to be discussed which are the categories of Public Safety (Police, Police Cruiser, Dispatch, Building Inspector, Emergency Management, Sealer of Weights, Animal Control and Forest Warden). She stated that the Board of Health is meeting this evening and has been invited to join tonight's meeting around 7:00 p.m. and discuss their findings.

CO presented an excel spreadsheet titled Public Safety Request showing these categories of Public Safety which allowed the Committee to review a range of budgets and expenses from FY20 expenditures through the FY23 requests and the increase percentages. The FinCom was asked, after reviewing this sheet, which items they would like to discuss. The Committee chose Dept. No 211 Police, Dept. No. 211 Police Cruiser and Dept. No. 212 Dispatch.

## **POLICE DEPARTMENT, POLICE CRUISERS AND DISPATCH**

Chris Menegoni, who was unable to attend tonight's meeting, wrote an email to the Committee which JA read prior to the discussion. His email read: *"I will be unable to attend our meeting tonight. I have read the email questions and feel they are in line with concerns I have had over the years. I find it hard to gauge the true reality or necessity of our current budget structure and I think the idea of reallocation of funds should be part of the narrative moving forward. The concerns of the community are valid and what the solution is, I don't know but these ideas should be considered."*

GG reviewed the budget requests and the Selectboard's recommendations and he is satisfied with the recommendations and the budgets placed forward for votes.

JH stated he reviewed all of the various pieces of information received and has broken it down in 3 parts (dispatch, police cruiser and police department). He feels that the issues within dispatch is primarily coverage and the ability to respond to changes in staffing. He feels that the Chief made his case in his concern of losing 911. He applauds the Chief with his support of moving towards hybrid cruisers rather than replicating the Crown Vics. He asks the Chief if the cruiser is not replaced by the end of FY22, is it possible to wait until FY23? His question regarding the police department will be in later discussions.

Chris Williams stated that he has not received a cruiser for FY22 as of yet so mileage is increasing on the other cruisers. He stated that he ordered the cruiser last July and it is now in limbo as the sales representative is no longer with the company. His second request has been submitted and is marked to be built starting March 31, 2022. Chief also stated that he would not like to skip a year as he does not know of the costs if something, such as a blown engine, would happen although he knows he can always bring it before a Special Town Meeting in 2023 if needed.

FW asks about the promotion of a sergeant and the Chief's justification of that position. She would also like to know more about the role of the School Resource Officer. Chief Williams responded stating the SRO is a senior officer and is chosen by the Superintendent of Schools with the criteria of being a fit with the students and an ability to work with them. The Sergeant position is needed due to extra supervisory responsibilities. The Chief is looking at all of the staff and the needs within the community and adjusting his department according to those needs; hence the request for a sergeant. FW also inquired about the recommendations of Community Engagement based on the need. The Chief stated that CSO (Clinical Support Options) has been put in place with clinicians working within the community.

JW looked over the budget line items and everything looks reasonable. She feels it is good to have a spare cruiser just in case one is out of commission.

JA added that in previous years, the Police Department has provided a list of vehicles, the mileage and condition and ranked in order. This plan seems reasonable to her. Her concern, however is given the

way the marketplace has changed and the higher cost of hybrid cruisers, she asks about adjustments to the timing. Does this need to be an annual request? Could they skip a year? The Chief says it is possible but he would rather not.

JH asked about the importance of having a spare cruiser should one be inoperable. The Chief explained how he tries to keep the newest cruisers utilized the least in order to lengthen its life. Having a spare cruiser, also, is important should there be a recall on another cruiser. The Chief explained that the older cars in the fleet have not been taken out of service; they are being used by the SROs, who need un-marked police vehicles.

JA shared her disappointment with the negotiations with the school districts and wished the Chief did not accept the argument that GMRSD could not afford the additional \$15000 needed to reimburse the full cost of their School Resource Officer. Her thought is that the school district should pay for the position. Chief stated there is no way the district would pay 100% for the SRO and if asked to do so, they would eliminate that position entirely. FW also supports JA's disappointment.

JH feels the addition of CSO is a positive step. He understands the State requirements are driving up the costs, and that the increasing public needs are one reason for the increase in staffing.

JA acknowledges the dispatch as well as the police department made up of the Chief, Lieutenant, Detectives and Patrol Officers. She stated they complement each other in their work. She feels a good argument has been brought forward for the addition in the dispatch department. She also recognizes that the increase in staffing will add stability to the department and make their jobs better which also helps in retaining staff. She feels the Police Department is doing their job responding to calls, investigating crimes and the small amount of community outreach. She had heard the Chief say that the addition of a sergeant and a patrol office is the first step of a long-term plan that would add several more officers over the next few years. Her concern is that the town is being asked to commit to investing a lot of money in order to be prepared for emergencies and she would like to see the town start investing more in services that will result in there being less emergencies. She respects the Chief's position however is not convinced the addition of a sergeant is necessary this year.

FW asked about civil service as well as how the new Police Reform will impact the department. The Chief explained that many towns in the area are no longer civil service. There are fewer individuals taking the civil service exam as well as there are fewer individuals who wish to become a police officer. His concern is with the area towns no longer being civil service, they will take officers from departments, such as Montague, who are still under the civil service plan. It is a large problem within Franklin County as well as there are less part-time officers in the pool to choose from. JH asked what is required to discontinue the civil service program. The chief stated it starts with the union agreement to leave the civil service, then it would be placed before the Selectboard. Should the Selectboard support the request, it will then be brought before a Town Meeting.

The request to allocate \$10,000 to the police discretionary fund was also discussed. JA thought that the fund had been eliminated years ago and that the Chief should have built the expenses within the budget and should an emergency need arise for such a modest amount, it can be addressed through a reserve fund transfer. GG also stated he was not aware of a discretionary fund request. JH would support a discretionary fund with the stipulation that the spending would be monitored. CO also recollected the police discretionary fund being eliminated and also felt the police would build it within the budget for the fiscal year.

The FinCom thanked the Chief and Marsha Odle for their participation. Chris Williams and Marsha Odle adjourned the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

## **BOARD OF HEALTH**

Michael Nelson and Melanie Zamojski of the Board of Health as well as Daniel Wasiuk of the Health Department joined the meeting at 7:05 p.m.. To avoid a quorum, Michael passed the discussion over to Melanie who stated the Board of Health has rescinded the request for 9 additional hours and a raise for the Public Health Nurse from the FY23 budget cycle. The Board will gather data and present a more informed request in the next budget cycle. Daniel stated the request for the clerk's position is under union negotiations and will be brought before the FinCom when negotiations are complete. There were no other discussions for the Board of Health. CO requested a revised budget to support this decision and Daniel will provide CO with this information.

JH asked each member if they felt comfortable with the direction in which the Board of Health and Health Department are going. Daniel felt that the departments are working in harmony. Melanie spoke for the Board of Health and stated the departments are working well together.

FW understands the challenges these departments are facing during the times of the pandemic. She asks for clarification for JH's questioning the department on the direction. JA stated she had sent questions ahead of time to each department and she received responses from these departments which were part of the meeting materials. She stated one question was regarding the elimination of the inspection's position and the response from Daniel was that he had the skills to fill the role as well as be the Director. JA also stated in light of the comments the town may have, she asks the department to not change their budget but to think about the future and the roles in general to make the town a better place to live and to not be cautious about asking what is needed in order to move in that direction.

JW asked if the department has a strategic plan and a vision. Melanie stated the department does not have a mission statement or a strategic plan. She feels the development of both would be a good start for next year where COVID is not taking up so much of their time. There are also changes in standards at the State level for roles and responsibilities of health departments which will need to be incorporated in the strategic plan of the department.

There is a request for a vehicle proposed for the Annual Town Meeting warrant. The Selectboard have discussed the request and is supportive for the department to have a vehicle to conduct inspections. The Selectboard would like the department to investigate options and complete a cost benefit analysis. The thought is for the possibility of a shared vehicle among the Board of Health, Health Department and Building Department. GG stated that the CIC also discussed this and is in line with the Selectboard requesting a more thoughtful plan to own a town vehicle as there are liability issues when using a personal vehicle. There was a suggestion to hold off on the request until the fall special town meeting, when these departments can develop a more collaborative plan.

The Board of Health and Health Department adjourned at 7:22 p.m.

## **5. Prepare for March 3, 2022 Special Town Meeting**

The FinCom now turned to discuss the capital requests in the upcoming Special Town Meeting. JA stated she and JH attended the last Selectboard meeting and that a summary of the Board's discussion regarding the Vactor Truck was emailed to the Committee. The Selectboard considered the purchasing of a new Vactor truck using ARPA funds but decided not to. The request is to lease the truck for the first year on the STM warrant. GG stated the CIC discussed the Vactor truck at their last meeting and although a refurbished truck is a possibility, the committee decided on the purchase of a new one considering the truck owned by the Town at this time, has been refurbished many times to where all the components are failing. The CIC as well as the SB are in favor of purchasing a brand new Vactor truck and will set a firm price within a few days as Tom Bergeron should be receiving the final price.

JH agrees to accelerate the purchase of a Vactor truck to the STM as it is a necessary investment for the Town. He also endorses the leasing opportunity.

JW inquired about the costs as well as the services this truck can provide. She also asks if the prices are really going up by 20% as well as wonders what other options there are for executing this service instead of purchasing a new truck. Steve stated that the request for a new Vactor truck has been on the CIC list for a very long time. This truck was purchased in 2004 and its lifespan, if maintained well, is 12-15 years. This truck is used to clean sewers for a 69 mile area. The Town has been cited by the EPA for not flushing every line of the town every five years, therefore the DPW is now in a cycle of completing that requirement. This truck works in tandem with the robotic camera and can be utilized in neighboring towns at a cost.

**GG made the motion to approve the Vactor truck on a 5-year lease agreement with a lease cap payment of \$125,000 per year with the funding source being the Capital Stabilization Fund. Seconded by JH. Steve stated the Selectboard's hope is to pay off the lease using ARPA funds but it is not guaranteed. He stated that the broader ARPA spending plan has not been finalized so therefore, should the ARPA funds not be available, it would revert to the Capital Stabilization Fund. JA, aye; JH, aye; JW, abstained; GG, aye; FW, aye. (Vote 4 aye, 0 nay, 1 abstention).**

## **ARTICLE 12 – HILLCREST FLOORING (Gill-Montague Regional School District Request)**

**Move that the Town vote to approve the sum of \$315,000 for the purpose of abating, replacing, and/or covering existing tile flooring in the Hillcrest Elementary School, including any and all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from the Town Capital Stabilization Fund.**

Discussion was that this is a necessary emergency repair and does not cover the whole scope of the project. The building is aging and as stated by GG, the CIC has encouraged Gill-Montague to work with the Capital Planning Committee for a school replacement. **The motion was read by JA and seconded by JW. There were no questions or further discussion. JW, aye; JH, aye; FW, aye; GG, aye; JA, aye. (Vote 5 aye, 0 nay, 0 abstention).**

## **ARTICLE 14 – MONTAGUE CITY ROAD FLOODING (Town Administrator Request)**

**Move that the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$66,481 for the purpose of making improvements to reduce flooding and related issues on and along Montague City Road, including any and all incidental and related costs, said sum to be raised from the Capital Stabilization Fund.**

JA listed the challenges with the flooding and stated there was a grant to remediate however there needs to be a permanent way to improve the flooding situation. The Town has already provided matching funds for this grant; this request is for contingency in the event that bids come in too high. Steve stated the bid results are varied as well as the ability to receive permits have been held up by engineers. **JA read the motion above and it was seconded by JW. FW, aye; GG, aye; JW, aye; JH, aye; JA, aye. (Vote 5 aye, 0 nay, 0 abstention)**

**ARTICLE 15 – NEW ASSESSING SOFTWARE AND COMPUTERS (Board of Assessors Request)**

**Moved that the Town vote to appropriate the sum of \$25,100 for the purpose of upgrading the Board of Assessors’ software and purchasing related computer equipment, including any and all incidental and related costs, funded with the remaining \$4,750 in Article #13 of the May 3, 2014 Annual Town Meeting, which provided funds for this same purpose, and \$20,350 from Free Cash.**

JA stated the current assessing software is running on Windows 7 which has created several errors as well as the system is no longer supported. **JA read the motion as written above and was seconded by GG. JH, aye; JW, aye; GG, aye; FW, aye; JA, aye. (Vote 5 aye, 0 nay, 0 abstention)**

**6. Topics not anticipated** – There were no other topics to discuss.

**On a motion by FW and seconded by JH, the meeting adjourned at 8:02 p.m. JW, aye; GG, aye; FW, aye; JH, aye; JA, aye.**

Respectfully submitted,

BettyLou Mallet  
Scribe

**Meeting Materials:**

(Posted here <https://montague-ma.gov/d/6571/Finance-Committee>)

[Department Requests 2-09-2022](#) (2022-02-07 at 9:37 AM)

[Finance Committee 2022-02-09 Agenda](#) (2022-02-07 at 9:36 AM)

[public comments received in advance of 02-09-2022 Finance Committee meeting](#) (2022-02-09 at 8:57 PM)

[q and a for Fin Com 2-09-2022](#) (2022-02-07 at 9:38 AM)

STM financial articles list for SB 2-7-2022 annotated for FC 2-9-2022 (2022-02-07 at 9:38 AM)

STM special article request forms to SB 2-7-2022 (2022-02-07 at 9:38 AM)

**Finance Committee Vote: 02/16/2022**