

FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 21, 2019
6:00 PM

Claire Teague Senior Center
917 S Main St, Great Barrington

Present:

Finance Committee: E. Curletti, M. Loubert, M. O'Connor, A. O'Dwyer

Town Finance Director: Susan Carmel

Town Manager: Mark Pruhenski

6:00 PM - OPEN MEETING

1. CALL TO ORDER: A. O'Dwyer called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

1. Finance Committee member committee reports:

- Community Preservation Committee
- Economic Development Committee

2. APPROVAL OF JUNE 11, 2019 MINUTES.

M. Loubert noted 1 typo -- corrected

MOTION: E. Curletti made a motion to accept the minutes of June 11, 2019 with correction.

SECOND: M. Loubert

VOTE: 4-0, passed.

APPROVAL OF JULY 23, 2019 MINUTES (one typo on agenda—not in minutes--was noted and corrected).
3 typos noted and corrected.

MOTION: M. Loubert made a motion to accept the minutes of July 23, 2019 with corrections as stated.

SECOND: M. O'Connor

VOTE: 4-0, passed.

3. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- **Community Preservation Committee.** < no report >
- **Economic Development Committee.** M. O'Connor reported that next meeting will be a walk-through of Housatonic School on Sept 3, 2019, and the Select Board has requested that EDC take on making recommendations for uses for the Housatonic School. A. O'Dwyer will attend the walk-through as alternate Finance Committee rep to EDC. M. Loubert asked if public could attend the walk-through, a she notes that others in the public may want to see the building, as well. Limits on size of groups going through the building at one time may be a concern (re: structural safety of building), but M. Pruhenski said he will follow up re: public access. M. Loubert asked if the lights (which had been noticed to be on by residents) are now off. M. Pruhenski confirmed that the lights are again off.

4. UPDATE FROM TOWN MANAGER

- **Update re: former Assistant Treasurer/Collector.** M. Pruhenski confirmed the recent indictment of the former Assistant Treasurer/Collector. He acknowledged that this is a personnel matter, and thus he is limited in what he can say. He shared the strategies/policies within Treasurer/Collector's Office the Town is putting in place:
 1. Cash Stamp on all cash payments – employees required to use this stamp (in the past, employees were expected to write in "Cash" on the Paid Date stamp, and now this Cash Payment stamp will be a separate and required stamp on both the residents' receipt and the one the Town keeps for records;
 2. The door to the Treasurer/Collector Office will now be locked at all times and only authorized personnel will be able to enter the office;

3. Each Treasurer/Collector Office employee will have a separate cash draw and spot-checks verifying that cash and check payments match will occur routinely and randomly;
4. Pick of mail and bank deposits –traditionally done only by Asst Treasurer/Collector—will now be divided up among staff in the office, so there is no single individual who has control over payments coming in and deposits going out.
5. Duties are now divided up more evenly. Traditionally, Asst Treasurer/Collector performed most of the collector task, and the Treasurer/Collector assumed most of the treasurer roles; these tasks are now divided more evenly across both employees;
6. Deposit batches will be smaller, and there will be multiple batches per week. This is to provide better control, and it is easier to match payments when batches are smaller;
7. A new bill printing company—for real estate and personal property bills—has been proposed. Also, the staff have been working to make the bills easier to read (to figure out what is owed, etc.).

A. O'Dwyer asked if there could be a sign at the window reminding residents that if they pay in cash they should get a receipt noting that on their receipt.

M. Loubert thanked the town manager for this update and confirmed that the name of the prior auditor was named Melanson Heath and we are now using Scanlon Auditors.

5. UPDATE FROM FINANCE DIRECTOR

- **New Assistant Tax Collector/Treasurer.** Ellyn Dupont has recently been appointed as Assistant Tax Collector/Treasurer. S. Carmel thanked Ms. Dupont for her excellent service already as a part-time employee in the department, and is looking forward to working with her in this new role.
- **New position: Finance Clerk.** The Town is currently advertising for a new position, currently titled “Finance Clerk”, that will be split hours between Treasurer’s Office and Finance Director Office. Recent transitions in the Town Hall staffing have created various open/unfilled positions, and the town hall offices are exploring ways to share support staff within constraints of the existing budget. M. Loubert mentioned BCC as a possible avenue to recruit applicants. She mentioned Julie Hannum [Director of Continuing Education & South County Programs] as a possible contact.
- **FY 2020 – July 2020 Budget Reports** had been circulated to the committee. She noted that MUNIS used to flag budget lines that are over the expected percentage spent. This did not occur on the current budget report. S. Carmel will investigate why this qualifier was missing from the recent reports.
- **FY 2020 Tax Rate.** There is preliminary approval for the FY 2020 values, and as this is a revaluation year, it is a more complicated and involved process this year.

6. FINANCE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- **Revised Procedure for Fund Transfer Requests to Fin Committee.** A. O'Dwyer presented the policy (included below), which had first been presented at previous meeting and updated with minor revisions, was presented for a vote. < see attached >
MOTION: M. Loubert made a motion to accept the new policy/procedure.
SECOND: E. Curletti
VOTE: 4-0, passed.
- **CPA/CPC request for proposals –** Was tabled to next meeting, as the committee rep to the CPC (T. Blauvelt) was unable to attend the current Finance Committee meeting.
- **Marijuana Revenue.** A. O'Dwyer presented some information regarding the timeline of the marijuana taxes and fees. Taxes (received via the State) and fees (host agreement / community impact fees, which are paid from the retailer directly to the Town) are certified the year after they are received (thus FY 2019 funds received will be certified this year (FY 2020), and will not be available until the year after that. Thus, taxes and fees received in FY 2019 will not be available for use by the Town until FY 2021.
 S. Carmel further pointed out that the host agreement fees will always come in with a lag, because they are based on sales for the quarter just ending—thus Q4 community impact fees will most often only be available three years after the year of the quarter. For example the Q4 F'19 community impact fees were posted to FY 2020 budget, and thus will not be available for use until FY 2022.

Thus, for FY 2020, we can expect approximately \$270K in additional tax revenues from retail marijuana sales [by Theory Wellness], and the community impact fees will be approximately \$185K.

- **Marijuana Revenue Use.** A. O'Dwyer asked M. Pruhenski to comment on the State regulations on the use of Community Impact Fees. M. Pruhenski noted that the town's new intern just started on Friday, and he will be researching this is – what the CCC is stating, and what other communities that are ahead of this are doing. M. Loubert asked if the information on the CCC website re: guidance on host agreements and uses of the Community Impact Fees. M. Loubert said she is studying those in depth and has found that they suggest, for example, traffic design, environmental impact, public safety, and municipal inspection costs. She noted that she's gone to various meetings and noticed that many of our inspection services are stressed, brought on by the new business from this industry, and that she is going to be focusing on shoring up these inspection services and recommended them to the new intern. M. Pruhenski said the intern will and will work with Chris Rembold to present soon to the Finance Committee.

M. Loubert also wondered if the host agreement regulations fall under the regulations (935 CMR 500)—for both recreational and medical marijuana use. She observed that those new regulations may be rolled out in September, but currently, we should be following the regulation guidelines. M. Pruhenski said he will look into that. A. O'Dwyer asked if we should have a special meeting during budget season to discuss the use of these funds. E. Curletti asked if it is the Finance Committee or Selectboard's role to decide how to use, and S. Bannon indicated that revenue discussions are part of the regular budgeting process (of the joint meetings of the Finance Committee and Select Board). M. Loubert expressed that we want to be careful not to hire someone based on these funds and then something happens... and we can't afford to keep them. A. O'Dwyer noted that we know what we will have [from these taxes/fees] in 2020, and have some idea for 2021 and probably more in 2022, but can't speculate into 2023. E. Curletti suggested that the best bet is to use it to offset taxes. S. Carmel mentioned the opportunity to offset a short-term budget need. M. Loubert mentioned the Police Department has requested training funds, and there was general agreement re: this as an appropriate area for use.

- **Update on Outstanding Tax Payments.** Karen Fink, Town Tax Collector, reported to the Finance Committee that unpaid taxes reported this year—those who were more than one year behind in their taxes—because there were 31 separate parcels that were in arrears—14 of those were for one developer. She reminded the committee that the public notice of unpaid taxes (those well more than a year in arrears) protects the town's interests. The local paper had noticed that there were more—in number of parcels—listed. Ms. Fink reported that since then 13 (of the 14) have been paid off, and several others, so now there are only 14 outstanding and a couple others had been in contact with her. The typical number is 9, so 14 is a bit higher, but this is not unusual for the process. She stressed that publishing these names and amounts is not about taking people's property from them, but to protect the town if such steps were to be necessary in the future.
- **Looking ahead: Setting Tax Rate and FY'21 Budget Hearings Schedule.** S. Carmel mentioned that she will be proposing the dates for the upcoming Budget Hearings Schedule. Dates that are proposed. The schedule is likely to be similar to last year's. S. Bannon will be confirming the dates with the Select Board as well. **The proposed dates are:** Jan 21, Jan 28, Feb 4, Feb 11, Feb 18 {alt.}, and Mar 17 (Public Hearing). These dates will be finalized at the upcoming Select Board meeting.

7. CITIZEN SPEAK

- Town resident Steve Farina indicated that he had drafted a petition for a special town meeting to remove the funding from the CPA and the transfer of \$300,000 from the special reserve fund to repair the roof on the Housatonic School, in light of the Select Board's recent decision to cancel the agreement with Greyhouse Partners. He indicated that he has put this call for a Special Meeting on hold, and plans to bring it to the Select Board meeting for discussion. The second topic Mr. Farina addressed was asking the Finance Committee to examine the possibility of increasing the Select Board members' salaries. He noted that this is a difficult role, and he suggested that the salary would go a long way to supporting the Select Board. A. O'Dwyer mentioned that, she too, had on her list of comment topics to discuss the Housatonic School, and was glad it was on the agenda for Monday's Selectboard.

8. FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS

- M. Loubert mentioned that citizen, Sharon Gregory, had asked that a letter she had written be read aloud into the public record. This was written as a open letter to the Select Board, Finance Committee and other town departments and committee. A. O'Dwyer agreed that it could be read aloud. This was read aloud – see attachment for full text. This topic was also requested to be brought forward to the next Finance Committee agenda.
- A. O'Dwyer mentioned that she has concerns that there are so many department and committees talking about and thinking about the Housatonic School, and it is important that they inform each other about what they are doing and considering and that they work together.
- A. O'Dwyer apologized for delay in her typing up minutes. Also noted that she continues to work on information for a Town finance committee information page on the Town's website, and noted that she is using the Town's Finance Director's office website format.
- A. O'Dwyer also mentioned that she had several concerns from citizens regarding the meeting regarding setting the tax rate, wondering if it was a meeting at which a significant change in the tax policy, and wanted to assure residents that setting Town tax policies is not a single-meeting issue, and would involve feedback from residents, as well as a discussion at the Town Meeting.
- M. Loubert also brought up that she had heard from a regional listserve that local municipalities had a computer spam (Ransomware) attack, and that she wanted to be sure the town had heard. M. Pruhenski indicated the town had been informed and was taking steps to ensure the town's computers are secure.

9. MEDIA TIME

[No additional questions]

10. NEXT FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING

As noted above, the next Finance Committee meeting will be on **Tuesday, September 17, 2019 at 6:00 at the Town Hall.**

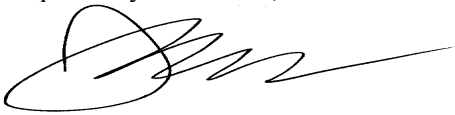
9. ADJOURN

MOTION: E. Curletti made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:05 PM

SECOND: M. Loubert

VOTE: 4-0

Respectfully Submitted,



Anne O'Dwyer
Chair, Finance Committee



Approved September 17, 2019

[Attachment]

**Proposed Policy/Procedure for Requests to Finance Committee
re: Transfer of Funds
from Finance Reserve Fund and
Year-End Transfers Requiring Finance Committee Approval
Revised**

- 1) All requests are to be made in writing and include written documentation supporting the request, including: (a) the need/rationale for the request; and (b) the basis for the amount requested, e.g., written estimates or bids from the vendor(s) associated with the requested funds. These requests should be will be sent to the Finance Director/Town Accountant no later than 12:00 (noon) on Wednesday the week prior to the FC meeting at which the requests are to be discussed.
- 2) The Finance Director/ Town Accountant will review the request(s) and send them—along with the most recent Budget Reports for the relevant department(s)-- to the Chair of the Finance Committee (FC) or designee no later than 10:00 AM on the Friday before the relevant Finance Committee Meeting.
- 3) These requests will be included with the FC agenda that is sent to FC members, Town Manager, Selectboard Chair, and posted on the Town's website for public review.
- 4) Departments heads making the request(s) will arrange to be present at the FC meeting at which their request(s) will be discussed (or appoint a designee to be present on their behalf). (Note: The FC Chair will make every effort to put the request early on the agenda, so if there are other FC business at that meeting, the department head/designee need not wait too long for their request to be discussed).

August 19, 2019

Housatonic Village Revitalization

Open Letter to the Great Barrington Select Board, Planning Board, Finance Committee, Community Preservation Committee, Economic Development Committee:

Recently, the Select Board of Great Barrington rejected the proposed renovation of the Housatonic School. Some board members wanted to address the School in a more comprehensive manner, driven by a larger vision. Due to the confluence of forces, we have just that opportunity.

A vision should address the necessary integration of our two village centers (Great Barrington and Housatonic), the beautification and improved use of a revitalized town center, the reuse of town properties, housing needs, and the creation of an economic development template that would attract community members and investors. The renovation of the Housatonic School and Housie Dome would play an important role within that context.

SITUATION. According to the Master Plan, housing is much more affordable in Housatonic than in Great Barrington. However, the amenities needed such as shopping are centralized in Great Barrington with little integration between villages.

Since the closing of many mills and the relocation of the Housatonic elementary school in 2005, Housatonic Village has reduced its vitality. Recent developments point towards positive change including:

- New CPA funding for the Housatonic School
- Purchase and renovation of the former Country Curtains' warehouse by a furniture making artisan and artist which houses additional businesses
- Partial funding to renovate Ramsdell Library
- The Town's "tax taking" and ownership of Cook's Garage.

FIVE YEAR OUTLINE. It is my hope that Great Barrington's committees (many are addressed here) would consider this five-year outline of goals:

VILLAGE CENTER:

1. Reposition Housatonic School as a central Village magnet within a broader context;
2. Combine the Housie Dome property with the Housatonic School project, developing an RFP to address broader functions, including possible underground parking;
3. Relocate the adjacent Housie Dome functions and expand its facilities elsewhere, providing a more economical infrastructure (e.g., HVAC and maintenance) than exists today for all ages;
4. Create a “Housatonic Center” with new functions such as business offices, meeting facilities, maker spaces and childcare center;
5. Along with other town properties, modernize Ramsdell Library, making it a central resource for all age groups;
6. Address Village deficiencies in utilities (gas, water, high speed communications) by negotiating broad contracts and creating a more economical and livable Village, starting with its center;

VILLAGE INTEGRATION AND HOUSING:

7. Re-zone Van Deusenville Road (VDV) from an “industrial zone” to being a part of the Housatonic Village Overlay District (HVOD), grandfathering current businesses:
 - a. Design VDV as an artery for bicycle, walking and vehicles over this 4-mile stretch linking village centers;
 - b. Institute an experimental bus shuttle
 - c. Increase workforce housing, using the Housing Trust Fund to encourage small, single and multifamily residences.
8. Explore potential uses of the Town-owned Cook’s Garage to encourage development in the adjacent mill complex. Consider broader usage of the water source that was commercially sold from the Cook property.

FINANCE and PLANNING

9. Use new Town “marijuana revenues” to plan and invest in revitalizing Housatonic, similar to what was done in 2006 in an effort to market Town properties;
10. Continue to apply CPA funds to favor Housatonic economic development.

CONCLUSION: Housatonic is experiencing positive changes that support revitalization: its housing stock is much more affordable than other parts of GB. Housatonic prides itself with inherent community spirit. It has capacity for additional housing that we need.

In part, Housatonic’s renaissance is supported by Great Barrington’s Master Plan. By embracing a common vision, the separate arms of town government including the Select Board, Planning Board, ZBA, Community Preservation and Economic Development Committees can work together toward collective improvement.

If we could mobilize our planning efforts this year, we would encourage people to invest their time and money in Housatonic that we do not now have.

Sharon Gregory
Great Barrington