

Finance Committee Meeting
Minutes
Tuesday, January 14, 2020
Town Hall, 334 Main Street
Great Barrington, Massachusetts

1. Meeting was called to order by Chairman A. O'Dwyer, at 6:00 pm. Those present at the meeting: A. O' Dwyer, Chairperson, T. Blauvelt, M. Loubert, and M. O'Connor (W. Curletti absent).

2. Minutes from December 16, 2019 meeting. Motion was made to approve, with one correction (the spelling of M. O'Connor's name), by T. Blauvet; M. Loubert seconded. All in favor (4 - 0).

3. Finance Committee member reports:

- A. Community Preservation Committee (CPC). T. Blauvet gave an update of the January 2020 meeting at the Firestation, which was well attended. He noted that the pool started with 13 applications totaling \$1.5 million. Two (2) application have withdrawn, one was not recommended to proceed, and several other applications have lowered their asking amount. Thus, the CPC will recommend a funding amount of **\$894,550**. He summarized the proposals and amounts for the Committee [details of these are in the minutes of the CPC January 6, 2020 meeting, available on the Town's website]. The Committee will present the 11 applications at its next meeting January 21, 2020, 5pm in Town Hall Meeting Room to put any conditions on the applications (e.g., re: compliance), with the help of C. Rembold, Assistant Town Manager.
- B. Economic Development Committee report was given by M. O'Connor. The Committee met January 7, 2020. Primarily the committee is working on getting together an advisory group and to develop a questionnaire that will get feedback from a variety of constituents in the GB community. Trying to best utilize the Committee as a voice for the community. The feedback is not coming from a new committee, but rather seeking general feedback from members of the community.

4. Update from Town Manager: M. Pruhenski, spoke that S. Carmel is working hard on getting the Budget Books finished and that this has been a focus of his office.

5. Update from Finance Director: S. Carmel spoke about the Annual Audit for FY 2018. A tentative date of **February 11, 2020 for the audit presentation**. Tom Scanlon, of the Town's audit firm [Scanlon & Associates] will come to meet with the Finance Committee and Selectboard. The joint FC/SB meeting for this presentation was set for **5:30 PM**. A. O'Dwyer thanked S. Carmel & M. Pruhenski for their efforts to schedule the audit presentation as soon as possible. Ms. Carmel concluded by sharing with the committee that she plans to have Budget Books well in advance of the first Budget Meeting.

6. Finance Committee business:

- **Budget Financial Policy.** A. O'Dwyer wanted to circle back to review the Town's Budget Financial Policy, from the last Finance Committee meeting. She reminded the group that for expediency, at the December 16, 2019 FC meeting, the FY20 Policy was approved—with no revisions—for FY21. The purpose of the current meeting's discussion was to check for any typos or wording the group may want to edit. [S. Bannon indicated that the Selectboard followed the same plan, and has not yet voted on the policy, but will do so at the next joint SB/FC meeting.]
- A. O' Dwyer brought to the committee's attention the section on Budget Preparation Process, regarding item #3: "Participate in BHRC's joint budget meeting with Stockbridge and West Stockbridge on [a specific date for previous year is in the policy." She wondered why a policy would include a specific date that is changing every year. It was agreed that the policy should not need to include dates that are not consistent, and that the statement would simply read, **"Participate in BHRC's joint budget meeting with Stockbridge and West Stockbridge."**
S. Bannon, from audience, gave the **2020 joint BHRC meeting date as: February 25, 2020, 6 pm., Stockbridge Town Hall.** He went on to state that all are encouraged to come. A. O' Dwyer, would like, next year, to include this meeting in the full schedule for the budget season.
- A. O'Dwyer went on to clarify the ideas and definitions of "revenue sources," specifically in relation to the Financial Management Policy item, "Seek to diversify revenue sources." A. O'Dwyer feels that in the current Policy and in the Finance Director's understanding, the meaning of "revenue sources" are different. S. Carmel said that there are very limited options for sources (categories) of revenue, all dictated by the State (e.g., property taxes, local receipts, State Aid, any other available funds (e.g., using Stabilization Fund or Free Cash) to offset tax levy; she noted that all these categories are listed in the annual Budget Book. S. Gregory, from audience, indicated that it would be helpful for residents, at some point, what proportion of local receipts and taxes come from restaurants, hotels, etc. The committee agreed that the statement would not be changed for this year, but would be considered again next year for the FY 2022 policy.
- S. Carmel asked about the policy's title. A O'Dwyer noted that when she looked at the policy of other towns, no other had Great Barrington's title ["Budget Financial Policy"]; more often it was **"Budget & Financial Policy."** The committee agreed to revised the title to include the ampersand on the policy.
- M. Loubert brought up, under "Strategic Priorities" about the item "Maintain a high quality of life." She would like it to say, **"Strive for a high quality of life,"** as this is more realistic as to what can be asked for from elected officials. This change was also agreed upon by the committee.
- **Open Meeting Law Guidelines.** Chair A. O'Dwyer wanted to make sure all members had a chance to review the pamphlet on Open Meeting Law Guidelines that had been circulated to the committee members and if they had any questions regarding the guidelines. No questions.
- **Reserve Fund Transfer Request.** The GB Police Department requested \$30,000 for three officers of the Great Barrington Police Department to attend training in order to transition to full-time officer status. These funds will be used for academy training and travel. M. Loubert indicated that she was pleased with the itemization included with the

Department's request, and that all her questions had been answered in the request documentation.

A. O'Dwyer asked if it is possible that at the end of the FY, might funds be available in the Department's salary line (as the department has been down in funded positions until recently.) Chief Walsh spoke (reported that the department is actually down four officers, one currently injured), and that the three officers are now on the payroll – through the end of the FY. He also noted that it has been more costly to pay overtime, and to ensure coverage of shifts, as there need to be 16 officers in town to cover patrols. C. Becker (Executive Administrative Assistant to the Police Chief) spoke of the grant the Department received, she has been using that monies to currently cover the payroll shortages, but will not come close to covering all those overtime expenses. The Department would like to prevent any further shortages. T. Blauvet made Motion to approve the Reserve Fund Transfer Request on behalf of the Police Department, M. Loubert seconded. All in Favor, 4 - 0.

7. Citizens Speak: Eileen Mooney would like to request funds/money to fix the lighting at the GB Senior Center, very dim, and Town Hall parking lot. M. Loubert seconded this concern. M. Pruhenski, Town Manager, said that both items come out of Capital Budget. The Town Hall parking lot improvements are already in the FY 2020 Capital Budget; the Senior Center is scheduled for FY 2021. Ms. Mooney talked of the challenges re: accessibility, especially for those with handicaps with the dim light and the poor quality of paving. M. Pruhenski reported that the Town did put some lights at Senior Center lot, but agrees that more are needed and reported that the lighting should be better by next winter.

Sharon Gregory spoke about local receipts. She had sent email to Committee members a few days prior to the meeting. She indicated that she would like to see the "actuals" for previous year's "actuals" receipts available on the Town's website. She feels that is important that actual amounts received are transparent and made available. Wants the public to be more educated about town's revenues. Her suggestion is to put revenues from cannabis sales be in the Town's stabilization fund—particularly for Other Post Employment Benefits (OPEB). She is particularly concerned with the rising costs to the Town for personnel, retirement, salaries, etc. Feels the potential OPEB long-term liabilities are un-funded. She feels there needs to be a OPEB stabilization fund for the Town, and include it in the Town's Personnel budget lines. Related, she indicated that she had looked at the regional schools' OPEB liabilities, and is concerned regarding Great Barrington's school district liabilities, which she suspects are significant.

Ms. Gregory also asked if the FY 2018 Audited Report would be posted on the Town's website. S. Carmel and M. Pruhenski confirmed it would.

8. Finance Committee Members Comments: T. Blauvet asked Chair if she was preparing the report for the Town's Annual Report booklet. A. O'Dwyer thanked him for the reminder. A. O'Dwyer also shared with the Committee that J. Minacci will be stepping down Recording Secretary for the Town at the end of January 2020. Members thanked her for her service to the Committee.

9. Media Time: no comments.

10. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 6:52 PM. T. Blauvet made the motion to close, M. Loubert seconded. All in Favor, 4- 0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie M. Minacci, Recording Secretary
& Anne O'Dwyer, Committee Chair

Approved April 7, 2020