

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
MASSACHUSETTS**

**FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES**

**THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2020
6:00 PM**

LOCATION: REMOTE MEETING

Conducted via Conference Call

1. **Meeting was called to order** by Chairperson A. O'Dwyer, at 6:00 pm. The meeting opened with a reading aloud of Remote Meeting Guidelines provided in response to Governor Baker's March 12 and 15, 2020 Orders Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G.L. c. 30A §18, in response to strict limitation on the number of people that may gather in one place.
2. **Attendance roll call** was called by Chairman A. O'Dwyer, at 6:00 pm. A roll call verified that present at the meeting: A. O' Dwyer, M. Loubert, T. Blauvelt, W. Curletti, and M. O'Connor.

Also in attendance: Town Manager, M. Pruhenski; Finance Director, S. Carmel; Selectboard Chair, S. Bannon; Selectboard Member, E. Abrahams; Fire Chief, C. Burger.

3. **Approval of Minutes**

Minutes of May 20, 2020 FC meeting. M. Loubert made the motion to approve the minutes, T. Blauvelt seconded. M. Loubert noted one wording change. Roll call vote on minutes as corrected: all in favor (5 - 0).

4. **Finance Committee member committee reports:**

Community Preservation Committee. T. Blauvelt indicated that there was nothing new to report from the CPC.

Economic Development Committee. M. O'Connor reported that EDC met the week prior, and the committee discussed the boom in people moving to the Berkshires at this time. Still working on how to best serve the Town given the start-up nature of the committee and to go back to the Selectboard for guidance. M. Loubert requested clarification on where the boom was occurring, and if this was different from prior years and if there have been any reports. M. O'Connor noted that the perceived boom was based on sales under contract data, but no formal report has been made yet. E. Abrahams shared that this was based on a conversation the presenter had from the Board of Realtors. M. O'Connor indicated at the committee it was described as "off the charts", but specific data was not presented at that meeting.

5. **Update from Town Manager.** M. Pruhenski shared with the committee updates about the upcoming outdoors Annual Town Meeting planning, particularly the procedures and plans related to Covid-19, including how packets would be distributed, where committee members and staff would be seated/stationed, weather contingencies, plans re: presented budget warrant items, citizens'

petition distributions, voting on postponing zoning items and citizen petitions to a later meeting. The Town's press release went out just prior to the current meeting.

A. O'Dwyer asked the Finance Director and Town Manager to share with the Finance Committee regarding the correction to the FY 2021 proposed budget page for the Town Manager's budget-- \$20,000 was in the original budget, but was not included in the total for that budget. A. O'Dwyer noted that this resulted in the total budget being \$20,000 more than originally in the totals page on the original FY 2021 budget report.

6. **Update from Finance Director.** S. Carmel noted that there have not been any notable changes from the prior month. The one change was in the DOR procedures re: accounting for Covid-19 expenses, in a special revenue fund, with the expectation to set it up similar to a grant, as the Town will likely be receiving MEMA and CARES Act funds. A. O'Dwyer asked if there have been greater IT expenses related to Covid-19; S. Carmel reported that there have been \$12,000, but new bills/outstanding invoices are still coming in. She reported that this past week was the last week to apply for CARES Act funds, and she had applied for this, and hopes that with this tracking that the Town is doing and the MEMA and CARES Act funds, these additional expenses will not need to be made up via the tax rate in the coming year.

Re: Review of FY 2020 Budgets through May 2020. S. Carmel confirmed that the bulk of the Town's FY 2020 debt payments and school assessments are still to be paid. Budget, and thus the total percent used is at 76%, even though there is only one month left in the FY.

The committee also discussed briefly planning a date for the end-of-year budget transfer meeting – a tentative date of July 13th was set. S. Carmel indicated that this was pushed to close to the absolute final deadline of July 15th to give departments time to review their final budgets in this very unusual year. S. Bannon indicated he would check to see if this worked for Selectboard members.

Report on Historical Data on Local Receipts. A. O'Dwyer thanked S. Carmel for providing the committee with a report reviewing local receipts from FY 2015 through FY 2020, noting that the "variance" is what rolls into Free Cash for the next year. She noted that FY 2019 is the first year that we are seeing the cannabis revenue and there is an increase of approximately \$400,000 from prior years, and a \$2,000,000 increase of receipts actuals in FY 2020 [note: to be certified to Free Cash in FY 2021, available for use in FY 2022]. A. O'Dwyer also commented that she was surprised to see that there is a slight increase (approx. 10%) in room occupancy tax actuals in FY 2020 vs. FY 2019 (surprised given the effects of Covid-19 on tourism in the area). S. Carmel noted that this may be due to the new revenues from Air-B&Bs. A. O'Dwyer also noted that there had been a general decline in departmental revenues over the years; S. Carmel explained is that is not a decrease in overall revenue, but a reorganization in how the funds are accounted for; they are now accounted for in the fees revenue line. The large increase in Fees from FY 2019 (approx. \$500,000) to 2020 (approx. \$1.9 million) is due to the Cannabis Community Impact Fees.

7. Finance Committee Business

Vocational Transportation Expenses. A. O'Dwyer shared with the committee that it is her understanding from reading the regulations that it is the obligation of the sending town to cover the costs of tuition and transportation for out-of-district vocational education, and that there are restrictions on what we can and cannot provide re: transportation. She noted that she had been in

contact with P. Dillon and S. Harrison at BHRSD, and the Town can look into other transportation companies and options and can and should put this out for a bid for providing this service. M. Loubert shared with the committee that she had looked into guidelines re: vehicles for educational transport (e.g., 7D vehicles). She agreed to forward info from the MA State RMV documents with information on this; she had also looked into minibuses as an option. She continues to ask that the Town look into alternatives. S. Carmel indicated that the town hall staff is working on this and has been researching it for over a month.

M. Loubert asked that the Annual Town Meeting, the breakdown of the total amount on the FY 2021 proposed warrant of \$123,000—tuition and transportation—approx. \$36,000 is for tuition, and thus the bulk is transportation, and to make this clear to voters. A. O’Dwyer agreed to report out on that at the town meeting, if questions are raised by the voters. All agreed the tuition is not negotiable, but the very high transportation expenses are what we are hoping to address.

Southern Berkshire Ambulance Squad. A. O’Dwyer also report that she continues to review the materials forwarded to the committee from SBAS. She shared that she met with Bill Hathaway from SBAS, as well as Chief Burger to discuss the reports. She said that she is having some difficulty “getting a handle” on the SBAS financials. Her sense thus far is that FY 2020 has already been a very difficult year for SBAS already, due to Covid-19. She noted that in prior presentations Mr. Hathaway had reported that much of SBAS’s revenues come from nursing home transports, and other such transports, and that because of Covid-19, that revenue source has decreased considerably. The FY 2019 financial data is still unclear. A. O’Dwyer indicated that while she supports the \$42,000 proposed to support the SBAS in FY 2021, she would like the audited 2019 statements, which should be available some time this summer. before considering any support in 2022 or beyond. She thanked B. Hathaway for making data available as she requests it. B. Hathaway thanked the committee for their attention to their request and in reviewing their financials.

M. Loubert shared with the committee that she subscribes to an EMS newsletter which confirmed the hardship that ambulance squads (esp. volunteer and non-profits) are going through. She, too, recognizes the complexity of this budget item. Just about all the non-profits are struggling, but this organization is critical for saving lives.

8. **Finance Committee Members Comments.** M. Loubert noted that she would like to see the updated Town Budget posted more visibly on the Town website so citizens could find it more easily in advance of the Annual Town Meeting. M. Pruhenski acknowledged that it had not been updated and needs to be refreshed and he would ensure this. She also expressed concern that past minutes are behind; A. O’D confirmed that she was delayed in posting minutes but they are now caught up.

O’Dwyer shared that, in response to public questions re: police department funding, she is getting questions about the Town’s spending. She is looking into how the Town’s PD expenditures compare to those of other comparable towns. She also noted that as we are moving into a search for a new Chief of Police, this is an opportunity to think about how the GBPD continues to serve everyone in our community.

- A. **Citizen Speak.** Trevor Forbes asked what the FC and Town had been doing re: revising the budget in light of potential reduced revenues due to the cancelled seasons of so many arts organizations in the Berkshires. A. O’Dwyer responded that the Fees Historicals report presented by S. Carmel was a first step in looking to see how the Town’s revenues is being affected by Covid-19. She also reported

that the FC is looking into how other towns are responding to Covid in terms of budgeting and managing expenses. She noted that the general projections from other FC are that the range is between 10-15% in some towns or areas and up to 30-40% in reductions in other areas, and the committee is monitoring them. A. O'Dwyer also noted that the FC made cuts to the Capital budget in light of anticipated losses in revenue due to Covid-19. She also noted that she was pleased that there is now scheduled an additional second/special Town Meeting planned for later in the summer/early fall, as this gives the Town more time to evaluate the impact of Covid-19 on the Town's revenues.

Mr. Forbes = expressed concern re: the upcoming Town Meeting—wondering how to manage idling of cars. M. Pruhenski shared that the moderator would be making announcements at the meeting to remind attendees re: regulations re: car idling, and repeat if needed, and the various ways attendees can listen in to the broadcast. A. O'Dwyer noted that those with special health concerns may have an accommodation that allows them to run their air-conditioning, if needed due to health concerns. It was noted that there was no projection possible at the Town Meeting, and decided that only one member of the FC would speak, to limit the number of committee members using a microphone, with wipes available to clean the microphones between speakers.

B. Media Time. < no comments or questions >

C. Adjournment. Motion was made by M. Loubert at 7:16 PM to adjourn the meeting; W. Curletti seconded; vote 5-0, all in favor.

Respectfully submitted by

Anne O'Dwyer

Approved FinComm Mtg: July 21, 2020