

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON  
MASSACHUSETTS**

**FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES**

**TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 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, T. Blauvelt, & W. Curletti were in attendance; M. Loubert and M. O'Connor were not present.

Also in attendance: Town Manager, M. Pruhenski; Finance Director, S. Carmel; and Selectboard Chair, S. Bannon.

3. **Approval of Minutes**

**Minutes of August 18, 2020 FC meeting.** T. Blauvelt made the motion to approve the minutes, However, as W. Curletti was not at the August 18<sup>th</sup> meeting, it was agreed to pass over the approval of the minutes until the next FC meeting.

4. **Finance Committee member committee reports – Economic Development Committee:**

Economic Development Committee. No updates.

Community Preservation Committee. T. Blauvelt reminded the committee that the request for first-round applications are out and available on the Town website, due back by November 2, by 4:00 PM. Review of applications received will begin on October 6.

5. **Update from Town Manager.** Vocational Transportation Update: M. Pruhenski reported that S. Carmel had been working closely with the Chair of the Transportation Committee, Tate Coleman. S. Carmel reported that the Town has entered into an agreement with CRT Transportation to provide transportation for the two GB students to the vocational program in Pittsfield, and thanked T. Coleman for all his hard work on this. She indicated that the Town has contracted with CRT a daily rate that is approximately half the rate the Town had last year with Massini Bus Company. The amount, she estimates, will come to around \$40,000 (+/- a small margin, depending on start date and other Covid-related reductions in in-person days). S. Carmel also noted that with Covid, the vocational program is supposed to start in-person 2-days a week for juniors and seniors only (one of the GB students is, she believes, a sophomore).

A. O'Dwyer asked if this contract is such that, unlike last year when the contract required us to pay for transportation even if school was not in session in-person, it was only for services provided. S. Carmel clarified that it is a year-long contract (for the school year), but that the Town did put into the contract that we do not pay for the service if no service is provided (e.g., if there is no in-person vocational classes/transportation). The committee members thanked S. Carmel and T. Coleman for all their work on this, and S. Carmel again acknowledged the hard work of T. Coleman.

6. **Update from Finance Director.** A. O'Dwyer thanked S. Carmel for getting the August 2020 operating budget reports to the committee well in advance of the meeting. A. O'Dwyer asked about the Collector/Treasurer tax/title litigation budget. S. Carmel noted that because some of the prior year fiscal year is still open in the system, there are carry-over PO's from the prior year, which will not be taken out of the budget until the fiscal year is closed in the system. So, this early in the budget year, a few budget lines (e.g., also true for the cemetery/parks budget line). can look like their over-budget, but it is due to carry overs from last year, which will be removed when the FY20 budget is closed. S. Carmel shared that this is due to grant receipts can come in until September, so she always try to make give as much time for grant funds to come in, and the State is particularly late this year in getting out grant funds requested.

A. O'Dwyer also asked if the additional \$50,000 voted at the Annual Town meeting in September is included in the Wastewater budget report from August. S. Carmel reminded the committee that the additional funds were not voted on yet, so the Wastewater Budget will be revised for future budget reports. Committee members thanked S. Carmel for her work on the budgets.

## 7. Finance Committee Business

A. O'Dwyer indicated that she wanted to be sure that the Finance Committee members were aware of the outcomes and data of the Tax Classification numbers. S. Carmel shared the information as shared with the Selectboard prior.

The good news, she shared, is that at the time of the initial budget-focused Town Meeting, the Town was proposing a tax rate increase of approximate 44 cents, for a tax rate of \$16.19. She is pleased that the Town has been able to come in with tax rate under \$16 -- \$15.99. The Town had originally anticipated that the increase would be an average of \$133 (based on an assessed value of \$300,000), and it came in at a \$72 increase. Some of the factors that played into the lower-than-anticipated tax increase included: (a) very strong growth (160% higher than budgeted); (b) we were able to increase the local receipts estimates slightly, based on our year-end results; and (c) we reduced the overlay (what is set aside for abatements and exemptions)—we had proposed \$150,000 at budget time, and based on the 5-year average, were able to bring it down to \$130,000. All these helped to kept the levy low, keeping tax rate down. Also, our excess levy capacity has grown modestly over the past two years, and we are back over \$1 million in excess levy capacity. The percentage increase in the tax rate was thus 1.5% (we were at \$15.75 and went up to \$15.99).

A. O'Dwyer also asked about the recent upward trend in real-estate sales. She wondered if the town received any revenues from the increase in real-estate sales and increased home values. S. Carmel indicated that the Town Assessor could likely speak more to this, but generally assessed values are based on prior year sales, not the current year. T. Blauvelt shared that the fees from real estate sales do benefit the town indirectly, because the recording and transfer fees help fund the CPA pool of funds. S. Carmel also indicated that we get the municipal liens, and shared that the Town has already done more by now than the entire year last year.

A. O'Dwyer also asked if the Town was yet seeing any impact of Covid on revenues. S. Carmel reported that because we get our State revenues on a quarterly basis, we'll know more about these revenues by the end of September (for June, July & August). T. Blauvelt confirmed that we will start the quarterly tax payments starting in June 2021 billing. A. O'Dwyer confirmed that we will now set the tax rate sometime between November and early December, as bills need to be out by December 31<sup>st</sup>. The first billing will go out in June of next year (a "preliminary bill") – the first two quarters are based on the current year's tax rate; when the 2<sup>nd</sup> two quarters' bill goes out in December, these are based on the adjusted (new) tax rate (which is set in December for billing on December 31<sup>st</sup>). Nothing needs to be done in November and December of this year—this is all for the next fiscal year. One advantage of this later setting of the tax rate allows for the Town to have one quarter of revenues information, which helps in setting a more reasonable tax rate.

8. **Finance Committee Member Comments.** T. Blauvelt asked if the Finance Committee would wanted to weigh on these deliberations. A. O'Dwyer indicated that she felt she didn't know enough about if there are financial implications of this decision and would want to know more before, as a FC member, making a recommendation. She can see it could have potential implications in both directions (increasing some revenues but also could have negative effects on some property values).
9. **Citizen Speak.** < no comments or questions >
10. **Media Time.** < no comments or questions >
11. **Adjournment.** Motion was made by A O'Dwyer at 6:30 PM to adjourn the meeting; T. Blauvelt seconded; vote 3-0, all in favor.

Respectfully submitted by

Anne O'Dwyer

*Approved at February 2, 2021 Meeting*