

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON
MASSACHUSETTS**

**FINANCE COMMITTEE'S MEETING
MINUTES
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2019
6:00 PM
TOWN HALL
334 MAIN STREET**

Present:

Finance Committee: T. Blauvelt, M. Loubert, M. O'Connor, A. O'Dwyer

Town Manager: Mark Pruhenski

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

2. APPROVAL OF AUGUST 21, 2019 MINUTES.

M. Loubert noted location of meeting: Claire Teague Senior Center -- corrected

MOTION: M. Loubert made a motion to accept the minutes of August 21, 2019 with correction.

SECOND: M. O'Connor

VOTE: 3-0, passed (T. Blauvelt abstained – did not attend at August 21 meeting)

3. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- **Economic Development Committee.** A. O'Dwyer (M. O'Connor was not able to attend the meeting, so A. O'Dwyer attended as FC alternate) reported that the EDC had the walkthrough of the Housatonic School recently, and held the committee meeting directly following the walk-through. A. O'Dwyer reported that the general feeling from the EDC was that the school was structurally in good shape and it was worth pursuing options for the building. The rest of the meeting, however, focused on finalizing vision and the mission of the EDC. October 3rd is the next EDC meeting.
- **Community Preservation Committee.** T. Blauvelt reported that the public hearing was held on August 6, and the plan was adopted and posted on the town website. Key dates: Oct 4 by 4:00 all Step 1 applications due; the CPA will then meet to review the applications. Step 2 applications due back on October 12, and the CPA will make recommendations. A. O'Dwyer responded regarding T. Blauvelt's prior request to the committee regarding possible projects, noting accessibility issues—asked if Ramsdell Library in Housatonic was being considered; T. Blauvelt reported that he expected a proposal from the library.

T. Blauvelt reported a summary of the CPA awards to date: since town approved the CPA funds, voters have approved \$3.6 million, and the amount already spent \$1.7 million, for a balance of \$1.9 million. The projects are at various stages of completion. He noted that an applicant usually has 3 years to complete their project (need to start the project in the

year that they are awarded the funds, and the money is not distributed until there is documented receipts for work completed.

4. UPDATE FROM TOWN MANAGER

- **Marijuana Impact Fees – Possible Uses.** M. Pruhenski reported that the Town’s Special Projects Manager/Intern has been working with Chris Rembold to find information. He reached out to CCC, but the information from the conversation was not more than in on the website, which the Town is already aware of: that the funds can be used for public safety overtime, substance abuse prevention, inspection costs, traffic studies. Northampton, even though they have had retail marijuana distributors longer than Great Barrington, they don’t seem to know more than us (M. Loubert confirmed her sense, as well, that Northampton is not much further ahead of us).

M. Loubert recommended a phone conversation with the Commissioners at the CCC and legal guidance, as she has found these very helpful. She has spoken with Jennifer Flannagan and Kay Doyle at the CCC. M. Pruhenski reported his feeling that we need more guidance as we go into budget season, and M. Loubert agreed that “reasonably related” purposes is quite subjective. M. Pruhenski said that the Special Projects Manager will come to the committee with a report in the future—going into budget season. A. O’Dwyer noted that it will only be approx. \$185,000 [in impact fees] for this coming FY budget.

- **New Hires at Town Hall.** M. Pruhenski reminded the committee of recent new hires in Town Government:
 - Ellen Dupont appointed **Assistant Treasurer/Collector** (filling a vacant position—the plan is to maintain the department at its prior staffing level: 2.5 positions (no new positions). These include: Assistant Treasurer/Collector (1.0), Treasurer/Collector (1.0), and an Admin Finance Clerk (.5). The Admin Finance Clerk is still open and the position has been advertised and received applications; interviews starting soon.
 - Chris Rembold was appointed to **Assistant Town Manager**/Director of Planning and Community Development. M. Pruhenski had reached out to members of the FC about this change in C. Rembold’s position. He will continue to serve on his prior boards and committees; his new responsibilities will include oversight of the Building Dept and Zoning, and Capital Asset Management, a position M. Pruhenski reported the town needs, and he will return to the Economic Development Committee.

The Assistant Town Manager position does not have any hiring, firing or contract signing authority, as this would have town charter implications. These responsibilities remain solely with the Town Manager. The Committee asked for clarification of the position/role: if the Town Manager is not available or is away, the Assistant Town Manager can/would “stand in” for the Town Manager if the latter is not available.

T. Blauvelt thanked the Town Manager for these new personnel appointments, noting his sense that M. Pruhenski now has a great team working with him.

- **Monument Next Steps Committee.** M. Pruhenski reported that the Monument Next Steps Committee has requested a joint meeting with the FC and SB. A tentative date has been set for **November 4, 2019 at 6:00 PM**. The FC agreed that it worked for committee members.

5. FINANCE COMMITTEE BUSINESS

- **Recent Budget Reports** – August 2019. A. O'Dwyer reported to the Committee that Finance Director, S. Carmel, could not make the current meeting; however, they met to go over the recent budgets reports prior to the current meeting—looking at those that were flagged as having spent a high percentage of their budget. Noted are budget lines involving annual subscriptions or memberships (including Emergency Management Consulting)—not surprising that these are high as they are paid up front for the year. Also, A. O'Dwyer reported that several budget lines show a high percentage expended, as several departments have started to use the P.O. system; and these departments have included encumbrances. M. Loubert shared that she has heard from S. Carmel that she is working aggressively to move this new PO system forward. M. Pruhenski reported that the departments that are furthest along in the new PO system are: Police, Fire, DPW – the largest departments. The smaller offices (library, town hall) are also moving forward. M. Loubert noted that she has seen positive changes re: PO usage by the committees whose meetings she attends.

A question from the audience (V. Orłowsky) requested more guidance/assistance (perhaps written guidance) for chairs of committees with smaller budgets and/or less-frequent budget requests who may be less familiar with the PO process.

M. Loubert observed, overall, the budget looks good. But, observed also that Legal Fees are higher. M. Pruhenski reported that those funds are mostly those encumbered (not yet spent) expenses for the “Rest of River” legal costs; he noted that the Town did this, as in the past we have received legal bills for this legal work after June 30th, and this year we want to be prepared for such contingencies, expecting that we will be spending the full amount. A discussion ensued regarding the need for more realistic budgeting for legal fees moving forward, and to ensure that this is part of the upcoming budget process. All agreed that realistic legal fees budgeting should be a priority.

A. O'Dwyer also raised the concern that the Hazardous Waste Collection budget line is also high. M. Pruhenski reported that our relationship with CET for hazardous waste collection ended (CET stopped providing this service to all towns with a 30-day notice); Tri-Town Health Dept in Lee is covering this service for all towns, so the price went up. Thus, the cost of this service is higher and will be higher—by about \$1,800--in the future. The good news is that the program is continuing.

- **CPA/CPC request for proposals** – See FC Committee Reports, above.

- **Housatonic School - Financial Implications** – A. O’Dwyer reported that she came away from the recent Housatonic Community Meeting feeling that a larger initiative to improve the infrastructure and community in Housatonic would make any renovations to the School more appealing and feasible. She mentioned that she would relay this to the EDC, also noting that the citizens had presented some useful ideas. M. Loubert shared that her most pressing concern is further damage to the building – esp. right now to the front entrance porch roof – the portico. She also noted the broken glass around the building when she toured the building. She reiterated her concern that the building continues to deteriorate more -- asked that a member of the Town’s custodial staff (A. O’Dwyer asked about Housie Dome custodian) be responsible for general care of the building and the grounds around the building.

M. Pruhenski reported that the glass around the building has been addressed, and that the tarp on the portico is more complicated than anticipated. He reported that Sean VanDeusen has the Housatonic School on his radar and will present an update on plans soon. M. Loubert stressed her desire to see efforts to prevent further deterioration. Should we even consider boarding up the windows to protect the interior – esp. of the first floor. M. Loubert complimented the Town for the improvements to the Housatonic Park, but that the building needs preventative measures ASAP. A. O’Dwyer reminded the FC that the ECD felt the structure is in good shape, and M. Loubert reported that she had worked in the building not too many years ago.

M. Loubert asked about the timeline for new RFP’s regarding the Housatonic School. S. Bannon indicated that originally the deadline had been early November, but with the EDC’s work, it will be later.

- **Reflections on recent 2020 Tax Rate Meeting.** The meeting has been delayed to the September 23, 2019 Selectboard meeting. A. O’Dwyer shared with the committee her surprise to learn that the FC in GB is not explicitly involved in this process. She indicated that she had researched what is done in other towns, and it does seem consistent that Selectboards (not Finance Committees) ultimately deliberate and vote on Tax Classification Policy, but the Finance Committee ought to weigh in on. Several reported that this is how it had been in the past. She suggested that there be an opportunity for the GB Finance Committee to review the data and make recommendations. All agreed that moving forward, these **conversations about tax classification policy should be held during budget season**, not at the Tax Rate Classification meeting.

M. Loubert also noted the last-minuteness of the changes in the schedule makes planning for discussion/recommendations difficult and more challenging for residents to be informed on the subject. M. Pruhenski indicated that the last-minute changes in the schedule of the meeting as the State had not certified the numbers by mid-day (although they as of this meeting, the numbers have been certified). M. Loubert also pointed out that putting the Tax Rate Classification hearing on the same agenda (on Sept 23) as many other controversial topics will make the meeting a very difficult one in which to have time for the necessary conversations. A. O’Dwyer reminded the committee that the purpose of the Sept 23rd meeting is to approve the Tax Rate, but it is called the Tax Classification Hearing, which is confusing.

S. Bannon, from the audience, reported that this has been an ongoing issue, that the Town waits until the Tax Classification Hearing to discuss Tax Classification Policy, and noted, again, that the Policy should be discussed during budget season. M. O'Connor indicated

6. CITIZEN SPEAK

- No comments.

7. FINANCE COMMITTEE MEMBERS COMMENTS

- No comments.

8. MEDIA COMMENTS

- No comments.

9. CONFIRMING DAY/TIME FOR NEXT FC MEETING

* October 15th was confirmed as next meeting.

10. ADJOURN

MOTION: T. Blauvelt made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:00 PM

SECOND: M. Loubert

VOTE: 4-0

Respectfully Submitted,



Anne O'Dwyer
Chair, Finance Committee

Approved on Nov 19, 2019