

Finance Committee Meeting  
**Minutes**  
Monday, December 16, 2019  
Town Hall, 334 Main Street  
Great Barrington, Massachusetts

**1. Meeting was called to order** by Chairman A. O'Dwyer, at 5:00 pm. Those present at meeting, A. O' Dwyer, Chairperson, T. Blauvet, W. Curletti, M. Loubert and M. O'Connor.

**2. Minutes from November 19, 2019 meeting.** Motion was made to approve by W. Curletti, M. O'Connor seconded; M. Loubert, would like the EDC paragraph to be reworked, and real estate tax "bills". A. O' Dwyer agreed to do so. All in favor (4 - 1; M. O'Connor, abstained)

**3. Finance Committee member reports:**

- a. Community Preservation Committee (CPC): T. Blauvet, gave an update from the CDC, reviewed the Step Two applications (affordable housing). There were three applications. Two favorable recommendations for Town Meeting were approved, 910 Main Street project, for \$250,000; and \$15,000 for an affordable housing study. The other 11 applications will be voted on in the January 6, 2020 meeting. The State has a billion dollar surplus, they compromised on a \$541,000,000 surplus spending package; included in that package is an extra \$20,000,000 to Community Preservation Act. Not certain Great Barrington's share of that money will be yet. They put remaining \$587,000,000 into the "rainy day fund", which is now is at \$3.45 billion.
- b. Economic Development Committee (EDC): M. O'Connor gave the report of the Committee, L. Davis, stepped down, E. Abraham's replacement for Selectboard, Tim Newman, is the new Vice Chair. Committee is trying to come up with some plans for small projects or ways to support local businesses with economic growth. A. O'Dwyer's request to serve as an "at large member" to the EDC was voted in at the recent Selectboard meeting. M. Loubert made motion that Finance Committee member A. O' Dwyer resign as the Finance Committee Alternate Representative to the EDC, and will serve as an 'At Large' representative to the EDC, M. O'Connor, seconded, all in favor, (5 - 0). The committee did not appoint a new Alternate Representative.

**4. Update from Town Manager:** M. Pruhenski, gave an update. Budgets were due from department heads this past Friday [Dec 13] and as soon as Dec 17, will meet to start conversations regarding the FY 2021 budgets with all the Department heads.

**5. Update from Finance Director:** S. Carmel reported that there was nothing to highlight in the November 2019 budget reports, except that the fiscal budget year 2019 has been closed in Munis, so that the year-end are all "clean" (meaning no further negative amounts in the encumbrances due to hold-over purchase orders from FY 19). M. Loubert observed the asterisks on the lines that are over the amount expected in the percent used, but she and S. Carmel both observed that this is due to the use of purchase orders—which is new for the current fiscal year. T. Blauvet asked about the revenue tracking. S. Carmel reported that she doesn't have that information for this meeting as focusing most recently on FY 19 close and planning ahead for FY 21 budget. She reported she would like to have this info for a future committee meeting (and to put this on the agenda for the next meeting), and recommended quarterly reviews of revenues with Finance Committee. T. Blauvet then asked about Auditors' report. S. Carmel remarked that

they were here this week, the FY 2018 auditors' report will likely be ready in late January 2020. M. Loubert asked that it be available before the first FY 2021 budget meeting, and S. Carmel said she would relay this request to the auditors.

## **6. Finance Committee business:**

- a. Review of 2021 Budget Financial Policy (discussion/vote). S. Carmel, pointed out that she and M. Pruhenski had met and noted some typos that need to be corrected. Copies of these edits were passed out at the meeting. A. O'Dwyer noted that the packet she had distributed to the FC prior to the meeting was the FY 2020 policy. M. Pruhenski note that in the joint FC/Selectboard packet, a revised FY 2021 budget had been included. The confusion re: these two different distributions was noted and discussed. S. Carmel, acknowledged that the proposed revised FY 2021, went into Joint SB/ Finance Committee meeting packets. This led to a discussion regarding the process of revising the Budget Financial Policy, and the suggestion to review the proposed suggestions, which included:
  - Re: Strategic Priorities, 5th bullet point: T. Blauvet suggested change "maintain developed, stable and healthy communities" to "maintain and develop stable and health communities...." He also indicated that he wanted a statement in the policy that the Finance Committee reviews the annual audit.
  - Re: Financial Management Policy, Revenue: T. Blauvet suggested a statement regarding a timeline (number of days) to review revenues [note: S. Carmel's proposal in above]. S. Carmel & M. Pruhenski indicated that the phrase "Seek to diversify revenue streams needs consideration, as we have to follow Massachusetts General Law, and what we can charge for certain services. A. O'Dwyer wondered if this was due to different understandings of what was meant by 'revenue' sources or streams—what is understood by the State (as to what are allowable revenue categories and what are revenue sources).
  - Re: Financial Goals: S. Carmel & M. Pruhenski indicated that the "Maintain appropriate financial capacity for present and future needs" is redundant with "Maintain adequate financial resources to sustain municipal services in the short and long term." They also suggested rewording keeping tax levy "low as possible" to "reasonable". W. Curletti questioned what is meant "reasonable". M. Pruhenski talked about putting the budget together for Finance Committee, the Committee can review it, to see what the Committee priorities of the town, and not necessarily keep the tax rate as low as possible. M. Loubert suggested "as low as reasonable."
  - M. Loubert raised the concern that she was not comfortable with making significant wording changes with such limited time for consideration and wanted more time to review proposed revisions/changes. Several others on the committee agreed. S. Carmel pointed out that the budget policy meetings with department heads are starting this coming Tuesday morning, and that this review should have occurred earlier in the fall. M. Pruhenski indicated that he is requesting a level service budget from all departments this year, and feels that has enough time to review the policy for 2021. He requested that the Town proceed for the upcoming budget meetings with the 2020 Policy.
  - It was agreed that the 2020 Financial Budget Policy had worked quite well in guiding the budget process for the FY 2020 budget process, and that the existing policy could be used to effectively guide the FY 2021 budget process. W. Curletti made motion to approve the budget policy for 2021, maintaining the existing FY 2020 policy to guide the 2021 budget process. M. Loubert, Second, all in favor (5-0).

- b. Looking ahead to Tax Classification Hearing: A. O'Dwyer wanted to remind the committee that the upcoming Joint Committee Selectboard/Finance meeting (held immediately following the current meeting), the purpose was to educate both committees about the tax classifications. She noted that it is not the hearing, at which the vote actually occurs, and that this meeting happens in August/ September of each year.
- c. Proposed Finance Committee budget line, amounts for 2021: A. O'Dwyer, mentioned that \$180 is spent annually most years for dues and memberships, but the budget line is \$300. M. Loubert suggested to keep the budget line the same, rather than having to increase it later, as there may be trainings or other memberships that arise and are important. FC members discussed the importance of highlighting the importance of training or education for FC members. S. Carmel indicated that would be best to break any training fees out into their own training budget line. It was agreed to keep \$200 in the dues/membership line and \$100.00 for training.

**7, Citizen Speak:** Ms. S. Gregory, Hollenbeck Avenue, asked to post the full budget (2020) on the Town website, where it can be found easily. She also suggested that local revenues should be a line item in budget reports/presentations. It is presented as budgeted and actuals as \$1.5 million, but is not a broken-out line item. She reported that the Mass DOR website for local services, and this site reports that the town receives \$3 million for local revenues. She suggested that the town show what was the actual [revenues] were for the previous years. She indicated that the town receives about \$800,000 from our restaurants and hotels. That is important for people to know—they contribute a good deal to the local economy. She is also concerned re: expectations around Cannabis retail revenues, and suggested more education around these revenues, and segregate the monies. She is concerned that we still don't know what these revenues will be in the long run. She also suggested that the town have a sub Committee for DPW capital budgeting, to plan for the future. Her final observation was that for many small towns, expenses for salaries, retirements, etc., are expensive, and suggested the FC think of a way to aggregate these costs a little better.

**8. Finance Committee Member Comments:** M. Loubert reported that she had attended a recent School Committee meeting. She distributed hand-outs of the preliminary budget from Dr. Dillon. She stressed that it is a very preliminary proposal. Passed out copies to members.

**9. Media Time:** No comment

**10. Meeting was adjourned at 5:58 pm.** T. Blauvet made motion to adjourn, W. Curletti second, all in favor (5-0).

Respectfully submitted,

Jamie Minacci & Anne O'Dwyer

*Accepted on January 14, 2020*