

**Great Barrington Select Board &
Great Barrington Finance Committee**
Town Hall
Great Barrington, MA 01230

Minutes of January 21, 2020, meeting

Attending were Selectboard Chair Steve Bannon, Vice-Chair Ed Abrahams and members Bill Cooke, Kate Burke and Leigh Davis; also Town Manager Mark Pruhenski; plus Finance Committee members Thomas Blauvelt, Anne O'Dwyer, Meredith O'Connor, Eugene Curletti and Michelle Loubert; Town Accountant Susan Carmel; Town Treasurer/Collector Karen Fink; Town Planner Chris Rembold; and Principal Assessor Shaun McHugh.

1. Call to Order

The meeting opened at 6 p.m. in the Conference Room, Town Hall.

2. Budget Overview

Mr. Pruhenski said his first budget as town manager was a challenge, considering unavoidable increases in insurance, debt service and retirement expenses. He said the town has to catch up on infrastructure deferrals. The proposed budget including town operating, Berkshire Hills Regional School District, Enterprise Fund, special articles and state assessments/overlay is \$33,124,528, a 7.3 percent increase. Of this, \$24,905,318 is expected from tax levy; \$1,240,800 state aid; \$2,000,000 local receipts, \$2,449,400 Enterprise Fund; and \$2,529,000 free cash to reduce the tax levy.

The proposed town operating budget is \$12,170,486.

The proposed capital program is \$5,041,000.

Mr. Pruhenski said street and bridge work will include an Old Route 7 Greenway Path on Stockbridge road, Lake Mansfield Road, sidewalks and paving.

He said the town needs to replace one DPW dump truck, two police cruisers, six police radios, Fire/EMS Car 8 and vehicle extraction equipment for Engine 5.

Buildings and grounds work include Mason Library steps; Ramsdell Library HVAC; Town Hall elevator repairs, carpeting, meeting room sound system and furniture; Memorial Field and parks equipment including ballfield backstop, bleachers and dugout.

Finally, Mr. Pruhenski discussed proposed special town meeting articles including:

- Community Impact funding, \$185,000, derived from proceeds from a cannabis sales tax, to be dispersed on a grant basis to qualifying, appropriate proposals for example for police drug recognition training, school programs.

- Emergency Medical Services, \$132,000, a first-time proposal from the Southern Berkshire Volunteer Ambulance Squad to have its participant towns help fund costs. Finance Committee members said they want to learn more and Mr. Pruhenski said he will ask SBVAS to provide financial information and details of how individual town shares would be calculated.

- South County Vocational/Trade Scholarship Fund, \$65,000, a new concept, Mr. Pruhenski said, to encourage students interested in entering the trades. BHRSD towns would be assessed based on property valuations, not student enrollment.

- BHRSD Vocational Tuition and Transportation, \$94,400 (or \$20,000 higher) to cover the cost of busing two students to Pittsfield for this fiscal year and probably next. Towns, the town manager said, are obliged to cover bus costs, not the school district.

3. FY2020 Budget: 9 Items

Chairman Bannon led the two committees through quick discussion of nine budget items, with further review to come during Finance Committee meetings.

- Legal expenses — Mr. Pruhenski said \$80,000 is requested.

- Public relations — Mr. Pruhenski said a consultant prepares press releases and places town information in social media, saving him the time it would take to do it. Some Fin Com members expressed dissatisfaction with the present PR effort, and the consensus seemed to be to redirect how the money was used, but not eliminate the expense.

- Selectboard salaries — Member Burke raised the issue of that board's stipends. She said all of the \$2,500 she receives and more goes to paying for the town health insurance program. She said it is costly to be a member of the board. She said it discourages many from running for the office. Others agreed the issue deserves examination.

- Contingency — No salaries listed in the budget show raises. This contingency, \$228,300, anticipates collective bargaining results.

- Assessors — There was suggestion of \$20,000 contingency fund.

- Debt Service — The amount said Treasurer Fink, is \$1,865,390, up 12 percent. Accountant Carmel said she will issue a new bond in May for \$1.8 million.

- Retirement — Medicare costs are up \$74,500, to \$940,411. The entire budget is up 9.7 percent.

- Insurance — The \$1,754,952 budget is up \$58,202 or 3.43 percent. Health insurance is up \$40,000 to \$1,645,200. Some of the increase is in anticipation of three new police officers, also insurance on vacant properties.

4. Adjournment

The board voted to adjourn at 7:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

151 Bernard Drew

Bernard A. Drew
Recording Secretary