

**PUBLIC HEARING  
GREAT BARRINGTON FINANCE COMMITTEE  
and  
SELECTBOARD and FINANCE COMMITTEE JOINT MEETING**

**CONFERENCE DATE: TUESDAY, MAY 5, 2020 at 6:00 PM  
LOCATION: ZOOM VIDEO**

**I. 6:00 PM - Call to Order.**

A. O'Dwyer, Chair of the Finance Committee called the Public Hearing to Order at 6 pm. Those at virtual meeting were Finance Committee members: A. O'Dwyer, M. Loubert, W. Curletti, M. O'Connor, and T. Blauvelt. Members of Selectboard present, S. Bannon, Chairman. L. Davis, K. Burke, B. Cooke, and E. Abrahams.

A. O'Dwyer opened the meeting by orienting those in attendance at this, the Towns' first ever remote budget hearing, about how to use Zoom to participate, and then read the Town Charter guidelines regarding the Budget Hearing.

**II. Public Hearing FY21 Budget – Conducted by Finance Committee:**

M. Loubert made motion to Open the Public Hearing. T. Blauvelt seconded the motion; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0.

**Public Input:** M. Pruhenski asked S. Carmel to provide the public with some background information on the Town's budget. S. Carmel reviewed a few changes since the last joint budget meeting on April 15, 2020.

- 1) The Town Manager/ Consultant line was voted at the meeting to be increased by \$6,000 [to support PR/ communications expenses];
- 2) Finance Committee Budget reserve fund was voted at the meeting to be increased by \$25,000 [to allow for flexibility in possible unanticipated Covid-19 expenses];
- 3) The FY 2021 debt service budget line was also decreased slightly, both due to reductions in general funds and wastewater funds. The General Fund reduction is \$ 62,000, and the Wastewater reduction is \$126,000 from the original proposed budget;
- 4) In Special Articles the allocation recommended to fund the Southern Berkshire Ambulance Squad was reduced to \$42,000;
- 5) The Berkshire Hills Vocational Scholarship request of \$65,000 has been removed from the request.
- 6) The out-of-district vocational education tuition and transportation funding request is \$94,400 (an increase of \$28,600 from the original request).

M. Pruhenski also shared for those in the audience some additional budget information:

- 1) The proposed tax levy increase is at 2.7% (with this proposed budget), down from the original proposed 3.8%. The estimated FY 2021 tax rate is now at \$16.18, down from \$16.35, which was in the original budget proposal.

- 2) The Town operating budget totals \$12,203,502, a 5.2% increase. The Wastewater budget is of \$2,322,973, an increase of 5.1%. The Regional School District assessment is \$17,567,344, a 5% increase.
- 3) The average annual tax bill (based on a \$300K assessed value) will be \$129.22, a reduction from the original projection of \$179.58. Special Articles for FY 2021 equal 350,000: which includes the Community Impact Fund, \$185,000.; Emergency Medical Services \$42,000.; vocational training and transportation for \$ 23,000. Capital (including Wastewater) Budget, equals \$4,318,500; anticipating borrowing \$3,778,500, an overall reduction of \$726,000 since the first budget meeting.

A. O'Dwyer shared that the Finance Committee and Selectboard had met five times since January 2020 to prepare this budget, including a special meeting to reflect back on the budget after the Covid-19 restrictions. The focus at these meetings were to keep the budget down, and made cuts in both the Capital and Operating budget proposals. Just over \$400,000 is left in Free Cash. She noted that this amount is not atypical of amounts left in Free Cash in budget planning. She also noted that an increase of 2.7% is less than last year's increase, again noting that this a projected amount as it depends on local assessments. She also recognized residents' concerns regarding Local Receipts revenues, but that the Town continues to make projections around local receipts conservatively.

A. O'Dwyer opened the hearing for questions or comments from those in attendance.

B. Hathaway; SBAS, spoke of his appreciation to the Selectboard and Finance Committee to hear the organization's request for financial support.

While waiting for a resident to email in their question, A. O'Dwyer raised her concern that a significant portion of the budget increase for the coming year is due to retirement cost increases and increased debt expenses, and noted the need to be mindful for OPEB costs now and in the future, as well as to take a closer look at the Town's borrowing.

M. Loubert stated that there are two budget items that are outstanding for her—and needing of more information: the ambulance squad request and the vocational training transportation article. She continues to feel we should be looking into other transportation options.

K. Schumacher emailed in a question: Why the increase of \$153,000 to the Finance Committee Budget? This is a significant increase from the prior budget of \$100,300. S. Carmel answered that \$128,000 of the increase is money set aside for the projected salary increases, which are set aside as they are still in contract negotiation between the Town and the various employee unions. The increase (voted at the April 15 joint budget meeting) also includes \$25,000 for the Reserve Fund to provide some flexibility in funding unanticipated Covid-19 related expenses that may occur.

**Citizen Speak Time;** No comments/questions. All attendees were unmuted for participation.

**Media Time;** No questions.

**Close Public Hearing:** M. Loubert made motion to adjourn the Public Hearing, M. O'Connor, seconded, Roll Call Vote; All in Favor 4-0. Public Hearing ended at 6:38 pm.

Respectfully submitted,  
*151 Jamie Minacci*  
 Jamie Minacci  
 Recording Secretary

*151 ANNE O'DWYER*  
 Anne O'Dwyer  
 Chair, Finance Committee

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**IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING THE PUBLIC HEARING**

**GREAT BARRINGTON FINANCE COMMITTEE and SELECTBOARD**  
**JOINT FY 21 BUDGET MEETING**

**I. Call to Order:** Chair S. Bannon, called the meeting to order. Noted that same remote meeting guidelines are in effect and recordings being made. Meeting began at 6:39 pm. Those also present (along with Finance Committee members listed above) from Selectboard are, B. Cooke, L. Davis, K. Burke, and E. Abrahams.

**II. Approval of FY21 Joint Budget Meeting Minutes of Finance Committee and Selectboard:**

- 1) **January 21, 2020** – Finance Committee Only: M. Loubert made motion to approve. T. Blauvelt, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor (5-0).
- 2) **February 4, 2020:** Finance Committee: T. Blauvelt made motion to accept, M. Loubert, seconded, Roll Call Vote; All in Favor. 5-0. Selectboard: E. Abrahams made motion to approve with one change (correcting “ K. Burke was in attendance “ to “K. Burke was not in attendance”); B. Cooke, seconded; Roll Call Vote; 4-0, All in Favor (K. Burke abstained).
- 3) **February 11, 2020:** Selectboard: E. Abrahams made motion to approve, B. Cooke, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0. Finance Committee: A. O'Dwyer noted one correction: the Selectboard members' salary increase should be corrected to read increased by \$1,250 per member); M. Loubert made motion to approve with the correction; A. O'Dwyer seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0..
- 4) **February 18, 2020:** M. Loubert noted a correction re: her Speed Trailer question – indicate that the question was if the trailer was new or replaced (it replaces). Also typo re: DPW request. Also – statement re: vocational scholarship misattributed to M. Loubert – stated by A. O'Dwyer. Selectboard: E. Abrahams to accept, with one correction—the SBAS Board Chair is Dennis Hogan; B. Cooke, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0. Finance Committee: T. Blauvelt made a motion to accept with the noted changes/corrections. M. Loubert seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0.
- 5) **April 15, 2020** – The incompleteness of detail in the minutes were noted as well as an error in the Vocational Transportation amount given in the minutes. Agreed to return for greater detail in the minutes; no vote.

**III. Discussion Re: Outstanding FY21 Budget Matters:**

M. Pruhenski and S. Carmel declined to add additional information or comments.

T. Blauvelt brought to the committees' attention that he had just received an email sent to the Finance Committee from P. Hollenbeck, writing in as a GB resident, asking about the \$300,000 for heating system at the Ramsdell Library. S. Bannon pointed out that the Public Hearing is closed, can't add new information. M. Loubert noted that the email had come in at 5:45 pm, but she does not monitor emails during meetings; others agreed.

S. Bannon and S. Carmel opened a discussion of how to manage the vote on the operating budget and it was agreed to vote on the Budget Total. T. Blauvelt reminded the committees that he needs to recuse himself from voting on the Library budget. It was agreed to vote on the total operating budget (minus the library), and the library budget separately.

### **Vote on Proposed Town Operating Budget for FY 2021**

Re: Debt Service: S. Carmel reminded the committee that the debt service budget for FY 2021 had originally been budgeted at \$1.8 million. However, she reminded that she was able to restructure this budget, with a reduction to the budget of \$62,000.

Selectboard: E. Abrahams made motion to accept Operating Budget of \$11,643,544 (Library budget removed), B. Cooke seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0. Finance Committee: M. Loubert made motion to accept the Operating Budget, minus the Library, T. Blauvelt, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0.

Selectboard: E. Abrahams made motion to accept the **Library** budget total of \$559,958, B. Cooke seconded, Roll Call Vote; All in favor, 5-0. Finance Committee: M. O'Connor made motion to accept same motion as Selectboard; M. Loubert, seconded; Roll Call Vote, 4 in favor, 0 opposed (T. Blauvelt recused).

### **Wastewater**

Selectboard: E. Abrahams approve Wastewater budget at \$2,322,973; B. Cooke, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in favor, 5-0. Finance Committee: T. Blauvelt made motion to accept the Wastewater Budget, M. Loubert, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in favor, 5-0.

### **Capital Expenses**

Selectboard: E. Abrahams made motion to recommends the Capital Budget request of \$4,318,500, B. Cooke, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0. Finance Committee: T. Blauvelt made motion to recommend the Capital Budget, \$4,318,500; W. Curletti seconded; A. O'Dwyer reminded the committee that we may want to revisit this budget as the Covid-19 restrictions continue; M. Loubert also shared that her perspective on capital expenses have changed since the February joint meeting—suggested revisiting this recommendation prior to a vote. A. O'Dwyer felt this time is still appropriate for a vote. Roll Call Vote; 4 in favor; 1 opposed (M. Loubert).

### **School Budget Assessment**

Selectboard: E. Abrahams made motion to accept the recommendation of \$17,567,344 for the School Budget, B. Cooke seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0. Finance Committee: Will

Curletti, made motion to approve the School Budget, T. Blauvelt seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0.

S. Bannon reminded all in attendance that on Thursday May 7 at 5:30 the Finance Committee of the SBRSD is holding its remote meeting, and all are welcome to attend to learn more about how Covid-19 may be affecting their budget. S. Bannon also reminded those who may have joined the meeting recently, the committees' votes come out of five prior joint budget meetings.

### **Special Articles**

- 1) **Community Impact Fund: Selectboard:** E. Abrahams made positive recommendation of the Community Impact Fund of \$185,000; B. Cooke, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0. **Finance Committee:** W. Curletti made same motion as Selectboard, T. Blauvelt seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0.
- 2) **Emergency Medical Services: Selectboard:** E. Abrahams made motion to make a positive recommendation to Town meeting of \$ 42,000. for Emergency Medical Services, B. Cooke seconded; Roll Call Vote; L. Davis recused herself from this vote/discussion; 4 in favor; 0 opposed; 1 recused. **Finance Committee:** M. Loubert made a recommendation of \$42,000. for subsidizing emergency medical services as provided by Southern Berkshire Ambulance Squad to the Town Meeting, M. O'Connor, seconded.

FC Discussion: T. Blauvelt wanted to clarify that it's for one year. S. Bannon confirmed that this is only for the one year. K. Burke reminded attendees that the \$42,000 is based on the highest amount other towns were asked to provide. A. O'Dwyer stated that she feels it continues to be important to look at their financials to see what is causing their financial problems, and why they need money, and that it is important that this assumption is met before the funds are distributed. M. Loubert shared that she continues to have a problem with the language of this recommendation and wants more information on this request before Town meeting, noting Chief Burger's comments and concerns.

A. O'Dwyer made a motion to include that this is a one-year subsidy of \$42,000 to the emergency medical services (SBAS), pending more information to be provided by the SBAS prior to the Annual Town Meeting. The amendment was voted on: All in favor; M. Loubert moved on the motion as amended; M. O'Conner, seconded the motion as amended; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor; 5-0.

- 3) **Out-of-District Vocational Tuition and Transportation: Selectboard:** E. Abrahams made final motion of positive recommendation of acceptance of \$123,000 for the vocational training and transportation, B. Cooke, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0. **Finance Committee:** W. Curletti, made motion for recommending \$123,000. for the vocational training and transportation, A. O'Dwyer, seconded. M. Loubert raised that she continues to want additional information prior to Town Meeting, noting numerous other options and proposals still being considered. General agreement on this point among Finance Committee and Selectboard members; Role Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0.

### **IV. Selectboard & Finance Committee Comments.** No further comments.



**V. Citizen/Media Speak Time.** No comments/questions. All attendees unmuted via Zoom. M. Pruhenski shared that K. Schumacher had responded via email that he was satisfied with the committees' responses to his question re: the Finance Committee FY 2021 proposed budget.

**VI. Adjournment.** Selectboard: E. Abrahams made motion to adjourn meeting, B. Cooke, seconded; Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0. Finance Committee: M. O'Connor made motion to adjourn, T. Blauvelt, seconded, Roll Call Vote; All in Favor, 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at 7:33pm.

Respectfully submitted,

*/s/ JAMIE M. MINACCI*

Jamie M. Minacci  
Recording secretary

*/s/ ANNE O'DWYER*

Anne O'Dwyer  
Chair, Finance Committee