

JOINT FINANCE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING
February 26 2014

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Meeting Date: February 26, 2014
Location: 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls MA

Called to Order: 6:00 PM

Finance Committee Members Present: John Hanold, Sharon Kennaugh, Lynn Reynolds, Greg Garrison and Lisa Adams. Michael Naughton arrived at 6:02 PM.

Selectmen Present: Mark Fairbrother. Michael Nelson and Christopher Boutwell arrived at 7:06 PM .

Others Present: Town Administrator Frank Abbondanzio, Town Accountant Carolyn Olsen, from the Franklin County Technical School Superintendent James Laverty, School Committee member Richard Kuklewicz and School Business Manager Russ Kaubris, Police Chief Chip Dodge, Dispatch Manager Marsha Odle, Director of Libraries Linda Hickman and Library Trustees Karen Latka, Steve Winter, Karen Schweitzer and Cindy Tarail.

Minutes

Finance Committee Moved:

To approve the minutes of February 12, 2014.

Vote: 5 In Favor 0 Opposed Abstained

Mr. Naughton arrived.

Franklin County Technical School

The district presented their Fiscal Year 2015 budget. This budget has been tentatively approved and the final budget will be voted on by the School Committee on March 12, 2014. The numbers will be a little different as there have been some program changes. The impact of eliminating the art program will be in the range of \$73,000. At this point it is not known if the budget will be reduced or if the amount will be moved to the capital reserve as the school has some capital issues that need to be addressed.

Highlights include:

- There is a 5.4% increase in the overall budget for Fiscal Year 2015.
- State aid has been estimated at level funding from Fiscal Year 2014.
- The district is using more from the tuition revolving (tuition from non-member towns) to reduce the impact to the town assessments.
- Montague's assessment is almost 6% lower for Fiscal Year 2015 due to lower enrollment.
- The district has submitted statement of interest to the state for an accelerated repair program.
- There have been significant energy savings due to the recent improvements.
- The superintendent briefly reviewed program and staffing changes.
- The proposed School Resource Officer is included in the budget.
- The school is seeing a steady increase in enrollment, and has added sophomore seats in each of the last two years.
- The other budget driver is a new 5 year bus contract with a 20% increase. This translates into a 2-2.5% increase in town assessments. This increase is mostly because the previous contract was under market value.
- There is a one year lag between transportation costs and state transportation aid, so there is essentially a double hit for transportation costs for Fiscal Year 2015.

- The Fiscal Year 2015 budget also includes \$30,000 for the costs related to the re-accreditation done by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. This is done every ten years.
- There are three potential capital projects in the near future;
 1. The roof is 19 years old and the school is incurring expenses for fixing the cracking and leakage. The administration would prefer to repair the roof membrane rather than replacing the roof. The estimated for this is \$800,000. This would not be eligible for any state reimbursements under current guidelines. The cost for a complete roof replacement is estimated at \$2.5 million, with a potential 75% state reimbursement.
 2. The parking lots and driveways are also original and need to be repaved at a cost of between \$450,000 and \$500,000. Repaving would not be eligible for reimbursement from the school building assistance program.
 3. The district is also considering a modular pod unit for additional classroom space at an estimated cost of \$850,000.
 4. The district hopes to have a capital plan in place for the Fiscal Year 2016 budget process.
- Mr. Hanold asked what led the school to request a School Resource Officer (SRO). Mr. Laverty noted that the school is much more open to the public than a traditional school due to the public use of programs such as the student restaurant and salon. This year the school instituted a program where all exterior doors are locked full time, with swipe cards available to staff. Students are no longer allowed into the building until 7:30 AM. Mr. Laverty feels that the next step in the process of a safe school is a SRO. Mr. Laverty has worked in schools that had SROs and found them to be very helpful and an excellent resource. The SRO would primarily assist in providing a safe environment during school hours. They are currently using a police officer through a police detail for 4 hours a day and have found it to be helpful.
- The district will be pursuing a COPS grant to help with the cost, but will use the SRO even if grant funding is not available.
- Ms. Adams asked if the school had summer programs that would require the presence of the SRO. The school has one summer program and will have to evaluate whether the SRO will be needed.
- The estimated Chapter 70 revenue is lower than the Fiscal Year 2014 budget because the Fiscal Year 2014 actual was lower than the estimate used for budgeting.
- The amount of tuition revolving (tuition from non-member towns) funds allocated for the Fiscal Year 2015 budget equal the amount that will be received this year. While the district is using a larger amount than usual, they are not using the entire fund. Mr. Kaubris noted that we are not “eating into the principal”, but are using all of the revenues. Mr. Kaubris would not recommend using this large of an amount on a regular basis, but feels it is appropriate under the current situation.

Police Budget

Chief Dodge provided some handouts with additional information on the Police, Dispatch and Animal Control budgets and the Code Red notification system.

- The SRO at GMRSD already had a day shift, so he worked as a detective when school was not in session. For the Tech School, there will be no cost to the town, but the Chief still wanted it clear that it will be a town officer and would be available to the town in case of emergencies, and when school is not in session. It's not uncommon for police officers to graduate from the academy and go straight to the school, but Chief Dodge feels that it's much better to use an officer that has street experience.
- The reason the town is doing this for the FCTS but not GMRSD is because the GMRSD hasn't asked for it.

- During school breaks the SRO will be on patrol or at training.
- Mr. Abbondanzio noted that the scheduling could work well in that the SRO would be available for youth related projects during the summer.
- The Fiscal Year 2015 police budget includes an increase of \$25,606 over the adjusted Fiscal Year 2014 budget, excluding the cost of the SRO since that cost is being completely reimbursed.
- Much of the increase is related to contracted pay increases and holiday pay for the higher paid officers who work on holidays.
- The Chief reviewed his handouts.
- Most of the costs for the SRO are in the police budget, and the costs for benefits are included in the Benefits budget, but the total cost will be reimbursed by the FCTS. The school will also reimburse any unemployment costs if they end the program and the town has to lay off the employee.

Mr. Boutwell and Mr. Nelson arrived at 7:06 PM.

- Chief Dodge noted that the new SUVs are getting better gas mileage than some of the cars of the same model year.
- Mr. Naughton asked if things like time lost due to injury could be included in the narrative's statistics.

Dispatch Budget

- Most of the budget increase is the inclusion of the anticipated TOMEA contract settlement. Approximately \$2,000 of the increase is being reimbursed by the Turners Falls Fire District.
- The Turners Falls Fire District pays the town \$0.50 per hour for the dispatcher on duty for their work for the District. That amount is paid to the dispatcher through payroll. For Fiscal Year 2015 the Turners Falls Fire District will be paying \$0.75 per hour and this will increase to \$1.00 in Fiscal Year 2016.
- Ms. Odle is vigilant about pursuing grants for personnel and training costs.
- Dispatch may need a Fiscal Year 2014 supplemental appropriation or reserve fund transfer due to a dispatcher who has just announced she will be retiring at the end of April.
- Mr. Naughton asked if they have tried to determine how much of dispatch time is actually spent on Fire Department calls. Ms. Odle says that the \$0.75 is appropriate for the current workload.

Animal Control Budget

- The budget increased a very modest amount for Fiscal Year 2015.
- The shared Animal Control Officer is completely separate from the animal shelter.
- There may be an increased cost for the animal shelter when it moves in the next few years.
- The shared Animal Control Officer is working out very well.

Code Red

Code Red is a program that would allow notification to residents in the event of both emergency and non-emergency situations.

- Residents could sign up for what types of notifications they wish to receive, and how they wish to receive the notifications. Options include automated phone calls to home and/or mobile phones and text messages.

- The company allows unlimited notifications at a flat cost per year. The cost is also guaranteed not to increase.
- The department issuing the notification will be able to select residents within a certain geographic area or through the use of a specific list of residents. There is no limit to the number of specialized lists that can be set up.
- The cost would be included in the Shared Costs Budget. If any other local government agencies wish to participate they will reimburse the town \$800 per year. Currently both the Montague Center Fire District and the Turners Falls Fire District have said they want to participate. That amount will be reviewed in a few years after actual usage can be tracked.
- Many towns throughout the country already have this or a similar system.
- Mr. Nelson thinks that for \$6,500, if one kid is found, or a tornado comes and one person gets to the basement in time, the system would be priceless.
- Mr. Naughton asked how much research has been done to determine if this company has the best price. Chief Dodge has asked other companies and feels that this company has the best price.
- Concern was expressed over the possible over-use of non-emergency notifications. Mr. Boutwell suggested that the Selectmen set guidelines.

Libraries Budget

- Mr. Hanold noted that the main change in the library this year has been a chain of employee replacements. Ms. Hickman noted that the Library Trustees will be interviewing for a new Children's Librarian next week.
- Mr. Hanold also noted the funding requirements for state aid. The first is that the total budget must increase at least 2.5% over the average of the previous three years. The second is that 19% of the total budget must be spent on materials.
- The increase for Fiscal Year 2015 is slightly over that 2.5% increase, mostly due to expected wage changes resulting from the Pay and Classification study and the addition of a new part-time position.
- There has not been a new position added since 1998.
- A graph providing circulation statistics was provided showing the increase in circulated items. Ms. Hickman noted that almost 50% of circulation is DVDs, which require more work as the discs must be kept behind the counter.
- The library gets 4-5 delivery bins each day of inter-library circulation items. This requires a great deal of work, which frequently has to be done by the higher level employees.
- Ms. Hickman noted that the libraries have computers and staff is besieged by questions from computer users as well as questions about how to use e-readers. Now staff is required to be computer experts as well as librarians.
- Mr. Hanold asked if the trustees were comfortable with the budget and the plans for future growth. Karen Latka replied that she certainly was and noted that the need for a new person was considered well before the change in Library Directors.
- Grant writing was only done by the Children's Librarian in the past, and even that has not been done in the recent past due to time constraints upon current staff.
- Ms. Hickman added that the previous Director really enjoyed working the desk but when Ms. Hickman found herself spending hours shelving books she realized it was not an efficient use of her time.
- When the budget was prepared there were two employees who were planning on retiring, but who had not given notice. Since then one will be giving notice within the next few days and another is planning on retiring this summer. Both employees are at the top of the scale as

were the previous Library Director and Children's Librarian. The new employees will be hired at lower pay.

- Mr. Boutwell asked about the return statistics. Ms. Hickman noted they do have a problem getting items returned.
- The Fiscal Year 2015 budget has to be at least \$316,661 to meet the state requirements. The requested budget is \$13,000 above that amount.

Topics not anticipated within in the 48 hour posting requirements

- Mr. Abbondanzio stated that his presentation may not be ready for next week.
- Mr. Hanold asked if they anticipate resolution to any collective bargaining issues within the next two weeks. Mr. Abbondanzio said that there may be resolution with one unit soon, but it is not expected that the remaining contract will not be resolved in the near future.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:15 PM

List of Documents and Exhibits

- Minutes February 12, 2014
- Handout from the Franklin County Technical School
- Handouts from Chief Dodge
- Handouts from Ms. Hickman

Next Meetings:

March 5, 2014	GMRSD, proposal for joint action regarding Chapter 70, Town Administrator Budget
March 12, 2014	Capital Improvements Committee, decide final use of reserves, final Schedules I & II, Town Administrator Budget
March 19, 2014	Vote STM and ATM recommendations
March 26, 2014	Vote operating budget and funding sources for Town, WPCF, Colle, Airport and school districts