

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON**  
**FINANCE COMMITTEE**  
**TOWN HALL**  
**334 MAIN STREET, GREAT BARRINGTON, MA**  
**MINUTES**  
**October 9, 2013**  
**5:30 P.M.**

**PRESENT:**

**SHARON GREGORY, CHAIR**

**WALTER ATWOOD**

**MARK LEFENFELD**

**LEIGH DAVIS**

**THOMAS BLAUVELT**

The meeting was called to order at 5:30 P.M.

**I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**MOTION:** Buddy Atwood to approve the minutes of September 10, 2013

**SECOND:** Leigh Davis

**VOTE:** 5-0

**2. OLD BUSINESS:**

A. Preliminary Discussion of School Committee Issues to discuss at the October 29, 2013 Meeting. A draft letter to Steve Bannon (cc: David Adler) – dated 10/9/13 was read into the record and will be attached to these minutes. Sharon noted we can send the School Committee a letter in preparation of the meeting and entertain discussion at that meeting. Sharon also suggested having joint meetings with the school committee before their budget is approved. It would help to inform us as to what the issues are and make suggestions. Buddy said by the 10/29 meeting we should have from the School Committee the report that they have to send to the State which is due 10/1 that lists the number of students in the Town of Great Barrington. He said they estimate it to be 681. He also noted he would like to know the number of students in the school district, the number of students at each grade level, and the number of choice and the number of tuition students and what grade level they are at. He noted right now based on the 681, we are talking \$17,700 per student to the Town of Great Barrington. Tom said he attended the School Committee meeting at the end of September and one of the agenda items on their budget was a rating by Standard and Poor's about the district and they affirmed it is an AA Credit Rating. He noted that they advised their enrollment is stable at 1,370 students for the 2014 school year. Sharon said she would write a letter on behalf of the Finance Committee requesting information on the building and student information. It was also noted that Peter Dillon was invited to the upcoming meeting.

**MOTION:** Tom to authorize Sharon to sign the letter to the school committee in regard to commenting on school board decisions which are not cost neutral.

**SECOND:** Mark

**VOTE:** 5-0

**MOTION:** Buddy that we have the state report on the student enrollment as soon as possible.

**SECOND:** Mark

**VOTE:** 5-0

**MOTION:** Mark to that we send a separate letter to the school committee to set plans for meetings to discuss the budget prior to the budget time.

**SECOND:** Tom

**VOTE:** 5-0

It was noted that we are preparing for long range planning of 10-20 years and a meeting was set up with the Town Manager and others. Sharon would cover the results at the next FinComm meeting.

It was noted that the storm water management is \$18 million for phase 1 and 2 combined. Tom said he is waiting for an update on the unpaid property taxes. Sharon advised she would request it again.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

A. Housatonic School Re-Use Recommendation: The school is now mothballed. There is concern the school will deteriorate. It is noted that there was a task force report done last year. Mark read into the record the Finance Committees recommendations dated October 9, 2013 on the Housatonic School re-use into the record. Sharon is going to add a preamble to the Housatonic School Recommendation.

**MOTION:** Mark to send recommendations to the Board of Selectmen on behalf of the Finance Committee. (The letter with both items will be attached to the minutes).

**SECOND:** Leigh

Amendment to motion: Mark to eliminate "the community previously rejected the practicality of creating an affordable housing facility". (Section B Paragraph II).

**VOTE:** 5-0

It was noted that an RFP should be developed to attract bidders. Money should be allocated for a feasibility study if the town is willing to invest in the building. Berkshire County Regional Planning could be hired to do the study. Craig Okerstrom-Lang advised that we have detailed cost estimates to renovate the building that are approximately 7-8 years old.

B. Waste Water Upcoming Changes and Ad Hoc Group Report (Jim Stark /Michelle Loubert)

Michelle advised that the group has been meeting since January in regard to the pending sewer rate increases and changing the possibility of changing the rate from a flat rate billing to water meter billing. Mr. Heuberger said that the objective to metering is that the sewer billing would be based on usage. Housatonic and the Fire District are already metered for water. It was noted that the Waste Water Treatment budget is an enterprise fund which is funded by sewer users. It is currently \$460 for 1 equivalent dwelling unit. Next year it is going up to \$700.00. The group advised they would like the Finance Committee to support the idea and for the Board of Selectmen to commission a study on the subject to see if it is feasible. A questionnaire could be included with the sewer bills asking "yes" or "no" if people are interested in using water usage for sewer usage. It was also noted that the state has to approve the way the wastewater is billed.

While many felt this was a reasonable measurement, it was noted there were anomalies and that some houses redirect rainwater into the sewer and should be fined. Michelle said she met with someone at Tighe and Bond who advised the conversion from a flat rate to a meter rate occurs often and that they have algorithms to adjust for those who have unusual water usage. She recommended a rate study should be done and agreed that first we need to see what capabilities engineering firms have in this area. Tighe and Bond could be helpful in advancing this idea. It was requested that the Finance Committee support a rate study and to put together a preliminary RFP for rate study so we can get a range of costs.

**MOTION:** Mark to ask the Board of Selectmen to consider developing a preliminary RFP for a rate study with costs so we could request funding under a warrant.

**SECOND:** Leigh

**VOTE:** 4-1

Sharon said she would develop a letter to the Board of Selectmen.

Sharon said in preparation for the budget cycle, she would like everyone to think about what financial policy requests are going to be. Last year we wanted the budget not to include cents. We did not receive detailed department plans which this year, we need to request. Sharon asked that committee members come to the next meeting with a list of requests of the Town Manager and staff so we could consolidate them and send them to the Town Manager. Last year we asked for a level funded budget as well as a 2% decrease in operating budget and 5% reduction in capital expenditures. Sharon asked if Tom could prepare a list of budget issues carried over from last year (such as the Reserve for "Other Employment Benefits"). Last year we asked to have input on the labor negotiations; we need to formalize the request. There should be a joint meeting with the Town Manager, Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee for the upcoming budget cycle.

Other matters. Tom said he is not convinced on spending \$56 million to renovate Monument Mountain. He attended the school committee presentation. He noted that of the \$51 million, there is \$3.8 million not eligible for reimbursement by the state. The design is for 570 students. The state has indicated they will reimburse us for 48.52% so we would be responsible for the balance of \$31 million. The estimated tax impact to Great Barrington is \$425.00 to \$460.00 for the average tax bill and would go up about 15%. One vote will be to approve this expenditure and the other will be to exempt it from proposition 2 ½. The addition would add 27,100 sq. feet to the high school. If they did not go forward with the total renovation and they piecemealed it, it would be \$40.2 million but we may not get the 48.52% reimbursement.

Sharon requested that board members review their calendars for November meeting dates.

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Carolyn Wichmann

Secretary