

**MINUTES
FINANCE COMMITTEE
TOWN HALL
344 MAIN STREET
GREAT BARRINGTON MA 01230
NOVEMBER 24, 2015
6:30 PM**

The chair called the meeting to order at 6:30. Present: chair Michael Wise and members Walter Atwood, Thomas Blauvelt and Will Curletti. Absent: Leigh Davis. Also participating in the meeting was town manager Jennifer Tabakin. The agenda was approved, as circulated, without objection.

Minutes of the meeting of October 27, 2015 and the joint meeting with the Selectboard on November 2, 2015 were approved, without objection.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS: The chair reminded the members to submit the certification of receipt of open meeting law materials to the town clerk by December 31. The town manager noted that there will be a training session about the open meeting law in January, presented by town counsel Kopelman and Page.

REPORTS & STATEMENTS: The chair said that the committee should express its appreciation for the services of treasurer Sandy Larkin, who is retiring at the end of the month. At the retirement event next week, Atwood will make a statement for the committee. The town manager advised the committee that Eddie Sporn, of Housatonic, has been appointed interim treasurer until the recruiting process is completed, which could take about four months. She said that he has 35 years of experience in public budgeting and administration and that he might conceivably be a candidate for the post.

The chair reported that the Board of Assessors at its latest meeting endorsed the committee's recommendation to extend the provisions about eligibility and benefit for the "Clause 41C" senior property tax exemption to the maximum levels under state law.

The chair reported on the budget process at the Berkshire Hills Regional School District. The School Committee's finance subcommittee has instructed the staff to plan on a level program budget in principle, with some changes likely such as food service and repairs to the high school. The subcommittee will have a meeting on December 2 with the principals and department heads about the implications of cutting below a level-program budget. The school system's budget schedule calls for a joint meeting with the town boards February 23 and a public hearing February 25. For the five-year program of repairs to the high school, the schools' business administrator has prepared a pro forma schedule for borrowing the needed funds over ten or 25 years, to show the likely impact on capital assessments while paying off the debt on the elementary and middle schools. The subcommittee has asked what magnitude of capital budget increase would have Proposition 2½ implications for Great Barrington; the town manager pointed out that the town has substantial room under its levy limit, so the relevant consideration is the town's general budget policy, which calls for a Proposition 2½ vote for all school improvement projects.

Blauvelt reported on the decisions recently taken by the Community Development Committee. The CDC has concluded its evaluation of the applications. It recommends funding for eight of them: Construct, CDC, CHP, River Walk, the Unitarian Church, GBH, the Historical Commission, and BNRC. The state has announced that the funding match for this year will be 45.8 percent. The town manager said she had requested and received a letter from town counsel

concerning the application from the Unitarian Church; the letter advises that approval is consistent with how other communities have dealt with similar applications.

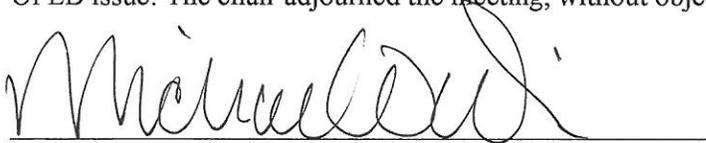
BUDGET POLICY FY17: The staff revised the draft that had been discussed at the joint meeting with the Selectboard on November 2, incorporating the changes and additions that the committee requested. On motion by Blauvelt, seconded by Atwood, the committee voted unanimously to adopt the budget policy for FY17 in the revised form presented by the staff.

QUARTERLY REVIEW OF SPENDING VS. BUDGET: The committee reviewed the line-by-line reports on first quarter spending, which the financial coordinator had distributed to the members on October 22. It was noted that the report showed that no payment had been made at that point to the school system or for community services; the town manager observed that the community services agreements had not been finalized until late September. A small item for "parking" under "contracted services" drew a question; the town manager will check into what that represents. A question arose about several items at the bottom of the wastewater budget, totalling about \$400,000, which were not in the town meeting budget; these appear to be elements of the improvement project that is underway, which were unspent from previous budgets. The town manager said that the wastewater operation is accumulating an operating surplus in order to cushion the fiscal impact of paying for this project over the next several years.

BYLAW REVIEW AND REVISION: Blauvelt and Atwood reported that they had looked over the provisions of the town code dealing with the finance committee and did not find anything that called for change. The chair observed that one item in Section 7-2 was not gender-neutral; however, changing "his" to "the" might not be worth the effort, unless it was part of a larger project to make similar corrections elsewhere in the code. The town manager said that the Selectboard is considering convening a meeting about bylaw revisions with the committee chairs.

CITIZENS SPEAK: Michelle Loubert noted that the letter from town counsel about the Unitarian Church application to the CPC did not address all of the issues that she had raised in her letter to the CPC. Eileen Mooney asked how much the interim treasurer would be paid.

The committee agreed to skip the regular scheduled meeting at the end of December. Instead, the next meeting will be a joint meeting with the Selectboard on December 14 about the town's audit report and also the expected audit and actuarial reports concerning the pension system and the OPEB issue. The chair adjourned the meeting, without objection, at 7:04.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michael Wise", written over a horizontal line.

Michael Wise, Chair