

**TOWN OF GREAT BARRINGTON  
SELECTBOARD AND FINANCE COMMITTEE  
JOINT MEETING MINUTES  
TOWN HALL  
November 2, 2015**

**PRESENT:**

**SELECTBOARD**

SEAN STANTON  
STEPHEN C. BANNON  
DANIEL BAILLY  
ED ABRAHAMS

**FINANCE COMMITTEE**

MICHAEL WISE  
LEIGH DAVIS  
WALTER F. ATWOOD III  
THOMAS BLAUVET  
EUGENE CURLETTI

TOWN MANAGER JENNIFER TABAKIN  
TOWN ACCOUNTANT LAUREN SARTORI

**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Mr. Stanton called the meeting to order at 6 p.m.

Town Manager Tabakin pointed out changes in this year's budget preparation. She said the annual report will be issued at the end of the calendar year for the prior fiscal year. She said the budget book will have a different format this year and will be available on the Internet. She said Selectboard Bill Cooke and Karen Smith and an intern have used the existing software to make improvements to the town webpage, and will contract next year for the Virtual Town Hall system. She said further transparency in financial reporting will be achieved by Town Accountant Sartori with new software. And she demonstrated a Massachusetts Department of Revenue webpage that breaks out comparative information for all Commonwealth communities.

**2. FY 2017 BUDGET AND FINANCIAL POLICY & CALENDAR**

The town manager began a section-by-section review of Great Barrington budget and Financial Policy for Fiscal year 2017 (11/2/2015). She said under Strategic Priorities, "Follow Great Barrington's Master Plan" has been added. Mr. Wise pointed out, under Financial Goals, that "AAA credit rating" should be "AA+ credit rating." There was brief discussion of inclusion of demographics and seasonal and second-home populations. Under Financial Management Policy, Revenue, there was discussion of "Accurately estimate available resources including state funds, local funds, fees, grants and other sources." Mr. Blauvelt noted the town is deliberately conservative in some of its estimates, i.e. overestimating insurance costs and underestimating town revenues. There was discussion of the town's free cash policy. Mr. Atwood said that while there is sense to putting funds into the Stabilization Fund, rather than accruing free cash, practically

speaking the former would require two votes at town meeting, including a two-thirds vote, to extract funds and using free cash requires only one majority vote. Ms. Sartori noted free cash also allows town flexibility in covering liabilities between property tax cycles. Mr. Wise said the Finance Committee recommends no changes at present in the single tax rate for all classes of property.

Under the Real Estate Tax section, minor changes have been made and another bullet was added: Consider and review new policies for senior exemptions. Under User Fees, "to the extent possible" has been added. For Debt Management, "school facilities improvements" was substituted for "school facilities renovations."

Under Budget Preparation Process, Ms. Tabakin said the five-year capital plan should mean planning for a fifth year each budget season, as the first four years simply move up in priority. There was discussion of emergencies and other reasons priorities change. For the 18 itemized steps, it was decided to eliminate 12 through 18 as happening after the budget process. "Attend," rather than "Hold," meetings with the BHRSD School Committee. Discuss regional sharing at a time other than budget season. "Communicate with," rather than "Invite Berkshire Delegation."

The boards discussed the proposed budget meeting schedule and added Dec. 14, Audit Report. It was noted the BHRSD budget will be voted by the school committee March 10. The Selectboard will vote on the final budget March 28. The Finance Committee will likely vote on the budget following its March 23 public hearing.

Under Town Budget Format, it should read Fiscal Year 2017, not 2016. Under Capital Budget report, Mr. Wise asked that a Debt Schedule be included, broken down by department and function and a 10-year history be provided as possible. Chairmen Stanton and Wise are to receive clean copies of the document for further action.

### **3. PUBLIC SPEAK**

Chip Elitzer spoke to the matter of underfunded insurance liabilities, town and school, for present and retired employees, and asked that the issue be examined. Ms. Sartori said the liabilities are nearly impossible to determine with any accuracy, and Standard & Poor and other rating services take them into account in determining the town's rating. Mr. Atwood said the town has received conflicting information from the state and is waiting for the newest report, this fall.

### **4. ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting adjourned at 7:43 p.m. on a motion by Mr. Bannon, seconded by Mr. Bailly and voted without dissent.



Bernard A. Drew  
Recording Secretary