

# Monson struggles with finance board

## *Board, moderator at odds over appointments*

By Emily Thurlow  
Staff Writer

MONSON – Although it's been several months since Monson finance committee's social checks and balances have been calculated, there is still a general difference of opinion as to who and how appointments should be made to the only appointed committee in town.

After Town Moderator Richard Guertin opted not to re-appoint James Pennington [who was chairman at the time] to the finance committee prior to the last town meeting, at the very next finance committee meeting, the board asked if Pennington was still interested in serving and the board self-appointed him back to the committee.

"With this action, the [committee] demonstrated that they are accountable to no one. We have a self-appointing committee accountable to no one...something is very wrong here," said Guertin.

The way the bylaws are written, he explained that while the finance committee can decide to fill vacant seats midterm, the appointment is only effective until the next annual town meeting, which means that Pennington would be required to be re-appointed by Guertin again.

"As moderator, I do feel it's my responsibility to maintain professionalism of the town meeting," said Guertin. "It's my hope that by the time the next annual town meeting or special town meeting there will be a potential bylaw up for consideration that will be acceptable to both he and the finance committee, to ensure that there will not be a continual 'back and forth.'"

But, in Pennington's opinion, the vote that took place

earlier this year on the proposed by-law that was defeated 98 to 12 – that would have allowed the moderator and selectmen to fill vacancies between meetings – speaks volumes to how residents feel about the change.

"The way that we have been doing things [on the finance committee] has been working effectively for years, why should we change things now? I think it's because some positions on the school department don't want to be questioned about how things are being spent and in turn was the reason why I was not re-ap-

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James Pennington  
Finance Committee

pointed [to the finance committee," said Pennington. He also expressed concern for trying to potentially fill vacancies on the committee.

"In the last 15 years we've had two [new] people volunteer. There's not a lot of interest for people to serve on this committee, that's why we have so many of the same names repeated over from committee to committee...where are we going to get more members from?" he said.

Another concern that was raised by some in the community when the contention first commenced was that members of the finance committee are not "required" to have a background in finances. According to the town's bylaw, there are no requirements

and/or standards for the volunteered position. And because it is a volunteered position, it isn't considered a something that requires a "job description." Town Administrator Gretchen Neggers explained that the select board – a completely elected committee – isn't required to give a "cause" for why an individual is or isn't re-appointed to a specific committee, but if residents are not pleased with that body's decision, they are held "accountable" by the regular election cycle.

That being said, Pennington said he takes great pride in his 17 years of service on the board and the fact that the committee isn't comprised solely of those with a financial background.

"We are a board with members from the Massachusetts Highway service, teachers, toll takers, businessmen and housewives and I take applaud the committee's diligence and work in streamlining the budget. We are not a body that serves just the businessman, we are a board that serves the farmers, the retired folks, the teachers...I think that when you limit a finance committee to people with a financial background you're leaving out a large group in the community," he said. As Pennington explained, to obtain a seat on the Monson Finance Committee that deals with a \$24 million budget, individuals need to be able to attend all of the meetings and have a willingness to serve; they are not required to submit a resume or cover letter.

"It's not an easy position to fill because it requires a large time commitment," he said. "That willingness to serve is invaluable. Even when someone is elected onto the school committee, they don't know the ins and outs of the position...it's a cooperative learning process," he said.