

February 25, 2012
Town Hall
8:30 am

Meeting was called to order at 8:30 am with the following members present: Kevin Smith (KS), Mike Serio (MS), Patti Affenito (PA), Joni Light (JL), Larry Morrison (LM), Mary Redetzke (MR), Prescott (Scott) Arndt (SA), Richard Volpe (RV) and Arnold Wilson (AW).

Attendees: Tom Creamer (TC), Mary Dowling (MD), Priscilla Gimás (PG), Angie Ellison (AE), Mary Blanchard (MB): all BOS members; Shaun Suhoski (SS), Town Administrator; Barbara Barry (BB), Finance Director; Bill Mitchell (BM), Principal Assessor; Linda Cocalis (LC), Board of Health Chair; Alyssa Rusiecki (AR), Board of Health Agent; Erin Jacques (EJ), Conservation Agent; Greg Morse (GM), Dept. of Public Works Director; Tom Ford (TF), Police Chief; Lenny Senecal (LC), Fire Chief; Don Miller, resident; Don Chaput, new BOH member; and David Barnicle, resident.

Opening statements from KS: Thank you your interest in the process; this meeting is designed to hear about the bigger issues in the FY 13 budget.

SS outlines his budget requests for FY 13 by discussing changes from last year's budget such as a decrease in the Tantasqua assessment of \$114,023, while Proposition 2 ½ may see a \$585,401 increase as well as a Chapter 70 Aid increase of \$329,100. He goes on to outline his reasoning for personnel increases in several departments. The overall increase over last year's budget is \$1,070,089.

TC states that the BOS have not had any budget discussions to date.

BM, Principal Tax Assessor, gives a synopsis of the past year's accomplishments: a positive outcome for the Town in four tax cases (saving the Town \$67,600 in tax money); timely completion of 2500 cyclical inspections (June 2012) with a cost savings of \$25,000; in-house inspections of sale reviews, building permit inspections and abatement inspections for a savings of \$39,375. He goes on outline the savings (\$1200/yr versus \$3500/yr) and efficiency possibilities by using a new software vendor, Vision Government Solutions, that promises better compatibility with the Town's current software, and he is requesting a three-year contract for revaluation services thereby locking in a rate for three years. Additionally, BM asks that the clerk's position be re-graded due to additional responsibilities and the workload presently handled by the clerk, and requests an assistant for 18 hours per week. TC states that he will not support any personnel increases until an in-progress work-flow study is completed by SS. KS asks BM if the pay range is adequate for a certified data collector; BM answers yes, in this market. BM goes on to support his request by saying that inspections are up 30% and that each renovation can, and each property addition does increase tax revenue to the Town. KS asks BM his opinion of the time frame for increases in property values; BM answers about 3 years.

Linda Cocalis, Chair of the Board of Health, outlines BOH accomplishments in 2011: a wide range of inspections that were completed in 2011 such as pools, food safety, and septic systems, and some BOH fees were increased (as much as 30%) which raised revenue that helped fund the BOH Revolving Fund. LC praises the Revolving Fund as enabling the emergency inspections of restaurants and lodging facilities in the aftermath of the tornadoes and the October 29 storm. AR supports request for additional personnel by pointing out that there are on-going statutory requirements for the BOH and states there is a need for more administrative assistance. MB says she hopes the work-flow study will be completed soon. KS applauds the fee increases that the BOH implemented in the previous year. MD asks how many hours the senior volunteers are working? AR answers about 61 ½; that is about 2-4 hours/week in slow periods. TC points out that some of these seniors are working for the Senior Municipal Service Program to reduce their tax bill by up to \$750. PG states that she cannot support any increases in town staff; austerity measures are necessary instead. KS asks again for a cost analysis study of the recycling center, saying that previous requests have been ignored. The number of households was incorrectly computed; the actual numbers are as follows, courtesy of Bill Mitchell, Principal Assessor:

- 2,968 single-family homes,
- 248 condominiums,
- 28 mobile homes,
- 78 two-family homes,
- seven three-family homes and
- 27 apartment complexes.

LC says a proposal from CME of \$5,000 will include a cost-benefit analysis, efficiency survey and opportunities to reduce leachate costs. KS asks how many bags have been sold; LC does not know. The stores order the bags to restock, but the re-orders are not tracked and the bags are not counted at the recycling center as they are thrown away. LC does say that approximately \$15,000 has been raised since November 2011. MR asks if contracts include the vehicles or if one needs to be purchased; SS answers yes, if DPW handles the leachate. The bid does include the vehicle. MR goes to ask if training and oversight will be provided to the DPW employee; SS states the hired employee would be specially chosen based on their skill set.

TF, Police Chief, is asked about a School Resource Officer (SRO). He responds that Daniel Durgin, Superintendent of the Tantasqua Regional School District, fully supports this position but will not make any funds available in the district budget. TF is asked if Brookfield officers can respond to calls at the Jr. or Sr. High Schools, he responds no; we have no mutual aid compact with any local towns. TF is requesting an increase of three officers; his staff is currently 18 FT and four dispatchers. Personnel has not increased in spite of the work load increasing two-fold. TF warns that level of services may drop if these positions are not approved. There is a brief discussion about the Blackboard Connect and ConnectEd notification systems. SS says a transfer fund request (about \$2,500) is forthcoming to implement this system throughout the town. At the request of MD, TF outlines the genesis and history of the School Resource Officer. A grant was received in 2002 for this position. In TF's opinion, the SRO was a very successful program. Anecdotally, the SRO was instrumental in preventing some serious incidents at the Jr. and Sr. High Schools. While the grant expired in 2005, TF is still committed to the school. Now, however, the patrol nearest the school is the one that will enter the school; there is no designated patrolman. KS asks if the SRO instructed classes; TF answers that the SRO did instruct the DARE program. KS says that need is clear, but how to fund? Is it possible

to share the financial burden between the five district towns? TF answers that it is difficult to ask others for funding. LM offers insight that three years ago the case was made to re-instate the SRO, and he was told that funding is not an issue. MB says the need is obvious for this position. MD believes responsibility fall on Sturbridge as the buildings are within town boundaries. KS asks if the reorganization of the department was beneficial, TF answers yes, but the day-to-day operations are expanding; also, any new staff would be responsible for some administrative duties. TC asks for the actual cost of a patrolman, it is \$58,000. TC re-states his position about any budget increases but, now says he sees the benefits of an SRO and may reconsider his position. PA asks for an estimate of the summer population of Sturbridge; TF says the estimate of 25,000 came from the tourist assn. KS asks if 2012 is a contract negotiation year, SS answers yes but the money is already in the budget. JL asks if any cost-benefit analysis has been done for a part-time SRO; TF answers that in his experience, part-time employees may not be fully committed to the town, are not as cost-efficient and are not always as well-trained or up to date in their training. BB makes the point that unemployment benefits will have to be paid for a part-time employee.

GM is asked if administrative personnel are covered by (non-union) collective bargaining agreements, answer is no. SS makes the point that the recycling center revenues will support a personnel increase (salary is approximately \$50,000 including benefits). KS asks if longer-term forecasts provide revenue to pay for this full-time person? SS answers yes, the requested increase is 4.2%, rather than last year's increase of 4.4%. GM does point out that if the bidder for the leachate contract does not have a self-pumper, a 10-wheeler may need to be purchased. GM goes on to say that this person is really needed, burying trash can take up to eight hours. KS asks if this person will be available to assist on other crews, answer is yes. GM warns of a possible cost related to the contracted amount of salt for this past winter. The discussion turns to the DPW building; GM says the size is adequate, but the building is not very efficient. Waste oil is burned for heat. LM asks how use of the hydraulic lift is prioritized. GM says the lift cannot lift every vehicle due to its age; school busses usually have priority. LM makes the point that this lift is a built-in inefficiency; GM states the lift is not unsafe because it can be locked once it is in the air. MR makes the point that garbage collection is always increasing, GM agrees and says that the economy-of-scale expected through the contract did not, in fact, come to fruition. BB interjects here that the contract will go to bid on July 1, 2012. MR asks if more vehicle service will need to be out-sourced because of the complexity of some repairs, GM answers only as necessary. MR asks if the bus mechanic uses his own tools, answer is yes.

RV leaves the meeting at 12:05pm.

TC asks about Chapter 90 monies and how they will be dedicated? TC also asks if there is a detailed road plan? KS asks the condition of the Class 1 roads in town. GM indicates that they are in good shape. TC interjects that the road plan was good for the town. MD asks for the ratings of the Champeaux Rd. and Farquhar Rd. bridges, GM answers 6,7. TC asks if a spreadsheet outlines the current road ratings? SS answers that the roads have been surveyed but not all data has been input yet; it will be ready within two weeks. LM asks if there is a range within each rating level for the bridges? GM answers that there is a range and goes to say that when a bridge is designed and completed, it is a 10, but that within the next year it may have fallen to an eight due to a number of factors. LM asks about concerns for the structural integrity

of town bridges with regards to a fully loaded fire truck, GM answers no, but points out that the Champeaux Road bridge design is no longer acceptable.

LC, Fire Chief, states that wages are level-funded this year because of contract negotiations. KS asks if the FinCom report has been reviewed and if any recommendations have been considered? TC responds that there was a lack of interest and the state of the economy took precedence. MD states that BOS did in fact speak with LC about the report but they felt that were a lot of policy recommendations from the FinCom. SS interjects that he spoke with LC about the report and the chief has initiated some changes in the department. MD asks if any rescheduling has been done to reduce over-time expenses? LC answers not really, makes the argument for the status quo because it is more efficient in his mind, there is a rotation for covering vacations and sick days, and that over-time does not decrease even personnel levels increase.

EJ, Conservation Agent, is requesting an administrative assistant for 18 hours per week. SS makes the point that there is no fee increase and therefore no revenue stream to fund even a portion of the salary. MB wants to see a completed work-flow study. AE feels the BOH and Conservation Departments want staff to provide administrative assistance but also customer service. TC again states he wants to see the completed work-flow study. PG agrees saying there is no justification for the position. KS asks EJ what new duties she is performing. EJ answers primarily MA wetlands responsibilities, Trails Committee personnel and work, Notice of Intent filings for trails work and amendments to existing Orders of Conditions for development in Town and related to trails work. MD provides a narrative of the reasoning of the BOS reassignment of the Trails Committee to EJ: since the majority of public lands are under the care, custody and control of the Conservation Commission, they felt that EJ had the expertise to oversee these lands and any associated activities. AW makes clear that the increased need for services was known with respect to the acquired lands. LM offers an assessment: time on task coupled with a minimum degree of expertise to get a first-class outcome. SS outlines reasoning for the staffing increase: regulatory requirements, trails work oversight, and open space management. EJ says that open space management is a bulleted item on her job description, but it now requires 50%-60% of her time. MD believes the lack of a work-flow study should not preclude addressing an inadequacy when it is apparent and recognizes the need to balance information requests with job requirements. MS makes the point that even after a study is completed the decision to fill positions usually fall to the TA and are based on professional opinion. MD asks EJ about the skills required for this position. EJ answers that she has not had the opportunity to outline the necessary skills yet. PG asks if EJ has used student interns? EJ answers yes and relates the past and present work that has been/is being completed: locations of storm drains and trails have been pinpointed with GPS coordinates, placement of bird houses, work on the forest cutting plan for Leadmine Mountain Conservation Land.

BB makes the argument that staffing levels for Conservation and Town Assessor are not adequate; job expectations and responsibilities have changed over time, and there are not enough hours in a day or a week to accomplish what is necessary. Discussion ensues regarding the timing of these staffing requests, the state of the economy and the fact that there are employees working more than 40 hours per week. MB believes Sturbridge does a good job of meeting the needs of its residents and does not see how current levels can be maintained without an increase. MB also makes the point that taxes always increase and it is an investment in the Town. PA

reiterates the need for the work-flow study and makes the point that once it is completed, staffing needs can be assessed from a financially-prudent perspective. PA feels that she cannot move forward without this information.

BB explains that if we do not fund the full Proposition 2 ½ % allowance, we will lose the difference. KS asks about the excess in sewer/water funds and whether they can be used to relieve some of the burden that last year's steep increases in fees have caused. KS does want to stay financially strong and believes it will be easy to damage our position if careful decisions are not made. He asks if 480,000 in expenses should be put in the line item budget, so if it is not approved at ATM, we will not lose our 2 ½% levy. SS and BB make the point that both the Ambulance Stabilization Fund and the Stabilization Fund are items which require 2/3 votes at ATM to change. KS agrees but does not know if the Town Moderator would allow the overall warrant article numbers because he usually likes to see only a 10% difference.

AW thinks the OPEB annual contribution should be \$100,000; SS agrees but feels the Town can afford only \$10,000 a year. SS goes on to say that we are ahead of most Massachusetts towns; very few are funding their OPEB accounts at all. Another point that he makes is the Town has about \$200,000 from MEMA and FEMA from storm clean-ups possibly coming prior to ATM and could be placed in the General Account. TC asks what the rebate to water/sewer rate payers may be; FinCom estimated the amount to be between \$40 and \$50 each. BB says that this \$200,000 was used each year to provide some rate relief but in recent years this money was used to help balance the budget. The point is made several times that while rates are going to continue to rise, the percentage increase each year will be smaller. BB also stresses the fact that like the Stabilization Funds, the Water and Sewer Account are an insurance policy against catastrophic loss/accident. MS asks if the rates are uniform, SS answers yes but does not know if this is the case in most communities.

KS asks that once that work-flow study is complete, a priority list is created of staffing needs by department and position.

PA asks about the hotel/motel taxes and the number of building permits that were issued last year: first, are FY 12 revenues included in these numbers, and second, is the revenue from the building permits reflected in the figures here? Both are answered no; the revenues for FY 12 are forthcoming and will be seen next year, and the fees for repairs/rebuilds were waived by the BOS. There is discussion about several programs that provide tax relief for residents: Senior Municipal Service Program and the Tax Assistance for Low-Income Senior and Disabled Citizens Program. These programs allow citizens the opportunities to lower their tax bills by performing service for the Town.

KS acknowledges Don Miller, resident, and asks if he has any questions. DM replies that he just wanted to see the process and would ask that the FinCom report be made available in a more timely fashion than two weeks before ATM.

Motion to adjourn at 3:37pm made by KS.