

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 6, 2012
Town Hall
7:00 pm

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm with the following members present: Kevin Smith (KS), Mike Serio (MS), Patti Affenito (PA), Mary Redetzke (MR), Larry Morrison (LM), Prescott (Scott) Arndt (SA) and Arnold Wilson (AW). Members absent: Rich Volpe (RV).

Motion to approve February 1, 2012 minutes as written made by MR, seconded by SA. Vote 7-0-0.

JL arrived at 7:05 pm.

Line Item Budget:

AW makes a motion to approve the Burgess Elementary School budgets of \$9,195,756.00. It is seconded by MS. MR begins the discussion about the collective salaries line for the Supt. KS makes the point that since the new Supt. May change the office structure, for now, the line will remain empty. AW says he did request of several Tantasqua District Representatives that any salary over \$100,000 be frozen; he does believe that the requests have been considered. MR asks about the upcoming article that proposes to balance and freeze the budget at last years' level; KS responds that if this article passed, the results would mean drastic measures would need to be taken by the school and the Town to get through FY 13. PA asks what is the process? KS answers that he has asked SS about 'Plan B', if this article passes. Once 'Plan B' is known, we will contact the school and advise them of the results. PA asks how the process will unfold; KS responds that for now the process will remain the same, but perhaps the budget should be looked at to figure out what the new budget would look like. AW thinks a second Special Town Meeting (STM) would be needed if this article passes just to propose the new budget, KS agrees but says that he would expect questions about the effect of this freeze (would the Library be open only two days a week). PA says the second STM would need to occur before July 1. MS makes the point that this article would be considered early at the Annual Town Meeting, KS agrees. PA says we can certainly request the article be considered out of order; KS agrees saying it would be unfortunate if this budget was passed, only to have this article passed later in the evening. PA asks if we would see 'Plan B' before it is sent to the school, KS answers yes. KS will talk to Mike Caplette, Town Moderator, about the sequence of these articles.

New Business:

There are two Reserve Fund Transfers to consider:

The first concerns Veteran's Benefits: a \$6,000 transfer is requested to cover payroll. The balance of this account is \$18,000. Information is read by KS about these benefits and how the monies are paid. If the Town pays the benefits, 75% is reimbursed to the Town by the State.

Motion to transfer \$6,000 from the Reserve Fund to the Veteran's Benefits Account (15432-57700) is made by MS, seconded by AW. Vote 8-0-0.

The second transfer request concerns the Blackboard Connect system that will allow mass alerts in the event of emergencies. The amount of \$2357.27 is requested to get this program started before the end of the year. The Police Dept. Purchase of Services Account now has approximately \$13,000. KS makes the point that if the funds are expended from the PD, there may be a shortfall later in the year. General consensus is to table this request.

KS wants to be sure all members are receiving communications from him. He runs through a list of e-mails that have been sent and reminds members that on 3/8, Master Plan Implementation Committee and the Economic Development Advisory Committee are scheduled. The Sturbridge Tourist Association and the Community Preservation Committee are scheduled on 3/27. MR asks about the March 20 meeting of the Tantasqua School Committee Public Hearing; KS will change the meeting location and the time.

KS wants to discuss the proposal from the BOS to form a joint committee for a staffing analysis. The proposed committee would consist of a member of the BOS, a member of the FinCom and a resident-at-large, three members in total. KS asks if there interest in serving on this committee? KS makes several points including that right now there is no timeline, and there are no stated goals. KS asks for interest; MR asks the effect on this budget. KS answers he is not sure. SA mentions that right now there is no senior member of town administration slated to be included. KS believes that members may be placed in awkward positions because they will look like they are fighting for their own, rather than fighting for the good of the Town. LM believes this arises from the Saturday meeting where the customary information desired was not available. LM goes on to say that the 'stem to stern' analysis has not been responsibly completed in less than a year and with this committee it is likely that daily work responsibilities and vacations could add up to a loss of 12 weeks of time toward a product; he does believe that 'nothing ventured, nothing gained', but that the work should be seriously done but only with a formal charge to the newly-formed committee; and that not only should a timeline be decided but also set high minimum expectations of the work product. Lastly, the work product needs to be actionable; a conversation needs to take place with the BOS about expectations in detail, and the expectations of the Finance Committee member, and everyone is entitled to an actionable work product. MS asks who the third member would be, KS answers a resident-at-large. LM goes to say that perhaps this idea is in lieu of the work-flow study from the TA. MS says that kind of study has not been done, that it is a good idea but wonders if then action should be suspended on all personnel requests that came up at the Saturday meeting. KS says that is up for discussion. MR asks where the Personnel Committee stands on this? MS answers that the committee is trying to move away from issues like this and focus on Human Resource issues rather than the budgetary advice. KS states that wage scales were disseminated and that the Personnel Committee would insert a new position in the existing pay scale. LM asked what the relationship would be between the members; what would the substance be for contract negotiations; would there be dove-tailing; he makes the point that it may appear that the Town is not negotiating in good faith, which it must. KS says there are fewer than 20 non-union positions. PA says that if this committee is formed the material they would consider is subjective rather than financial and she feels that the FinCom role is financial. PA would like the FinCom member to remember the

financial role. LM wants to see this idea vetted in detail before a decision is made. KS does not know how the BOS voted, if they voted, on this idea. PA is in favor of this committee but really wants know the FinCom role in the completion of the goals; she believes this has begun but now the analysis of the relevant information is needed. AW would like to hold this discussion until the parameters are more defined. He also recommends five members, rather than three since this is a big job requiring many hours. MR says this project would be comparable to the Fire Dept. Study that was completed last year. MS asks about having an outside consultant to streamline the process. The comment is made that the cost would be between \$50,000 and \$100,000 and KS thinks an effort is being made to reduce expenditures. MS wants to know how would possible members be identified? LM is comfortable with the current information. KS wants more details but agrees with the concept. LM asks if perhaps the public office holders be the minority; makes the residents three of five and also asks to whom the finished product would be delivered? He goes on to ask if this is a product of the BOS or the FinCom? Lastly, he asks, on what grounds will the product be accepted or rejected? AW shares an anecdote relating to his service on the Zoning Study Committee: the committee met regularly for some time but after some changes were suggested, the committee was disbanded. MS asks if this is perhaps avoidance. KS/PA both state the need for this but right now there is no clear way to discern priority in hiring. KS says that this year is no different in the way that these requests are coming forward; there is populism in the air that makes it seem different. MS makes the point that the TA can arrange to filter these requests and make his case to various committees; something more rigorous is desired.

Motion to adjourn at 7:51 pm.