

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 27, 2012
Town Hall
7:00 pm

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

Attendees: Shaun Suhoski (SS), Town Administrator; Tom Creamer (TC), Chair of the BOS and member of the Sturbridge Tourist Association (STA); Brian Amity (BA), Chair of the STA; Jim Leaming, member of the STA; Alyssa Ruscieki (AR), Board of Health Agent; John Degnan (JD), Board of Health member.

Reserve Fund Transfer:

The amount of \$7,453.38 is requested by the Fire Dept. for repairs to an ambulance. These repairs include the head gasket and another repair. Discussion occurs about the repairs, maintenance and oversight of this vehicle: KS asks how did oil leaks go un-noticed, SS cannot answer. KS asks about any overheating, SS says the Fire Chief should answer. Did SS have any warning that this request would be forthcoming? He answers, no. KS asks why the attached estimate is for \$5,814.94 when the request is almost \$2,000 higher. SS answers that an additional repair is necessary; SS does not remember what this repair is at the moment. KS asks if the head gasket repair has been completed, answer is no. KS asks if the Town has a maintenance policy for vehicles? SS answers that the Fire and Police Depts. Have their own policy; the dept. managers are responsible for the vehicle up-keep. AW asks if the maintenance logs are used, SS answers yes but he has not seen this particular log. KS would like to table this request as the Police Dept. budget has money enough to cover this request. A Reserve Fund Transfer can be reconsidered, if necessary.

SS-next Monday, he will meet with the Finance Director and they will be calculating changes to the Line Item Budget, namely Health Insurance and some other items. There is an anticipated drop in the insurance figure by about \$45,000. These changes will be presented to the BOS on Monday evening. He is also attending the April 3, 2012 meeting of the FinCom.

Annual Town Meeting Warrant:

Sturbridge Tourist Association: Discussion begins with BA stating that six of seven positions are currently occupied on the STA; the board is functioning with more cohesion and is moving in a better direction. KS observes that this year's budget is more targeted, with objectives having at will been identified and funds having been set aside. BA says that this year has been different; definitions have been completed and the budget was addressed as soon as it was received from the TA. KS asks on what projects will this money be spent? BA says that \$35,000 has been

earmarked for the Town Planner for an RFP regarding the Commercial Tourist District Plan. A figure of \$75,000 may be closer to the actual amount needed according to BA. KS asks what will \$35,000 pay for; BA answers that this plan has different components with differing costs, so this amount may be spread over several parts of the Plan. TC says that Planning may target certain components of the Plan based on what is approved at the ATM and that any funds from Betterment will complement funds from STA. He goes to say that the Town Planner wants to begin implementing this plan and needs to show the State what has been done to date and to encourage dove-tailing with the State's plan. According to TC, the State will not consider any request from the Town that does not include any design information. KS asks if Planning will use the \$35,000 to pay for components that equal that amount?

LM joins the meeting at 7:20 pm.

TC says that in referencing the by-laws, this action fits into the long-range development of the Tourist District; if unfunded at the ATM, perhaps hotel/motel revenue from last October's storm could be used instead and that these funds should be reinvested in the community. MR asks how does this fit with Article 12 Commercial Tourism District Plan; KS answers that the \$120,000 would be reduced by \$35,000. TC says that the BOS would make a substitute motion at the ATM.

Welcome/Information Center: BA is trying to negotiate a better and different agreement between the STA and the Chamber of Commerce. He says that Chamber may not be able to continue to support this endeavor but the STA must fund some type of Information Center. BA has doubled this year's Community Support request saying that last year's budget was hastily completed and that the Information Center was not given the attention it deserved in the previous budget. TC makes several comments about the STA working to conform to the intent of the Town by-law. BA points out that bills do not come from the Chamber in a timely fashion and are not very detailed; this is being addressed. KS asks how the figure of \$17,000 was decided and TC answers that the Chamber asked for \$20,000. KS asks how this money will be spent; TC/BA answer the hope is that the Information Center will be open more hours, particularly on the weekends. KS asks if some of these functions can move to the internet; BA shares that he spoke with the staff member in the center and was told that visitors want information on restaurants, OSV, general information; there is foot traffic in the building. MR asks if Chamber advertising still come out of this \$17,000? BA answers yes, but he is working to earmark the funds so that the advertising is used to promote Sturbridge. JL asks about the trial of extending hours last year in the center; BA found that not only did the Chamber have trouble finding staff to work, but it seemed that more requests for local information were fielded at lodging front desks. JL asks if a portion of this request will fund staffing; answer is yes, it will help keep the center open Saturday and Sunday for the year. KS asks if a written agreement exists that stipulates the operation of the Information Center; BA answers no, it was the Chamber's proposal to keep it open. KS asks if this proposal outlines how the requested funds will be allocated; BA says yes. TC says these funds are only paid when service has been rendered; JL agrees saying that there is documentation of last year's payments. KS asks BA for this information. JL says that co-mingling of funds was hard to avoid but attempts were made to keep Chamber advertising and Chamber information funds separate. BA again says that he is asking for more detailed invoices for service from the Chamber.

Special Events: BA states this could be any event by any organization. KS asks if there is an official definition; BA answers yes, it is very detailed.

Advertising/Marketing: BA says the STA is working on merging the Merchants of Sturbridge website and the STA's site so that any search will bring the user to the STA page. KS asks who maintains the site now; BA says Smith and Jones, but that STA owns both of the domain names. TC makes the point that the STA has complete control over content; BA says that all town merchants are represented on the site. JL asks why the STA site cannot be accessed through the Town site; TC says it can be but the IT personnel need to keep it updated. JL also asks what other content can be posted; BA says an events calendar that includes any special events in the area. BA hopes to increase the use of Facebook on the site. JL asks what else will be used to specifically promote the Town? BA answers that while one project has not come to be; the STA is still working with the Hartford Courant; there has been some success with this partnership. BA goes on to say that a brochure is being developed and will be distributed to area locations. JL asks if this will happen for FY12, answer is yes. JL asks how the success of this will be determined; BA answers that he is hoping to find a way to get concrete results. KS also says he would like to be able to measure the effectiveness of these strategies. KS also asks if the STA is driving the planning of the celebration of the 275th anniversary of the Town; BA answers yes and he also says that the STA has set aside funds for the event. LM asks several questions:

- 1) What is the difference between radio, TV, billboard, or internet advertising and event promotion and advertising? BA answers that general ads will be used for the Town and targeted ads will be used for special events.
- 2) Is the STA paying to be a member of the Chamber of Commerce, or paying dues? BA answers the STA has joined the Last Green Valley Association and the Quaboag and Blackstone Valley Chambers of Commerce to broaden their scope.
- 3) What would a potential visitor received about Sturbridge if they request information from the State, apart from OSV information? BA answers that postcards and brochures will be printed and placed in various locations.

LM goes to ask will \$25,000 really allow all this to be accomplished; BA hopes it will be by piggybacking on other organizations.

Route 20 Restrooms: KS asks if this facility falls under the purview of the STA; BA answers only funding; but it is shared with Betterment. KS also asks who maintains the facilities; TC says that the BOS has directed the TA to have the DPW address any maintenance issues that arise. TC goes to say that the cleaning will be done through the Town contract.

Community Support: KS notes that the intent in this line item has changed this year; BA says while there is no clear use yet perhaps a trolley service can be supported or the promotion of Sturbridge events. TC says that perhaps a gateway sign could be funded. MS asks if any thought has been given to an automated kiosk; BA says this has been considered for remote site such as Roy Rogers or the former Hebert Candy building. AW requests that the Crossroads Café sign be removed or re-opened, BA states this is under Chamber control. KS applauds the work that has been done thus far.

KS makes a motion to approve Article 10 Sturbridge Tourist Association as written, AW seconds. Vote 8-0-0.
SA leaves the meeting at 8:40 pm.

Line Item Budget:

Board of Health: Several comments by RV are inaudible. There is some discussion about getting all information about budget requests from the dept. heads before the budget book is printed. RV says that seven hours per week are being requested. A request with documentation was submitted to the TA for this increase but it was denied. AR says this position would be for a file clerk for one day a week. KS asks if this is a separate position, answer is yes. RV says the salary would be approximately \$4,300 per year. AR makes the point that with the increases in fees, the cost of this position is covered and funds are left over. RV points out that the TA intimated that if the revenue was raised, the position may be approved. KS asks if the fee revenue goes into the General Fund or the Revolving Fund; AR answers the General Fund. RV suggested that AR make the request even if not approved because at least it will be in the queue for next year. JD points out that this work must get done but that the most highly paid staff person is left to do it. KS asks how the seven hours will be allocated in the dept.? AR answers that one hour a day will be added to the current Administrative Assistant's position (four days per week) and a second position of seven hours for one day a week will be filled. JD points out that many duties are neglected because there is just not enough time and staff. Discussion ensues regarding tight tanks; their need for frequent inspection, the lack of documentation received by the Agent from property owners documenting pumping of tanks, and the cost of these systems. LM says that in not funding this position the Town is essentially over-paying for the services rendered. KS asks about the senior citizens that assist the Agent; AR answers that there are three and they work 61 ½ hours per year. JD says that they try to cover as many hours as possible but it is not enough. RV restates that there are funds for this position and thinks it should be supported. KS says that the TA has said that there will be changes in some of the line items of the budget. AW says he would support a motion from RV to add \$4,851 to the salaries/wages line.

RV makes a motion to approve line 116 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$18,369, AW seconds.

More discussion: MR says she is uneasy about this process even though some figures are going to change; she would like to consider these requests at the end of the budget process when final numbers are more certain and adding positions or approving funding should not be done piecemeal. RV/KS both say that only the Planning position has been added; the DPW position was already in the budget. AW agrees with MR but says that the FinCom can always reconsider. RV again says that he supports this position. MS agrees with MR: the need is documented but the TA did not agree. MS would like to hear the TA's rationale. MR would like to see additional information from the TA, but does not want to become the 'appeals court' for every budget request that is not reflected in the TA's budget. KS begins a discussion about whether the budget is being allocated in the best possible way; MS says the best is the enemy of the good. RV says asking the TA for all budget-related information is fair since we do not now see the actual requests from the departments. MS would rather see two differing numbers in the book, rather

than to edit on the fly. KS agrees with MR about being the appeals court and wants to have a philosophical discussion. MS asks if the board has been consistent in the past?

Vote for the existing motion is 3-3-1.

RV says that line 119 has increased because pool testing supplies need to be purchased.

RV makes a motion to approve line 117 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$2,270, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

RV makes a motion to approve line 118 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$2,050, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

RV makes a motion to approve line 119 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$1,320, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

RV makes a motion to approve line 114 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$0, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

RV makes a motion to approve line 115 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$58,538, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

Line 116 will be held.

Community Health: it is level funded; KS says Harrington Preventive Care will be changed to Community Health Care. RV makes a motion to approve line 120 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$4,000, MR seconds. Vote 6-0-1.

Inspections/Testing:

RV makes a motion to approve line 121 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$0, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

RV makes a motion to approve line 122 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$13,390, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

RV makes a motion to approve line 123 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$0, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

RV makes a motion to approve line 124 (pg. 11, Line Item Budget) for \$3,000, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

MR asks if the lake association tests Cedar Lake Beach; AR answers that both the lake association and the Rec. Dept. do the testing. AW says the funds come from Betterment.

Landfill/Recycling Center: KS asks for a breakdown of the line items in the purchase of services portion of the budget between the landfill and the recycling center. AR goes through the lines: several lines apply only to the landfill such as cover material, well monitoring, leachate and consulting engineer/BMPs, among others. Other lines apply to both facilities. MR asks about the timeline for the completion of engineer's proposal; AR says the process will continue because there is not enough money for all the tests to be done; MR asks if \$7,500 is enough, AR says yes. JD says he hopes that this will be a one-time cost but this report needs to be completed first; the engineer will investigate the increase in the flow of the leachate and topography of the

landfill. It is hoped that the leachate flow can be reduced. When will the final report be received; AR says the go-ahead has not been given to begin. There are several inaudible comments. AR explains that there is one FTE, and three part-time employees. The overtime line is for the DPW employee that works at the Landfill because he is a union employee. RV states that the leachate line will increase by \$35,000 based on the new contract. MS asks if the figure pays for engineering or removal; answer is removal. JD says the leachate can be put through the wastewater plant but this takes up capacity that would otherwise be available; KS notes that the plant has excess capacity. MS asks if the leachate went to the same location; JD answers yes, but it was hauled by a private company.

JD asks to make a few comments about the Board of Health: think it should be re-named the Board of Environmental Program Enforcement because 99% of their work is inspections and enforcement: food safety, pools, septic systems, well inspections. At the national level, 10 essential public health services have been identified. Sturbridge does two of these services well: 1) enforcement of public health laws/regulations, 2) maintain a competent public health and medical workforce (although we have no nursing staff). Lastly, most Massachusetts towns focus only on enforcement, not the health side of public health.

Line Item Budget:

Finance Committee: LM would like to highlight the fact that the salaries/wages line is for the recording secretary, not any of the sitting members.

KS makes a motion to approve lines 12, 13 and 14 (pg. 2, Line Item Budget) for \$5,711, MS seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

Town Counsel:

KS makes a motion to approve line 30 (pg. 3, Line Item Budget) for \$80,000, MS seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

RV leaves the meeting at 10:05 pm.

Town Administrator: JL reports that information was received from the TA; this figure includes the merit pool incentive.

JL makes a motion to approve line 8 (pg. 1, Line Item Budget) for \$8,700, MS seconds. Vote 6-0-0.

JL makes a motion to approve line 9 (pg. 1, Line Item Budget) for \$2,700, MS seconds. Vote 6-0-0.

JL makes a motion to approve line 10 (pg. 1, Line Item Budget) for \$1,500, MS seconds. Vote 6-0-0.

JL makes a motion to approve line 11 (pg. 1, Line Item Budget) for \$2,500, MS seconds. Vote 6-0-0.

Unclassified:

Two lines are being held, Group Insurance (167) and Insurance Blanket (175). JL says that the figure for line 175 is \$270,000; and the new figure for line 167 will be available by the end of the week. JL makes a motion to approve line 175 (pg. 14, Line Item Budget) for \$270,000, MR seconds. Vote 6-0-0. JL says that Central Purchasing is revising the gas line (179) and the new figure should be available by the end of the week.

Annual Town Meeting Warrant:

KS asks members to read the warrant and send any questions. He goes to say that there is some concern regarding the approval of increased hours in the Planning Dept. Some have said that the FinCom should only be making decisions based on information in the budget book. A precedent is being set since we are circumventing the existing process; in the past, personality conflicts have prevented requests from being heard but this has restricted the flow of information and resulted in the FinCom not having pertinent information. MS says that there are other examples in the past. KS reads a question: "Is it appropriate for us to adjust positions that were not considered via the budget process?" He goes to say that the process is flawed; much information has not been forwarded. It is a sin of omission-the board really should be aware of all that is presented by the Dept. Heads. MS asks if both the Planning board position and the BOH position were discussed at the Saturday meeting; answer is only the BOH position. The Town Planner was not present.

There is more general discussion regarding this issue: the board really needs to understand the entire picture; it is OK to be involved but should there be a process. LM makes the point that if the board has all of the information then the answer is in the information and that the townspeople want the FinCom's best advice and that only comes when we have full information. MS asks if there should be flexibility or rigidity in the process? LM points out that the Zoning Board of Appeals never sets precedent; what they do is for that instant only; also says the FinCom can do that as well. KS wants to take a view of how the pie is divided and make decisions on how best to allocate money; this is the FinCom role as he sees it. LM thinks the board can follow the ZBA example since the BOS vote is also listed in the warrant and the rationale is provided. MS says that each vote is policy setting in some way, KS and LM both agree. But KS does not agree with the policy making term since the FinCom does not set the day-to-day operations, they look at the general scope of how decisions affect the ATM and budget. KS truly believes that the FinCom is the advisory committee to the Town Meeting body. MS voices support for MR's position of evaluating at the end of the budget process; KS says we can always reconsider a vote. LM believes the value of a position needs to be known/defined but the rest is up to the TA. KS thinks this is a topic for the Finance Committee Report.

The discussion shifts to consideration of the term 'directive' that was used in a communication to the BOS regarding the TA. KS relates that the TA is going to be present on April 3, 2012 and a list of questions has been sent to him. LM hope the BOS and the TA do not think the FinCom was trying to reach over their shoulders and mix in their work. MS/KS want to hear the reasons behind budget decisions. KS also thinks this could be a topic for the Finance Committee Report.

Motion to adjourn at 10:36 pm.