

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 22, 2012
Town Hall
7:00 pm

These minutes were approved as written on April 17, 2012.

Meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm with the following members present: Kevin Smith (KS), Joni Light (JL), Patti Affenito (PA), Mary Redetzke (MR), Rich Volpe (RV), Larry Morrison (LM), Prescott (Scott) Arndt (SA) and Arnold Wilson (AW). Members absent: Mike Serio (MS).

Invited Guests: Dave Lindberg (DL), Building Inspector; Jean Bubon (JB), Town Planner; Erin Jacques (EJ), Conservation Agent; Becky Plimpton (BP), Library Director; Dolores Courtmanche, Library Trustee; Greg Morse (GM), DPW Director.

Audience member: Dave Barnicle, Chair of Conservation Commission and resident.

Building Commissioner: LM begins the meeting with some general comments and says that he invited the professionals with whom he spoke to be present this evening to answer any questions or offer explanations, if necessary. He goes on to read a portion of the budget message from the TA: "The budget would also increase the hours of the Building Commissioner from 21 to 28 per week to accommodate growing service demands and a directed effort to enhance Zoning Enforcement and to document same." LM points out that this is an elegant way of saying that the Town is not keeping up. First is the Building Inspector (Commissioner), LM says that inspections are a process, not an event, since many projects require more than one inspection. DL is responsible for inspecting the on-going renovation at Burgess Elementary School, the former Basketville property and many others. LM states that in 2008, the hours for this position were cut to twenty per week with the expectation that all the current responsibilities would be completed. DL says a house may need 5-6 inspections before a permit is issued. He goes on to say that inspections also vary in length and detail. KS asks how much time DL spends on zoning issues, DL is not sure. DL also says that he can see violations in his travelling around town and sometimes they are reported to him. The administrative assistant works 20 hours/week. Recently, the Building Commissioner has been given the added responsibility of being the ADA coordinator for the Town. PA asks if this position has any guidelines or regulations; are there any goals or quantitative measures? KS thinks there was an ADA survey completed in the recent past; but DL does not have the book. PA asks if other inspectors visit Burgess, DL answers that the Town can do any inspections it deems necessary. PA asks how much time DL spends at Burgess, answer not sure, does not keep track. PA thinks future projects should have the costs built in for time reimbursement to Town employees so that these costs and time are not put into the regular line budget. These are extraordinary costs that do not relate to regular time on the job and would only move forward to artificially inflate their budget. AW disagrees saying that even at 40 hours per week the inspector was stretched thin. KS asks how many of the 426 inspections were for additions or houses; DL does not keep track. LM says that since all inspectors are paid piecework fees, it is difficult to figure out the worth of each permit. LM goes on to say that

some inspections can be contentious and require law enforcement assistance. DL states that he fully believes that he will work 28+ hours per week if the increase is approved. JL asks if the position was cut in 2008, answer yes. JL asks if this was due to a reduction in permits, again, yes. LM states that the cut was made in response to a decrease in permits but a full understanding of the results was missing. KS asks if DL will spend these seven hours on Zoning and ADA; DL says no, they will be spent on all three areas of responsibility. MR asks how many hours did the full-time person work? LM/KS both say the 37 ½ that any town employee would work. PA does think the position was cut because of the decrease in permits. DL points out that permits are not easier now since technology and materials are changing.

LM makes a motion to approve line 80 (pg. 8, Line Item Budget) for \$46,486, AW seconded. Vote 7-1-0.

LM makes a motion to approve line 81 (pg. 8, Line Item Budget) for \$17,566, AW seconded. Vote 8-0-0.

LM makes a motion to approve line 82 (pg. 8, Line Item Budget) for \$830, AW seconded. MS asks about any software to streamline the process of completing applications, answer is no. Vote 8-0-0.

LM makes a motion to approve line 83 (pg. 8, Line Item Budget) for \$1,000, AW seconded. Vote 8-0-0.

LM makes a motion to approve line 84 (pg. 8, Line Item Budget) for \$300, AW seconded. Vote 8-0-0.

Library: there are 14 staff members. LM points out that at least 19% of the Library appropriated-budget must be protected to preserve certification and remain in the CW/MARS system. LM says that time off needs to be covered, staffing levels needs to be maintained for various reasons: 'shop-lifting', personal safety. LM references the article about libraries operating small bookstores in the buildings. BP says that some titles fetch up to \$20 on Amazon, whereas the same title may only sell for a few dollars at the semi-annual book fairs. The current amount raised through the on-line service and three book fairs so far is \$4629; these funds have been used to purchase items such as Nooks and Kindles. RV asks if there has been a rise in the use of and requests for e-reader devices, answer is yes. KS asks if the new gutters are wood? BP says that they are wood-look vinyl. MR also asks if the ceiling has been fixed completely, answer is yes.

LM makes a motion to approve lines 62 and 63 (pg. 6, Line Item Budget) for \$28,731, seconded by AW. Vote 8-0-0.

LM makes a motion to approve lines 139-144 (pg. 12, Line Item Budget) for \$371,882, seconded by AW. Vote 8-0-0.

Conservation: LM reports that the Dept. Head will be increased by 2%, and a new 18 hour position has been requested by the TA. EJ says that in 2007 her position was full-time with a 10 hour per week recording secretary, since that time there has been a 75% increase in the amount of open space acquired by the Town and other conservation land responsibilities have also increased for the dept. EJ lobbied the former TA for an open space assistant that would assist with the day-to-day activities for open space. KS asks how many hours the open space asst. and the recording sec. work each week, answer is 10 for each position. The funds for the secretary

come from wetland filing fees since the work that is done falls under the umbrella of the Wetland Protection Act. EJ states that the open space asst position would drop to seven hours per week if the new position is approved. KS asks how EJ sees the new position complementing her office; EJ has not really developed a firm job description but would like more technical expertise such as forestry, or biology. KS thinks that EJ's role should be one of oversight, that tasks should be delegated when possible. EJ says she is looking for an Executive Assistant. KS asks if this would be an Asst. Conservation Agent? EJ answers yes, but wants mostly administrative assistance with some technical background. KS asks if there is a likelihood of filling this position? EJ says absolutely, possibly a student or recent graduate looking for experience. KS asks if this position is filled, on what duties or issues would you like to see them focus? EJ answers Recreational Trails Master Plan, Open Space Master Plan, wetland permitting tasks. KS asks how would this position fit in to current rotation of staff? EJ sees statutory deadlines as the most important in the short term; but would also like more support for field work and in procurement with regards to trails work. LM stated that the townspeople are not receiving full value because department heads and their staffs must jump from task and project to task and project, since they are understaffed. The population keeps growing and state and federal regulations keep being added, and performance expectations go up. There is always more needing to be done. Ironically, then, when the townspeople approve increases in staffing and compensation to recognize the stepped up responsibilities, the people will obtain both the full value they are now not receiving and, further, gain the value associated with the funding increments. As it stands, the Town is much behind the curve and losing ground by the day. KS really would like EJ to flesh out a clear job description; now the lack of same is a real impediment to the approval of this request. SA asks if EJ feels the TA did his due diligence with regards to this position; EJ answers yes, he really sees the strain this dept is under currently. PA asks if liability insurance covers the use of trails, JL answers yes. MR asks how much time EJ spends at the High School with students and training? EJ is invited about twice a year to lecture a class and assist with the Enviro-Thon. She goes to say that 50% of her time is devoted to private road issues. LM makes a motion to approve lines 40-45 for \$84,459, seconded by AW. Vote 7-1-0.

Planning: LM reports that the Design/Review Committee has no budget. JB says that a \$52,000 grant, for which she applied, funded the Design/Review Guide Book. JB reports that the ZBA budget is level-funded and pays for training. LM says this is the sixth consecutive year that an increase in staff has been requested; he asks what is not being accomplished? JB says that the administrative assistant works 23 hours per week. Evening meetings are carved out of those hours each week. JB says this works well but the position really requires more than 23 hours a week. JB goes on to list some of the tasks that could be accomplished: by-law drafting, a housing plan, grant writing, GIS. KS asks if JB knows how many grants were missed because an application could not be submitted, answer is no, she does not know. JB goes to say that she was hired for her GIS expertise but obviously does other tasks as well. RV asks if JB submitted her comments to the TA, she answers yes. LM reports on a missed opportunity regarding the wireless overlay communication district: an applicant approached the Town but ultimately was denied the permit. KS asks if this \$8,500 cost is a one-time expense, answer is yes. SA asks if a fee would have been paid to the Town, JB says yes, about \$25,000 a year. PA asks if JB uses interns. JB would like to but has not for the past two years; it is too difficult and requires too much time. JL asks about the purpose of this lost siting opportunity; JB says the applicant

needed to fill in coverage gap. She goes on to say that the Town really needs to be more proactive in this area, since it will allow the Town to decide where it wants to site equipment and it also signals that the Town is prepared to accept new technology. JB relates that any applicant that is denied can appeal to the State (Department of Telecommunications and Energy). AW relates that the current overlay map was the reaction to the previous request for a tower.

LM makes a motion to approve line 46 (pg. 4, Line Item Budget) for \$0, seconded by AW. Vote 8-0-0.

LM makes a motion to approve line 47 (pg. 4, Line Item Budget) for \$71,062, seconded by AW. Vote 8-0-0.

LM makes a motion to approve line 48 (pg. 4, Line Item Budget) for \$24,593 seconded by AW. PA asks how the DPW vehicle lift repair will be funded, what funds will still be available or become available if the Planning expenses were increased. Vote 8-0-0.

MR rescinds her second of the previous motion, the motion dies for lack of a second. LM makes a new motion to approve line 48, AW seconded. Vote 7-1-0.

LM makes a motion to approve line 49 (pg. 4, Line Item Budget) for \$29,920, seconded by MR. Vote 7-1-0.

LM makes a motion to approve lines 50-52 (pg. 4, Line Item Budget) for \$5,386, seconded by MR. Vote 8-0-0.

LM would like to request that all departments furnish original calculations for budgets beginning now and for the future. KS agrees and adds all budget items including warrant articles and fund transfers.

Department of Public Works: PA reminds the board that all lines have been voted except for the salaries and wages line. PA wants to discuss the vehicle lift and wants GM to prioritize the two requests from DPW: the DPW person and a new lift. GM says the dept. needs to cover the trash every Friday; the current person is doing a good job and knows how to run the equipment. GM goes to say that a full-time skilled person would allow other tasks to be accomplished. SA asks if this person should actually be paid out of the Recycling Center, GM says no, should stay under the DPW budget. PA asks about the vehicle lift: is it safe? GM says it is safe but it should be replaced soon. GM does not have a new/current estimate but would like a 4-point lift. GM thinks the cost would be between \$50,000 and \$75,000. AW wants to see the lift requested in Capital Planning; MR agrees saying it is not a want, it is a need and that the biggest/strongest lift should be requested. PA asks GM if he still thinks the standing requests are more important than the vehicle lift; GM answers yes. PA makes a motion to approve line 99 (pg. 9, Line Item Budget) for \$613,695, AW seconds. Vote 6-2-0.

New Business:

CPC meeting will be on April 2, so their information will not be ready for next week.

Warrant Articles: the deadline was March 15. Perhaps it will be ready next week.

KS has received a letter from the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen stating the FinCom has no authority to request a Plan B budget from the TA. KS makes motion to send another request, seconded by JL. Vote 8-0-0.

Old Business:

PA spoke with the Town Clerk and the issue around the requested raise has been resolved because the Town Clerk accepted that a 17% raise was paid with the FY05 and FY06 budgets. PA cannot connect with the Tree Warden. PA has new information since speaking with the Veteran's Agent: the benefits line (138) is likely to change due to new beneficiaries. The Agent says this line could be as high as \$60,000. The Agent requested \$25,000 but thinks better figure is \$28,500. PA makes a motion to approve lines 132-138 (pg. 12, Line Item Budget) for \$37,030, seconded by MR. Vote 8-0-0.

PA goes on to say that she cannot support the SRO position. She states that the summer is not the busiest season for the Town, therefore this is not a reason to vote for this position. She goes on to say that the other towns have not been consulted, either by advocates of this position or by the BOS as a body; this is not just a discussion of shared expense but one of necessity and that neither the School Administration, nor the School Committee nor the other towns seem to think it is a necessity. KS says that the chair of the Tantasqua School Committee approached him and asked why the SRO position has not been requested of them. Also, it seemed as if the committee would be open to the request. PA points out that the other district towns have not been consulted. LM says that the other towns certainly did not mind the benefit of the Sturbridge grant for this position. PA asks why the school is not concerned, LM responds that if this is requested, it will be perceived that they are presiding over a problem.

Motion to adjourn at 11:12 pm.