

Sturbridge Finance Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
April 3, 2012  
Town Hall  
7:00 pm

Approved as

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

Audience: Shaun Suhoski (SS), Town Administrator; Mary Blanchard (MB), Selectman; Tom Creamer (TC), Selectman; Mike Caplette (MC), Town Moderator.

Motion to approve March 20 minutes as amended made by MR, MS seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

KS-begins a discussion about the clerk's hours; with the submittal of the hours for the month of March, there is only about \$500 left until the end of the fiscal year. Since there has not been a clerk for quite some time, it was difficult to project the time needed to complete the minutes. AW says that the committee should approach the TA about a reserve fund transfer and then put a proper number of hours in next year's budget. AW makes a motion to approve a Reserve Fund Transfer in the amount of \$575, MS seconds. LM makes the point that the FinCom would not approve a dept. budget with an open-ended figure, so the committee certainly cannot approve the same for itself. KS figures that \$575 should cover the number of meetings still to go this year at 5 hours per meeting. MS says that since there are a finite number of meetings left this year, the amount of money is not really open-ended. Vote 7-0-0.

AW says a Reserve Fund Transfer is also necessary for the Center Office Bldg. copier. AW makes a motion to approve a Reserve Fund Transfer in the amount of \$7,325.32, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

KS begins the budget discussion with a set of answers from the BOS to FY13 questions from the FinCom. SS states the BOS finalized their budget recommendations the previous evening. KS asks about the Council on Aging Purchase of Services section of the budget that includes \$1,000 for transportation of seniors to and from Town Meetings and Elections. KS asks how this figure was derived, says that Town owns buses and aside from paying for the time, the cost of this should be pretty low. SS says that since this figure is for next year, they are exploring options. The use of Town resources is being explored first; but he goes on, what if there are no volunteers? SS also says the Senior Center Director received a reasonable quote from RRI (Rehabilitative Resources, Inc.) for van service. MR asks if the Town has any liability arising from this transportation, answer is no since the Town insurance covers this.

**Annual Town Meeting Warrant:** KS asks if any more versions of the warrant may be forthcoming, SS answers yes, the BOS added an article last evening. But there will be no

substantive changes as the figures are close to being finalized. SS goes to say it is possible that the order of the articles will be changed and Article 29 Citizen Petition – FY 13 Budget will be moved up and placed behind Article 3 Town Budget, thereby becoming Article 4. The reasoning for this change is a desire to have the same voters place their votes on both articles, to avoid having many fewer voters voting on this article later in the meeting. KS asks what happens if both of these articles pass, SS answers that Town Counsel is reviewing the answer to this question. TC says that they could not both pass, KS disagrees. SS says that since the language of this article is correct, it must be considered at ATM. AW asks if the budget in Article 3 would be voted, KS answers yes. AS goes on to say but he would then expect many holds as the article is read, and asks if it would it be more expedient to vote the Citizen's petition first? SS answers that is a possibility. KS reads the article language saying that this is not the actual FY 12 budget; it does not account for debt obligations, cherry sheet offsets, Prop 2 ½ levy limit and contractual agreements with unions that must be met. At this point the final order for the warrant articles will be set by next week.

**FinCom Questions for the FY 13 Warrant:** KS states that the Free Cash balance prior to ATM is \$591,831.02. He also says that if the two Free Cash articles pass (Articles 13 and 18) the remaining balance will be \$192,014.02. SS tells the committee that an article on the warrant for the Special Town Meeting will seek to rescind the prior approval of between \$275,000 and \$300,000 for tornado-related debris removal and clean-up; also this possibility was expected from the beginning. SS says also that the Town will receive approximately \$130,000 from the State in re-imbursments from FEMA. The total savings could be close to \$300,000.

**Article 11 Betterment:** AW will attend the Betterment Committee meeting tomorrow. SS says there may a couple of changes to the item in the Betterment budget.

**Article 12 Commercial Tourist District Plan:** SS says he has no knowledge of any engineering design for Route 20. He goes to say that this article does include information from the Central Mass. Regional Planning Commission and looks at the corridor from New Boston Rd. to Route 148. Also, MassDOT has sent correspondence that indicates that Route 20 from Route 49 west to the Route 84 interchange is scheduled to be resurfaced. The TA and the BOS sent a letter in response with input about a center line with plantings and rumble strips. AW says that there is a finalized design plan that includes some of the features that SS mentioned. SS reiterates that the DOT letter indicates that only resurfacing is planned for Route 20.

**Article 15 Ambulance Stabilization Fund:** There is some discussion about the actual versus desired amount of money in the Stabilization Funds and the Free Cash accounts. Historically, the Town keeps seven percent of the total Town budget in these accounts. If that percentage is met, the amount on hand will be approximately \$1,929,278. This should allow the Town to be prepared for any unexpected events.

**Article 16 OPEB Trust Fund:** SS shares that the Finance Director has told him that this fund is becoming an actuarial-based assessment and that while costs may go up, the increases may be moderated. MR asks if KS is satisfied with the \$10,000, answer is yes. SS has sent this article to the Town Moderator to see if the language is appropriate. KS would just like to see tighter

language with respect to the amount so voters will have a better idea of the sums being discussed.

**Article 18 Tax Rate Relief:** KS speaks to the historic name of articles that use Free Cash as ‘Utilization of Free Cash’ rather than ‘Tax Rate Relief’; SS just used wording that went straight to the use of the money. LM asks if the text will explain the use for the funds, KS answer yes. LM goes on say that this is a record of our actions and there should be consistency between years. MS asks why shouldn’t the title be transparent; why should the text box explain the intent of the article? KS asks SS if any of this money will be used for operating expenses, SS answers no.

**Article 19 Proposed Zoning Amendment – Historic Commercial District:** KS asks if SS knows when an answer may be forthcoming from Planning about this article, SS answers no.

**Article 22 General Bylaw: Regulation of Collection Receptacles:** KS thinks the language should be clearer as there seems to be confusion around the type of receptacles; some thought trash or recycling and others thought Good Will. The intent is for clothing. KS asks about the visual component of this article; how far is far enough to be allowable? SS says power lies with the granting authority. There is some discussion about to whom this would apply, and whether or not it would apply to the Town. KS and TC have differing views on whether the Town is required to conform to the bylaw. KS brings up the size of a container; it could the size of an 18-wheeler trailer. SS agrees but says this is a process and it will be revisited as necessary. MR asks if this would apply to Hobbs Brook; TC says that is not a public right-of-way, KS disagrees. MR asks about the church across from the Town Hall that has a receptacle; TC maintains that the church is exempt since it is a non-profit entity. There is agreement that all entities should adhere to the spirit of this bylaw.

**Article 25 Amend Regional School District Agreement:** KS is not willing to cede authority to a committee; he maintains that this will result in a power shift away from the Town to the Tantasqua Regional School Committee. KS also says that the Sturbridge representatives to the Regional School Committee are elected to represent the interests of the Town with this committee but it seems that they come to represent the interests of the Regional School committee to the Town instead. TC says the BOS voted in favor of placing the article but voted 3-2 to take no action.

**Articles 26, 27 and 28 Acceptance of Roads:** KS asks if the DPW has agreed that these roads meet the necessary requirements; SS says that final answers will be available after April 10. There are just a few items left to be finished.

**Article 29 Citizen Petition – FY13 Budget:** KS asks if a general idea in percentages has been considered about how the budget will be changed if this article passes; SS says the BOS and TA feel that the Town budget needed to be finished first along with the warrant and then it would be addressed. KS says that questions from the floor should be anticipated and how will they be answered? SS says that obviously lay-offs would occur; the decisions would come down to the numbers. KS asks what are the numbers? His calculations say about \$600,000 would have to be come out of the budget, since there are certain items that must be funded. He goes on to ask if

SS has a sense of the actual number; SS responds he is looking at it. He goes on say that the article is misplaced, and calls out the authors on their changes to the budget. KS thinks we should be to say that in order to meet this number, we need to remove \$1,600,000 from the FY 13 budget. LM asks SS what if a citizen says they do not know which way to vote because they do not know the benefit of their vote? SS answers that he will answer when the question is asked at the ATM. TC interjects here that this discussion is unnecessary since the TA will furnish this later. LM and TC exchange comments about how to reach the figure in the article. LM maintains that since this has never happened before that a plan should be in place before the finance book is printed, TC believes the committee can make an informed decision about this article for the voters. There is an exchange between KS and TC about the process this budget has followed; KS maintains that in the past, there has been cooperation between the BOS and the FinCom. He feels this year is different; requests have been deflected rather than addressed. LM asks if SS has a list of cuts now or will have one before the book is printed; SS responds that he will not engage in scare tactics but of course, he has given this some thought. KS just wants a figure from the TA, asks what if the proposed amount that goes to the ATM from the FinCom is higher than the actual figure? SS has met with the Finance Director to discuss how to meet this possibility. KS again just would like a number with which to start, and he would like consensus on this figure. KS states that this is an unfortunate circumstance and no one believes this is a fiscally-responsible article. He asks SS again when a figure will be available, SS answers next week.

**Article 30 Citizen Petition – Time of Town Meetings/General Bylaw Amendment – Day of Town Meeting:** KS asks if it has been confirmed that a Saturday would work for the ATM? SS seems to think it would be difficult to accommodate given the number of activities that take place in the school auditorium.

**Article 31 Citizen Petition – Purchase 310 Main St.:** MR asks if this article passes, does the Town have the right to inspect and possibly negotiate the purchase price? KS responds that the ATM can lower the price through a substitute motion.

**Article 68 Re-Allocation of Funds – Sturbridge Tourist Association:** SS make several inaudible comments about the Commercial Tourist District Plan. KS asks if this Plan is rejected at the ATM, then is the \$15,000 wasted? SS cannot answer this question. KS asks if this is encumbered for next year, where will it get put as there is no account for the CTDP. SS thinks it can go back to STA, KS counters saying it actually goes back in for re-allocation to STA and Betterment, and may not be \$15,000 next year. There is a brief series of comments about the need for a STM: SS sees an accounting benefit as does the Town Planner and the Finance Director, MC feels it is not necessary since the text box will clearly state the intent of the article. MB feels that STMs are appropriate and that for voters information is kept clear.

### **Line Item Budget:**

**Town Administrator (pg. 1):** MS first asks MC how the order of articles is set on the warrant; MC answers that the BOS historically has set the order but since the adoption of Town Meeting Time for our parliamentary procedures, there is an order to be followed. MC does, however, agree that perhaps this article should be considered before others on the warrant.

JL asks what if this line does not pass? KS answers the higher figure was approved but if it is not spent it will go back to the General Fund. JL makes a motion to approve line 7 for \$18,630, LM seconds. Vote 6-1-0. SS requests that line 10 (pg. 1) be restored to \$2,000 from \$1,100. His rationale is that with the events of the previous year, the TA was unable to attend training sessions/conferences or to complete certifications. This year the TA expects to and will need to do both of those actions in order to catch up/remain current. This is a drastic cut in the line item. AW makes a motion to reconsider line 10 (pg. 1), LM seconds. Vote 7-0-0. AW makes a motion to approve line 10 (pg. 1) for \$2,000, LM seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

**Town Clerk (pg. 3):** JL makes a motion to approve line 31 for \$62,555, AW seconds. Vote 6-1-0. JL makes a motion to approve Line 32 for \$31,960, AW seconds. Vote 7-0-0. JL makes a motion to approve lines 33-35 for \$4,660, AW seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

**Elections & Registrations (pg. 4):** JL makes a motion to approve lines 36-39 for \$23,275, AW seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

**Town Hall (pg. 5):** JL reports that she spoke with the Finance Director: the internet does include the Center Office Building and it is just set in the contract with Charter. There are questions about the cost of the service and the fact that each Town building has a different charge for this service. SS does mention that the Town Hall and the Safety Complex do require higher bandwidths than other buildings and also have business service. KS just asks for any additional information that can be furnished. JL says that the Finance Director will research this issue. JL makes a motion to approve lines 56 and 57 for \$42,050, MS seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

**Safety Complex (pg. 6):**

MR asks SS about the cost of trash removal for the building; SS responds that the request of \$3,300 was not enough to cover the actual cost and since it a building that is open seven days with 20 staff persons the volume of trash is high. MR goes on to ask if there is a plan to go to a Town-wide contract for trash removal; SS answer yes. KS asks about garage door repairs, SS responds that there are five different garage doors in the building, not just the doors for the Police Dept. MR says that the roof has been fixed and the air conditioning unit has been replaced (which was causing some of the issues with the roof); the garage floor leaks and she asks SS if he knows where the floor study is, KS/SS both respond that it has not been funded yet. SS goes on: the scope of work will come from the insurance and then it will go to bid. MR asks if the cost will fall in FY 13; SS is awaiting the engineer's scope of work, it will be a substantial repair, possibly \$50,000-\$60,000. SS also says that it is not in the FY 13 budget; MR responds that this is a big repair and if it cannot wait, this contingency must be considered now. SS agrees but says that with the rescinding of Free Cash, then the funds may be available if this needs to be done now. MR moves to the issue of the third floor of this building; she says it is very crowded and asks if it will cleared out so the Fire and Police Depts. can use the space? SS answers that the town departments will have to clear out some records, will be by the destroy date and this has not been done for at least two years. KS points out that there are three large rooms available for storage in the Center Office Building, SS says that for now election materials have been stored there but can begin to move other materials in those spaces. SA asks SS about ADA compliance: this list was to have been completed by June, 2011 and of five items, only two have been

completed. KS says that about five or six years ago, a study was completed, very comprehensive. SS has seen the report, KS asks if it should be given to the Building Inspector? SS says that once he meets with the Building Inspector regarding this issue, the report will be handed over. SA moves on to the \$880 for chairs, KS says that the money was for both chairs and carpet. SA says the carpet cost \$1450 of the \$1,670 that was approved last year. MR says that since this money was approved for FY 12, he will not get for FY 13. SS will follow up with the Fire Chief. MR makes a motion to approve lines 64, 65 and 66 for \$116,150, SA seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

**Police Department (pg. 7):** SA begins with the Dept. Head salary saying the figure includes a two percent increase plus the allowance for the Quinn Bill since the Chief has his Master's Degree. SA goes on to salaries/wages saying that this includes a request for a FTE that would be the School Resource Officer. KS asks if the officer will spend time in all three Sturbridge schools, SA answers yes. KS asks if anyone has approached the schools to find out if they are interested in having this resource? SA/MR both answer no. There is general conversation about this officer: the chief believes this is an imminent need; SA says it will be filled from within; JL agrees in part but does not see that there is so much crime and would this officer really be needed outside of the school year; SA makes the point that there is a time delay between the time of an incident and the reporting of the incident, consequently, these can be difficult to investigate; AW asks SS about any discussion regarding this issue and SS responds that the officer was well-liked, accepted and there was a culture of trust. MB notes that a report dated 12-5-09 mentions crisis and intervention plans for the schools; MR asks MB if hall monitoring is still occurring, MB answers no. SA makes a statement about the schools having a culture of institutionalized insularity—they will take care of their own issues. KS notes that this may eliminate the time lag in reporting of incidents. He goes to ask how the Town would get an accounting of the time and actions of this officer, TC says this information will be available.

SA makes a motion to approve line 68 (pg. 7) for \$108,704, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

SA makes a motion to approve line 69 (pg. 7) for \$1,620,416, MR seconds. Vote 5-1-1

SA makes a motion to approve line 70 (pg. 7) for \$216,500, MR seconds. Vote 5-1-1.

KS asks why the police department has so many cruisers; MR answers saying that each cruiser is shared by two officers who are responsible for maintenance and cleaning. Detailed logs are kept for each vehicle. SA points out that in spite of Ford's elimination of the Crown Victoria, the Town will probably still use Ford vehicles, most likely SUVs. AW notes that the old vehicles are declared surplus; MR says some are sold for \$600 and this goes into the General Fund. SA makes a motion to approve line 71 (pg. 7) for \$67,656, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0. SA makes a motion to approve line 73 (pg. 7) for \$5,000, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0.

**Fire Department (pg. 7):** SA makes a motion to approve lines 74-79 for \$850,073, MR seconds. Vote 7-0-0. KS asks SS about the police contracts, SS says the negotiations began on July 1, 2011 and defers LM's offer to move into Executive Session.

**Landfill/Recycling (pg. 10):** There is a brief discussion about the leachate hauling figure. Line 112 does include this. KS makes a motion to approve line 112 for \$166,822, MR seconds. Vote

7-0-0. There is a brief discussion about the 2 ½ % levy limit and it seems that all three boards are very close in their estimates.

**Board of Health (pg. 11):** KS begins the discussion by saying that he looked back at records for his tenure on the committee and the FinCom has been higher than salary requests on eight positions in five different fiscal years, but the committee has never added a position. KS understands sections 1.24 and 1.25 of the Town's bylaws to say that this committee has the responsibility to give advice on the budget to the Town Meeting body. SA asks SS if he would make the same choices about the budget if he had knowledge of the savings that have been realized, SS says probably not. Conversation turns to the \$8,500 that was not spent on the update of the Town's overlay district. SS notes that now the higher priority is the Commercial Tourist District Plan, KS asks if funds will go into the budget for this now; SS answers that the study would be helpful but it would not be funded. The conversation returns to the request for a seven hour position; AW notes it is a clerical position that will be shared by two people. AW makes a motion to approve line 116 for \$18,369, LM seconds. SS feels that the FinCom can make recommendations but cannot create new positions, only the Executive branch can do this. SA asks AW how much can a job be split since there will training costs for the new person before this becomes inefficient; AW agrees. Vote 4-3-0.

Motion to adjourn at 11:03 pm.