

# **STURBRIDGE FINANCE COMMITTEE**

## **Meeting Minutes**

**March 5, 2013**

**Town Hall – 7:00 p.m.**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Kevin Smith (Chairman), Michael Serio (Vice Chairman), Prescott Arndt; Arnold Wilson; Joni Light, Patricia Affenito

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Laurance Morrison

**RECORDER:** Melanie Rich

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.

Items for discussions will be the snow and ice deficit spending, reserve fund transfer for the elections, dealing with the logistics of the upcoming process (liaisons), meeting schedule, what to expect at the Saturday meeting, how to deal with manpower shortage, and the Burgess Public Hearing scheduled for start at 7:00 p.m. on Thursday. There is a possibility of a snowstorm and may have to cancel our meeting).

Snow and Ice Deficit – On January 22<sup>nd</sup> it was voted \$20,000 for Purchase of Services, \$20,000 for Supplies, and \$15,000 in overtime (not including the February 8<sup>th</sup> storm). This is another request of deficit spending. There is an impending storm predicted for Wednesday, Thursday and Friday which has not been included with this. They are asking for an additional \$35,000 to be added to Purchase of Services, \$20,000 for Snow and Ice Supplies, and \$7,500 to Snow and Ice Overtime.

Michael Serio made a motion to authorize the additional deficit spending in the amount of \$35,000 in the Snow and Ice Control Purchase of Services (Account #14232-52000); Scott Arndt seconded. Ms. Affenito asked if that would cover expectations needed. Mr. Smith said the supplies are at \$17,791, but \$17,000 is already committed. **Voted 6-0-0**

Scott Arndt made a motion to authorize \$20,000 in additional deficit spending for the Snow and Ice Control Supplies (Account #14232-54000); Arnold Wilson seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Scott Arndt made a motion to authorize \$7,500 in additional deficit spending for the Snow and Ice Control Overtime (Account #14231-51300); Michael Serio seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Reserve Fund (Town Clerk) – The Town Clerk is asking for an additional \$1,500 for election workers. Because this was her first election cycle with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Precinct and a Presidential Election, she underestimated the amount of staffing required for the elections. She is requesting the appropriation to Wages and Salaries at the Annual Town Election and for checkers at the Annual Town Meeting. Depending on state reimbursement, she may have to request additional funds for the Special State Primary and the Special State Election on June 25<sup>th</sup>. The state may possibly reimburse for the Special Primary and Special Election. This request is for the Town Election

## Finance Committee Meeting Minutes – March 5, 2013

and the Annual Town Meeting. Ms. Light asked how many people were being added and if there was a set number. Mr. Smith was unsure and said the request was received today. Ms. Light will check. Mike Serio made a motion to transfer \$1,500 from the reserve fund to the Elections & Registration Salary & Wages (Account #11621-51130); Joni Light seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Logistics – Liaisons have not been changed since last year.

Ms. Affenito has Board of Assessors, Cemetery, DPW, Nursery School, Weights and Measures, Sewer Department, Snow & Ice, Town Road Maintenance, Tree Warden, Veterans, and Water Department.

Mr. Arndt has everything to do with Public Safety.

Ms. Light has all town buildings and anything related to Town Hall, Town Administrator, Finance Director, Town Accountant, Town Moderator, etc. She will also be responsible for the Board of Health, Community Health Care, Inspections and Testing, Landfill and Recycling Center.

Mr. Morrison – We will know more tomorrow about his effect on the process.

Mr. Serio has Council on Aging, Personnel Classification, Recreation, Senior Center and Inspectors.

Mr. Smith has Capital Planning, Community Preservation, Finance Committee, Sturbridge Tourist Association.

Mr. Wilson has Betterment and Education.

Mr. Smith said he will know more about Mr. Morrison's progress and what he will be able to do tomorrow. There was discussion of him participating remotely, but the Board of Selectmen denied a remote request from the Board of Assessors. FinCom members feel there are special circumstances that would warrant it if needed.

Meeting Schedule – Mr. Smith sent out the meeting schedule. The March 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting will now be held this Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup> at 8:30 a.m. at Town Hall. The general sense is to be done by 1:30 p.m. or 2:00 p.m. and not get lost in the details. He asked if anyone had the chance to review the material and said there are some good improvements including the changes and the rationales as to why they were changed. We will try to move that along and deal with some of the newer things. He asked the members if there were any conflicts with the meeting schedule. There was a question as to whether the Burgess Public Hearing on Thursday, March 7<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m. would be held due to the impending snow storm. Mr. Wilson has been at all the Burgess School Committee meetings. He said the process is to present the budget, open it for discussion to the public and the board, and vote. He also said he has documentation for the last three years if anyone wants to review the details. Mr. Smith said Mr. Wilson has done a good job of putting the information together. Mr. Wilson said it was voted at the February 7<sup>th</sup> meeting to present it at the Public Hearing. The Burgess Elementary School FY14 Operating Budget is \$9,349,003.

## Finance Committee Meeting Minutes – March 5, 2013

The Tantasqua FY14 Operating Budget is \$20,038,464. Mr. Wilson also said there is a possible reduction of \$60,000 depending on Special Education regarding Burgess Elementary. It is determined by a five-town formula.

Mr. Smith said we would go through the summary sheet for Tantasqua on Thursday. Their meeting is scheduled for March 19<sup>th</sup> which conflicts with our regular meeting. Our meeting will be rescheduled. Mr. Wilson reminded the members that he has Tantasqua's detailed budget and those who want it may borrow it. Ms. Light said she would like to do that. Mr. Smith will make copies for the members after the meeting.

Saturday Meeting – Mr. Smith does not have an agenda as yet. Lorraine Muraski (Town Clerk) wants to talk about adjusting the salary for the Assistant Town Clerk. Tom Ford (Chief of Police) will be in attendance and possibly the School Safety Officer and the School Resource Officer will be there as well. Mr. Smith wanted to go through some of what he saw there because he is not sure we will be able to get to it Thursday. One of them is the Revenue vs. Expenses tally right now the way things are proposed. We are \$132,720 below what we can raise of Proposition 2 ½. One of the items he noticed was that we saved \$1,209,614 when really we cost-avoided \$1,209,614.

Mr. Smith asked the rationale for the Building Inspector going to a full-time position. He felt that the housing and commercial sectors have not rebounded that much to have that much work. Mr. Wilson said there is some activity commercially and spoke of the Cumberland Farms on Route 20 (which is a total rebuild). The house next door is scheduled to come down. It has not been purchased as yet, but has gone through the Zoning Board of Appeals, granted the exception for a non-conforming use, going to design review tonight, and then Planning Board for a site plan review. The Historic Commission said it is not a historic building. Across the street will be a new restaurant and across from the Yankee Peddler they are gutting that building which will be something. In addition, building permits for homes were up.

Funding for the Champeaux Road Bridge would cost \$1.4 million. Although not the most politically correct statement, Mr. Smith said two alternatives came to his mind: (1) would it be cheaper for the town to take those properties by eminent domain since there are only a few houses, or (2) could we cede the property to Brimfield and avoid the cost altogether? It does take time for emergency vehicles to get there, but there are approximately six or seven houses which are still in Sturbridge. This bridge as currently built floods and is not passable at times.

COLA – The Town Administrator's rationale was that if all the unions went up over a three year period of 5 ½%, this would put the non-union personnel over a three year period going up 5 1/2%. Last year they were given 2%. The Town Administrator is asking for a 2.5% increase. Mr. Arndt asked why everyone has to receive the same amount. Mr. Wilson said the department heads are part of the merit pool, not clerical. Mr. Smith said that would be a good question to ask. Ms. Light asked why you can't reward the better performer. It would eliminate the Town Clerk from going over budget. Mary Dowling came up with the rationale for how to pay the Assistant Town Clerk the first year. The Town Clerk takes exception to being reviewed by the Town Administrator because she doesn't work for him. The Town Clerk's assistant is a town employee so she needs to be reviewed by the Town Administrator. Only the Board of Registrars

is under the Town Clerk according to the chart. Mr. Smith said this should be discussed with the Town Administrator. Ms. Light said it would resolve a lot at budget times. Mr. Smith asked if it had even been taken up with the Personnel Classification who the Assistant Town Clerk reports to. This is a good question to ask Saturday. This has been approached in the past, but nothing was resolved. The pool of clerical people all report to the Town Administrator in some way. Ms. Light said they should be assessed individually and use the funds as needed. The whole salary issue can be justified based on the CPI. The compensation section is where the rationalization for the COLA is explained. There are graphs and reports and a memorandum that came out of our meeting. The Town Administrator also supports the adjustments he made for the Fire Chief that were proposed.

Mr. Smith asked if there was a cyclical nature to the salary demand for different positions. The Town Accountant for example is at 6% of her rate. The salary range is \$58,000 to \$79,000. The survey low is \$61,900 and survey high is 83,700; she is close to the bottom. There are a few positions that are not as bad, and we are trying to figure out why this happened. Back in the 90s we gave out mostly 3%-4% raises. In the 2000s it started to drop. It seems like other towns do not always follow suit and is hard to explain. Mr. Arndt tried to explain and basically said it's always feeding off itself by moving the lowest to the middle, etc. When we first started out we were unhappy with the amount of data reported for a lot of the positions.

Department Budget Overview – The Finance Director talks about the new “Information Technology” department. She talks about the MUNIS software. Mr. Smith asked her about the Vision software. She said this is a phased-in approach and the MUNIS is in the budget and hopes to eventually phase in other departments and systems. It is not personnel related.

Senior Center Building – Only three buildings were identified. Mr. Smith spoke with her and she meant all the buildings with slate roofs. Confirmation is needed that they are aware of the Nursery School.

Police Department – The police cruiser is included in the Police Department Budget which more accurately reflects as a cost sector, but it artificially inflates the Capital Budget because we knew there would be one or two cruisers funded out of the Capital Budget. Now that this \$38,000 expense is moved to the Police Department, does that make it look like we have an additional \$38,000 we can spend in Capital Budget. The Town Administrator is asking for a \$300,000 appropriation to the Capital Budget which is about 10% higher than in the last few years. Mr. Serio said cruisers only last two years and should be part of the Capital Budget.

Mr. Wilson said Tom Ford (Chief of Police) and Office Lavalley attended the Burgess Elementary School meeting and the reception of the School Committee was they would like the Town to fund the School Resource Officer. The position of the Tantasqua Regional School Committee is they haven't been formally asked as a School Committee. Because there has been no dialog between the full School Committee, it hasn't been placed on the agenda. So until that happens, they won't discuss it. It has to be officially put on the agenda by the Sturbridge representatives.

## Finance Committee Meeting Minutes – March 5, 2013

This has been an issue for years. There has been no official request. This is a question that needs to be asked Saturday. The Board of Selectmen should ask, especially if the Town of Sturbridge is going to fund the officer that goes to Tantasqua, because then the argument is if there are five towns, why is Sturbridge funding the whole thing.

Fire Department – Mr. Smith said they are moving some things that are capital into their active Operating Budget and worried how that will affect the Capital Budget. Mr. Wilson said they brought back Butch Jackson (ex-lieutenant) but does not know what his role is. It is not known if Mr. Jackson is an employee or being paid. They also hired a consultant.

Landfill/Recycling Center – Second leachate pump. Last year one failed and was replaced. This is the same type of concept. It will be monitored and replaced if needed.

Unclassified – They changed the funding for the reserve fund at 5% of last year's Operating Budget so it is already in the budget.

Administrator's Discretionary Account – Mr. Smith said he would like to have a discussion on this. Things come up during the year, someone wants to buy paper, we don't have to get a reserve fund transfer for that (\$2,500). He doesn't like the idea of the slush fund. It could become a gray area in years to come.

Central Purchasing – It is not all town copiers. Town Hall, Center Office Building, Safety Complex, DPW and COA are accounted in here. The Library has their own maintenance contract. Toner and paper only applies to copiers at Town Hall and Center Office Building. Toner and paper for other departments are in their budgets.

Five Year Forecast – Talks about putting \$150,000 into stabilization fund in the beginning of the book, but it is not mentioned here. Mr. Smith wanted it done at the last Special Town Meeting. He wants to make sure it is a legitimate item to be considered because it is not mentioned here.

Mr. Wilson asked if there was any consideration by the Board of Selectmen to purchase the property next door (310 Main Street). Not sure.

Members had no specifics at this time. Mr. Smith said they can read the material and come up with questions.

Mr. Smith will ask Barbara Barry for the agenda for Saturday.

Ms. Affenito asked if the board had any idea what direction the Selectmen will go. Mr. Smith believes they are looking to approve.

Mr. Smith asked if there was any update on recruiting for members. Ms. Light said she is trying to recruit residents for appointments to the Committee.

Ms. Light asked about email discussions. Mr. Smith said you cannot start a dialog because that might be considered a quorum and therefore a meeting. Questions to be asked can be emailed, but no opinions can be replied. You can email departments. For example, Scott is the liaison for

## **Finance Committee Meeting Minutes – March 5, 2013**

all Public Safety, so if you have a question for Public Safety, you can send it Scott and he will be responsible for getting an answer. That is acceptable. Members can be copied, but were reminded not to answer.

Mr. Wilson said the biggest money figures facing us is Chapter 7. Tantasqua's budget is based on the governor's proposed budget which increases their Chapter 70 by \$300,000+, but the legislature has not voted yet. Need to keep an eye on this. Mr. Smith said the town does not receive a large percentage of state aid, but the schools do.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:26 p.m.