

STURBRIDGE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

March 9, 2013

Town Hall – 8:30 a.m.

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

OTHERS PRESENT: Thomas Creamer (Chairman), Priscilla Gimás (Vice Chairman), Mary Redetzke, Mary Dowling, Mary Blanchard (BOS Members)

Shaun Suhoski (Town Administrator), Barbara Barry (Finance Director)

RECORDER: Melanie Rich

The Department Head budget meeting with the Board of Selectmen was called to order at 8:30 a.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Creamer suggested any detailed items be discussed at a later date.

Town Administrator Overview – Mr. Suhoski presented slides which were available primarily for those watching at home so they can see the overview. He said the condition of the town is strong financially by taking a measured and conservative approach to revenue protection and not spending beyond the municipal corporation. It leaves the town in a good position and able to withstand the fluctuations in state aid and dips in the economy. He touched on a few of the policy objectives and what it is that is being funded. The budget is a brief summary of changes. The focus is in public safety and buildings and facilities as well keeping an eye on the burden upon taxpayers. Public Safety includes Police Department Budget funds sufficient for a full-time police officer for a School Resource Officer, not to add to further patrols.

The Public Safety Budget and Police Department Budget will also include funds for a part-time Emergency Management Coordinator for 15 hours. The budget for the Fire Department asks to reinstitute funds for training (monthly training). The funds will go into Wages. The Buildings and Facilities budget will include funds for a full time Building Inspector. The job description would add the component of facility management. It is proposed for a 35 hour qualified professional building inspector. The person from Charlton is part-time and not sufficient. The person will enforce zoning opinions as well as facilities management. The FY14 allocates \$150,000 to the Stabilization Fund. Based upon a conservative revenue projection, feels revenues will come in above or at what they are projecting. Not budgeting everything under Proposition 2 ½. Revenue was up by \$28,229,865; Expenses - \$28,097,145, leaving a surplus of \$132,720. The total Operating Budget is \$27,402,061. Warrant Articles from Revenue amount

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes – March 9, 2013

to \$190,000; Warrant Articles from Free Cash amount to \$700,000. There will be a mix of funds for Champeaux Road Bridge (Chapter 90, Free Cash and recommending five-year borrowing).

Mr. Smith asked what the projected effect on the tax rate is. Ms. Barry did not have that information available because they are in the revaluation year. More information will be available in approximately a month. Single rate or split tax rate was discussed.

Mr. Creamer said budgets are prepared on assumptions. Assuming that a certain money is coming from the state, coming towards education and presume to be as accurate as possible but recognize that some things change and it would be useful in the future if we know potential impacts on the tax rate projections for expectation under the certain parameters subject to change, e.g., going back to a single tax rate. Mr. Creamer asked Mr. Suhoski for documentation of the dollar amount of Chapter 90 funds for their meeting on Monday. The number was said to be \$974,000 uncommitted. The budget as is would not raise the tax levy more than 2 1/2%; probably 1.7%.

Fire Chief Senecal (Fire Department) – Salary and Wages proposed increase due to contractual agreements. Chief Senecal said training was asked for by the men. It was eliminated between 5-10 years ago. The training schedule will be four hours per month. Mr. Smith asked if that was per individual, per company, etc. The Chief said it was for everybody. Mr. Smith asked why the overtime is up so much when training is a component in Salary and Wages. The Chief said it is contractual. Mr. Suhoski said the overtime funds will go from \$101,000 to \$139,000 total. It includes monthly trainings (four hour components per month) estimated at 100% full timers participating and 80% on call. The Chief said the value of the training is the togetherness of the men working. Mr. Smith asked where and what kind of training might be. Chief Senecal said aerial operations, ground ladders, hose lays, auto extrication, forcible entry, SCUBA, etc. Mr. Smith asked about the equipment line item. Are they moving some of items from capital into their budget? Mr. Suhoski said the capital budget is for items of \$5,000 or more in value. Mr. Smith said the 6 x 6 four speed truck is more than \$5,000. Chief Senecal said the vehicle was acquired by a grant. It is for the equipment they need for the truck. Ms. Barry said historically the overtime was funded at \$101,000 and has not been adjusted. The Department has had an overtime freeze in order to stay within that budget number. The other component of that number is collective bargaining increase.

Chief Senecal said vehicle maintenance is too low. Last year's budget was \$17,428.42. This year's rate is already at \$10,804. Mr. Smith asked what is driving this cost (vehicles breaking down, etc.). Chief Senecal said yes along with other issues he is finding (replacement parts). Mr. Suhoski said maintenance is costly and could look into considering more.

Mr. Wilson said he saw that Butch Jackson is back with the Fire Department and asked what his role is. Chief Senecal said he is a civilian and helps him with fire calls, dispatch, and brings the trucks places when needed. The position was a six month temporary position. Money was not added to the budget, it came out of the existing budget. It is not a boost the budget for next year, but is funded. Mr. Creamer said that mileage, uses of vehicles, etc. for fleet maintenance will be in a centralized data base for use for budgets next year.

Fire Chief Senecal (Safety Complex) – Mr. Smith asked if the garage floor can be driven on. The Chief said no. The Safety Complex has been identified as a high priority. Mr. Smith asked why we are seeking money to replace the garage doors if the garage can't be used. The Chief said he doors are bad. Mr. Smith said if we have to overhaul the whole garage with equipment going in and out, why jeopardize the new doors. Why not leave them as is and do all the work that needs to be done, and then replace them. Mr. Suhoski said we need to get back on this and get answers. The Chief feels the doors are bad enough now and should be replaced right now.

Greg Morse (DPW Director) – Champeaux Bridge \$1.4 million cost. Mr. Smith asked questions that he felt could be asked by residents. Were there any discussions with the Town Administrator about alternatives to funding such as taking some of the houses or ceding the property to Brimfield? He was told the cost would be more than \$800,000, but Mr. Suhoski agreed that was an interesting question for policy regarding Brimfield. Mr. Smith said the bridge is flooded and impassable part of the year. Mr. Morse agreed. Mr. Smith asked if the redesign will fix that problem to which Mr. Morse said no. Mr. Smith asked how do you repair a bridge that spends a portion of the year under water where you're not shortening its life span. Mr. Morse said the bridge was constructed over a brook and we are not far enough away from the water table. The bridge will stay where it is with a slight elevation (15") with the new structure. He explained the construction comparison of the old and new design. The design plan has not been received yet. Mr. Morse said at one time the bridge was under water for 60 days straight. Regarding snow and ice, Mr. Morse explained the cost and alternatives to products used. Mr. Wilson asked if the \$7,500 in regular overtime had covered him in the past. Mr. Morse said it does for routine year, but would not cover a catastrophe. It is used for storms (when trees come down), or when subcontractors are hired (staying with them as flaggers). No additional manpower was asked for. Chapter 90 funds (\$1.4 million) will be used for the Champeaux along with \$400,000 free cash. The bridge has no rating/ranking; therefore not eligible for federal funding. His current budget is \$974,000. If they receive \$400,000 or \$450,000 from the state, they will be in the \$1.4 million range financially, but the submittals for the road (phasing work) is \$664,000 so with not enough money to do both the bridge and paving, they need more funds. The design is being paid for out of the DPW budget.

Police Chief Thomas Ford (SRO) – The Chief had two budgets; his own (which has more requests), and one the Town Administrator has recommended. Mr. Creamer suggested that for today's presentation, it should be based on the Town Administrator's budget and he can ask questions from his budget as opposed to presenting two budgets. Mr. Suhoski said the Chief has requested additional staff, patrol officers, dispatch, emergency management, stipends for existing personnel, additional EOC equipment and upgrades, one full-time police officer position for serving as School Resource Officer and included part-time emergency management coordinator for 15 hours per week, as well as software (but not all the Chief requested).

Mr. Smith asked about the SRO position. Last year the Chair of the Tantasqua Regional School District Committee told him that no one had ever approached them and never formally asked them to consider that position, therefore there are not in favor of supporting it all. He asked if we have written or gone in person to a Tantasqua Regional School District Committee meeting and proposed it to that board and the answer was no. Mr. Suhoski said the Superintendent has approached the Committee. Mr. Smith said that is not what they are looking for. The Chief said

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes – March 9, 2013

he has appeared before the Tantasqua Regional School District Committee before. During that time he was advised that they were going to have a subcommittee established and look into the SRO but has never received any reports from that subcommittee and does not know what the outcome of that was. Through the former Superintendent we were advised that the school was favorable for that position. The Committee never took a vote or action. Prior to this budget this year, he had met with the Sturbridge School Committee with regards to that. Their support of the program has not been solidified. They want to have an open forum for the residents to come for a joint meeting with the School Committee and Public Safety. Mr. Morrison said four years ago a meeting was attended with Tantasqua Regional District School Committee and maps were brought that showed the property lies in the town of Sturbridge except from the football 30 yard line northerly in Brookfield. A Tantasqua School Committee member from Brookfield said “no Sturbridge cop is going to arrest my son in Brookfield”. The presentation was made, facts were laid out, the then Superintendent said if there is money for a Resource Officer “and I had the choice, I’m going to get me another English teacher first”. So the matter was referred to a subcommittee. Ms. Dowling said the Board of Selectmen and the Finance Committee should take a vote before going to Tantasqua. Mr. Smith said we should have it done before March 19th. Mr. Wilson commented that they might want to consider requesting to the Tantasqua Regional School Committee an agenda item to bring some thoughts forward because a few weeks ago, the Budget Committee at Tantasqua said they would not even think about unless they are approached by the town of Sturbridge formally. The Chief was asked if Tantasqua didn’t want one, did he see a benefit for Burgess still funded by Tantasqua. The Chief said it is beneficial and should be in the elementary school because the age of children in that school are in their very informative years they could begin to form a relationship with the resource officer. The SRO becomes part of the administration and faculty. Mr. Creamer will send an email to Tantasqua. It will be on the Finance Committee agenda for discussion on Tuesday.

Police Chief Thomas Ford (Emergency Operations) – Mr. Smith had questions on the part-time position (close to 20 hours; \$15,000 year). The Chief said the person will have to have background in emergency management, capability of being trained for all the ICS levels up to the executive levels, some experience in grant writing, some exposure to emergency management program through private police, fire or independently through emergency management. Mr. Smith asked in the event of a crisis, would this person then supersede his authority and the Fire Chief’s authority to run the entire operation because he would be the emergency coordinator. The chief said no. It is a coordinator position, clerical and administrative work, downloading data. Not taking the role of charge. The Chief hopes to map out a year’s worth of work, set goals and determine how many hours going forward not withstanding emergencies or disasters throughout the year that may occur. The position has not been presented to the personnel department as yet. It is only being entertained today. The Chief and Mr. Suhoski will refine the sample job descriptions. Mr. Smith said it would have a high grade because of the description. The Chief said he would adjust the amount of hours depending on the funding. Mr. Smith wants to make sure that the \$15,000 is a realistic number based on what the person will be doing in the amount of time given to do it. Mr. Suhoski said the position will be developed along with a sample job description and will he approach the Personnel Committee at the appropriate time. Mr. Smith said the time is soon. Mr. Suhoski asked if Mr. Smith was suggesting to classify a position that is not funded. Add job descriptions to a grid? Mr. Smith said he is hearing it as being more than just a clerical position. Mr. Suhoski asked if he agreed that

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes – March 9, 2013

development of a job description, grading it and putting that together is an operation of government administrative and would he consider that we want to have additional support for emergency management as a policy decision. Mr. Smith said yes. Mr. Suhoski said that is what he is asking for, to make a policy decision. The Chief believes \$15,000 is sufficient for what the position is.

Alyssa Rusiecki, Health Agent (Board of Health) – Ms. Cocalis wanted to recognize that there are members of the Finance Committee that may have financial interests in establishments that are inspected and permitted, and read a statement because there could be a perceived conflict. Mr. Smith informed her there is no voting today. Ms. Cocalis did not want to get into it further. Dan Chaput wanted it to be recognized that there could be a perception. Mr. Smith said he has salary questions which will be taken up with Ms. Barry and Mr. Suhoski when it is their turn. Ms. Rusiecki said they are currently subcontracting services relative to communicable disease follow-up with Harrington Community Health Nurse and would like to hire a Public Health Nurse for Sturbridge. It was not included in the budget. It would be in lieu of the Community Health contract. Amending the budget was discussed if agreed to with Town Administrator. Ms. Rusiecki said the figures are \$9,000-\$10,000 for the Public Health Nurse and \$4,000 for additional hours. Mr. Smith asked if there was any costs associated with MAVEN and was told no. Ms. Cocalis briefly discussed the leachate, landfill and recycling. Ms. Rusiecki thanked the boards for supporting the additional hours for the administrative assistant and clerk.

Lorraine Murawski (Town Clerk) – Mr. Smith asked about the additional funds for the annual town meeting and elections and how many people are included. Ms. Murawski stated that it varies depending on the election expectancy. Mr. Smith asked what are the numbers based on. Ms. Murawski said the Presidential election. She added four or five people at that election.

She discussed the Assistant Town Clerk salary. She talked about the ten town wage comparison and the annual revenues brought into her office. Since 2005 she has requested a salary increase for the Assistant Town Clerk. At the 2009 Annual Town Meeting she was given the go ahead to hire a full time clerk. She appointed the Assistant Town Clerk July 1, 2009. The starting salary was set by the Finance Committee. She had provided a survey showing \$34,000 as the low range figure. The Finance Committee recommended \$30,480 for the full time position. She respectfully asked the Finance Committee and Board of Selectmen to review the numbers and see the difference what other Assistant Town Clerks are being paid. She would like feedback from the boards. Mr. Wilson noted she requested \$32,886. Ms. Gimas said she conducted her own survey last week. She said that in some towns, the Assistant Town Clerks work part-time in other positions. She asked Ms. Murawski if she could justify \$36,500 a year for a town of 9,800. Ms. Redetzke explained how the salary range was established. The low number in the range (\$30,000) was taken. It was intended to be a compromise, because at the time the Finance Committee was split with whether or not this new position was going to be recognized. At the time there was a Town Clerk Administrative Assistant and we established that an Assistant Town Clerk's position would be different because she would have all the same duties as the Town Clerk. That was the concern. Ms. Redetzke again said it was a compromise. Ms. Murawski does not see how the Assistant Town Clerk is rated at 4 while the Town Clerk is rated at 11 and both do the same work. Mr. Suhoski said the grade was looked at by the Personnel Committee within the last two years and the grade assigned was formed. Ms. Murawski said it is a situation

Finance Committee Meeting Minutes – March 9, 2013

that needs to be looked at. Mr. Smith said at the time the increase was an \$18,000 clerical position vs. \$30,000 if she accepted the position of Assistant Town Clerk. That was the incentive at that point in time. The level of responsibilities may have influenced the initial grading. Ms. Murawski said her information is based on the survey she did in December 2012. Ms. Affenito wanted to let the public know that there was an analysis and research done to determine the salary and it was a split decision by the Finance Committee.

Ms. Murawski came back to the meeting to speak about the money she saves during elections (set up and take down).

William Mitchell (Principal Assessor) – The department request is \$186,828. Purchase of Services was up slightly from \$70,190 to \$70,705. Revaluation is \$53,440. The entire town is being revaluated. Mapping and GIS has been combined. Mr. Mitchell is asking for seven additional hours for the data collector and five additional hours for clerical support. More analysis is being conducted, and there are more inspections and sales reviews. Asked how data is supplied, Mr. Mitchell said through different sources (Google, private companies).

Barbara Barry (Finance Director)/Shaun Suhoski (Town Administrator) – Mr. Suhoski said the Personnel Committee did review the ten comparable towns in this past year and those towns show the averages. It was accepted as the appropriate comparators to go forward. The Fire Chief and the Board of Health Agent relative to the tentowns comparable are both below the survey range now (FY13) which is a year behind. There is a modest movement in the budget to increase the Fire Chief's salary to bring it within survey range and same with the Board of Health Agent. Mr. Smith said you would actually be in the pay grade range in the town. Mr. Suhoski said yes, but below the survey comparables. It includes the 2 ½% COLA. Mr. Smith said he does not have a problem with the structure of it, but doesn't understand how you got a salary of \$82,600 from \$79,653, and why that isn't the salary. Mr. Suhoski said you bring it into the salary range and add 2 ½% COLA to that, and then considered that the incumbent has been in the position for 30 years. Mr. Smith said the Board of Health Agent falls into that proposed salary range as well. Mr. Suhoski said the Board of Health Agent is on the survey low, not by much, so they are looking at supplemental data provided by the elected Board of Health. \$81,644 (the actual figure) for the Fire Chief and the proposed is a few thousand dollars more because he has been here for 30 years. Asked if giving him COLA and an extra \$2,000 is considered his merit increase? Mr. Suhoski said the merit program is not a raise, it is a year by year increase based upon attained goals. Department heads are eligible up to 2%. It is a separate program. Ms. Affenito asked if what is proposed and recommended for him is he still eligible for the merit increase. Mr. Suhoski said he would be if he attains his goals. Mr. Smith asked what the effect of the merit program. Mr. Suhoski said it is built into the budget. Job descriptions are factored into the grade and pay range. Education and compensation were also discussed. Mr. Smith said training in the past was paid for but the salary was not increased. The only way the base pay changes is with the COLA increments. CPI vs. COLA was also discussed as well as hourly ranges and grades.

Ms. Dowling made a motion to adjourn; Ms. Redetzke seconded; all in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 2:38 p.m.