

STURBRIDGE FINANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

March 12, 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

OTHERS PRESENT: Mark Edmonds, William Mitchell (Principal Assessor), Tom Ford (Police Chief)

RECORDER: Melanie Rich

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 p.m.

Resident Mark Edmonds (103 Breakneck Road) asked to address the board to express his concerns about the sewer rates going up between 38%-50% on July 1st. The rate depends on the amount that is taken out of the water and sewer reserve fund. Mr. Edmonds wanted to make the committee aware that the seniors, who currently pay between \$250-\$300/month and are on a fixed income, along with others, will be negatively impacted by the increase. Some are negatively been impacted by the overall increase in real estate tax rates. He felt the Selectmen did a good job in splitting the tax rate to try and mitigate the damage to the residential tax base. He feels it is getting into a very dangerous area for people like him who were until recently fairly middle class. He also said affordability of the town is in jeopardy if some major steps are not taken by the Finance Committee to rethink the ways things are done.

Line Item Budget

ASSESSORS (page 2) Data Collector Discussions. Mr. Mitchell was in attendance. Ms. Affenito (liaison) met with him to discuss the additional hours requested for the Data Collector. He is requesting an additional 7 hours, bringing the position to 25 hours per week at a cost of approximately \$6,700. The explanation and clarification are outlined in the memo Mr. Mitchell submitted to the committee entitled "FY 2014 Budget Addendum, dated January 28, 2013 to the Town Administrator and the Finance Director". The math calculations are on page 4. Mr. Smith asked if this inspector is different from the Building Inspector. Mr. Mitchell said it was and explained that after all inspections are done by the Building Inspector to the point of issuing a Certificate of Occupancy, this is when the Data Collector will go in and put a value on that space. It is a full inspection regardless of the type of inspection. The clerk does not help with this position. Her duties are also outlined in the memo that was submitted (mostly clerical). The increase from \$17,084 to \$23,725 does not include COLA. He wanted to make note that the budget in 2009 was \$122,480 and last year was \$171,800 (an increase of \$49,300). He said in the \$49,000 exists an 18 hour Data Collector position. It also includes the revaluation budget which he put within the budget rather than a separate article which was \$65,000 in 2010. He

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further said when you include the Data Collector and the revaluation budget and include any wages or increases over the past five years, he has actually cut the budget in his office since 2009. He felt it is important for the committee to know the history of each budget before making decisions. Ms. Affenito said there were technology changes as well as the revaluations. Mr. Smith said we need to get correct salary figures before voting on them. Mr. Mitchell said his salary is \$65,344; the Clerk's salary is \$22,606; and the Data Collector salary (if approved) would be \$23,931. The committee can in concept support the increase in hours. Mr. Wilson made a motion to support the increase in hours for the Data Collector from 18 to 25 per week; Mr. Arndt seconded. Ms. Affenito will abstain from voting.

There are two issues; Proposition 2 ½ and 2.5% COLA. Ms. Light feels the 2.5% COLA is high and would like to see the numbers.

ASSESSORS (page 2) Clerical Discussions. Mr. Mitchell feels it is important to increase the hours to 25 per week from 18. The current clerk has been employed for the past 12 years and is retiring in August. Mr. Mitchell said the Town Administrator and Finance Director are reviewing it for the possibility of changing it to a higher grade. Ms. Affenito spoke with Ms. Barry who said at this time she wasn't going to change it. The hours will be increased because the job requires more than 20 hours.

There was no more discussion regarding the increase in hours in concept for the Data Collector.
Voted 5-0-1

Purchase of Services – Salaries/Wages – no action taken. Ms. Affenito said that last year there were changes to how it was calculated. Mr. Mitchell had presented information and recommendations on how to finance the revaluation and interim evaluations. It is in this budget, but previously it was an article. The revaluation final for this year is \$53,440. Mr. Mitchell said it was raised in interim in two years so they are now on cycle. From 2015 forward it will be raised 1/3, which will go down.

Mr. Smith asked why VISION was not moved to the IT budget. Mr. Mitchell was never approached about it. VISION has a license and only used in his office. Those who have ERSI software can access the GIS (Assessors/Planning/Conservation). The software maintenance contract went up to \$7,000 and there is a \$125 database so they don't have to print out the property record cards. Last year there was \$2,200 that was GIS webhosting which has now been taken out. Mr. Mitchell said last year he had a GIS Webhosting line item of \$4,240 to cover a \$3000 start-up fee and \$1,240 maintenance fee. The \$3,000 start-up fee is gone. Two years ago he paid \$2,200 to maintain a property records online website. Jean Bubon (Planning) used to spend \$3,500 per year on the GIS website (two different websites). Last year they joined them to reduce the costs and it made more sense to take out the \$2,200 he was paying separately and put it in the line item. He took \$2,200 out of VISION Software/Services line and put it in the GIS Web Hosting line item with the other maintenance he pays.

Mapping Fees Line Item – The Registry of Deeds fees did not change. The interim revaluation we no longer do. Previously it was a \$4,000 line item. He implemented the deed to be matched with the map. It went up to \$6,000. Rather than increasing the budget, he met with Tighe &

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Bond about entering into a three-year term. They said they would reduce their rates by 3% if we locked into a three-year term. In doing that, Ms. Bubon and he combined their services that they are used for (his mapping updates, her GIS updates, and a training portion). The Planning budget includes \$14,500 per year over the next three years to reduce the rates and will run through her department (beneficial for all).

VISION software upgrades amount to \$9,100 total. He will encumber the \$7,000. The \$2,100 is needed for the updates. Ms. Light will get the actual figures from Ms. Bubon.

Supplies – Office furniture (desk) for the Data Collector. Other Charges Travel is for conferences/training workshops.

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Purchase of Services (Line Item 24) in the Assessor's budget at \$70,705; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Supplies (Line Item 25) in the Assessor's budget at \$2,678; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Other Charges (Line Item 26) in the Assessor's budget at \$1,783; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

POLICE CHIEF (page 7): Chief Ford was in attendance. The SRO is on the Tantasqua agenda for March 19th. Mr. Smith said his questions pertain to implementation if it was to go forward. The Chief was asked about the uniform and was told it would depend on the event. The police officer would wear a uniform in the daily operations, but for example, if there was a field trip, he would not wear a full uniform. It would be funded as a police officer with the main duties being the SRO during the school year and going back to patrol after the school year. It was asked if the position was not wanted by the schools, would the need still be there for the officer. Ms. Light feels they are two different discussions and would like to know more detail as to what the Chief feels it would be and accomplish. The Chief's budget requested two additional officers and one dispatch person. Mr. Smith said the Town Administrator's budget only recommended one officer with the main function to be an SRO. The Chief said the SRO could be used at Burgess for approximately 37-40 hours per week. Mr. Serio made a motion in support of funding of the SRO officer position in the FY14 Salaries/Wages line item of the Police Department Budget; Mr. Wilson seconded.

The Burgess School Committee wants to have as part of the Chief's meeting with them, a public forum so residents can ask questions about the SRO. It is scheduled for the last week of March. The Tantasqua Public Hearing for their budget is on the 19th. After that hearing they will have their normal Tantasqua Regional School Committee meeting. The SRO is supposed to be bringing this up as part of that meeting. The Chief is not sure when the Burgess meeting will be held.

The Chief envisions the individual being fitted for that type of position to have the social skills and the ability to integrate into the school culture at Burgess and Tantasqua, be able to identify the needs of the environment, critical incident plans, training, drug safety as well as personal

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safety, assisting with health and awareness classes, and be the liaison in the school. He would need to know where they fit in on day-to-day activities, where they want them, etc. The administrator will have input and direct the individual as needed. He hopes to have the SRO in place by September 1st. Ms. Affenito realizes it is cost but feels there is a need for the SRO and the town needs to be kept safe. **Voted 6-0-0**

Mr. Wilson, going through the Betterment proposals, asked the Chief about the \$42,800 for cruiser. The Chief said he asked for three cruisers through capital planning (the only place he submitted it). Mr. Smith said there are three cruisers in that budget as well. One is in Betterment; one in the Police Department budget; and three in the Capital budget. This should be answered by the Finance Director and Town Administrator. The Chief described the type of vehicles that will be used and the transitions that will take place.

Meeting Minutes: Mr. Wilson made a motion to authorize the Chairman to make corrections to the Minutes, issue the corrections to the members, and vote on them at meeting; Ms. Affenito seconded the motion. **Voted 5-0-0**

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS (page 9): Cemetery is now in DPW budget. Department Head Salary – No action. Salary/Wages – No action. Mr. Smith would like to know what the 4.1% Salary increase includes.

Purchase of Services – The Cemetery roof was funded in 2012, but not yet completed. The funds will be encumbered. The electric is up and the oil is down. It is contractual.

Fire Extinguishers are old and need to be replaced.

Propane is a one-time expense for the tanks for the waste water treatment plant and water towers. It was asked why it was coming out of the Water & Sewer expense. It is not a general town expense. Ms. Affenito will check with Ms. Barry.

Plowing Contractors went up \$20,000.

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the DPW Supplies (Line Item 110) at \$62,050; Mr. Serio seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the DPW Other Charges (Line Item 111) at \$1,300; Mr. Serio seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

TOWN ROAD MAINTENANCE (page 10): Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Repairs & Maintenance (Line Item 112) in the Town Road Maintenance budget at \$205,000; Mr. Serio seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Private Road Maintenance (Line Item 113) in the Town Road Maintenance budget at \$5,000; Mr. Serio seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

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Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Road Construction (Line Item 114) in the Town Road Maintenance budget at \$253,000; Mr. Serio seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

SNOW & ICE CONTROL (page 10): Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Overtime (Line Item 115) in the Snow & Ice Control budget at \$25,000; Mr. Wilson seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Purchase of Services (Line Item 116) in the Snow & Ice Control budget at \$60,000; Mr. Wilson seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Supplies (Line Item 117) in the Snow & Ice Control budget at \$85,000; Mr. Wilson seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

VETERANS' SERVICES (page 12): Incorrect Salary/Wages. It is 2 ½% increase, not 6.7%. The correct figure is \$3,465. Purchase of Services - \$4,150. Veterans' Benefits was increased last year. The Director does a lot of outreach. We do receive 75% reimbursement.

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Purchase of Services (Line Item 140) in the Veterans' Services budget at \$100; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Supplies (Line Item 141) in the Veterans' Services budget at \$175; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the American Legion (Line Item 142) in the Veterans' Services budget at \$1,400; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Memorial/Veterans' Day (Line Item 143) in the Veterans' Services budget at \$2,650; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Other Charges (Line Item 144) in the Veterans' Services budget at \$400; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Veterans' Benefits (#15432-57700) in the Veterans' Services budget at \$39,000; Mr. Arndt seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

SEALER OF WEIGHTS & MEASURES (page 8): Contracted. Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Total Purchase of Services (Line Item 92) in the Sealer of Weights & Measures budget at \$5,350; Mr. Serio seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

SEWER AND WATER: There are invoices and we won't know the amount until we get the warrant. Ms. Affenito will check on the \$3,000 from DPW. Do we know why the rates are going up? Mr. Morse indicated it was personnel costs. It is a warrant article and the Finance Committee does not set the rate. Mr. Wilson said we could discuss the amount they hold for catastrophes.

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NURSERY SCHOOL (page 6): Ms. Affenito visited the school and found the bathroom repairs we recently completed (February). The roof issue has not been resolved. The ceiling leaks. The town does cover the building. She will follow-up with the Town Administrator. Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Total Purchase of Services (Line Item 72) in the Nursery School Budget at \$2,000; Mr. Wilson seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

TREE WARDEN (page 8): Salary/Wages – no action. Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Purchase of Services (Line Item 98) in the Tree Warden budget at \$9,230; Mr. Wilson seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve the Supplies (Line Item 99) in the Tree Warden budget at \$650; Mr. Wilson seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

Ms. Affenito made a motion to approve Other Charges (Line Item 100) in the Tree Warden budget at \$1,050; Mr. Wilson seconded. **Voted 6-0-0**

OTHER BUSINESS

The March 19th meeting will be held at Tantasqua beginning at 6:00 p.m.

The April 4th meeting will be at Burgess Elementary beginning at 7:00 p.m.

The 2.5% COLA will be discussed on Thursday.

Ms. Light brought up comments made by the Board of Health at the meeting Saturday regarding the possible conflict of interest. She was surprised and insulted and felt it could have been handled differently. She is requesting not to be the liaison for the Board of Health any longer. She went on to say that she chooses to be a liaison to different departments in order to get to know them and better be able to take care the budget. Mr. Smith said there is no personal bias expressed. Mr. Smith will speak with Mr. Morrison to see if he will take it, otherwise he will. Mr. Wilson also reminded the members that they all took a conflict of interest training which is on record.

Mr. Serio made a motion to adjourn; Mr. Wilson seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 10:08 p.m.