

**Town of Sturbridge
Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
June 27, 2013**

Attendees: Kevin Smith (KS), Bob Jepson (BJ), Joni Light (JL), Laurance Morrison (LM), Kathy Neal (KN), Mike Serio (MS), Arnold Wilson (AW)

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM in the Town Hall.

MS made motion to approve the minutes of the April 18, 2013 meeting as written; seconded by BJ. So voted, 7 – 0.

MS made motion to approve the minutes of the April 23, 2013 meeting as written; seconded by KN. So voted, 7 – 0.

LM made motion to approve the minutes of the April 25, 2013 meeting as written; seconded by KN. So voted, 5 – 0 – 2.

KN made motion to approve the minutes of the April 30, 2013 meeting as written; seconded by JL. So voted, 6 – 0 – 1.

LM made motion to approve the minutes of the May 2, 2013 meeting as written; seconded by AW. So voted, 7 – 0.

LM made motion to approve the minutes of the May 7, 2013 meeting as written; seconded by BJ. So voted, 7 – 0.

KN made motion to approve the minutes of the May 9, 2013 meeting as written; seconded by BJ. So voted, 6 – 0 – 1.

JL made motion to approve the minutes of the June 3, 2013 meeting as amended; seconded by LM. So voted, 7 – 0.

AW made a motion to approve a transfer in the amount of \$1,317.12 from the Reserve Fund account (19102-57800) to the Building Inspector Department Head Salary account (12411-51120); seconded by MS. So voted, 7 – 0.

MS made a motion to approve a transfer in the amount of \$12,000.00 from the Reserve Fund account (19102-57800) to the Town Counsel account (11512-52000); seconded by AW. So voted, 6 – 0 – 1.

AW made a motion to approve a transfer in the amount of \$1,000.00 from the Reserve Fund account (19102-57800) to the Inspectors Other Charges account (12452-57000) along with sending a letter to the Board of Selectmen expressing the Finance Committee's dismay at their

approving a policy change without providing a method to pay for that policy change; seconded by MS. So voted, 6 – 1 – 1.

The Finance Committee then began a discussion about a policy brought forth by LM regarding the Finance Committee’s development of public statements and responses. LM stated the policy serves as a starting point for the Committee’s response. KS made a motion that the Finance Committee adopt the public statement policy; seconded by JL. So voted, 6 – 0 – 1.

Policy Guidelines on Response to Publicly Stated Matters Relevant to Finance Committee Responsibilities

Introduction

The purpose of this policy guideline is to document and explain the basis on which the Finance Committee shall, in any given instance, decide, by majority vote of a quorum, whether in public or executive session, to respond to publicly stated matters relevant to the Finance Committee’s responsibilities.

Background

At indeterminate times and at unknowable frequency, a statement may be made, by a variety of means, in public, by members of the public, by government officials, or by the media that bear on Finance Committee responsibilities. Regardless the motivation of anyone making such public statements, such statements may range on the spectrum from completely and comprehensively accurate to completely inaccurate, to include accurate yet misleading and accurate yet without context.

Definition of a Public Statement

For the purposes of this policy guideline, a public statement is a written or spoken opinion, judgment, notion, concept, idea, thought, conclusion, belief, estimate, guess, rumor, hearsay or any other expression of a point of view or of an understanding or of an actual or presumed fact made by or on behalf of an individual, formal or informal group, or established organization, made by any method or means of communication, at any time, at any place.

Definition of a Matter Relevant to the Finance Committee’s Responsibilities

For the purposes of this policy guideline, a matter relevant to Finance Committee responsibilities relates, however slightly, on any and all Finance Committee responsibilities set forth in Commonwealth of Massachusetts statutes and/or regulations and/or the Town of Sturbridge Charter and Bylaws and/or in any other manner or way that anyone may reasonably believe does so relate, even if, in fact, no such relevance exists or has ever existed.

Policy Guideline Discussion

The Finance Committee’s duty runs to the residents of the Town of Sturbridge.

The Finance Committee is obligated to fairly research the facts and make timely good faith recommendations to the townspeople on the Town’s finances and all matters bearing on those finances.

The Finance Committee is expected by the townspeople to make, at all times, publicly-accessible, fact-based and truthful representations of its duty and of the particular terms, circumstances and conditions that it considers in the course of performing its responsibilities, both prevailing and foreseeable.

Therefore, it is prudent for the Finance Committee to respond publicly when, in its considered judgment, a public statement, as defined above, raises the possibility of clouding or confusing the public's understanding of a matter relevant to the Finance Committee's responsibilities.

Criteria for Finance Committee Analysis of a Public Statement

Demonstrable misstatement of fact; and/or

Demonstrable incomplete and/or misleading statement of fact; and/or

Expression of belief framed as empirical fact; and/or

Apparent orchestration of public statements from various sources; and/or

Evident aim of enlisting Finance Committee support for or opposition to a matter; and/or

Apparent aim of drawing the Finance Committee into a contentious matter.

Criteria for Finance Committee Discussion of Whether to Issue a Publicly Accessible Response to a Public Statement

For the purposes of this policy guideline, the Finance Committee shall always consider:

The degree of relevance of a public statement to Finance Committee responsibilities; and

The full range of foreseeable consequences of issuing/not issuing a response; and

The timing of the first appearance of a public statement and any subsequent same or similar public statements; and

The place and/or means by which a public statement was made; and

The intent declared, if any, of the maker of the public statement; and

The presumed intent of the maker of the public statement, if none is declared in the public statement itself; and

The authoritative status of the maker of the public statement; and

The extent, if any, to which a Finance Committee public response will, in turn, engender a further public statement.

Notes

Each and every Finance Committee discussion and vote with respect to a publicly accessible response shall be made in full compliance with the Massachusetts Open Meeting Law.

Each and every Finance Committee publicly accessible response shall include and make explicit the vote tally on the response.

The response may carry only the signature of the Finance Committee chairperson at the time of the vote, or, in the alternative, the signatures of each Finance Committee member voting in favor of issuing a response, at the option of a majority of the Finance Committee quorum voting.

Each and every Finance Committee publicly accessible response shall be made at the earliest practicable moment following a vote to issue such a response. Such a response shall be delivered to the public in print and electronically, in all means generally available to the townspeople for such purposes, to include the means by which the public statement that the Finance Committee is responding to was originally made.

The voted and approved/disapproved version of this draft shall be made a part of the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting at which a vote was taken to approve/disapprove.

The Finance Committee also discussed the adoption of a policy regarding public interaction at Finance Committee meetings. LM stated any policy should balance the need of completing the Committee's work with public access by setting a consistent framework for such interaction. KS suggested that this could be accomplished without the adoption of formal policy by structuring all interactions in a manner where the Finance Committee has its questions and concerns addressed with a proponent before allowing the public to weigh in on the topic being discussed with the proponent. A statement expressing this framework could be added to all of the meeting/agenda postings. A public access section should also be added to each meeting's agenda so non-agenda items can be addressed.

The Finance Committee took up re-organizing for Fiscal Year 2014 (July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014).

KN nominated KS for the position of Chair; seconded by MS. No other nominees were brought forth. So voted, 6 – 0 – 1.

KS nominated MS for the position of Vice-Chair; seconded by KN. No other nominees were brought forth. So voted, 6 – 0 – 1.

LM nominated JL for the position of Secretary; seconded by KN. No other nominees were brought forth. So voted, 6 – 0 – 1.

Motion made to adjourn at 8:55 PM by BJ; seconded by MS. So voted, 7 – 0.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin J. Smith