

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 17, 2014 ~ Sturbridge Town Hall
7:00pm

Call to Order:

The chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00pm with the following Finance Committee members present: Joni Light (JL), Mike Serio (MS), Kevin Smith, Chairman (KS) Kathy Neal (KN), and Alex Athans (AA)

Absent: Arnold Wilson (AW), Prescott (Scott) Arndt (SA), and Larry Morrison (LM)

Guests: Jacob Ryan (JR), Don Fairbrother (DF), Anthony Detarando (AD), Penny Dumas (PD), Bob Brieire (BB)

Stipend Review Committee:

Members attended to answer questions from their previous meeting in front of the finance committee and to further discuss Article 22. KN confirmed that the stipend collected will not go towards a town compensation plan or any such town retirement plan in place for town employees. It is consider deferred compensation (OBRA). Discussion was brought up by KS around the dollar values given to the specified town boards. KS further asked for clarification as to why “past practice” in Sturbridge, and “common practice” across the ten towns surveyed should dictate what the town does in the future. The difference between the stipend for the BOS was significantly higher than that of the other boards (approximately 120%), and KS was hoping for clarification on why it was calculated so high. JL wanted confirmation as to whether or not the towns compared for the stipend were towns that had town administrators, and this was confirmed. JR stated that he personally had a hard time to justify such a disproportion.

DF stated that the increased budget responsibility, decision making, and policy making that the BOS provides to the town was significant in giving a higher stipend amount to the BOS. KS correctly stated, however, that the budget actually falls under the town administrator’s responsibilities as per the town charter. Further, point 2 of the warrant, KS felt it may cause more problems and he would like it to be further reviewed by the committee.

Additional questions were discussed around how the pro-rating would be done, and JR advised that they sought guidance from town counsel. MS was curious to know if the town even had a policy in place for pro-rating as to how it was administered, but KS stated the finance director must have something in place. With some language being changed on Article 22, KS advised that the committee would have to vote again on the new languages, and if scope had changed it would have to go before the BOS again. KS was concerned about time and cautioned the committee to be mindful of the finance committee’s deadlines and commitments.

Community Preservation Committee:

PD began by giving an overview of the CPA funds to the finance committee members; how it’s calculated, what it can be used to purchase for the town, how the land can be used, etc. KN asked about the status of any outstanding conservation restrictions (CR’s) to the town lands. PD explained how it was now in the hands of the BOS to administer. PD did confirm that the town is working with Opacum Land Trust to hold a CR for some of the CPA purchased lands in town. BJ asked if there were any additional lands being sought by the town to purchase for open land, and PD replied that there was a parcel of land that has become available to the town.

After much discussion MS moved the motion to accept Article 2 as written; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

Moving the discussion to Article 3 and the administrative purpose of the CPA, PD explained that the money is primarily administrative and also for the lawyers working the CR's and other dues paid to the CPA Coalition. She also explained that any unused funds would go back to the CPA Undesignated balance at the end of the fiscal year. MS asked about brochures and that there was a request to have something printed for town land and uses. PD stated it was on hold due to recent changes. JL was curious to know how much a CR would cost the town and PD explained that it really varied from the parcel and who would be seeking to hold the restriction.

BJ moved the motion to accept Article 3 as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

BB opened discussion around Article 4 and the funding for the North Cemetery and Article 5 for the funding to the Old Burial Ground. He is very happy with the work from the vendor doing the restoration. Each stone is photographed and registered. MS and BJ asked about the stone placements and were curious to know if all stones were still on the grounds. BB commented only that it was too difficult to be 100% sure but he hoped all stones were still accounted for; records are at the DPW for more recent interments.

BJ moved the motion to accept Article 4 as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

With regard to Article 5 and the Old Burial Ground project to restore stones, MS asked if there were plans to perhaps digitize the cemetery for people to be able to find their ancestors. BB stated that the library definitely has all the information, and the DPW has cards on file but no plans to digitize. JL asked how many stone repairs would be covered for this cost. PD stated that the details are in the specific proposal.

BJ moved the motion to accept Article 5 as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

KS moved the meeting over to the line item budget to ensure everything had been voted. The accountant wages category was on hold pending further details on the additional step increase for the account billing assistant as this position is one of the ten up for consideration by the town administrator.

BJ moved the motion to accept the wages for \$12,411 (account 11351-51130); JL seconds. Motion is lost 3-3-0. KS requested that the line items for the ten positions held for additional step increase to set aside until next meeting.

The Senior Center Purchase of Service line item was held due to pending quotes for new chairs. That information had been provided by the finance director and therefore a vote could be taken to secure the budget.

JL moved the motion to accept the Purchase of Service line item for \$7,900 (account 11952-54000); BJ seconds. Motion accepted 4-2-0.

KS directed discussion back to the warrant articles. He noted that the BOS took up discussion on Article 25 Acceptance of Local Options Property Tax Exemption Active Military Deployed Overseas and there would likely be another article seeking to apply this article with respect to past occurrences. KN stated that this would be going beyond the scope of the legislative date. KS had concerns that residents who moved out of Sturbridge may be eligible to get tax relief for those years and could be a lot more money than anticipated.

Article 11 for Revolving Funds - MS moved the motion to accept as written; KN seconds. Motion accepted 5-1-0.

Article 13 for Betterment funding - BJ moved the motion to accept as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 5-1-0.

Article 17 for the Water Meter Replacement Program was reviewed but the majority of the committee had questions so this will hold until next meeting or when details are available.

Article 20 on Streets Defined - KN moved the motion to accept as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

Article 21 Medicinal Marijuana District brought discussion on the special permits and questions previously posed to the town administrator. KS reviewed all answers. BJ moved the motion to accept the article as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 4-2-0.

Moving onto the Special Town Meeting warrant articles, and beginning with discussion on Article 41 Sludge Handling. MS moved the motion to accept the article as written; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

Article 42 Fiske Hill Booster - MS moved the motion to accept the article as written; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

Article 43 Mountainbrook Betterment - MS moved the motion to accept the article as written; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

Meeting Minutes:

Minutes of April 3, 2014 were reviewed and approved as amended. KN moved the motion; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

BJ left the meeting at 9:45pm.

Minutes of April 8, 2014 were reviewed and approved as amended. KN moved the motion; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 5-0-0.

Minutes of April 10, 2014 were reviewed and approved as amended. KN moved the motion; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 5-0-0.

KN moved the motion to adjourn the meeting; MS seconds. Meeting adjourned at 9:56pm.

/jml