

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 22, 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), Larry Morrison (LM), Alex Athans (AA), and Bob Jepson (BJ)

Absent: Arnold Wilson (AW), Prescott (Scott) Arndt (SA)

Guests: Shaun Suhoski (SS), Barbara Barry (BB)

The chairman opened the meeting with a review of the town line item budgets. BB confirmed that the BOS changed their voting for the principal assessor's salary and for the Merit Based Incentive budget which reflect the principal assessor's actual salary and adjusted merit base. AA moved the motion to reconsider the Merit Based Incentive budget; KN seconds. Motion to reconsider accepted 7-0-0.

KN moved the motion to accept \$20,722.00 as the new budget for Merit Based Incentive (account 11232-51170); BJ seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

The wages and salaries line item for the town accountant was up for discussion and vote. KS noted that he's ok with a one-step increase as per the town administrator's original budget request. He would like to advocate strongly putting back in place the step increases that were frozen back in 2009. LM asked what the distinguishing aspects were that named these ten positions. SS answered that his rationale was to move them up a step as these particular positions selected have not been able to progress within their grades for 5 years. This would be an opportunity to demonstrate the town's appreciation for their service. It's not a perfect solution, SS stated, but fair. He would support discussion on bringing back the "step-in-grade" progression. KS stated that the library trustees did such an increase adjustment for the librarian for this very same reason, and perhaps there should be a by-law governing the practices of other boards to be consistent and fair. JL stated that she supports the additional step towards these employees' wages and would like to see the town recognize and properly compensate them for their work. Additionally JL added that the total amount for the additional step increase was still well under the proposed "stipend" warrant for town boards and committees. LM noted that proposing the stipend shows the town that there is money available, yet take away the stipend request and this compensation issue will still exist and need to be addressed. Further, communication is vital to a successful operation and recognizing these employees in this manner would mean a lot and send a positive message. MS noted that this was a fair compromise to move two steps, as the perfect compromise would be to move five.

BJ moved the motion to accept \$12,411.00 for Town Accountant Salaries and Wages line item (account 11351-51130); JL seconds. Motion accepted 4-3-0.

JL moved the motion to accept \$102,329.00 for Finance Director Salaries and Wages line item (account 11451-51130); LM seconds. Motion accepted 4-3-0.

The Town Planner Salaries and Wages had previously been voted and since one of the ten positions falls within this budget JL moved the motion to reconsider; LM seconds. Motion to reconsider accepted 7-0-0.

LM moved the motion to accept \$29,904.00 for Town Planner Salaries and Wages line item (account 11751-51120); JL seconds. Motion accepted 4-3-0.

The Police Department Salaries and Wages had previously been voted and since two of the ten positions falls within this budget JL moved the motion to reconsider; LM seconds. Motion to reconsider accepted 7-0-0. There was discussion around the reserve officers' policy with regard to part-time officers and LM asked SS if this position was truly a regular part-time officer or an "on-call" officer. SS confirmed that it was not a fill in officer.

LM moved the motion to accept \$1,666,633.00 for Police Department Salaries and Wages line item (account 12101-51130); JL seconds. Motion accepted 4-3-0.

Discussion continued with regard to the Taser units and the line item for Supplies in the Police Department budget. SS asked the committee to reconsider as they found a program plan where the 15 weapons would be fully funded for replacement in five years, plus an additional unit by going through this program. Financially there would be a savings by essentially buying new Tasers in 2016 at 2014 prices. JL moved the motion to reconsider the Supplies line item in the Police Department budget; MS seconds. Motion to reconsider accepted 6-1-0.

MS moved the motion to accept \$59,830.00 for Police Department Supplies line item (account 12102-52000); LM seconds. Motion accepted 4-3-0.

JL moved the motion to accept \$24,104.00 for Building Inspector Salaries and Wages line item (account 12411-51130); BJ seconds. Motion accepted 4-3-0.

JL moved the motion to accept \$681,528.00 for DPW Salaries and Wages line item (account 14101-51130); MS seconds. Motion accepted 4-3-0.

JL moved the motion to accept \$46,614.00 for Council on Aging Salaries and Wages line item (account 15411-51130); MS seconds. Motion accepted 4-3-0.

The chairman moved the discussion onto the town warrant articles.

Article 7 and 8 for the Water Department and Sewer Department respectively, is slightly different from the version the committee had received due to changes. SS stated that final numbers are not yet available at this time but the language of the article is approved by town counsel. KS was wondering if it would be better to entertain a motion to take no action because the committee does not have any details and the deadline for print is drawing near; the finance committee has to provide the town with some guidance. SS did not feel it was best to do as it can always be reconsidered at town meeting. LM confirmed that the finance committee has the floor at the beginning of the town meeting and could mention the motion to reconsider at that time.

BJ moved the motion to take no action on Article 7; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

BJ moved the motion to take no action on Article 8; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

KS mentioned that it may be best to keep the same budget categories but pro-rate them for this year as the STA did not provide any budget yet under Article 12 Sturbridge Tourist Association. This is mainly due to the problem that the STA meetings were not quorate. SS confirmed that their budget is the same as Betterment; \$145,222.00.

Moving onto Article 17 Water Meter Replacement Program, SS consulted with the DPW and confirmed the program is to replace the meter heads over the course of four years. BB further confirmed that FY13 is year one as there was money in the budget to start; FY14 is year two. A notice will be going out to all residents on town sewer with their quarterly statements.

KN moved the motion to approve Article 17 as written; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

SS stated that the BOS was going to take up review of Article 19 Tax Rate Relief and they will likely revise this number to \$200,000.00.

The Stipend Study Committee was planning to meet again on Thursday, April 24 to deliberate on issues brought up from their meeting with the finance committee.

SS noted that there may be changes to Article 23 on General Bylaw Amendment to the STA.

For Article 25 Acceptance of Local Option Property Tax Exemption, SS stated that the BOS supported the article yet there is a second article pending in relation to this warrant. KS asked if the assessors even had their criteria and policy written. SS confirmed that they had not. BB explained that Article 25 is only going back two years and is not retroactive, but the pending article may be seeking to change the timeframes and make it retroactive. Currently there are only two residents that would be eligible for relief under Article 25, as per BB from data obtained from the veteran's agent. KS would like SS to confirm the veteran's agent's research.

Article 26 is a new article for adding conservation land. BB explained that this was due to land being repossessed by the town due to negligent tax payments. SS said he would provide more details, reasons adding to conservation and acreage on the land.

SS indicated that there would be a TIF (Tax Increment Finance) as the town ramps up for a new facility at the Gateway on Route 20 near Charlton. Meacham may be moving their headquarters to the Sturbridge Technology Park and they are seeking a tax rebate. SS will provide more information as details are revealed. There is a potential for three additional warrants after the next BOS meeting.

Moving onto the Special Town Meeting warrant articles, SS confirmed that the BOS supported articles 39, 40, 41, 42 and 43. There was slight change in language to Article 43. BJ moved the motion to reconsider Article 43; KN seconds. Motion to reconsider accepted 7-0-0.

BJ moved the motion to accepted Article 43 as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Reserve Fund Transfer – Town Administrator:

A reserve fund transfer (RFT) to the Unclassified Town Report (account 19102-53090) was made by SS for \$429.70. This represents to additional cost of printing that was exceeded in 2013 as the report was an additional 30 pages longer than estimated.

LM moved the motion to accept the RFT for \$429.70 to the Unclassified Town Report (account 19102-53090); AA seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Old Business:

BB asked the committee to reconsider the Transportation Assessment figures as the numbers were not accurate at the time of voting due to the calculation of the new bus. The revised total to be voted should be \$167,874.00. BJ moved the motion to reconsider the Tantasqua Transportation Assessment line item (account 13002-53220); KN seconds. Motion to reconsider accepted 7-0-0.

MS moved the motion to accept \$167,874.00 for the Tantasqua Transportation Assessment line item (account 13002-53220); BJ seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

KS asked to consider the topics for the Issues & Memo topics from the finance committee. He will send confirmation of the topics and who would be responsible for the write up of such. Note that the meeting on Thursday, April 24 is cancelled and he'd like to have the write ups by the Tuesday meeting on April 29.

Motion to adjourn made by BJ; MS seconds. Meeting adjourned at 9:29pm.

/jml