

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
March 7, 2015 ~ Town Hall
8:30am

Call to Order:

The BOS chairman called the meeting to order at 8:30am with the following finance committee members present: Mike Serio (MS), Kathy Neal (KN), Joni Light (JL), Arnold Wilson (AW), Bob Jepson (BJ) and Kevin Smith, Chairman (KS). Absent: Larry Morrison (LM), Eric Perez (EP), Alex Athans (AA). The following BOS members present: Priscilla Gimas (PG), Mary Blanchard (MB), Mary Dowling (MD), Craig Moran (CM).

Other town officials: Suzanne Kennedy (SK), Barbara Barry (BB), David Zinther (DZ), Greg Morse (GM), Tom Ford (TF), Melissa Beauchemin (MB), Tom Chamberland (TC), Glenn Colburn (GB)

Opening Remarks – Suzanne Kennedy

Overall the town is doing very well to keep a high rating, and thanks go out to all the town workers and its various committees for their good work. Currently the snow removal of roofs on town buildings is complete with minimal damage. The Senior Center will have a claim. The town has entered into new contracts for electricity and cable. SK also suggested the town consider an increase of the town's reserve funds, as well a suggested increase in non-union personnel salaries and wages. The TA recommends an increase in reserves of between 10% and 15%. Currently, the town reserves are within 7% to 10%.

Council on Aging – Melissa Beauchemin

MB presented her requests for a new reception desk area at the Senior Center. She has approached Tantasqua requesting quotes for the students to build and is currently awaiting details from the carpentry teacher. She hopes she can have this done minimally as some of the cost may be funded through a recent grant given generously by a resident of a deceased senior.

Additionally, MB is requesting additional hours for the community resource coordinator bringing the total weekly hours worked to 25 hours. This position is currently working 20 hours per week. MB requested capital funds for additional furnishings and window treatments, but these were not funded, as certain furnishings should be funded through the operating budget. The window treatments must be fire retardant as well as insulated and are costly. SK noted that the main reason the window treatments were not funded was because the windows of the building are in need of replacement first. Since this is a historical building certain guidelines must be followed.

Conservation – Glenn Colburn

GC presented his request for a 10 hour increase for his administrative assistant. Currently 20 hours are budgeted out of the operating budget and 5 hours are budgeted from the Wetlands fund. Additional field work and trail mapping plus the need to have the office staffed for the public necessitate his request. KS asked if the work being done for the trails fall under the conservation description or if it is being done merely as a good will task. GC noted that it is indeed helpful to the trails but also logical that it falls under the conservation department due to the level of expertise in town properties. MD commented that she would like to see the trails fall under the jurisdiction of

the conservation as right now the trails fall under the town administrator, and the land is most if not all conservation land.

Tree Warden – Tom Chamberland

TC opened up with the news of a new insect with the potential to wreak havoc on town trees. The Emerald Ash Borer Beetle has been identified in certain areas of Massachusetts. Currently the USD is not supporting treatment of these pests unlike that of the Asian Long Horn Beetle that has been found and is currently being treated in Worcester. This insect only attacks the white ash trees of which the town has several hundred (381) along public roads and walkways, as well as the town common. TC has concern over which trees should be removed and which trees should try to be saved and he recommends removing the older trees or trees otherwise at risk, and treating the rest of the trees with a chemical aimed specifically at destroying this insect. The pesticide will have to be treated every odd year, and TC would like to have a proactive policy from the town to perform such duties.

In addition to the extra funding requested for the pesticides and the cost of tree removals, he is requesting additional hours to perform these tasks. MB suggested a comparison of what other communities are doing and how many other towns are taking this approach. JL asked about the potential side effects of the pesticides and if any research has been done on the effects to the soil and water table. Also, has the beetle even been confirmed in Sturbridge? TC was not sure which prompted discussion around such drastic action. MD further noted that perhaps a committee should be put into place specific to the conservation of the town common and include the DPW director, the fire chief and recreation director as all have a mutual interest in the activities and safety of the common. MS further asked if other state properties were putting forth efforts to eliminate the insect, such as Wells State Park. TC was unaware except that Wells State Park does do timber harvesting. SK suggested the tree warden put together a policy detailing what is to be accomplished.

DPW – Greg Morse

GM noted his major concern for his department is the additional employees he was seeking. After much discussion, KS asked if this would eliminate his continued request for the “third crew”. GM noted that it would help but not eliminate the need. MB noted that there are more roads being maintained this year with the new home developments being turned over to the town. GM noted that he put together a document showing the additional maintenance of the roads as well as, and seemingly more important now after this winter, the storm drains and retention dams. He has concerns over a potentially heavy mud season. MD asked about the difference in the TA budget and his original request. GM stated he was requesting 3 new staff and the TA is asking to budget only 2. KS asked if the finance committee could have a copy of the road plan and any other road report.

Police – Chief Tom Ford

TF reviewed his budget request in detail. He is seeking to fund the additional 1% stipend (currently only the dispatchers and police officers receive) to the chief, the administrative assistant and the two lieutenants. He further noted that he himself is working without a contract that may otherwise address the funding of this stipend, along with the two lieutenants. At the very least he would ask that the stipend be considered for the administrative assistant which amounts to approximately \$396.00 annually. MD asked for the chief to elaborate on the lack of contract as he did noting that it is common practice throughout the Commonwealth that the chiefs of police have an employment

contract in place. He did note, however, that he and his predecessor did not have such a contract. MD wanted the MGL to further research and commented that perhaps Sturbridge just does not use this practice. CM asked if TF felt the need to have a contract in place, and he replied “no”.

KN asked about the SRO and whether or not he felt it was still of value to the elementary school, and is there enough data to support her at Burgess full time. TC stated confidently that she had enough to do each day and was a valuable resource to the students. He noted that she is used as an additional patrol officer when school is not in session. KN further asked if there was any interest from Tantasqua to have an SRO, and KS specifically asked if TRHS expressed an interest whold the chief be looking to hire a second SRO. The chief noted there was no expressed interest from TRHS, but if there was he would be looking to hire a second officer. Additionally, TC was seeking to increase the hours of the animal control officer from 20 hours to 25 hours, mostly due to mandatory training. This dispatcher position went from a part-time positon to a full-time position, and additional funds were being requested in the training budget for mandatory training for this full time dispatcher.

Fire Department/Safety Complex – Chief David Zinther

DZ reviewed his current budget request in detail. KS asked about the aerial ladder truck and the imminent request to fund it. DZ noted that it would be requested in FY17, and that the town is looking at a cost range of \$750K to \$1M. MD asked about the difference in salaries/wages from his request and the town administrator’s request, which he confirmed to be additional hours for his administrative assistant. SK noted that there was an increase given last year for this positon and to see what happens throughout this year. DZ has been doing extensive filing to get the office better organized and it has taken a lot of her time. SK suggested perhaps deploying additional help with files, etc.

With regard to the Safety Complex renovations, DZ noted the bathroom will be removed as it is never used and would be used for additional space to the administrative office. AW asked about the level of maintenance (increased) to the building and whether or not it has been properly maintained. DZ noted other issues that need attention such as water damage and the potential for mold, but as BB stated, this could be an insurance issue and not an increase to the operating budget. Additional requirements for the building in the near future: better insulation and windows, which are not great, and the roof will need attention soon.

Moving onto the staffing requirements this year, MD asked if the additional paramedic would potentially decrease the overtime budget, and is that reflected in this year’s budget. DZ stated that it would, and that it is included. He further commented on the dispatch regionalization that is being put into practice by several communities.

Finance Director\ Town Administrator Closing Comments – Barbara Barry & Suzanne Kennedy

BB will provide the finance committee with non-union step increases for those who will be eligible, as well as the CPI increase so that the committee can see how the increases were constructed at the request of KS. Steps are annually granted and those still on step increases will also receive the CPI increase.

MD asked about the large adjustment to the town accountant’s salary as he was just hired last year, and was curious to know where he fell within the range. BB commented on how pleased she is with

his overall knowledge, ability and work ethic, and while the increase is large, he is still not at the salary that the previous town accountant would be had she remained in the position.

AW asked about the Plimpton Parcel Purchase on New Boston Road, and whether or not the parcel on Holland Road could be taken by the town by eminent domain. There was a fair amount of discussion around these parcels as well as the recycling center property. Specifically, AW asked if there was any discussion on the BOS around the administration of the recycling center going under the jurisdiction of the DPW with over-sight from the BOH.

SK updated the committees with the solar panel agreement and that an amendment would be forthcoming to the BOS. National Grid has a proposal under review with the planning board.

Meeting was adjourned at 12:35pm.

/jml