

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 16, 2015 ~ Sturbridge Town Hall
7:00pm

Call to Order:

The chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00pm with the following committee members present: Kevin Smith, Chair (KS); Joni Light (JL); Kathy Neal (KN); Arnold Wilson (AW); Mike Serio (MS); and Bob Jepson (BJ). Absent: Eric Perez (EP); Larry Morrison (LM); and Alex Athans (AA).

Guests: Penny Dumas (PD); Darci Schofield (DS); Carol Goodwin (CG); Donald Taft (DT); Howie Fife (HF); Leslie Duthie (LD); BB (Bob Brier – sp?)

Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes of April 7, 2015 were reviewed. MS moved the motion to approve the minutes as amended; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

The chairman recognized Penny Dumas from the Conservation Commission, and Darci Schofield to discuss the CPC/CPA articles. PD gave an overview of the Plimpton Parcel located off of New Boston Road, and that this has been a priority parcel to the town for many years. It will connect conservation acreage from Hamilton Rod and Gun Club, Wells State park, and the Wolf Swamp Wildlife Management area in Brookfield. There will also be an area set aside specifically for ball fields and a parking area for 100 cars. KS mentioned how the article mentions borrowing and asked for specifics on the funding. DS explained the various funds starting with the initial \$668,000.00 from the Sturbridge CPA fund; \$400,000.00 awarded by the MA Land Grant, \$343,950.00 from the USFS Community Forest Grant; \$15,000.00 from the Fields Pond Foundation; \$50,000.00 from the Bafflin Foundation; and \$10,000.00 donated by the Hamilton Rod and Gun Club. The last four will be awarded at time of closing; the MA Land Grant will be awarded as reimbursement to the short term borrowing grant to be voted on at town meeting; and the first is also to be voted on at town meeting. KS asked why the town needed this land. PD noted that it would be developed into housing developments and a large portion of this parcel surrounds and protects the Cedar Lake watershed. Building would increase traffic not only with the equipment trucks during the construction but also an increase of residential traffic on an already precarious road with twists and bends. PD also commented that the CPC has been banking this money for the purchase over the past 8-10 years as that's how long the discussions have been taking place.

DC stated that the land meets the open space criteria that allowed the town to qualify for grants. The 16 acres of land reserved for recreation fields will allow for 4 playing fields and parking for 100 cars. KS asked if the CPC funds would cover the maintenance of the fields. PD noted that the CPA fund is continuous and there is funding available. KS ask how much has been collected this past year. \$211,000.00 was collected from the state, and \$400,000.00 was collected from the town. KS commented on how the state's portion was decreasing. PD stated that as more communities tap into the CPA the state match does decrease.

KN asked if any of this land was Chapter 61 land, and what was the assessment of the Plimpton parcel. Ds confirmed it was Chapter 61 but not sure on the assessment. KN asked further if the CR was in place as they had been working on this over several years. DS noted that certain criteria, including the CR, had to be met in order to qualify for the \$400,000.00 grant, and that this all has to be met by June 15. PD stated that the \$40,000.00 on the STM warrant is for the stewardship to hold the CR. The CR has to be in place in order to receive certain grants. Additionally, the short term loan for the land is necessary as the land has to be in the town's possession in order for the land grant to be awarded.

KN commented that traffic would increase when there is a field event, and speculated that regardless of a housing development or ball fields, traffic would increase noticeably to the area in either case. PD noted that it would, but it would be more seasonal traffic with ball fields, and heavy traffic would be

more sporadic. She further noted that she was not aware of any traffic study, however, and without one she could not be certain. KS asked about the Brookfield Parcel for \$160,000.00. PD indicated the area on the map provided as it connects the Plimpton Parcel to the Wolf Swamp WMA. KN asked to know if there was a general benchmark or guideline on how much open space should be allocated to a town. Further, KN noted that Sturbridge is behind in affordable housing yet they have over \$4M allocated for open space. DS was not sure on such guidelines or quotas for communities but felt it would vary from community to community. BJ noted that a local bank gave 14 acres to Habitat for Humanity on Podunk Road and was curious to know if the town had available funds to help this cause. PD said she would be in touch with the town planner to get more details.

CG spoke notably on behalf of the project and the amount of work that went into this effort by all involved to secure the Plimpton Parcel. Additionally she indicated that over 60% of residents spoke favorably on the purchase of the property for open space. She further reiterated that this would secure and preserve the watershed and allow for a healthy and thriving wildlife population. She also indicated that the CPC was looking into affordable housing and some of the tax properties on the ATM warrant are included.

DT from Hamilton Rod & Gun Club also spoke favorably to the purchase of the Plimpton Parcel to be used for open space and conservation. The Hamilton Rod & Gun Club put up \$10,000.00 towards the purchase which will be matched at 100%, bringing the total to \$20,000.00.

LD from Opacum Land Trust also commented that this is a great community to preserve such land, and how it fits within the Nature Conservancy's vision to preserve such areas that would allow different elevations and terrain for wildlife to remain thrive while continuing to have a secure area away from residential areas. LD noted this was important and Sturbridge was fortunate to have such areas.

KS thanked the group before the committee, but noted there would be no vote on the CPC articles until the BOS puts the language into the articles. The BOS was planning to meet on April 21 to re-open the warrant so language could be added and placeholders could become permanent articles.

Moving onto the articles using document "Draft ATM Warrant-7 – 2015 dm.doc", KS started with some of the CPC articles.

Article 4 – Community Preservation – LED Light Fixtures

PD commented that the sheds were building and Tom Chamberland asked for CPA funds for this project since the sheds are on CPA land. The lights are motion detection lights. KN asked if this was an appropriate use of CPA funds. PD said they looked at the definitions and felt that it met the criteria for appropriate use of funds. She further noted that it does not specify solar power in the specifications. KS asked how the lights were intended to be powered as there is no electricity in the sheds currently, and why was there a need to have lights on these sheds several years after being built. PD stated that there is equipment being housed in the sheds and perhaps it would be to keep intruders away at night, and also that the trails have a lot more evening walk events and the lights are likely needed. KS was curious to know if there was an alarm system if there was expensive equipment being housed in the sheds. PD was now sure but would get more details. HF noted that the sheds would have likely been addressed more thoroughly prior to building had the CR been in place for this property. The CR states specific boundaries for parking areas, sheds, kiosks and the like.

Article 5 – Community Preservation – Trail Assessment Software

PD stated that Tom Chamberland asked to help map the ADA trails for the town, and asked for CPA funds for this software. KS wanted to know where the software would reside as it is town property and needs to be on a town computer. PD indicated that there is an office used by the trails committee and a town computer. KS suggested some additional follow up.

Article 6 – Community Preservation – Old Burial Ground

KS asked if this was a continuation of the project to repair and restore old gravestones as done in years past, and if anyone had looked into the cemetery trust funds. PD was not aware of this fund and did not believe anyone has used them. JL noted that the DPW has used some of the funds to repair and maintain the cemetery within the cemetery, such as the roof repair needed for the shed, and some crack repairs along the interior roads. PD was very interested and felt it would prove useful in small projects. MS noted that the finance director indicated the balance on some of the trusts would have to be greater before the town would tap into them. BB provided documents on the old stones that will need to be repaired and restored. There are three stones in dire need of repair, one of which is being strangled by tree roots and will need to be relocated; another military stone is broken into many small pieces. He described the process of repair and restoration.

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

Article 7 – Community Preservation – Town Records Restoration

PD stated that this article was brought forward by the town clerk. All records are stored in the safe, which was revealed to be climate controlled. Many of the records for preservation date back to 1733. KS asked if any had been digitized. PD said they did have some done and the town clerk would check to ensure nothing is duplicated. KS said it was not clear to him what exactly was being done, and if it was going to span back to the beginning of time. PD noted that preservation will be done in phases over time. KS wanted to know the definition of “permanent” town records. It was suggested by several people present that perhaps it is birth, death and marriage records, but PD would clarify.

BJ moved the motion to approve Article 7 as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

KS stated that the STM article for the CR is not yet an article and would have to be added at the next BOS meeting. HF did indicate that the \$40,000.00 is for four parcels; a flat fee of \$10,000.00 each CR. With the Community Preservation articles being discussed in full at this point, the finance committee moved back to the approval of meeting minutes.

Meeting Minutes

The meeting minutes of April 9, 2015 were reviewed. MS moved the motion to approve the minutes as amended; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 4-0-1. (MS abstaining; BJ not present at time of vote.)

The committee focused attention on one article on the STM warrant, using document “DRAFT STM WARRANT 4-2-2015-1 2 3 dm.doc”.

Article 46 – Transfer of Funds – Snow & Ice Removal Costs

MS moved the motion to approve Article 46 as written; KN seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.

KS cancelled the Tuesday, April 21 meeting as there were no further articles to review until the BOS re-opened and finalized the warrant at their meeting on this date.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was moved by BJ; KN seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0. Meeting adjourned at 9:57pm.

/jml