

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 23, 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); Larry Morrison (LM); and Bob Jepson (BJ). Absent: Eric Perez (EP); and Alex Athans (AA).

Guests: Tom Chamberland (TC)

The chairman recognized Tom Chamberland to come and speak on behalf of the outstanding line items under his town budget, Tree Warden; specifically line 97.

KS asked about the chemicals and was still not convinced his questions on the effects to ground water was adequately answered. TC gave quite a bit of background on the Emerald Ash Borer and how it was found in the Berkshires back in 2012. According to TC the state is no longer monitoring the beetle and is depending on communities to manage the pest. The beetle has not been confirmed in Sturbridge or the surrounding towns. TC has been in contact with Northern Tree, who do extensive work in the area in and around Sturbridge, and they have not found any trace of the beetle. The only way to confirm that the beetle exists is to cut into the tree. TC indicated that the town has approximately 391 ash "street trees", meaning trees on Sturbridge public right-of-ways. TC would like these trees to be treated. The first step would be to treat the larger trees with a diameter of 200" or more, and the second step would be to put a plan in place for the management of the remaining trees. He has not yet identified the trees. The cost of the chemicals is approximately \$3.00 per inch of diameter. KS wanted to know if trees on private property would be treated should the beetle be found in the area. TC was not sure if the town could force a resident to treat their trees.

KS asked if the BOS had done anything by way of offering guidance for a tree management plan or procedures that would include treatment through the life of the ash trees, as ash trees live approximately 250 years on average. TC indicated that trees would have to be treated at least every other year to kill or keep away the beetles. This is a long term plan and could have long term effects on costs to the town.

JL had concerns over the use of chemicals on trees that were otherwise healthy as the beetle has only been confirmed in Dalton, MA. There were too many unknowns about this process such as the effects on the soil and ground water, but also insects, birds and other trees and plants. JL specifically mentioned woodpeckers who drill into trees to get insects, as well as sap-suckers and other insects and birds who rely on the saps from trees. There was nothing in the documentation outlining the repercussions these chemicals would have over time on other aspects of the environment, and to treat a tree that is not infected seemed unnecessary. JL further asked if one could use pieces of trees that would be trimmed over the course of time (for regular safety and maintenance) to see if there were signs of the beetle before using any chemicals. TC did not have any answers.

LM mentioned that it is difficult to decide which tree would be more important to the residents to keep. TC noted it needs to be a town decision. MS asked how long the beetle can be present in a tree before it is gone. TC noted that if the beetle was caught in the first year or two the tree can be saved. Once the tree was more than 50% dead it cannot be saved. MS asked further if there were signs to tell if the tree were at that point, which TC noted that limbs would be dying off and then you could trim the pieces to open them up for signs of the pest. He also confirmed that no trees have signs of the beetles yet.

KN asked if other neighboring towns were treating the trees in any way, or if they confirmed the presence of the beetle. TC said to his knowledge only Dalton and a town near Boston were doing something about the beetle, and that communities need to take action. KS asked if this program was

not necessarily a need, rather a want based on aesthetics. Further, what would be the harm of losing a white ash tree if we were to replace it with an oak or a maple? TC noted that lots of trees are under attack for various pests and all trees are worth saving to avoid losing our biodiversity. TC then asked if the committee was not comfortable using the chemicals then at least give additional funding for the removal of trees. MS asked if there was another method of attacking this pest without using chemicals. TC said no.

AW moved the motion to accept line item 97 for \$14,102.00; BJ seconds. Motion accepted 5-2-0 (KN and JL in opposition)

Moving on to the Annual Town Meeting Warrant, and using document "Draft ATM Warrant-4-7- 2015 dm.doc", KS asked TC to remain to discuss those articles that pertained to the trails.

Article 4 – Community Preservation – LED Light Fixtures

KS asked about the power to the shed, and if it would be needed for these fixtures. TC said the LED lights being requested are solar powered, and they would be used on the sheds at the Riverlands property on Stallion Hill Road. He indicated that the DPW uses the shed to store town equipment. With an anticipated parking lot for the area under review the need to have the lights installed made sense. Fencing from the skate park is being re-used to secure the sheds as there is no alarm system. The two lights are portable and can be used for some of the "night walk" events that take place at the Riverlands. LM asked if there was consideration to mounting cameras. TC was not aware of any plans.

AW moved the motion to accept Article 4 as written; MS seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Article 5 – Community Preservation – Trail Assessment Software

TC noted that this was the same software he was using while employed at the Army Corps, but it was no longer available as he is now retired. He has been using this particular software for trail access information and to note ADA compliant areas, etc. He shared documents with the committee to show some of the work done on some of the trails. KS asked where the software would be installed. TC noted he has a town computer at the COB that he shares with the veteran's agent. KS asked if it was a single user license or could others access it, and is there space for it on the server. TC said he would confirm with the IT person. AW mentioned that one trail still has a tree over it preventing access and is not handicap accessible. KS asked if the Army Corps would be willing to do a data dump for previous work to the trails to the town if the town approves the software. TC said he would ask.

KN moved the motion to accept Article 5 as written; AW seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Before leaving the meeting, TC commented on the many discussions on the trails oversight, and where it should fall within the town's management. With a lot of the work from the trails committee being done on the trails themselves, TC noted that they interact more with the DPW. They often go to them for use of supplies and tools, and they use the same vendors as the DPW for what they need. MS congratulated TC and the trails committee for all their accomplishments this past year. He was curious to know if a sign would be considered for the turnpike for the trail system, similar to signs for the "Bridge of Flowers" in Shelburne Falls. TC said there was no discussion on marketing under the master plan. LM reminded everyone that Sturbridge is part of the Quinnebaug-Shetucket Heritage Corridor, now under The Last Green Valley. He was curious to know if there was any joint efforts being made with them for our vast trail system. TC said he routinely shares FB pages to promote each other's initiatives, and they also share brochures.

Reserve Fund Transfer – Becky Plimpton, Librarian

This Reserve Fund Transfer is necessary for the valve repairs on the propane tanks that heat the library building. This was discussed at a previous meeting after it was discovered that there was an issue with the shut-off valve at the building where the piping meets the underground tank. The price requested is \$585.00 to be transferred to the Library Building Purchase of Services Account.

MS moved the motion to accept the transfer from the Reserve Fund to the Library Building Purchase of Services Account (11962-52000) for \$585.00; KN seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

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The meeting minutes of April 16, 2015 were reviewed. KS wanted to be more clear in some of his comments and will provide specifics for review at a later meeting.

Moving onto the ATM Warrant and using "DRAFT ATM WARRANT 4-13-2015.doc", discussion started on Article 27 – 8 Brookfield Road.

Article 27 – 8 Brookfield Road

KS was curious to that the BOS deliberately left out the dollar value from the article, even though they received the quote of \$435,750.00, which is also noted in the text box. If the committee does not vote this article and the town votes in same the building will be winterized and water will be shut off. The line item budget for 8 Brookfield Road will have to be reduced to reflect this change. Likewise, Article 28 – Roof Renovations was discussed in parallel as it, too, had the similar language by deliberately leaving out the total cost of renovation while the text indicates a charge of \$282,000.00. MS asked if the articles were written using the proper legal language, and KS stated that it was proper and legal. Further, he noted that it does not indicate from which funds they would be allocated. KN asked if there was another use for the property and if this was still being considered. She went on to suggest that perhaps a committee should be put in place to do a review. LM was perplexed as to why the BOS would sponsor an article and not provide a known dollar value in the body. KS was equally perplexed and did not feel it should get this far with ambiguous language.

AW moved the motion to take no action on Article 27; BJ seconds. Motion approved 7-0-0.

Moving to the line item budget book for a review.

Line item 72 for 8 Brookfield Road can now be reduced based upon the committee voting not to move forward with Article 27. KS said the total can be changed to \$3,000.00 for odd expenses as the building will be shut down. He also noted that a motion must be made at the town meeting to move Article 27 before Article 9 – Town Budget so the residents can see the correlation of their vote to the budget.

AW moved the motion to approve 8 Brookfield Road line item 72 for \$3,000.00; BJ seconds. Motion approved 7-0-0.

Line item 148 for the Recreation Department Head Salary. KS said the BOS had voted this item and decided she is not eligible for the step in grade as she is now a department head. Department heads do not receive step in grade increases. However, she is eligible for the merit pool and the 2.75% increase.

JL moved the motion to accept Recreation Department line item 148 for \$32,921.00; LM seconds. Motion approved 7-0-0.

At this time the committee does not have confirmed numbers on the group insurance line item, and KS said the Plimpton Article was being changed again. He anticipated this revised language for Plimpton to be reviewed on April 30.

KS went through the remaining line item budgets to compare the differences between the town administrator recommendations, the finance committee recommendations and the BOS recommendations. The BOS differed in line item 16 for the town accountant, and did not approve the salary increase. They chose a random number without much rationale. Line item 79 for the police was lower for the BOS as they chose to fund only one cruiser. Line item 141 in the Veteran's Agent budget was changed because the BOS felt this should never be reduced from year to year, even though it is based upon numbers of cases, and that both the TA and Veteran's Agent felt \$60,000.00 was adequate for the year.

KS told the committee he asked the finance director to figure out the trade off to the town if the roof renovation passes. He was concerned about the effect it could have on the town's rating. He does not want to jeopardize the rating and would consider taking no action if it meant keeping the rating.

AW asked if there was a breakdown on the \$282,000 for the roofs by building and costs for each entity. Further, he was curious about the slate roof maintenance plan and if it was being done year over year as required. LM commented on the town's rating, and that it is really important to know that if the credit rating is reduced they can expect to see additional increases within the town if we have to pay higher rates to borrow.

Moving to the STM Article and using "DRAFT STM WARRANT 4-13-2015 2.doc".

Article 47 – Engineering Services for Public Safety Complex

KS said this was for engineering costs only.

MS moved the motion to accept Article 47 as written; BJ seconds. Motion approved 7-0-0.

Article 48 – Town Counsel

KN asked for the reason of the increase. KS was not sure and would try to get that information broken out from the town administrator.

Article 54 – Community Preservation – Compliance with Conservation Restrictions

This is for a one-time expense for conservation restrictions on four properties in town for Opacum.

MS moved the motion to accept Article 54 as written; KN seconds. Motion approved 6-0-1 (LM abstaining)

Motion to adjourn the meeting was moved by BJ; MS seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0. Meeting adjourned at 10:09pm.

/jml