

Sturbridge Finance Committee
Meeting Minutes
April 28, 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); Eric Perez (EP); Arnold Wilson (AW); Mike Serio (MS); Larry Morrison (LM); and. Absent: Bob Jepson (BJ); and Alex Athans (AA).

Guests: Tom Chamberland (TC); Brian Amedy (BA)

JL arrived at 7:02pm from the rear office; EP also arrived at 7:02pm.

Reserve Fund Transfer – Central Purchasing

A Reserve Fund Transfer request was submitted by Barbara Barry to cover additional costs in FY15 to the Water/Sewer account for the town buildings.

LM moved the motion to transfer \$108.39 from the Reserve Fund to the Central Purchasing Water/Sewer (account 19152-52320); MS seconds. Motion accepted 5-0-2 (EP & JL abstaining).

The chairman recognized members of the Sturbridge Tourist Association to come and speak on the STA budget article, and discuss the account categories.

BA provided the committee with the budget categories (Attachment A), and noted that these had not yet been voted officially by the committee but would be reviewed and discussed at the scheduled May meeting. A meeting was scheduled for this evening to vote on the categories before meeting with the finance committee but only three members were present. KS asked why the advertising category was now changed to “Advertising & Promotions” as it had been separated as “Advertising” and “Marketing” in the past. BA thought the definition was a better fit and agreed with KS that one was more for funding the physical products and one was more to fund ideas – intellectual v. physical. KN asked who was doing the advertising. BA noted that STA does not advertise but are currently involved in a co-op program with Global Publishing that subsidizes advertising of local businesses in their local tourism booklet. He went on to say that most of the advertising costs in the past were funded to the Chamber for their annual marketing and advertising campaign. They would submit a proposal on what they plan to do and are currently exploring the Hartford and Albany areas. Recently the STA had asked the Chamber to explore other areas, and they are using the Hartford Courant to expand into Providence and Boston markets.

KN asked if there was any discussion or consideration to go to an agency for town advertising, rather than using the Chamber as the main advertising force. BA said they had used Smith & Jones in the past to set up the domain and website that was used by the now defunct “Merchants of Sturbridge”. KS noted that the town owns that domain and to his knowledge, is still paying for it.

LM asked about the lack of quorum and wanted to know the STA’s position on why there were issues getting the committee together. Further, does the make-up and function of the STA sound like it is working as a corporation for profit, or a 501c organization, or perhaps it is an official component of the local government? With regards to the funded programs, are themes used as proof that the target audience is successful, and are there measurements in place to even know? With regard to the budget, each year the amounts differ so how can it be managed properly with little time to put together a budget now knowing how much can be spent? Many private companies know these answers before the money is dispersed. BA shared that he had similar questions for the committee over the years, and that the STA relies on the information people provide in order to manage measurements of success. Additionally, the STA ask for such details at the time of proposal, yet a volunteer committee is not

always qualified to put in place the proper mechanism to measure the success. For the quorum issues, interest in the success of the tourism brought to Sturbridge and is committed to the success of the committee. TC added that as a citizen at large he feels the STA is an official town government body and he had to be sworn in by the town clerk under oath. He feels an accurate mission for the committee is missing. At the last meeting the committee voted not to move forward with the MOU that was voted down at the last STM. The committee strongly recommended that the new TA take a vested interest and review the committee to offer guidance and direction. For TC, he is also committed to making the right decisions for the town and feels with a bit of guidance it can be an effective town organization. LM made note that while the STA has spending authority over a budget, if the committee is unable to hold a quorum to vote then the committee is non-functioning. With a lack of commitment of the appointed members then the issue points to the BOS. LM asked if the STA had ever had to report to the BOS. BA said that recently they had been having meetings and was hopeful those quorum issues were in the past. As for reporting to the BOS, KS noted that there is an annual report given to the BOS. BA confirmed this but said they did not report like other departments or committees. As for the reports, the STA asks the Chamber to provide reports regularly but they are rarely provided. For the quorum, there are currently seven seats with one vacancy, as TC noted, so the minimum number to make a quorum is four.

KS was curious to know more about the recommendation to the new town administrator. BA clarified that it is hopeful the new TA would be more proactive with the group and be more active in the meetings which may help guide others. KS said that the STA does interesting work and has an interesting group dynamic. BA agreed and was optimistic that more non-Chamber groups would come before the committee for town events and other proposals noting some interesting groups due in FY16. KN wanted to know if the smaller businesses knew about the funds available to them, especially smaller ones. BA said the plan is to expand more on advertising for the committee itself to be more proactive in getting the message out to those smaller groups.

JL pointed out a few of the budget categories, specifically the details in the Welcome Center, which does not include funding of the water, sewer and electricity as it was not funded in previous years nor is it mentioned in the by-law. The town does not own the Welcome Center but the STA by-law allows the funding of such a center to be in town by provided funds for staffing, internet and postage. This category specifies funding only these expenses. BA noted that back in 2012 when it was noticed that water, sewer, electricity were being paid for by the town, he questioned why but was not given an answer. JL also noted that there were questions around the funding of the restrooms whereby the cost of the bathrooms were shared equally between the STA and the Betterment, yet over the past few years the STA has been funding more than half the costs including repairs and maintenance, plowing, pest control and cleaning. The issue around cleaning was perplexing because it was turned over to the town cleaning contract a few years back, yet apparently the bathrooms were not being kept clean and complaints were made. The former TA had told the Chamber to handle the contracting of the cleaning company and to submit the bills directly to the town. It is now approximately \$750 per month to clean the Route 20 Restrooms. JL feels this is exorbitant, along with others, and should be reviewed. JL further clarified after a recent finance meeting it was confirmed that the Betterment committee would fund repairs and maintenance of the restrooms.

MS was asking about the town website and wanted to know if it was still actively in use. He felt it could be used as a tool to share success stories of the some of the events funded by the STA to help get a positive dialogue on the STA out in public.

Resident Jim Zavastoski was in the audience and has taken an interest in the proper management of the STA. He agrees with the sentiment of the committee's set up and felt the by-laws are too specific with the memberships and should be broadened to allow for an enthusiastic person to become a member. If there is such a person out there with energy and ideas then they shouldn't be deprived of becoming a member if they are not a specific business owner, for example. He further stated that having a finance

committee liaison and a BOS liaison as part of the committee is a good step in the right direction. A quorum could have been achieved tonight if the structure was different.

Moving to the line item budget, KS told the committee that the BOS was meeting on April 29 to vote on all the budget items and close the warrant. MS asked if the committee could have time enough to review their votes before finding the results at the time of the finance committee's April 30 meeting.

KS asked if the Conservation Committee line item 47 Salaries/Wages could be reconsidered after hearing the new figure based upon a new person in the position, which reduced the current budget amount.

KN moved the motion to reconsider line item 47 Salaries/Wages; MS seconds. Motion to reconsider is accepted 7-0-0.

KN moved the motion to approve line item 47 Salaries/Wages for \$16,944.00; MS seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

KS wanted to be clear on the association of the 8 Brookfield Road line item and the Article 29. If the vote was to approve the article, the cost to the budget line item 72 for 8 Brookfield Road would be \$10,500.00. If the article is not accepted the line item amount would be back to \$1,500.00 as it would be closed and winterized. Also of note is the town assessment of the building, which is \$286,000.00 for the building and \$62,700.00 for the land. The code compliance report was funded at \$14,000.00 last year. KS said the BOS has not reconsidered this line item.

AW moved the motion to reconsider line item 72 Purchase of Service; KN seconds. Motion to reconsider was accepted 7-0-0.

AW moved the motion to approve line item 72 Purchase of Service for \$1,500.00; KN seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Moving now to the ATM Warrant and using document "Draft ATM Warrant 4-13-2015.doc.

KS confirmed that the Article 8 on the Plimpton Parcel will be going before the BOS. Article 25 was on the solar by-law and wanted to know if there were any questions. KN asked about the section that stated if a resident was in this district does it have to be buffered or if it abuts a resident does it have to be buffered; it was unclear. LM asked also if it abuts a property in residential use and the property is vacant is it still considered "in use". KS said he would forward these questions to the town planner.

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

Article 51 is for the boiler replacement and Greg Morse sent details on the two v. one boiler units. KS asked if there were any questions with his explanation. Hearing none, JL moved the motion to approve Article 51 Boiler Replacement Senior Center as written; KN seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

New Business

KS asked to assign topics of discussion to the committee members. LM said he was happy to draft a summary on a High Knowledge Industry that was mentioned in the past, and propose the state be approached to include "high knowledge industry/economic development" into the by-laws. MS asked if this would include academics, such that Worcester is now becoming a college area being home to ten colleges. LM said the Quinsigamond is the only community college in the state that include curriculum for bio-engineering, and they're expanding their campus to Southbridge.

KN said she would consider the policy and plan for town owned buildings to under a condition assessment each year.

JL will review the Senior Center Building to consider long term options for the operation, i.e., remove it, renovate it, or build it.

MS agreed to write on trails oversight. AW will consider the use of town owned lands, and BJ will review the recycling center oversight and whether it should be under the control of the DPW or the BOH.

Motion to adjourn the meeting was moved by KN; MS seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0. Meeting adjourned at 8.41pm.

/jml