

**Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**  
**March 10th, 2016**  
**Conference Room 2, Town Hall**  
**Sturbridge, MA**

**Meeting called to order at 7:00 PM with the following committee members present; Chair Kathleen Neal (KN), Vice Chair Kevin Smith (KS), Michael Serio (MS), Laurance Morrison (LM), Clerk Joni Light (JL), James Waddick (JW), Suzanne Smiley (SS) and Leah Boutelle (as recording clerk). Becky Plimpton (BP) from the Joshua Hyde Library and Barbara Search (BS) from the Historical Commission were also present, in turn.**

**Reserve Fund Transfers**

KN reviews the Reserve Fund Transfer (RFT) request from the Public Library for Purchase of Services in the amount of \$3,913.00 for the purpose of repairing an HVAC issue in the main library building. There is currently \$11,595.00 in the Library Building Purchase of Services Account #11962-52000, however all funds are earmarks for other purposes.

BP explains that the HVAC unit broke on the roof and the heat exchanger has been consistently presenting issues and was repaired with parts for two years so far. They had to replace an entire heat exchange unit. There was no heat for four days. One night, she recalls was 10 degrees Fahrenheit and the staff were scrambling for space heaters. She notifies the committee that the repair has already taken place.

*SS makes a motion to approve the RFT as written.*

BP expresses that she has put forth the recommendation that they spend \$25,000.00 from the Capital Improvement budget for FY17 to do a study on the heating system in the library building.

JW wants to know how old the system is.

BP responds that it is about 15 years old, but on the roof the elements corrode the system exponentially faster. She hopes that with the study and new budget she will have repairs made in FY18 that will fix the problem long term.

JW expresses that in this case it may be better to replace it.

*JW seconds the motion to approve the RFT as written.*

KS asks what the current balance is for the Reserve Fund.

KN answers that there is \$99,614.00 in the Reserve Fund.

BP goes further to explain that 15 years ago, the heating system was propane. They switched to this

unit and now C and C Temp. Control do all the repairs. She can't use CAM (company used for other municipal buildings) because of lengthiness and time/financial investment involved in the learning curve; it took too long for them to figure it out, while C and C was already familiar.

KS reminds the committee that it is important to inquire of town officials why all HVAC systems are not being serviced by the same provider.

BP talked to Barbara Barry (Finance Director:BB), and that CAM and C and C are fairly similarly priced.

JW expresses that C and C did work that people were thrilled with at Southbridge Savings Bank.

JL wonders if this issue is new and if the leaks that were happening in the HVAC are somehow related to the previous roof leakage.

KS refutes this notion as this repair is due to mechanical failure.

BP notifies that committee that they have been "limping along" for the last five years, spending an estimated \$12,000.00 to keep the system in the repair that it's in.

JL asks if this issue came up last year.

BP reminds the committee that the issues last year were related to gutters and leaks. She wants to do the study this year, FY17, and do repairs in FY18.

JL asks if the study would not just be the HVAC system but heating and propane as well.

BP explains that the electric heat is in the basement, and that the wall units would be part of the study.

SS notices that with cold, the units work harder.

JL expresses that the system is riddled with issues.

BP goes further to explain that the same units are used for air conditioning.

KS adds that they switch over in June.

BP hoping the existing units will survive until FY18. BB had talked to her about putting a safety net type fund into FY17 in the case of failure.

JW states that it's not unusual for a 15 year old system to malfunction.

SS suggests that repair companies give recommendations, and asks if C and C did that.

BP responds that they the ongoing maintenance company and they will give informal recommendations.

SS suggests that they get such recommendations in writing.

JW and KS would like to see a maintenance contract for the whole town.

KS asks if the repair came with a warranty.

BP states that there was probably one on the part, as they purchased an entire part.

KS asks if it will be sufficient throughout FY16.

JL asks if this could be paid for out of Capital Projects Fund.

BP states that the study will be part of the Capital Projects Fund.

KN asks if there are any other questions.

*Motion passes 7-0-0 to approve RFT as written. \$3,913.00 is moved from Reserve Fund to Library Building Purchase of Services Account #11962-52000.*

### **Approval of Meeting Minutes for FinCom meeting 2-11-16**

KS, KN, and JL discuss several desired amendments, typos and figure errors, LB notes and revises.

*JL makes a motion to approve the minutes as amended, KS seconds, motion passes 7-0-0.*

### **Reserve Fund Transfer**

Barbara Search of the Historical Commission is requesting \$1,000.00 from the Reserve Fund for the purpose of paying a professional to do a historical study and documentation of the exhibition hall on Rt. 20 which is looking at being torn down.

KS makes the argument that it's not unforeseen, he sees it as clearly a waste of \$1000.00. There's nothing the town can do about it now, and feels that they should have done the study about a different historical landmark; its fait accompli, as the buildings coming down no matter what, now or six months from now.

JW clarifies that they can postpone it but if CVS (who is looking at the property) wants to tear it down, they will do so.

KS the "favorably preserved" action gives six months for them to try and figure out an alternative, they could offer them a TIF (Tax Increment Savings) that would offset their property taxes. KS learned from Jean Bubon, the Town Planner, that tax increment financing involves red tape in order to earn the 5% match the state gives on the savings.

MS feels that this is not hard to do.

KS states that the building is only 7,000 sq. ft. while CVS wants 11,000 sq. ft.

JL inquires what the intention is: to tear it down and build a sprawling structure?

KS notices that the location is favorable due to the visual: people are stuck looking at it at the lights.

JL feels that this resistance reflects the town's inability to nurture new businesses coming into the town, Ralph Lauren or Calvin Klein wanted to come to build an outlet but were discouraged and ended up not following through.

LM agrees that it has gotten to the point where the town has an unfortunate reputation among the business community. Basically, if a business has a lot of patience and a lot of money it might have a chance, but otherwise going elsewhere would be easier. This is not a tourist community and hasn't been for 20 years, and the uppity attitude is self flattery. Condescending attitudes cater/pander for re-elections, and this is representative of the dark side of democracy. This dark side shows itself towards the business community.

Barbara Search from the Historical Commission enters the room.

BS explains that there is no money appropriated for the Historical Commission. She goes on to notify the committee that the building in question is deemed "preferably preserved", which means there is a six month demo delay to allow research for building options; is there something else CVS or someone else can do. The possibilities are open ended and unexplored. She expresses that one thing that needs knowing is what is in the exhibition hall. She wants to know what, if researched historically or architecturally, can we find out about this building. Is there any other buildings like this in the area? Just looking at the observation deck, it is a grand building for exhibition hall for a fair. If the study does nothing to save the building it will at least give us a history of it. Jenn Dowry would hold the contract in Hopkinton, MA. She does multiple pages, takes pictures, goes into the building to do an evaluation. The end result would be 15-20 pages of documentation. BS felt comfortable with her and she was cheaper than the other quote that they got. She hopes that the RFT will be approved.

MS asks what the budget break down is.

BS replies that it is \$1,000.00 for the evaluation.

SS had a hard time getting onto the website, Town of Hopkinton.

BS explains that this building was built in 1768 for the Sturbridge Fair Grounds. The fair was held at the common. The Southern Worcester Agricultural Society built the observation level then the town bought it from the society when the society moved the fair to Brimfield.

KS had a conversation with Jean Bubon; CVS has said they're going to tear it down no matter what.

BS hopes that she can talk to someone about moving the building, it can be cheaper than taking it down.

SS doesn't agree.

KN asks if CVS would move it.

BS expresses that in a lot of cases, that's how buildings are saved.

KS asks why members of the Historical Commission can't go in and document these things themselves.

BS responds that it is because they are not historians, this not within the realm of what any of them could do.

MS believes that this is a small amount to give someone for documentation, when we spent \$6,000.00 to lacquer historical document books in the recent past.

KN asks if this could come from CPA (Committee Preservation Act) money.

BS states that it would take 2-3 months to complete.

KS responds that if there is a 6 month window, and only 3 months left, how is it feasible for us to move the building?

BS suggests that they could try to start the process before the report is finished. She stresses that the report is a total picture, that they need this for posterity. She is interested in seeing if they can get CVS to do a pocket park to say "this is where the exhibition hall was and this is what it is".

KS asks why the Historical Commission thinks this building is valuable. Were there any notable public figures who gave a speech there?

BS answers that its significance reflects economic growth, social and historical value. Sturbridge was and still is restaurants, lodging, and a traffic convergence.

MS adds that there was also horse racing.

LM asks BS if there are any surviving distinctive or vernacular historical features.

BS allows that the structure and footprint are the same, it still looks like it did.

LM inquires if the profile of today's building is comparable with the 1868 building. Is it still recognizable? Hypothetically, if a historical patron were to walk in now, would they know where they are?

BS is not sure because it's three levels now, although it was then too. Then it was divided into booths, in the exhibition hall, and people brought in handwork, vegetables, and canned goods.

LM asserts that the historical argument is that it's not the same building, it only looks like it is, therefore what are you really preserving and what are you really documenting. What can you learn unless you dismantle it? This is what OSV did. He offers that the most she can hope to do is move it somewhere in Sturbridge where it would do what..?

BS hypothesizes that it would be a symbol of what went on in Sturbridge and helped develop the town. What's missing in Sturbridge is the context of the history: it's not documented, no one has signs on their

house saying what year it was built.

LM asks if this building is on the state historic register.

BS is sure it is on the inventory list, as buildings get on when their 50 years old. When people come into Sturbridge they expect to see history and can't see it because its not made visible to people. She feels that this marking is something we need to do, if we want to be historic Sturbridge.

KS asserts that there's not a lot of historic buildings in town, as opposed to a city like Lexington.

BS counters that The Duck, the Blackington Building and Basketville are all historic.

JL adds that none of them are historically registered however, as the 538 Main St. building is not and it was built in 1799.

BS still holds that this exhibition hall is a major building in town. She agrees that KS is right in that Sturbridge is not Lexington, as it is a small town. She accepts that the town is not going to get 100 major buildings, but that we do have some.

JL asks if the owner were to try and tear down the Copper Stallion, would she try to stop them? She explains that the third floor of the building looks exactly the way it was 150 years ago with coal fireplaces, and bark as park of the roof.

BS states that she may.

LM contrasts the physical evidence of history in the Copper Stallion building with the exhibition hall. In the exhibition hall all the fingerprints are smudged. He still wants to know what is being preserved.

MS makes the point that we spend \$10,000.00 every year to improve grave sites, but why not spend \$1,000.00 to record history.

BS wants to see the Host Hotel take it as function building.

KS goes on to say that no one ever sees the Historical Commission paperwork, and asks who will hold this study.

BS responds that they don't hold artifacts, that societies do that.

KS maintains that there is documentation that is being held at homes of members.

JW believes that preserving information about a building in a book in the library for \$1,000.00 is fine, but would be opposed if it will interfere with usage of the parcel.

MS does not agree that the CVS take over is the wisest utilization of the historical building/parcel in discussion.

KS and KN point out that CVS has been approved through other municipal planning entities.

MS wonders why the corner of New Boston Rd. isn't used for the CVS project instead.

JW speculates if that would get passed by the Planning Board because of past commercial attempts being thwarted.

KN notifies the committee that they are getting off track. She asks BS if this could have made it onto the Town Meeting Warrant.

BS doesn't know when that warrant closed and the thought of getting an evaluation didn't surface in time.

MS asked if the village was interested in taking the building.

BS responds that it is too late for their era as it is an 1830's building.

*SS makes motion to approve RFT as written, MS seconds, motion passes 5-2-0. KS and JL opposed.*

### **FY17 Budget Proposal Book**

JW states that the Town Administrator Leon Gaumont (LG) wants to take the size of the STA from 7 to 3. He adds that Mary Dowling brought up a point and asked LG for the document targeted for tourism, did the document or special legislation allows for them to add into tourism.

JL states that the BOS didn't want a language change, and wonders if this economic development plan would be part of the STA budget.

MS states that this could be the constant presence that STA has been missing.

JW expresses unrest at only 2 votes controlling anything.

JL asks if this would have to be a warrant article.

KS offers that adding a position is completely in the realm of the Town Administrator. He can appoint and fire whomever he wants. Moves on to discuss the Facilities Coordinator; in the job description, does this role include water and sewer? This is pivotal because the biggest use of electricity is water and sewer.

MS asserts that the town hires a contractor to do that.

KS believes that a contractor is not always going to look out for the best interest of the town, however, this Facilities Coordinator would be more likely to do that. He believes that Building Inspector spillover and maintenance of the town's pool of vehicles should be in the responsibilities of this Facilities Coordinator. KS provides a caveat to the committee about handing out stipends, as there is a request for a \$6,000.00 stipend for the police chief. It is requested for work as emergency management, but KS doesn't understand how stipend equals time, granted that it's more time to do this, KS concludes that the chief needs more people not a stipend. KS is worried about setting a stipend precedent to be

followed. BB just received a stipend but she spends a considerable amount of time on duties that are part of her division but not able to be delegated appropriately. KS thinks this will be ongoing. He concludes that if the police chief deserves more money, the town should put it in his paycheck.

LM asks what the compensation was when the police chief was also the fire chief.

JL responds that it was \$20,000 additional to his salary in a separate line item.

MS remembers that they approved a stipend for BB.

LM recalled that a prior Board of Selectmen asserted that if BB's doing a full time job within her department, that it's still her department and is viewed as her responsibility. He projects that it could be a matter of time before the need for more expenditures comes before the town. He entertains the thought if economic development is successful, would the new business support the increase in budget to service the needs of the new business.

JW asks what is the roster increase is in the Police Dept.

KS brings up the case of the Building Inspector, who argued that his extra efforts and increased responsibilities would warrant extra time, but it was not funded by the TA. Additionally, KS states that LG is increasing some salaries above COLA. He is also questioning the newly formed 15 hour a week position by the TA and also changing the maintenance for roads to a warrant article to prevent encumbering funds.

SS asks if more people are going to the Senior Center.

LM replies that the town is "graying".

KS points out that the town allows other towns seniors to utilize the center. JL adds that non residents pay for this service. KS feels it is not enough to cover the actual cost of providing the service.

KS moves on to Recreation, where he questions moving purchase of services out of betterment to yearly expenses, and sees this as "creep". He asks if the skating rink really needs to be a part of yearly expenses.

KN observes that annual requests come up often.

KS points out that unclassified is an 8% increase.

LM holds that it was mandated.

KS speaks to the dangers of being caught off guard by some disaster. He ascertains that we are \$535,000.00 below our levy limit.

LM offers that the town is rated an AA+ which equals that we have a sustained, good outlook.

KS goes over the Great Ponds and weeds, which used to be paid for by lake associations, which is now



coming out of betterment.

MS asks if LG has given up on the idea that this Facilities Coordinator could be the same person as the building inspector.

SS revisits that LG is recommending salaries above COLA.

KS notes a 3% increase.

KS wonders how LG or BB arrived at a 3% increase for COLA.

LM counters that you pay for responsibilities and performance to increase, that steps and lanes are good and there, so why not use them?

KS offers that we have the authority to tell people to negotiate better. He asks what CPI is.

JL asks if the DPW has responsibilities for clearing out the Safety Complex. She inquires as to why there are two part time custodians in addition to the Facilities Coordinator.

JW asks if there is a maintenance person for public safety?

KS questions the amount of \$700.00 for combat gauze and asks when the Fire Department is going to replace the ladder truck.

MS SS KS and JL discuss the Tree Warden's responsibilities and budget.

### **New Business**

KN Eric Perez officially resigned from the committee.

### **Old Business**

KS asks LM if the Charter Review Committee is bringing forward any articles that would affect the Finance Committee.

LM asserts that there are no changes except the revisions themselves, and they will come to FinCom because they are going to the Town Warrant, then the fall Town Meeting. He notes 300-400 changes, some as small as comma placement, however this placement is crucial to meaning. He reminds them that it's a committee, not a commission, therefore it has no authority to recommend change in form of government. Last night they sat re-reviewing their work, astounded at how many mistakes they missed. The charter stems from 1987 from a group who collected 17 charters from other towns and literally cut and pasted to create the charter. It uses archaic language. Every time they propose a change, it can become a contradiction later on and may ramify throughout the whole document. He notes that there are two members who have external circumstances, and they wish to be thorough. They are not avoiding this upcoming meeting but the work will likely continue into the fall.

KS clarifies that he was wondering if there was any discussion about the operation of the Finance

Committee.

LM answers that nothing at all will change for the Finance Committee.

KS reminds the committee of the overview assessor section of the budget, and to look for a corresponding decrease (found in the budget overview tab).

**No Public Access**

*JL makes motion to adjourn at 9:27, JW seconds, motion passes 7-0-0.*