

Finance Committee
April 7, 2016
Town Hall ~ Sturbridge, MA

Call to Order:

The chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm with the following committee members present: Chair, Kathleen Neal (KN), Joni Light (JL), Kevin Smith (KS), Michael Serio (MS), Laurance Morrison (LM), James Waddick (JW), Suzanne Smiley (SS).

Guest: Lynne Girouard (LG), Recreation Director.

Article 26 – Town Barn Fields Project

LG informed the committee that on April 19 at 5:30pm there will be an informational hearing for residents. The fields and cost analysis estimate updated from the past configuration are obsolete as the layout is different and there are fewer fields being proposed. Costs have increased slightly, the excavation of the ledge is the biggest factor. She plans to use the proposed fields for soccer, football, lacrosse, and possibly little league in addition to the existing fields in the front parcel. There would be 99 parking spaces; currently there is parking for 20 cars. There would be also be a playground, two basketball courts, bocce court and standardized size fields. These amenities are to appease all age groups in attendance. In the future she wishes to put in a trail. There was a company interested during the last estimate that would use the ledge for commercial product and remove it free of charge. Recreation has been allotted \$1,000,000.00 from the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funds, and they are in process of grant writing. Community Preservation Act (CPA) for existing fields now, as the CPC regulations has been changed. She is looking at a soccer grant and being awarded from the Baseball Tomorrow Fund, but for a lot of it you have to have funding already in place.

LM asked if any thought has been put into permanent checkers or chessboards. He asked if LG looked at costs for maintenance, staff, and replacements, and if she is looking at an estimate to be available by Town Meeting. LG answered that it is an excellent idea to incorporate a picnic table type space, and that she will consider it. She stated that the DPW or the parks service will help to take care of the town fields. SS asked where the restrooms would be. LG answered the amenities would include an additional 2-4 porta-potties, and the operating budget would take care of maintenance. There can be three teams on the fields at one point, which is up to 60 children.

KS asked if LG had spoken to the Police Department about the possibility of youths at the parks late at night, as the skate park became a lot of work for them. KN asked if the problem has occurred in the past at the town barn. LG stated that there is no lighting there at the moment. Play would only be happening during day time hours. She further stated that only one incident occurred a few years ago where some kids drove on the fields. In years past the town used to close the gate beyond the DPW, but people used to get locked in so the gate is left open.

JL asked if there was conservation issues and if the Spotted Salamander would be considered. LG stated that there was a study done and that they will raise up the fencing for turtles. Compliance with conservation protection has been passed through the Planning Board. The current road drives through the outfield now but the plan is to bring the road closer to where the tornado damage is.

KS asked if there is any consideration about sponsorship funding. LG stated that the little league field has a lot of sponsorships; different teams will get sponsors that will pay for maintenance but not for main construction.

JL asked if going forward the budget would increase due to extra space to maintain and asked if plowing would become an issue. LG stated that Recreation is working with the designer to obtain an estimate for the maintenance with the additional fields. For now the DPW takes care of the Town Common, Turner Fields, etc. Seniors currently help with maintenance and general rubbish removal at the Recreation Area along with the DPW. The fields will be closed in the winter which will not require maintenance costs. All roads will be stone dust, not paved. Greg Morse was involved in the planning process.

LM asked about food service and the electrical needs. LG stated that there is electrical available. However, there is no running water and too costly to run pipes, so bringing pre-packaged food and bottled water will be encouraged. The town does have a well for irrigation purposes.

KN asked for an estimate of the numbers of kids served for the fields. LG answered 2,600 children; three teams using the Town Barn softball and soccer field. The larger field (110X70) serves under 10 aged children. Lacrosse is on Turner's Field. Pop Warner uses Turner's Field. There were four age groups several years ago which became a safety issue. If a varsity athlete ran into a Mighty Might there would have been serious injury, Mighty Might have been moved to the town common. LG there are 9650 people in Sturbridge just over 37% participate (2500+) participate. The town is getting greater and larger at the young end and larger at the old end and not a lot in between. The demographic of the ages of people in the town would help in assessing community members served. SS stated that we are also giving access to kids from surrounding towns as well, it is not just Sturbridge residents.

KS asked if the Recreation Committee approved and wrote Article 26, why it does not seek exception from Prop 2 ½ . He further stated that if the town goes forward the Finance Committee will add the exclusion of Proposition 2 ½.

LG said if the article gets approved at the Town Meeting there is a 90 day window to bring it before the town on a ballot. Leon Gaumont (Town Administrator; TA) modified the article after she gave him the information. She emailed Penny Dumas (CPC) concerning the Prop 2 ½ exclusion; she hadn't seen the warrant until she emailed it to her. There are several items coming off of the docket for Conservation, and BB said it would likely go into debt exclusion. MS stated that the Plimpton property article included 5 sources of funding; it was a complicated article. He thought that this article would be similar. KN stated that they should outline the use of CPC funds, which is not currently in the article.

LG explained how the US Army from Westover wanted to use our fields due to the central location but the town could not accommodate them as the fields are not regulation sized. Specifically, the fields are not regulation for senior league baseball, Babe Ruth baseball, or American Legion. The town could help businesses if we were a field destination. The idea is to take Turner's field and eventually turn it into a regulation sized softball field, and to take the Recreation Area and build a major league Babe Ruth sized field. Burgess is not town owned but is a regulation sized field. The town did not gain any fields from the Burgess project and they have had issues because the sports are starting to become three season sports. KS asked if the baseball field is AAU sized. LG replied that it is not.

KS asked what the proposed time line would be for project completion. LG wants to get the town barn field project done first. If approved at town ballot in September building could start in the fall, weather permitting. They could essentially be in use by fall of 2018. Recreation is having the design work done by CME; there are no cost estimates yet. The design work has to go out to bid.

LG said the town owns 15 acres that abut Caron Road. There is a small piece of wetlands, but it is not all wetlands. JL asked if there is a field plan for the Plimpton property. LG answered no, but she would love to see space reserved for recreation on that parcel. Land is not a produce-able commodity. Conservation restriction allows for land use at Plimpton. She then advised the committee to email her with questions.

KN asked if we have any adult teams looking to play games on the fields. LG stated that the fields are too small. Even town teams have to play games away because the fields are not regulation sized. Other towns don't come to Sturbridge for this reason. LG said there is an economic gain if the town had regulation fields. KN asked if there is AAU basketball at Tantasqua. LG stated that 470 kids this year play basketball. JW added that adult slow pitched softball was the largest participation sport in America a few years ago.

Approval of Meeting Minutes from March 22 and March 29 - 2016

Several amendments were discussed and corrected.

KS moves the motion to approve meeting minutes from March 22nd as amended, SS seconds, motion passes 6-0-1. (LM abstaining as absentee)

KS moves the motion to approve meeting minutes from March 29th as amended, SS seconds, motion passes 7-0-0.

Tree Warden Budget – Discussion on Use of TreeAzin as a deterrent to the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB)

JL moved the motion to reconsider the Tree Warden budget, LM seconds, motion to reconsider passed 7-0-0.

KS moved the motion to recommend the total Tree Warden budget at \$19,500.00, MS seconds, 3-0-4. JL, LM, SS, and KN opposing. Motion defeated.

KS then moved the motion to recommend lines 103 Account 12941-51120, 105 Account 12942-54000, 106 Account 12942-57000 for \$4,300.00. SS seconds, motion is passed 7-0-0.

KS asked JL if she is opposing the spending of money on the Ash Tree Treatment or all Ash Tree work. The plan to treat trees from last year is continued into this year, however, there is no official plan in place to treat the ash trees. JL stated that she doesn't agree that healthy trees should be treated, and with such toxic chemicals. MS stated that the committee can take funds out selectively but the Tree Warden does not have to follow our guide. KS agreed that if we take money out of purchase of services for ash tree treatment, they can still use a remainder for the ash tree treatment if there is money available in the budget. JL clarified that she has an issue with ash tree treatment not removal of tree damage or regular pruning. KS stated that the new total would be \$13,800.00 with removal of treatment funding. The committee needs to have a rationale for removing the funds; is it that we don't know the long term ramifications of the treatments?

JL stated that there is no sign of the EAB in Sturbridge or the surrounding towns, and she disagrees from an environmental perspective that there is not enough information on the effects to ground water, bees, woodpeckers etc. And she does not agree to treat healthy trees with such a harsh chemical.

KN stated that if the committee votes against it, it makes the statement that if it passes, the committee didn't support the ash tree treatment. She agreed with KS and MS that the Tree Warden can spend other funds to do the same treatment, however.

KS stated that last year the Finance Committee (FinCom) asked for a long term plan. JL agreed that FinCom asked to put it into a more formal schedule but this was not acted on as far as she is aware. KS stated that they had concerns about the chemical being injected, and how they plan to treat all the ash trees in town. FinCom received no reply back about the schedule. KS suggested removing all ash tree funding to bring up concerns about the chemical and the plan to the Tree Warden.

MS asked if the \$1,400.00 was specifically for treating the ash trees on the common only and if prevention would help us not have to clear cut trees. Speaking to Tom Chamberlain may help clarify. The committee doesn't know the scope of the problem. MS said it seemed that some treatment would be better than doing nothing but he understands JL's concerns about putting chemicals into the ground. LM agreed that MS made a good distinction about knowing the scope of the problem and the solution. LM used the comparison of forest fire fighting where the practice to start a fire with healthy trees can stop a fire from spreading. He maintained that there is no knowledge or basis or estimate here of what would happen if no action was taken. LM stated that the peculiarity is that EAB can infest a tree and for a year or two and no one would know it was there.

SS asked if the Plimpton property was included in the Tree Warden's jurisdiction. KS asked if there was conservation restriction on file. KN and JL answered yes. JW asked if the Tree Warden, Tom Chamberland is a certified arborist. KN answered yes.

JL moved the motion accept Tree Warden - Purchase of Services Account 12942 – 52000 at \$13,800.00, SS seconds, motion passes. 5-0-2 (LM and KN opposed) - (effectively removing the ash tree treatment funds in the amount of \$1,400.00)

KS recommended to KN to put a section in the FinCom Memorandum of Findings FY17 that we are having a heavy discussion on the ash tree treatment. KS also stated that there was no reasoning provided as to why instead of 200 trees (proposal from FY16) the Tree Warden wants to treat 400 trees but the removal would stay the same. JL will ask Tom Chamberland to clarify.

New Business – none

Old Business

KN stated that the FinCom will receive the Town Warrant summary boxes next week and will start review and revisions.

Public Access – none

KS moves the motion to adjourn at 9:02 pm, SS seconds, motion passes 7-0-0.