

**Sturbridge Finance Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
November 1, 2016 ~ Town Hall  
7:00pm**

**Call to Order:**

**The chairman called the meeting to order at 7:00pm with the following members present: Kathleen Neal (KN), Suzanne Smiley (SS), James Waddick (JW), Michael Serio (MS), Joni Light (JL), and Laurence Morrison (LM).**

**Absent: Jared Burns**

**Guests: Leon Gaumont, Town Administrator (LG), and Barbara Barry, Finance Director (BB).**

**Reserve Fund Transfers (RFT) – Joshua Hyde Library:**

KN stated that the first RFT is for \$300.00 to Joshua Hyde Library for the purchase of light bulbs and custodial supplies. BB stated that every other year there is an increase in replacement bulbs, and that the Library did not budget accordingly for it in FY17. Lights are being replaced more frequently, and the plan is to review it to try to find the root cause of the increase. The librarian generally calls the Department of Public Works (DPW) to replace the lights when there are several in need of replacing. The lights are quite high and requires some time on a high ladder to maintain them. Often the lights need to be replaced in pairs, as well. The current balance in the Supplies Account is \$325.00 and will not be enough to cover the costs for the remainder of the year.

*JW moved the motion to transfer \$300.00 from the Reserve Fund to the Joshua Hyde Library Building Supplies Account (11962-54000); JL seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.*

KN stated that the second RFT the Joshua Hyde Library is for \$1,250.00 for a heating unit for the basement. The unit is a 15,000 BTU electric wall unit and has a one-year warranty. LG stated that the current heating unit in the basement of the Library is no longer in working condition. BB explained that it's an electric heating unit and is only turned on when the room is in use. However, meetings will not be able to take place until it is fixed. JW stated that this type of unit can move to a new location if necessary.

JL asked if there is still a plan to consolidate all the municipal HVAC contracting, and also asked if this price is inclusive of installation. BB answered that the price is inclusive of installation through C & C Temp Control from Worcester. LG answered that the Library is using a separate heating company from other municipal buildings. In review of the HVAC plan, they will look at the contracts and attempt to consolidate them under one provider. The alarm systems have been consolidated on expiration and contract, with the exception of the DPW.

*JL moved the motion to transfer \$1,250.00 from the Reserve Fund to the Joshua Hyde Library Building Supplies Account (11962-52000); JW seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.*

KN stated that the final RFT for the Joshua Hyde Library is for \$1,400.00 to purchase a security panel. LG stated that the issue came up when the town was consolidating alarm services. The town's employees did not feel they were getting quality service from the vendor for a variety of reasons. Panic buttons were malfunctioning, and there seemed too many vendors involved in the system to troubleshoot effectively. Tyco Simplex is the new contractor; LG knows them as a reputable company and feels they provide good service. They found the existing security panels were inadequate to

perform the functions they required. JW asked about the scope of security in the Library. LG explained that the Library alarm system has a panic, fire (goes through the intermediary), and burglary alarm. SS asked if Tyco Simplex is willing to put in a panel for free if the town is paying for a contract and monitoring the alarm system. LG stated \$1,374.96 is mainly for the installation of the panel, which includes the battery, wireless receiver, daily monitoring, and dialer test. JL asked if the new contract will cause the library to lose services. LG stated that in addition to pre-existing services, they will regularly monitor that the system is functioning, which had not been in place prior. He added that the town is forming an emergency management plan.

*JL moved the motion to transfer \$1,400.00 from the Reserve Fund to the Joshua Hyde Library Building Operations Purchase of Services Account (16102-52000); JW seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.*

### **Reserve Fund Transfers (RFT) – Town Administrator:**

KN stated that \$3,000.00 request is to advertise for a new Fire Chief. LG stated that these funds are for recruitment of a Fire Chief that involves a search committee. In excess of 30 applications were received, and he plans to run an assessment center at a local hotel. These expense are above and beyond the normal hiring search requirements. LG does not know if he will use all of the funds but is trying to anticipate other extraordinary expenses. He has recently used budgeted funds for multiple town vacancies as discussed during the budget season. BB stated that there was \$1,500.00 budgeted for recruitment in FY17.

*JW moved the motion to transfer \$3,000.00 from the Reserve Fund to the Town Administrator Purchase of Services Account (11232-52000); SS seconds. Motion accepted 6-0-0.*

### **Old Business:**

#### Charter Review Process

KN and LG discussed ways to streamline modifications to the Charter and if striking the entire charter and starting over entirely would be more circumspect. KN suggested it would be better for listeners if the Charter Review Committee would be willing to summarize and present the changes and their ultimate meaning. LM stated that the Town Administrator's role is not strengthened but clarified because of the former ambiguity, but that there are many changes and removal of archaic language. LM stated that the changes are listed and color coded.

#### FY17 Budget Process Feedback

LG solicited comments from the committee on the budgeting process for FY17, and wanted to know if there were ways of making it better for FY18.

KN discussed the budget process and how discussion should be focused on changes and drastic increases and decreases. JL stated that she thought discussion has never been superfluous in the past. She also stated that BB continues to be the best objective source for financial information. JL felt there seemed to be a lack of communication between the Finance Committee and the BOS compared to past years.

SS stated that she felt it was beneficial to have the department heads present to explain the budget increases. BB stated that she has tried to incorporate documents within the budget book that explain the

major changes, and wanted to know if this was helpful. She made an observation that the committee tends to postulate over a question of which nobody present knows the answer to and it can be problematic when meetings are televised to the audience. She suggests the committee refrain from further discussion until the answer is known. She also requests committee members to notify her and the Town Administrator when items presented to them by department heads are not included in departmental budgets, and also when articles are not written properly.

JW stated that during interviews he had confidence in the department heads, their accountability and expertise and reasonable amount of funds. BB stated that department heads may not see the greater picture pertaining to the budget.

LG agreed with BB that having more “facetime” with department heads is beneficial to the committee. He also asked if the Saturday Budget Kick Off meeting is duplicative or a useful tool to the committee. KN stated that the combined overview and discussion of budget information during the Saturday meeting is useful.

LM stated that he was on the committee for 16 years and has never heard the TA open the discussion for feedback on the budget process and expressed gratitude for being asked. He asked that BB and LG frame the numbers thematically in the opening narrative of the annual budget book, from a financial and planning perspective (i.e. “This is a year of stage setting so the following year the town will be prepared to...”). He pointed out that there is a tendency to treat items as piecemeal. The budget book should be a tool for anyone to be able to understand what the budget is trying to accomplish holistically. LG agreed that the opening narrative is a good idea and stated that the state granted budget for next year is diminishing. MA state tax revenues are down and budgets will be lean. LG said his message going forward will be that the town needs to remain status quo, and to be prepared and cognizant that FY18 is going to be more difficult financially.

LG stated he is working on a calendar schedule with specific dates for meetings and deadlines, and will make it accessible. LM suggested that LG monitor all of the public hearings in order to promote continuation of other committees' work involving the budget process. LG stated that deadlines will be made more concrete and earlier going forward to provide budgeting work time flexibility.

BB stated that it may be better to start the budget season later. KN discussed the surplus amount of books printed and how the articles for the Annual and Special Town Meeting Warrants for FY17 were amended, formatted, or worded to make it more complicated than it need be. LG stated that there is the possibility of more consolidation within the warrant articles and that he will pursue in more detail.

BB stated that if the language in the warrant article is inconsequential to its meaning; it should not be changed. LG stated that he accepts or denies articles as written because they vote the article as it is submitted. LG and KN stated that the Finance Committee liaison should be responsible for attending the department meeting which votes to approve or deny the article. MS stated that articles can sometimes be legally incorrect and that the Finance Committee wants the final product to be consistent.

LM stated that the Finance Committee cannot knowingly recommend an article if the language is faulted. He suggested that the role of the Finance Committee is not to start review early but that they should start reviewing warrants after the BOS is finished voting. BB stated that the warrant article is the legally binding literature, not the summary box, and changes should be addressed to her.

LG stated that during the town meeting the motions made must include a dollar amount, therefore draft

articles that do not have a dollar amount should not be a problem. Furthermore, he would be willing to write a paragraph explaining the rationale for each warrant article.

**New Business:**

LG stated that there is preparation in the process to purchase a ladder truck and that they were unable to secure funds through a grant. Acting Fire Chief Ford presented a proposal to the BOS to secure and appropriate a sum of money to purchase a used ladder truck. Fire Chief Ford believes that this is a viable option as has worked with brokers to purchase used equipment in the past. The fire chief would like to discuss this proposal at the next Finance Committee meeting. The BOS wanted to get the process started and to put aside an appropriation for securing used equipment to avoid losing out on an opportunity to buy equipment.

JW asked if we are facing liability due to using a ladder truck from 1974. LG stated that the town is facing liability due to the fire truck currently not meeting safety standards. LM asked if a newer vehicle would have a favorable impact on fire insurance premiums. He also asked if all hydrants in town had uniform valves for the fire hose, or if the fire trucks have to carry various connectors/adapters for hydrants. His concern is that the adapters can get overlooked in inventory if they are always on the truck. LG did not want to speculate as to the benefit to insurance rates. He did confirm, however, the fire hydrants in town have been serviced but are not uniform. Carrying hydrant adapters on trucks is necessary.

Review of meeting minutes is postponed until the meeting scheduled for November 14.

**No Public Access**

*JL moved the motion to adjourn at 9:30 pm; MS seconds. Meeting adjourned.*