

**Sturbridge Finance Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
November 14, 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), James Waddick (JW), Michael Serio (MS), Laurence Morrison (LM), Jared Burns (JB), Suzanne Smiley (SS), and Joni Light (JL).**

**Guests: Fire Chief Paul Ford (PF), Bill Haggerty (BH), Paul Zapun (PZ), and Bruce Boyson (BB).**

**Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles:**

**Article 47 – Creation of a Fire Apparatus Stabilization Fund and Article 48 – Purchase of a Ladder Truck**

PF explained that the National Fire Association (NFA) maintains that a ladder truck should not be older than 25 years old, preferably no older than 20 years. Sturbridge has a ladder truck that is 42 years old. It would cost a minimum of \$100,000.00 to buy pre-owned apparatus. Approximately \$350,000.00 to \$400,000.00 will be needed to have on hand in order to put forward a bid on vehicles as they become available. Any remaining funds from the purchase will go into the stabilization fund. It is planned to set aside funding for the fire apparatus stabilization fund each year at ATM. The interim fire chief is interested in a mid-mount ladder tower as fire fighters are located in a bucket instead of on a ladder.

SS asked if there had been any consideration of federal grant funding. PF stated that the town was not awarded for the grant opportunity put through by former Fire Chief Zinther. He further stated that these grants are awarded based on need and a town's ability to pay for it. JB asked how much he expects to receive as a trade in value for the town's used ladder truck. PF stated that there are three vehicles eligible for trade; the ladder truck with virtually zero value, a rescue truck that could take in \$10,000.00, and the 2005 engine truck with a value of approximately \$75,000.00.

JL asked about the current status of the annual certification of the ladder truck. PF stated that the aerial parts are certified annually for amount of weight they can hold. JL asked about the assistance of mutual aid from surrounding towns, and if this would be sufficient to the town should it be required to need a ladder truck. Further, could this aid in determining the type and size of ladder truck to meet the town's needs; potentially to reduce the amount needed to purchase new or a smaller ladder truck. LM stated that mutual aid is reliable, but not a replacement for a town's need for its own equipment. Additionally, grants are given to municipalities who are in need financially, whereas Sturbridge does not fall into that category with a AAA rating from Standard & Poor. LM stated that he would be in support of the purchase of a new truck for \$1 million to \$1.4 million.

PF stated that safety issues are of concern for replacement of the ladder truck. He would be more than happy to accept the funds for a new ladder truck. New ladder trucks are built to customer specification and will take upwards of a year to be built. Firefighters will need to be trained on the new apparatus, as well. JW stated that Sturbridge has a \$30 million annual budget, and that to purchase a new truck would seem prudent investing instead of buying a used apparatus that would need repairs. The new purchase would work out to be approximately \$50,000.00 per year over a 25 year weighted average life. SS asked if the town would need a taller truck in the future. PF stated that 100 feet is standard design for a ladder truck, and would accommodate 6 stories. KN and JL noted that the town's zoning by-laws

has a height restriction on buildings which is 60 feet.

KN stated the \$400,000.00 requested is for pre-owned apparatus. LM stated that he would be willing to make a substitute motion for \$1,000,000.00 to purchase a new ladder truck. He said the Finance Committee could make their case to the Board of Selectmen. KN and MS stated that the Town Administrator and Finance Director would have likely contemplated the debt that already exists. SS stated that the Finance Director and Town Administrator could be in compliance with the Fire Chief's request and may be relying on his needs to keep the town safe. LM asserted that the committee should not vote until they have all the information.

JW asked about the fire department's principal operating vehicle. PF stated that the engine truck is sent out first; ladder truck is last. LM asked if PF finds himself in a position that he is modernizing the entire department's fleet and staff. He also asked if Fire Insurance companies assess their premiums based on equipment and adequate staffing for operation. PF said that insurance companies may or may not evaluate premiums on the town's ISO (Insurance Service Organization) rating. PF further stated that he was impressed with the staff when he first started but that there is not enough man power to operate the equipment that the town owns. The Town of Sturbridge is rated a 6/9 by the NFA, whereby a one rating is the best.

#### **Article 46 – Charter Review Committee**

Paul Zapun (PZ), Bruce Boyson (BB), Bill Haggerty (BH), and Laurence Morrison (LM) appeared to discuss changes to the Town Charter. BH stated that this committee met in 2015 with the goal that the Charter could be easily understood by any resident in Sturbridge and in doing so, try to predict possibilities that pertain to Charter. BH stated they made the Charter genderless as it was previously gender directed. They corrected grammar and misspellings. The crux was making the Charter an effective government document.

Key changes include:

Article 1 – definitions – subject to appropriation

Article 3 – at town meeting – every town officer is supposed to be present. The Town Administrator felt that it was excessive and unnecessary – section 8 STM remains, but the determination will be made by the TA as who needs to be there.

Article 4 – Town Clerk – corrected the omission “subject to appropriation”

Search for TA – Changed from 6 months to 9 months for term of interim Town Administrator.

Stated that under the current Charter the search committee is required to present 3 candidates to the BOS. This presented a problem in their last search, so they are recommending that it is revised to state the search committee must present no less than 2 and no more than 5.

Article 6 – Terms of office and appointments made by the Town Administrator are listed out, but committees are always changing and the Charter would never be current as a result since it is only reviewed every 5 years. “The Town Administrator makes all appointments.” in order to curtail the length of this article.

Article 7 – to be deleted and then renumbering the articles.

LM stated that the Charter review committee was asked by the BOS to review “strong” or “weak” chief (police or fire), which refers to their capabilities in authoritative action. The Charter Review Committee responded that making policy changes was outside of the scope of the committee, and would be the responsibility of the BOS to make changes, and ultimately the town residents at town

meeting. PZ added that the BOS also asked the Charter Review Committee to review the method to obtaining certain positions, such as a town clerk, whether the position should be an appointed position or elected position. Again, the Charter Review Committee did not feel as this was within their scope or authority to recommend such changes. LM noted MA General Law Chapter 48 Section 42 pertains to strong v. weak police/fire chiefs, and it was noted in the town's Charter in 1948 and 1972 with regard to a strong fire chief, yet is no longer in the town's Charter at present.

KN, BH and LM discuss how the Charter will be voted on in a single article and that if there are amendments desired by townspeople, they can come forward and make those motions on town floor.

*SS moved the motion to approve Article 46 – Charter Review Committee as written, JB seconds; motion accepted 6-0-1 (LM abstained).*

#### **Article 49 – Costs Associated with the Southbridge Landfill Project**

KN stated that Board of Health (BOH) spoke to Town Counsel about how much it may cost moving forward, and that they hope it will stay within \$75,000.00 for legal aid. JW stated that his daughter is a Charlton resident and has contaminated water as a result of the Landfill, so he will abstain from the vote. KN stated that there has been a great deal of contamination of water and wells, the firm that operates the landfill, Casella, is providing bottled water and filtration systems to residents. JW stated that Casella is arguing with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) claiming that the contamination is not their responsibility, nor is it coming from the part of the landfill they operate. The DEP has stated that this contaminant is commonly found in landfills.

*JL moved the motion to accept Article 49 – Costs Associated with the Southbridge Landfill Project as written, MS seconds; motion accepted 6-0-1 (JW abstaining).*

#### **Article 50 – Installation of Emergency Temperature Alarms for Municipal Buildings**

KN stated the purpose of installing alarms is to alert town officials when there is a failure in the heating systems. JL asked why there are no monetary amounts presented in the articles. No vote was taken.

#### **Article 51 – Unpaid Bills of a Previous Fiscal Year**

*JL moved the motion to approve Article 51 – Unpaid Bills of a Previous Fiscal year as written, JW seconds; motion accepted 7-0-0.*

#### **Article 52 – Transfer of Funds for the Reorganization of the Board of Health**

KN JL and SS discuss the need for more information. No vote was taken.

#### **Article 53 – Transfer of Funds - Capital Projects Fund**

There was discussion on whether or not this was already approved for funding at the ATM in June of 2016. LM suggested to ask the finance director to clarify. No vote was taken.

#### **Article 54 – Transfer of Funds - Water Miscellaneous Expenses**

JL asked why the amount was not anticipated in the FY17 budget. No vote was taken.

**Article 55 – Tax Increment Financing (TIF) and Project Certification Publick House**

JW noted that the Town Administrator is the sponsor for this article. LM asked if the Finance Committee should invite a representative from the Publick House to hear what their assurances would be for their performance in exchange for the TIF. KN stated that the TIF would only apply to the value of the new construction. JW stated that he feels more information is necessary. No vote was taken.

**New Business**

**Fiscal Year 2018**

LM stated that on November 15 the Tantasqua budget will be unveiled at the school committee meeting, therefore the Finance Committee can officially commence work for the FY18 budget season.

Review of meeting minutes is postponed until the next scheduled meeting.

**No Old Business**

**No Public Access**

*JL moved the motion to adjourn; SS seconds. Meeting adjourned at 9:03pm.*