

March 13, 2006

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES
MARCH 13, 2006**

Present: Arnold Wilson, Chairman
Hal White
Doris Sosik
David Schmida
William Emrich
James Malloy, Town Administrator

Finance Committee members:
Kevin Smith, Chairman
Laurence Morrison
Jeff Solari
Ron Rehkamp
Holly O'Neil Turley
Patricia Affenito
Michael Serio
Virginia Stallone
Robert Williams

Kathleen Reynolds, Superintendent
Dan Carlson, Principal
Deb Boyd, Business Manager
Francis Simanski
Ron Levine
Colleen Bonja
Mary Blanchard

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Budget

K. Smith asked for a breakdown of the merit based incentive item. J. Malloy said that he would provide it to him.

K. Smith noted that the Town Clerk's Assistant is budgeted at 14 hours/week; the Town Clerk has requested an increase in those hours. A. Wilson said that the Board of Selectmen was hearing this request for the first time. J. Solari said that the Town Clerk needs more hours for her Assistant, but it was unclear as to exactly how many hours she needs. K. Smith suggested putting a hold on the line item.

K. Smith said that the Fire Chief had requested increasing his secretary's hours, but J. Malloy had decided not to fill those additional hours. J. Malloy said that the

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Town is in protracted labor negotiations, and the firefighters have not had a wage increase in three years, which will be a substantial amount. A. Wilson noted that the Fire Chief had discussed the matter of extended hours for his secretary with the Board, and J. Malloy has been charged to review the staffing analysis

Kathleen Reynolds said that she and the other members of the School Committee had been prepared for a philosophical discussion about school spending and quality educational services, not about specific budget items.

Tatiana Rudkowski said that the proposed school budget increase is uncalled for, either from the taxpayers' perspective or financial planning. She asked for due consideration.

Regarding Town Road Maintenance, K. Smith recommended raising the Repairs and Maintenance account to \$180,000. J. Malloy suggested using free cash to plug the revenue gap, which would put the Town at \$170,000 over the estimated amount. A. Wilson recommended keeping the Road Construction account at \$150,000.

Regarding Snow and Ice Control, K. Smith said that the Finance Committee had level funded every line item in that budget. A. Wilson submitted to the Finance Committee an analysis of the last five years of the snow and ice budget (copy on file).

Under Veterans Services, K. Smith noted that the Finance Committee had added \$275 to the Memorial/Veterans Day account.

MOTION: To increase the amount for the Memorial/Veterans Day account by \$250 and make that account \$2,500, by D. Sosik.

2nd: W. Emrich

Vote: All in favor.

K. Smith suggested \$50,000 for the reserve fund line item.

MOTION: To approve \$50,000 for the reserve fund line item, by A. Wilson.

2nd: H. White

Vote: All in favor.

Annual Town Meeting Articles

Article #12: General Bylaw Amendment – Animal Control

H. O'Neil Turley asked whether a dog would have to be on a leash if there is an invisible fence system on a property. J. Malloy said that raises a different question, and noted that there has been an increase in complaints regarding unleashed dogs attacking other animals.

Article #13: General Bylaw Amendment – Scenic Road Exemption

J. Malloy read the article into the record (copy on file). He noted that this would be the only time that the DPW would be exempt from applying to the Finance Committee; they would be able to go ahead and do the necessary work.

MOTION: To support Article #13, by D. Sosik.

2nd: W. Emrich

Vote: All in favor.

Article #16: Sewer Bylaw Amendment – Permit Required

A.Wilson noted that the term “substantially initiated” was added to the article.

Article #21: Community Preservation – Acquisition of Land – OSV

J. Malloy said that he would review the conservation restriction with the Dept. of Fisheries and Wildlife. K. Smith requested a copy of the map of the property with a metes and bounds description. He noted that the Town will own the land, and the state will own the conservation restriction. A.Wilson said that the Town will have first refusal rights for all of the remaining land if the Village should sell more land in the future.

Article #25: Cyclical Inspection

Tom Chamberland said that Don Mapplebeck and Marita Tasse of the Board of Assessors had met with J. Malloy to discuss the matter. J. Malloy said that he had spoken with Marilyn Browne of the Dept. of Revenue, who indicated that the Board of Assessors must provide a data quality study. T. Chamberland said that they will review the options and develop a plan that will be acceptable to the Town and the Dept. of Revenue. A.Wilson requested that the Board of Selectmen and Finance Committee be given advance notice if the Board of Assessors plans to bring information to the Town Meeting.

Article #26: Revaluation

Article #27: Personal Property Inspection

K. Smith asked how revaluation of personal property was done. T. Chamberland said that personal property was part of the revaluation as a total package. Barbara Barry, Finance Director, said that there is a problem with personal property in the way that the town is keeping track of businesses; the town has been billing businesses that have left town. H. White said that the Board had not received a clear explanation from a representative from the Board of Assessors as to why it would cost only \$16,000 to do such a big job. T. Chamberland said that regarding personal property, possessions in a primary dwelling are exempt from taxation; but in a second home, personal property is taxable. He said that they mail out forms to lists of businesses, and they must file the forms with the Board of Assessors by March 1st each year. They need data verification.

Article #28: Street Lights

J. Malloy said that he would do research on this matter.

Article #32: Sturbridge Area Tourist Association

J. Malloy said that there should be a breakdown of the items condensed under Special Events for \$19,800.

Special Town Meeting Warrant

Article #62: Police Dept. Transfers

K. Smith noted that the amount should be corrected to \$40,074. It was the consensus to approve the article as amended.

Article #63: Community Preservation Committee – Senior Center Doors

A.Wilson suggested adding the words: “replace or restore the front doors.”

**MOTION: That the Board of Selectmen support Article #63 as amended,
by A. Wilson.**

2nd: D. Sosik

Vote: All in favor.

Article #64: Town Counsel Transfer

It was the consensus to change the summary. J. Malloy said that he would correct it.

MOTION: To reopen the Special Town Meeting warrant, by H. White.

2nd: D. Schmida

Vote: All in favor.

Article #68: Reserve Fund Transfer

MOTION: To place and support Article #68, by D. Sosik.

2nd: W. Emrich

Vote: All in favor.

MOTION: To close the Special Town Meeting warrant, by H. White.

2nd: W. Emrich

Vote: All in favor.

Burgess and Tantasqua Budgets

A.Wilson said that J. Malloy had provided graphs on the foundation budget and the growing disparity (copy on file). J. Malloy said that based on the School Committee budget, the foundation budget is inadequate. He noted that education consumes 97% of the total revenue growth, so municipal services cannot be adequately funded. He took the required spending for local schools (of other towns in Massachusetts) and the required spending for regional schools for a total foundation figure. He found that Sturbridge is about 12th from the top of the list.

K. Smith had put together a spreadsheet with a couple of charts (copy on file) showing where the education budgets have gone. J. Malloy noted that the Town of Sturbridge is 146% over the required spending level. He had taken figures out of the Town Reports and listed every service provided by the Town over a 10 year period to show how busy the departments are and what they are doing. He said that the Police Department has the highest number of calls for service, twice the average of other towns, but is below average on budget and staffing. He said that there will come a time when the Town will not be able to afford to do certain things. He said that cutting the Town's budget would seriously affect services.

Kathleen Reynolds said that all of the School Committee members and staff would welcome this discussion, but she felt that it is late in coming. She said that approximately 80% of the school budget is for staff, and their contracts were negotiated quite a while ago. She said that people should understand that this situation is something that has evolved over a number of years. J. Malloy said that he was trying to show what the communities were required to spend, what they actually spent, and the difference. K. Reynolds said that a lot of things are not recorded on the operating budgets, and there are many variables. She said that they would welcome a long-term dialogue.

Deb Boyd, Business Manager, said that the funding for transportation projected from the Governor is level dollars for our district. She said that they had projected 100% reimbursement last year, but they received 80%. Colleen Bonja said that they reviewed the Burgess budget with the Finance Committee and Selectmen line by line, and she felt that 2% was not realistic for Burgess. She said that they would have to make staff cuts. She said that other mandated things come through the Burgess budget, and a lot of it isn't anything they could fix in this budget cycle without adversely affecting the school.

J. Malloy said that it was his understanding that money was budgeted out of district tuition to hire two special education teachers at the Special Town Meeting in December, which was supposed to be a one-time expense on tuition; now it is part of the base of the budget. D. Boyd noted that more children who require special education have moved into town. A. Wilson suggested that senior staff consider taking early retirement. D. Boyd said that six or seven members of the staff will be retiring at the end of FY07.

L. Morrison said that the school committees have done nothing other than form a budget and make an argument that "2% hems us in." He noted that explanations are not the same as solutions, and the advocates have the responsibility to make their case.

F. Simanski expressed gratitude to the Finance Committee, Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator for the great job they are doing for the citizens of Sturbridge. He said that there are 15 – 20 classes at the high school with more

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than 30 students, which is not educationally sound. A. Wilson suggested that he identify the classes with 30+ students.

J. Malloy said that the state is shifting the required spending from Burgess to Tantasqua to equalize per pupil spending. He noted that there will be a similar increase next year, and there will not be such a large increase in FY09, and asked that the schools show restraint until that time. D. Boyd said that the foundation is going up because enrollment is going up. K. Reynolds said that the staff in the schools have bargaining agreements over many years, and to do anything which would impact bargaining now would cause trouble. K. Smith said that it is time to reconsider the educational structure. J. Malloy said that there is a near term issue which must be dealt with by the end of April, which could require a special election. A. Wilson asked how many were ready to go the Town Meeting for a Proposition 2 ½ override; three people raised their hands.

K. Smith announced that the Finance Committee will meet on March 14th.

B. Barry announced that there will be a Rally Against Cancer Day, a program between the Red Sox and the Jimmy Fund. Employees and residents will be encouraged to donate \$5 to the Jimmy Fund, and on April 11th (opening day at Fenway Park) everyone may come to work wearing Red Sox gear. The goal for Team Sturbridge is \$2,500 for the Jimmy Fund and the Dana Farber Institute. Contributions can be made through a link in the Town's website. Dan Carlson, Principal, said that the kids at Burgess will also get involved. J. Malloy said that Trot Nixon will come out to visit the business or institution that raises the largest amount of money.

MOTION: To convene in executive session under MGL Chapter 39, §23B, Paragraph #3: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation, not to reconvene in open session, by D. Sosik.

2nd: W. Emrich

Roll call vote: Four in favor; H. White opposed.

Since the vote was not unanimous, the Board did not convene in executive session.

MOTION: To adjourn, by D. Schmida.

2nd: W. Emrich

Vote: All in favor.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Judy Knowles

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BOS Clerk	Date
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