

November 4, 2011

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
MINUTES
NOVEMBER 4, 2011**

Present: Thomas Creamer, Chairman
Mary Dowling
Mary Blanchard
Angeline Ellison
Priscilla Gimas
Shaun Suhoski, Town Administrator

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.

T. Creamer announced that the meeting was being recorded by the press.

Power Outages Due to the October 29/30 Snowstorm

Lt. John Marinelli, Greg Morse, DPW Director, Barbara Barry, Finance Director, Police Chief Thomas Ford, Lt. Mark Saloio and Thomas Chamberland, Tree Warden appeared before the Board.

S. Suhoski said that the Board needed to activate the state contract with Ashbritt Debris Management. He noted that the financial picture was very grim, and the estimate had been put together by the Finance Director, Tree Warden, DPW Director and Town Administrator. He said that the initial phase of work involved pushing logs to the side of the roads, which was accomplished by the DPW crews.

S. Suhoski said that the total FEMA-eligible debris management was \$1.3 million; of that, the Town's share was \$330,000. He said that the non FEMA-eligible cleanup costs come to a total of \$408,640, which includes \$75,000 for tree/limb clearance. He noted that there is \$1.1 million available in free cash, and recommended deficit spending to give the Town a two-year window to finance this work. The proposed funding article for transfer of funds for the storm response read as follows: "To see if the Town will vote to transfer from Free Cash the sum of \$750,000 to be used for expenses related to federal disaster storm response in FY12, or take any action in relation thereto."

T. Creamer said that it would be necessary to plan and post an additional Special Town Meeting. He asked whether the Board would support a motion on the Town Meeting floor to postpone the November 7th Town Meeting, and take care of all of this business at one time. M. Dowling noted that the outcome of that meeting is not in the hands of the Board of Selectmen, but in the hands of the residents who show up at the Special Town Meeting on November 7th. She said that if 20 people show up and decide to move forward with the meeting that night, they would decide all of the warrant articles. T. Creamer said that people should

be encouraged to attend the Special Town Meeting on November 7th, and hopefully they will support the postponement of the Special Town Meeting. He said that a motion will be presented to recess the meeting until whatever date is decided upon.

S. Suhoski presented a letter for the Selectmen's signatures requesting deficit spending (as they had done for the tornado), with a motion that the Board declares a local emergency to health and safety in the Town of Sturbridge due to the severe snow storm during October 29-30, and further requests approval from the Director of Accounts to pay the liabilities the municipality incurs for emergency purposes without appropriation; and further, that the Board of Selectmen allows departments to incur a liability in excess of appropriation for storm related expenses in accordance with MGL Chapter 44, Section 31.

T. Creamer said that prior to placing an article on the warrant, the Board should vote on calling a Special Town Meeting, date to be determined.

MOTION: That the Board set a time and date for the Special Town Meeting, by M. Blanchard.
2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

M. Dowling asked whether the \$75,000 tree/limb clearance work would be preventative. Tom Chamberland, Tree Warden, said that it would be somewhat preventative, and noted that FEMA will only reimburse for certain types of debris. He said that FEMA would not pay for the removal of tree debris that is less than six inches in diameter and two feet from the ground. He said that the \$75,000 amount would pay for work that is not eligible for FEMA reimbursement.

S. Suhoski said that overtime expenses will be handled through a reserve fund request.

MOTION: That the Board of Selectmen declares a local emergency to health and safety in the Town of Sturbridge due to the severe snow storm during the period of October 29-30; and further, requests approval from the Director of Accounts to pay the liabilities the municipality incurs for emergency purposes without appropriation; and further, that the Board of Selectmen allows departments to incur a liability in excess of appropriation for storm related expenses in accordance with MGL Chapter 44, Section 31, by M. Blanchard.
2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

MOTION: To place an article on the Special Town Meeting warrant for Transfer of Funds – Storm Response, by M. Blanchard.

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2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

S. Suhoski said that it is necessary to get the debris out of the road before any more snow storms. Barbara Barry, Finance Director, said that while she understood the urgency, a lot of things need to be considered, such as how to pay for what needs to be done. She said that until the Town gets reimbursed from FEMA, the Town must up front the cash. She stressed the need for an article on the Town Meeting warrant to approve borrowing, and there needs to be an article to allow borrowing for a certain sum of money.

S. Suhoski said that the Board will meet on November 7th. He said that he would find out whether Tantasqua High School Auditorium would be available on December 5, 2011 for the Special Town Meeting.

T. Creamer requested that B. Barry and S. Suhoski have some figures for the Board for their next meeting on November 7th.

S. Suhoski noted that there were a few business items for the Board to address. He submitted the snow plowing and salt bids to the Board.

MOTION: That the Board accept the road salt bids as per the letter dated September 8, 2011 from Joseph Zeneski, Town Manager of the Town of Oxford, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

MOTION: That the Board accept the snow plowing bids as per the October 13, 2011 memo from the DPW Director, by M. Blanchard.

2nd: P. Gimas
Vote: All in favor.

S. Suhoski presented the update from National Grid. As of 9:00 a.m. on November 4, 2011, 1,739 customers in Sturbridge remained without power. National Grid indicated that restoration was underway and should be mostly complete by 11:45 p.m.; however, some single services may remain out.

MOTION: That the Board support having S. Suhoski draft a letter to National Grid, stating that the Board is disturbed, disgusted and appalled at their lack of service and lack of information provided to our community, by P. Gimas.

2nd: T. Creamer
Vote: All in favor.

T. Creamer noted that the Attorney General's office is conducting an investigation into the storm response by National Grid, and suggested that residents who have complaints should call 877-886-5066 to register their complaints with Mass. DPW. He said that the information would be helpful in the Attorney General's investigation, and the Attorney General's phone number is: 617-727-8410.

T. Creamer said that he would like to follow up on a suggestion made by Calvin Montigny, who said that towns in the Commonwealth that have local utilities typically get power restored more quickly after outages. He suggested that the Energy Advisory Committee conduct a study on those towns that have municipal power companies. He said that a stern message should be sent that the Town of Sturbridge is exploring other options. M. Blanchard noted that there had been a recent article about new municipal power companies not being allowed by the state. S. Suhoski said that there is a bill before the legislature that would allow more flexibility for municipal power.

MOTION: That the Board request that the Energy Advisory Committee explore the option of municipal power for the Town of Sturbridge, and present the Board with a preliminary report within three months, by T. Creamer.

2nd: P. Gimas

Vote: All in favor.

T. Creamer commended Calvin Montigny for his suggestion.

Police Chief Thomas Ford said that reverse 911 calls went out to residents prior to the storm, warning about the possibility of power outages. He said that this information was also posted on their Facebook page. He said that the Red Cross had established a shelter at Tantasqua Regional High School, providing food and water. He noted that the Sturbridge police officers have continued conducting business and community checks. He said that after the shelter at Tantasqua was opened, a bus was provided for people who needed transportation to the shelter. He said that he had participated in daily conference calls with National Grid and the Emergency Management Agency. He said that together with the Fire Department and Tree Warden, street by street assessments were done to determine conditions of the roads.

T. Creamer said that the Town should invest in a software program or a service carrier to handle thousands of text messages. He said that he was unable to provide updates to residents, as his phone service was down.

MOTION: To direct the Town Administrator and Emergency Management Director to look into the price of a comprehensive software program or a carrier that could handle text messaging for

