**Sturbridge Finance Committee**

**Meeting Minutes of June 13, 2023**

**Veteran’s Hall, Sturbridge Town Hall**

**Call to Order**

The Finance Committee (FC) Chair called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and read the agenda.

Members present: Chair Kevin Smith (KS) Leigh Darrin (LD) (arrived 7:06 p.m.), Michael Hager (MH), Michael McGlone (MM), Larry Morrison (LM) Kathy Neal (KN), and James Waddick (JW).

Members absent: Joe Freitas (JF), Ken Talentino (KT).

1) Call to order

2) Open Meeting Law complaint from Charlie Blanchard, received on May 23, 2023.

3) Meeting Minutes

4) Old Business

5) New Business

6) Public Access

7) Adjournment

**Open Meeting Law Complaint**

KS read the Open Meeting Law complaint from Charlie Blanchard received May 23, 2023, a copy of which was sent to all FC members May 23, 2023. The complaint alleges the agenda items for FC’s eight regularly-scheduled meetings in April and May listed all the same non-specific items and did not provide the public any information on what specific budget items, Town Meeting Articles, or expenditures would be discussed at any specific meeting.

KS referred to Town Counsel’s draft opinion letter that was received June 12, 2023 and forwarded to all FC members June 12, 2023 and states that FC’s approach is consistent with Open Meeting Law requirement.

MH said he reviewed the complaint and the Open Meeting Law requirements, and that the Open Meeting laws require that meeting notices include some level of specificity to the extent available, as is done in instances like when the Board of Selectmen lists specific contracts and appointments on the agenda. The FC has historically looked at the budget as a whole over the course of the budget season, often revisiting previously discussed items and suspending discussions on other topics until future meetings when more information is available. The ability to offer specificity in the agenda for any particular item on a particular night is inconsistent with the FC’s approach, which is necessarily broad and fluid.

MH moved a motion to accept the language of Town Counsel’s draft response and to have Town Counsel forward that letter to the appropriate state agency, with a copy sent to Mr. Blanchard; JW seconded.

JW noted that the third paragraph on Page 2 of Counsel’s Draft should say “reasonable” instead of “reasonably.”

The motion was accepted 7-0-0.

JW also noted that for the past three years, the FC has met once a week during its budget process, as opposed to two nights a week as was previously done. He believes that meeting two nights a week gives the FC a definite advantage of having broader discussions and not feeling rushed.

MH suggested that whenever possible, the FC include in its agenda specific items it expects to be discussing, as long as the agenda includes “reconsideration of previous discussed items.”

KN cautioned that such a plan could narrow what the FC could talk about. If a planned item fell through — which is common when liaisons’ and department heads’ schedules necessitate a delay — the FC would be prohibited from discussing other items. She stressed the importance of keeping flexibility in the agenda, as evidenced by this budget season’s numerous changes and updates that required revisiting or rescheduling items and created a need to jump from one item to another.

KN also agreed that having more meetings per week made the process less rushed.

KS added that the FC is always under an 8- to 10-week time constraint, and suggested the FC communicate to everyone involved in the process the importance of giving the Finance Committee at least 12 weeks to review the Budget items and Warrant items. MH said that while that would be ideal, it may be impractical.

MM suggested that anyone interested in a specific item or discussion topic contact a FC member, so the member could alert the person when it looks like the item may be discussed.

**Old Business**

No old business

**Meeting Minutes**

MM moved the motion to approve the minutes of June 6, 2023; MH seconded the motion. Motion accepted 6-0-1; LM abstained.

**New Business**

KS reported that LD and MH were reappointed to the FC. Sean Wawrzkiewicz of Cedar Street has been appointed.

KS thanked the two members who resigned this year, Bruce Boyson and Joe Freitas, for their years of time, effort, opinions and contributions.

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KS noted that because town departments have two weeks after the June 30 end of the fiscal year to wrap up that fiscal year’s business, the FC may need to meet during the first two weeks of July to approve reserve-fund transfers.

**Adjournment**

LD moved the motion to adjourn at 7:18 p.m.; LM seconded the motion. Motion approved 7-0-0.