**Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Town Hall ~ May 21, 2020**

**Sturbridge, MA**

**Call to Order**

The Finance Committee Chair called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:32 pm. The following committee members were present: Kathy Neal (KN), James Waddick (JW), Joni Light (JL), Larry Morrison (LM),

Kevin Smith (KS), Michael Hager (MH), Jared Burns (JB), and Bruce Boyson (BB). Absent: Karen Davis (KD).

Guests: Jeff Bridges (JBr), Town Administrator; Barbara Barry (BBa), Finance Director; Charlie Blanchard (CB), Planning Board Chairman; Jean Bubon (JBu), Planner; Michael Struppa (MS), Veterans’ Services Director.

This meeting was held remotely pursuant to Governor Baker’s March 12, 2020, Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, and the Governor’s March 15, 2020, order imposing strict limitations of the number of people that may gather in one place. The meeting was held via the GoToMeeting application, recorded, and posted on the Town website.

KN read an introduction to the virtual meeting.

**Review of Fiscal Year 2021 Veterans’ Services**

The following items were reviewed for Veterans’ Services. The motion was moved to recommend lines 61 and 62 for a total of $67,396.00 by BB.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Line** | **Account** | **Veterans' Services** |   |   |
|   |  | Salaries/ Wages | $9,771.00 |   |
|  61 | 15431 | Personnel Costs | $9,771.00 |   |
|   |   |   |   |   |
|   | 15432-52000 | Purchase of Services | $250.00 |   |
|   | 15432-54000 | Supplies | $575.00 |   |
|   | 15432-54100 | American Legion | $1,600.00 |   |
|   | 15432-54400 | Memorial/Veterans' Day | $3,200.00 |   |
|   | 15432-57000 | Other Charges | $500.00 |   |
|   | 15432-57700 | Veterans' Benefits | $51,500.00 |   |
|  62 |   | Total Expenses | $57,625.00 |   |
|   |   |   |   |   |
|   |   | **Veterans' Services Total** | $67,396.00 | BB; KS seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0. |

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

MS stated that there is a slight increase in the budget due to an increase in the number of veterans. When asked about the upcoming Memorial Day holiday, MS said that there are not any public events planned due to the current COVID situation.

**Review of Fiscal Year 2020 Town Planner**

The following items were reviewed for Town Planner. The motion was moved to recommend lines 21 and 22 for a total of $184,682.00 by JW.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Line** | **Account** | **Town Planner** |   |   |
|   |  | Department Head Salaries | $100,452.00 |   |
|   |  | Salaries/ Wages | $37,089.00 |   |
|   |  | Longevity | $300.00 |   |
|  21 | 11751 | Personnel Costs | $137,841.00 |   |
|   |   |   |   |   |
|   | 11752-52000 | Purchase of Services | $39,145.00 |   |
|   | 11752-54000 | Supplies | $3,750.00 |   |
|   | 11752-56000 | Intergovernmental | $2,721.00 |   |
|   | 11752-57000 | Other Charges | $1,225.00 |   |
|  22 |   | Total Expenses | $46,841.00 |   |
|   |   |   |   |   |
|   |   | **Planning Department Total** | $184,682.00 | JW; KS seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0. |

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

JBu explained that the bylaw software work has been contracted; she is currently reviewing legal and editorial analysis and is pleased with the process and the legal team’s support. She said that after being reviewed by the Town Clerk, JBr and JBu, the process will continue with meetings with the different Town boards. MH asked if engineering services are ever needed by the Planning Department. JBu answered that it happens all the time; she said that JBr has engineering fees in his budget, so she is confident that there will be funds available if needed.

**Review of Fiscal Year 2021 Zoning Board of Appeals**

The following item was reviewed for Zoning Board of Appeals. The motion was moved to approve line 23 for a total of $590.00 by JW.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Line** | **Account** | **Zoning Board of Appeals** |   |   |
|   | 11762-52000 | Purchase of Services | $500.00 |   |
|   | 11762-54000 | Supplies | $0.00 |   |
|   | 11762-57000 | Other Charges | $90.00 |   |
|  23 |   | Total Expenses | $590.00 |   |
|   |   |   |   |   |
|   |   | **Zoning Board of Appeals Total** | $590.00 | JW; KS seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0. |

Roll call vote:

 JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes BB, yes LM, yes

 JB, yes JL, yes KN, yes

KN stated that these expenses are for a conference and travel.

**Review of Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

Article 15 – Town Budget – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 15 as written; JL seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

JBr explained the purpose of this article is to remove the revenue received from Heal Medical from free cash and apply it to next year’s budget. He added that this is the only time that Heal Medical will make payment under the old Host Community Agreement and the only time it will needed to be transferred. BBa added that the $25,000.00 in question is intended to be used towards the actual operating budget; she explained that this article is offsetting the Town budget with marijuana fees which will reduce raise and appropriate by $25,000.00 for one year.

Article 18 – Sturbridge Tourist Association – JL requested that the committee hold on this article until someone from the Sturbridge Tourist Association (STA) could answer questions regarding the budget.

Article 19 – Betterment Committee – JBr stated that he is going to recommend a change to this article. MH asked if any action had been taken on his recommendation to allow flexibility to allow Betterment funds to be spent differently if a Betterment project is not carried out. BBa explained that Town Counsel had reviewed the special legislation regarding Betterment Funds and STA; Counsel felt that specific projects need to be brought forward, and it is not appropriate to use those funds for other projects that were not approved by Town Meeting voters. She explained that if a project does not move forward, it closes out, the money goes back into the fund, and is split again the following year. She added that if a project comes in at less than the budgeted amount, the same thing happens – the remainder is split between Betterment and the STA. She mentioned that there are a few exceptions to this under Betterment to build up funds to do a project. She cited fire department gear and sidewalks as examples of funds that are carried from year to year.

JBr explained that many warrant articles are currently under review due to the expected revenue loss for Fiscal Year 2022 due to the COVID issue and the Board of Selectmen’s (BOS) desire to keep the tax rate flat. He said that they are trying to determine the value of personal property and real estate. He added that this is complicated by the fact that the State has not released what it is doing with Chapter 70 funds and unrestricted aid. Additionally, he said that a 1/12th budget is recommended if Town Meeting does not happen on June 29 as scheduled. He said that the BOS will make their final decision on June 1. Concerns were raised if the book for Town Meeting will be ready in advance of the meeting. JBr stated that the book will be ready as far in advance of Town Meeting as possible. KN noted that the information will be posted online before the book comes out.

Article 25 – Revaluation/Interim Adjustments – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 25 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

Article 26 – Revolving Funds-Spending Limits FY21 – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 26 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

Article 29 – Sewer Project Debt – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 29 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

Article 30 – Inflow and Infiltration Study and Repair – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 30 as written; MH seconds. KS withdrew his motion after questioning the wording of the article; MH withdrew his second.

The question was raised whether the transfer was coming from the Water Reserve Fund Balance as stated in the article; BBa said she would check, and the article may need to be changed. JW asked if this article would investigate homeowners who are accessing the sewer system illegally. JBr stated that there is not a strategy to address that issue; the article is to fund the process of inserting a video camera into the sewer system to look for and repair breaks.

Article 31 – Cemetery-Records Management and Mapping – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 31 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

The question was raised whether to put this article on hold for a year; JBr stated that it is funded from free cash and it is acceptable to go forward.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

Article 33 – Tax Increment Financing Agreement and Project Certification: New England Cold – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 33 as written; BB seconds. Motion accepted 7-1-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, no JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

JBr stated that the Board of Selectmen has approved this agreement and explained the idea behind tax increment financing agreements (TIFs). He added that this company will be tying into the sewer system which makes it possible for a neighboring company to expand its operations. JBr agreed to send information on the value of previous TIFs. JBr clarified that the sponsor of the article is the Board of Selectmen.

Article 34 – Amend Chapter Two of the Zoning Bylaw – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 34 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

JBu explained that this article is updating district permitted uses and definitions to coincide with new uses adopted this year.

Article 35 – Amend Chapter Seven of the Zoning Bylaw – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 35 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

JBu stated that this is consistent with what was started in January and is consistent with the new definitions adopted in January. JBu explained the word “harmony” as it relates to planning as meaning generally consistent with the surrounding neighborhood and not out of character with the other nearby buildings.

Article 36 – Amend Chapter Eight of the Zoning Bylaw – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 36 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

 BB, yes LM, yes KN, yes

KN noted that the only change is “craft beverage with tasting room.”

Article 37 – Amend Chapter Nine of the Zoning Bylaw – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 37 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes BB, yes LM, yes

 JB, yes JL, yes KN, yes

It was noted that the only change in this article is the building height.

Article 38 – Amend Chapter Ten of the Zoning Bylaw – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 38 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-1.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, abstained KN, yes

JBu explained that because there are only two parcels left in the industrial park it may be desirable to rezone additional land on Route 20. She stated that the Planning Board is looking holistically at industrial space. She said that office buildings used to have to be 30,000 square feet; now office buildings are large with small offices in it. She raised the questions of how will the Town attract businesses if the it rezones and what amenities do businesses like to have in industrial spaces. She added that many industrial spaces have a large childcare facility, places to eat, dry cleaning, and a gym. She said that these new uses will be consistent with the parcels on Route 20.

 Article 39 – Amend Chapter Eleven of the Zoning Bylaw – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 39 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-1.

Roll call vote:

 JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes BB, abstained KN, yes

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes

JBu stated that this article contains all the language added to Chapter Seven; the only difference is the truck stop.

Article 40 – Amend Chapter Nineteen of the Zoning Bylaw – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 40 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 MH, yes KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes LM, yes

JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes

JBu stated that this article is the footnotes to go with the greater than thirty-five-foot building height by special permit.

Article 41 – Property Tax Exemption for Gold Star Parents – LM moved the motion to recommend Article 41 as set forth; no second. KS moved the motion to take no action on Article 41; JL seconds. Motion accepted 6-1-1.

Roll call vote:

 LM, no JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, abstained

KS noted that the Board of Assessors is not in favor of this article. KN stated that there is currently one family in Town which qualifies for this exemption. MS said that the request came from a Gold Star mother and that he feels it is a good fit for Sturbridge to show support for families who have lost everything. CB indicated that he would support this article as a resident of Town. MH added that the current $400 exemption is reimbursed to the Town by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. MS said that the Brave Act allows the full exemption for Gold Star families. KS questioned if the exemption was just for the Gold Star mother or if divorced parents would both get the exemption. MS said he would have to check; he added that this exemption only applies to service people who were actively deployed during time of conflict. JW said that there is a certain degree of uncertainty until the State clarifies its policy on reimbursing this this exemption. JB explained that there is an annual annuity given to disabled and Gold Star parents and unmarried spouses from Massachusetts; he asked if anyone currently qualifies for that and the proposed exemption.

Article 42 – Zoning of 7 Cedar Street – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 42 as written; BB seconds. Motion accepted 7-1-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, no JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

JBu and CB explained that this article is substantially changed compared to the similar article last year; this article requests that one acre be allowed for parking compared with four acres previously sought. JBu added that all abutters have been received legal notice even though it is not required by law and that the Public Hearing is set for June 9.

JBu stated that the Planning Department is extremely busy and listed many projects in different phases of development in Town.

**No Meeting Minutes to Approve**

**No Old Business**

**New Business**

JBr said the Little League field lighting project required a large change order and the project is being scoped for rebidding. He said the Community Preservation Committee will be reviewing the new proposal next week.

The question was raised if the Town foresees a problem due to tax payments and sewer and water bill payments being delayed. It was decided that this issue will be handled at a future meeting.

The motion to adjourn was made by KS; JL seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

 LM, yes JB, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes

 KS, yes BB, yes KN, yes

Meeting adjourned at 9:11 pm.

/jme