**Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Town Hall ~ May 28, 2020**

**Sturbridge, MA**

**Call to Order**

The Finance Committee Chair called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:30 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), Karen Davis (KD), and Bruce Boyson (BB). Absent: Jared Burns (JB).

Guests: Jeff Bridges (JBr), Town Administrator; Barbara Barry (BBa), Finance Director; Brian Amedy (BA), Sturbridge Tourist Association Chair; Thomas Chamberland (TC), Trails Committee; Brandon Goodwin (BG), Trails Committee; Barbara Search (BS), Historical Commission; Robyn Chrabascz (RC), Facilities Coordinator; and Rebecca Gendreau (RG), Conservation Agent.

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 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

Article 2 – Community Preservation Committee Report – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 2 as written; LM seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

Article 5 – Community Preservation Gravestone Restoration – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 5 as written; BB seconds. Motion accepted 7-1-0.

Roll call vote:

JL, yes JW, yes MH, no KS, yes BB, yes

KD, yes LM, yes KN, yes

MH asked for definition of the scope, schedule, and budget for this project. BS stated that this is an ongoing project: stones need repair and new problems come up each year. She added that these old historic cemeteries are valuable sites for genealogy, art, and craftsmanship; she said cemeteries need repair to keep historic originality. MH suggested that grant money is available or associations can be set up to help raise funds for cemetery upkeep. LM noted that there is no end game to many services offered in Town, and the cemeteries will need upkeep. When asked if other sources of support are taken into account prior to making this request, BS answered that it would be great if there were a Friends of the Cemetery group to help, but no one has expressed interest in supporting the cemeteries in any meaningful way. She added that the Board of Selectmen are caretakers of the cemeteries and it is generally viewed as the Town’s mission to maintain the cemeteries.

Article 6 – Community Preservation Town Hall Storm Windows – JW moved the motion to recommend Article 6 as written; KS seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

RC explained that this is similar to the Center Office Building storm windows project except only the windows on the sides of Town Hall will have storms installed. Discussion followed concerning the installing storm windows on the front of the building; RC explained that those windows are not in an office space where level of comfort is stationary. She said that a storm window would detract from the large upper front window. BS stated that the windows on the addition are not antique windows and do not require storms to be installed.

Article 7 – Community Preservation Recreation Trail Riverlands CPA Parcel – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 7 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes BB, yes KD, yes

LM, yes JL, yes KN, yes

BG stated that the Town has received a grant for $50,000.00 but needs a $25,000.00 match. He explained that there has been a design created for four to five miles of single-track flow trails on the Riverlands parcel. He said this project will allow approximately 2½ miles of easier trails for hiking and biking to be built by the company that designed the plan for the grant. He added that this will allow access to the property quickly with additional trails to be built later. TC stated that the trails have been used exponentially more during the COVID shutdown. BG stated that building trails for Town residents is the first priority, but a total of fifty miles of trails will make Sturbridge a tourist destination for its trails. TC said that the Town currently has 19.8 miles of trails; he said that there are 33 total miles of trails if the Opacum Land Trust, Trustees of Reservations and Army Corps trails are added to the Town total.

Article 8 – Community Preservation Recreational Trails Master Plan – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 8 as written; BB seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

TC said that the Trails Master Plan was completed in 2012; he stated that the plan included sixty goals for the Leadmine and Heins Farm properties and was intended to span twelve to fifteen years. He said new properties have been purchased and that 90% of the intermediate goals are now complete. He stated that some of the long-range plans are not a good fit anymore; he said the plan is eight years old and needs updating. TC added that he has been in touch with the Conway School in Northampton to have three of its graduate students update the master plan. He explained that the new plan will provide a road map for the next ten to fifteen years so the Town can move forward with structure.

TC stated that during the past semester, Structural and Environmental Engineering students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute evaluated eight potential sites for a bridge crossing on the Quinebaug River. He said that they found the best location to be behind 501 Main Street, which was recently purchased by the Town for use as a parking lot. He added that the incoming seniors will design a feasibility study for the six acres the Town owns between 501 Main Street and the river. Possibilities for use include a pavilion, a dog park and a canoe launch. He said the students will take an encompassing look at the property and create a conceptual design for the parking lot. JBr stated that the COVID crisis has delayed the engineering for the parking lot design.

There was discussion regarding the wording in the “Discussion Boxes” and who would be reviewing them for content.

Article 9 – Community Preservation Construction of Recreational Trails Leadmine Parcel and Restoration of Burgess Discovery Trail – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 9 as written; BB seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

TC explained that this article would fund a five person “crew” from the Student Conservation Association to build remote backcountry trails. The crew also has experience with elementary and would spend a day with the fifth and sixth grade students at Burgess Elementary School if they come during the school year.

Article 10 – Community Preservation Trail Construction – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 10 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes BB, yes KD, yes

JL, yes LM, yes KN, yes

TC stated that this article is for signage, materials, and labor to support volunteer efforts on the trails.

Article 11 – Community Preservation Property Boundary Delineation Long Pond Parcel – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 11 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

RG stated that the property was acquired in 2014 with Community Preservation Act funds but the required boundary markings were not done at the time of purchase. She added that this property is located on the west side of Long Pond and connects to other Town properties.

Article 12 – Community Preservation Outbuilding Removals – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 12 with the addition of the word “DOLLARS” – so that the article reads “ONE HUNDRED SIXTY-FOUR THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED NINETY AND 00/100 DOLLARS ($164,890.00)”; MH seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

RG stated that the structures in question have had samples tested and were confirmed by laboratory analysis to contain asbestos. She explained that the structures are all located on marked or unmarked trails, and it will be difficult to bring equipment to the locations. She added the possibility exists that the asbestos may be abated first by a contractor, and demolition may follow by the Department of Public Works if the roof has not collapsed on a structure. RC said that the structures are a liability to the Town. She explained that the project requires extra labor and time to get to the different locations of the structures. She added that part of the high cost is the necessity of the contractor’s removing the entire buildings where the roofs have collapsed.

Article 13 – Community Preservation Library Window Restoration – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 13 with the addition of the work ‘DOLLARS” – so that the article reads “THIRTY-FIVE THOUSAND EIGHT HUNDRED FIFTY AND 00/100 DOLLARS ($35,850.00);” BB seconds.

Roll call vote:

RC explained the plan for ten original historic windows in the main portion of the reading room to be professionally restored.

Article 14 – COMMUNITY PRESERVATION RESTORATION OF HISTORIC PORTRAITS BY WILLIAM WILLARD – JW moved the motion to recommend Article 14 as presented; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-1.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, abstained

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

BS said that William Willard was a Sturbridge artist whose most renowned work is the image on the Lincoln penny. BS said the library has three Willard paintings which were taken down during the recent renovation; the portraits are in storage because it is not safe to hang them in their current conditions. RC and BS were not able to place a value on the portraits other than the connection to the Town.

Article 18 – Sturbridge Tourist Association – KS moved the motion to recommend Article 18 as written; BB seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

BA explained that the Chamber of Commerce phones and postage were removed from the budget after the Information Center ceased operations. He added that the budget is based on the past and many summer events have been cancelled; he said that there are many unknowns due to the COVID crisis. BA stated that Open Door Marketing has created a well-detailed three-year plan for the Sturbridge Tourist Association (STA) including creating a strong social media presence, and improving and separating the STA website from the Town website.

Article 44 – Community Preservation Little League Lighting Proposal – JW moved the motion to recommend Article 44 as written; LM seconds. Motion accepted 5-3-0.

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, no JW, yes MH, yes KS, no

BB, no KD, yes KN, yes

JBr explained that the funds allocated last year for lighting the Little League field are insufficient and the contract has been cancelled. He said that the project will need to be rebid due to soil conditions, changing the specification to LED lighting rather than metal halide, and the necessary electrical work. JBr explained that originally the cost estimate was $154,000.00 based on a quote received from a vendor, but the bid came in at $175,000.00. BBa explained that $19,250.00 was reallocated as excess from another Community Preservation Committee (CPC) project, bringing the funds available to $175,000.00. RC added that the original 2018 bids ranged from $175,000 to $225,000. BBa clarified that the project has always been funded with CPC funds. RC explained that the change order was $33,000.00 to change to LED lights plus $23,000.00 to redesign the foundations. The previous contractor had said there would be another change order for an unknown amount for the foundations; this plus overhead is how they came up with $107,000.00 additional amount needed. JBr stated that this project was first scoped two years based on a quote from a vendor; he added that relying on vendor quotes is a process many towns use, but the Town’s situation is radically different today. He said that RC is able to properly scope projects so Town does not have to rely on vendor quotes. He stated that the new number requested is what was appropriated plus the value of the adjustments; it is a worst-case scenario so that they don’t have to come back for more money. He said that the project will have to be rebid. MH stated that this is now a $280,000.00 project and the question is whether the Town wants to spend the money to fund it.

**Meeting Minutes**

JL moved the motion to accept the May 7, 2020, minutes as presented; JW seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:  
 LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

JL moved the motion to accept the May 14, 2020, minutes as presented; KS seconds. Motion accepted 8-0-0.

Roll call vote:  
 LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes

BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

**Old Business**

BB asked that the committee look at Article 41. JBr explained that KP Law looked at Article 41 and realized that it actually contained two articles and they have been separated. KN stated that this vote should be dealt with next week.

JBr indicated that the revised money articles will be available after Monday’s Board of Selectmen meeting. He explained two articles: one for tax support and one for tax stabilization, both with the intent of supporting and stabilizing the tax rate. He added that the budget has been reduced by $700,000.00. He said they are proposing a mixture of expenditure cuts, free cash, and stabilization funds to keep the tax rate where it is now. He stated these numbers will be available well before the next meeting on Thursday.

**No New Business**

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

Roll call vote:

LM, yes JL, yes JW, yes MH, yes KS, yes BB, yes KD, yes KN, yes

Meeting adjourned at 9:32 pm.

/jme