**Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Town Hall ~ March 24, 2018**

**Sturbridge, MA**

**Call to Order:**

The Finance Committee chair called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 8:30am. The following committee members were present: Kathy Neal (KN), Michael Serio (MS), Joni Light (JL), Jared Burns (JB), James Waddick (JW), Mike Hager (MH), Karen Davis (KD), Larry Morrison (LM) and Bruce Boyson (BB) arrived at 8:50am.

The following Board of Selectman members present: Mary Blanchard (MB), Priscilla Gimas (PG), Michael Suprenant.

Other town employees: Leon Gaumond (LG), Barbara Barry (BBa), Greg Morse (GM), Tom Ford (TF), John Grasso (JG), Brei Eichstaedt (BE)

This is a joint meeting with the BOS and Finance Committee to kick of the FY19 Budget Review process. For additional information that may not be included in these minutes please refer to the Board of Selectman meeting minutes.

**Town Administrator – Budget Overview**

LG presented an overview of the FY19 budget and highlighted key points outlined in the annual budget book provided by the town’s finance director each year. Presented to the town this year is a budget of $32,553,300.00, or an overall increase of $1,008,500.00 from last year that equates to 3.2%. The education budget is 56% of the overall total, with general government at 18%; public safety at 13%; and public works and health/human services both at 4%.

He continued with a review on revenues with 74% obtained from property taxes; state aid is 14%; and local receipts accounting for 12%. LG noted that of the “new” monies to the town, education costs use up approximately 78.9% of those revenue dollars.

Moving to the staffing needs of the town, LG explained the request to fund an IT specialist position. The town is currently sharing services with Tantasqua, yet the technological changes require more time at town hall to better service their needs. Additionally, four positions are included this year under the Fire Department through the SAFER grant. This provides the town with four firefighters for 36 months. The fire chief will address questions. LG is requesting additional hours for the ambulance billing clerk, additional hours for the administrative assistant position in the planning department, and he is currently assessing the facilities position.

MH asked about anticipated revenue stream for the town, and how those costs may affect budgets in future years. LG reminded everyone that there is a five-year budget forecast in each of the budget books for review. LG did comment that he did not anticipate any dramatic increase in revenues. He would like to see an increase in Chapter 90 funds as this amount has been apportioned at the same level for the past ten years. Repair costs and such to the town are at a higher cost, and infrastructure needs attention at a more state aggregate level.

**DPW Budget Overview – Greg Morse**

GM provided details to the line items included in his budgets. Once concern he raised was on the electricity line item, and he wanted some visibility to how much his department is using. Explained by both LG and BBa, the electricity budgets had been moved out of the departmental budgets and into the Central Purchasing budget this year due mostly to the way net metering credits come through. BBa will continue to monitor each department’s usage.

KD asked about the analysis that will go into allocating the budget across the various departments. BBa explained that it will be managed by her team. The only budgets that will continue to have electricity included is the Water and Sewer accounts, the school, and the rest will be included in Central Purchasing. BBa further explained that the town accountant will allocate the credits appropriately.

KN asked GM about his staffing and vacancies. GM confirmed that he had three vacancies. He is anticipating filling all positions within the next month. There was further discussion on the landfill account for the position that is funded out of the DPW budget between MS and GM.

JL asked about the capital purchase of the dump truck, and if the truck funded in FY18 was received. GM confirmed it was not yet received but is anticipating it soon. JL also asked about the funding for roads and specifically the bridge at Champeaux Road that was approved several years back. GM said the $1.4M is currently still in the hands of the state, but it has been approved. LG explained the new process of prioritizing road repairs via the CPMR program. There is a “map” available to show those projects.

JB asked about the increase in internet, and if there was ability to have the town perhaps build their own infrastructure as some municipalities have done. BBa and LG explained the cable contract and difficulties in making changes, as well as how towns with their own municipal light plants are likely the towns who can provide their own structure for cable. Sturbridge does not have their own municipal plant.

**Police Budget Overview – Tom Ford**

TF opened with his “manpower” proposal that was not included in the FY19 budget book this year. He gave his evaluation on his dispatcher needs, as well as his quest for a full-time detective. Discussion continued with both committees.

LM asked if the chief had any “elasticity” in his staffing to avoid increased jeopardy in not having staff available, specifically in summer when the population swells. TF explained that it used to be that the busiest times were around the Columbus Day holiday/season, rather now he finds a steadier flow of necessary response from his team. Likewise, the discussion continued around the dispatcher needs, and LM asked if there was a potential for error with dispatchers being asked to do more “multi-tasking”, and taking up additional shifts to meet the needs of the town. TF used this example of how well trained the dispatchers in his department are, and how few faults have been made, but there is always potential for error.

KD asked for costs associated with his manpower proposal. TF and LG said they would have that information available to the finance committee.

KN asked about the school safety officer at the high school, and if there was any additional discussion around having one assigned. TF said he continues to have those discussions with the school, as well as the four towns and their police chiefs.

JL noted that the chief is now on a three-year employment contract; something that had been requested by the chief in years past. She commended the town for following through to put it in place, and hoped that it would be ratified.

**Fire and Safety Complex Budget Overview – John Grasso**

JG began his review of the fire department budget with a detailed commentary on the four positions funded under the 36-month SAFER grant. All will be hired on the condition that they will be certified paramedics within the first two years of employment. The reason for this is due to the small pool of available paramedics, and the expanding need of having trained paramedics in place. All four applicants have accepted the job offers.

Moving on to the increases in the budget, ambulance costs have increased due to increased number of calls, the need for additional supplies, and the higher cost of medications. There was a healthy discussion around ambulance rate increases which were recently approved by the BOS, and obstacles of keeping costs down with the significant rise in medications and other medical supplies.

Moving to the Public Safety Complex, JG highlighted the need for the washer and dryer unit needed for “regular” uniforms. Unfortunately, the installation cost is high due to the need to drill through concrete to get plumbing in place.

**Board of Health Budget Overview – Brei Eichstaedt**

BE gave a summary of her previous position as health agent and qualifications in her new position with the town of Sturbridge. A review of the BOH budget with minor increases in certain line items were noted.

MH asked about the staffing of the BOH for clarification. BE confirmed the full-time agent, a full-time inspector and a part-time administrative assistant who is working 30 hours per week. BE confirmed that there are supplemental staff from time to time, and she is looking to confirm a person dedicated to Title IV inspections. There was continued discussion around this staffing and subsequent funding, with several questions from individuals on both sets of committees. LG commented that he will be looking to increase their capacity to meet the needs with minimal adverse effect to the town. MB asked to keep communication open around this subject.

LG had one closing comment around the warrant articles, and that the warrant should be available in draft by April 28.

Meeting was adjourned at 11:50am.

/jml.