**Finance Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Town Hall ~ April 29, 2021**

**Sturbridge, MA**

**Call to Order**

The Finance Committee Vice Chair called the Finance Committee meeting to order at 6:31 pm. The following committee members were present: James Waddick (JW), Joni Light (JL), Larry Morrison (LM), Kathy Neal (KN), Bruce Boyson (BB), and Joe Freitas (JF). Michael Hager (MH) arrived at 6:36 pm. Absent: Kevin Smith (KS) and Karen Davis (KD).

Guests: Jeff Bridges (JB), Town Administrator; Barbara Barry (BBa), Finance Director; Brandon Goodwin (BG), Trails Committee; Joshua Wages (JWa) and Stacy Olkkola (SO).

This meeting was held as partially in-person, partially remote 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 on 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.

JW read the introduction to the virtual meeting.

**No Reserve Fund Transfers**

**Review of Special Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

Article 45 – Free Cash Transfer-Snow and Ice Deficit – JL moved the motion to recommend Article 45 as written; KN seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

Article 46 – Unpaid bills of a Previous Fiscal Year (9/10 vote required) – KN moved the motion to recommend Article 46 as written; JL seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

BBa explained that the motion may be amended at Town Meeting if more bills are received.

Article 47 – Funding for Disallowed Costs of the FY2012 Assistance to Firefighter Grant Program – MH moved the motion to recommend Article 47 as written; JF seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

Article 48 – Funding for Overlay Account – JL moved the motion to recommend Article 48 as written; MH seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

BBa explained that Article 48 is necessary because the Overlay Account currently has a deficit and must be closed out without a deficit.

Article 49 – Community Preservation Committee-Purchase of 48 Old Farm Road and 133, 137, and 139 Fiske Hill Rd – JL moved the motion to take no action on Article 49; KN seconds. Motion accepted 4-2-1.

Roll call vote:

BB, no JF, no MH, yes JL, yes LM, abstained

KN, yes JW, yes

BG presented Trail Committee suggestions for the property based on the Sturbridge Trails Master Plan. He explained the concept of creating neighborhood access to local trails, providing access to the downtown and connecting to the trail network. He explained that there would be 1 ½ miles of simple loop trails on the property and a small parking lot on Fiske Hill Road. He added that it would not be difficult to create the trails on the property using volunteer labor. BG stated that there would not be parking on Old Farm Road, but there is a path for neighborhood access into the property by the pump station on Old Farm Road. He added that OFS is onboard with discussing creating access to Hall Road. He said that typically Northern Tree brings volunteer labor and removes trees for free to create trail parking lots; the DPW will dump dirt or stone dust for the surface of the parking lot, so the only expense for parking is the materials for the lot. BG stated that the trail counters indicated that 40,000 visits were made to the Town trails in 2020. JB explained that, prior to the public hearing before the Board of Selectmen (BOS), the abutters were sent letters, and the neighbors had input possibilities into the Town’s purchase of the property.

JWa said that he and his wife, SO, are hoping to build a house on 137 Fiske Hill Road and an equipment shed on 133 Fiske Hill Road. He stated they want to clean up the downed trees; plant hardwood, nut, and fruit trees; possibly have a five-acre Christmas tree farm; keep bees for honey; raise goats; and potentially have a small store. JWa explained that the land is in poor condition due to heavy logging, and he feels it is unsafe for trails in its present condition. He added the feedback to a Facebook post was overwhelming favorable for his project. JWa stated that the land has a lot of ledge and has not passed a perc test. He proposed selling a portion of the land to the Town for trails.

JB stated that the BOS voted to exercise the Town’s right of first refusal on the property, but allocating the funds to purchase the land is up to Town Meeting voters. MH stated that there is plenty of open space and trails in Town. JF asked for an explanation of the purpose of the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) funds; JW explained that CPC funds are for historical preservation, affordable housing, and recreation and is funded by an assessment on real estate taxes. KN added that there is additional funding from the state. JF stated that this is an appropriate use of the funds and is the type of thing that many residents would think is a good use of funds. JW stated that there is an enormous number of trails in Town and questioned whether out-of-state visitors using the trails are spending money in Town. BG explained that there are 30 miles of useable trails in Town and the objective is to get to 50 miles. He added that 50 miles is essential to be a destination for tourism and then people will stay overnight. JF noted that local, neighborhood trails are an added value. MH advised JWa that a substitute motion is possible at Town Meeting.

**Review of Annual Town Meeting Warrant Articles**

Article 2 – Community Preservation Committee Report – this article is on hold.

Article 16 – Capital Improvement Plan – MH moved the motion to recommend Article 16 as written; JL seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

BBa stated that lightning rod protection for the Senior Center was added to the article.

Article 19 – Tax Rate Relief – this article is on hold.

Article 22 – Water Department – MH moved the motion to recommend Article 22 as written; KN seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

Article 23 – Sewer Department – JF moved the motion to recommend Article 23 as written; KN seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

BBa explained that transfer of $342,000.00 from the Sewer Reserve Fund Balance is to prevent a rate increase. JB stated that a rate study is underway and the rate will be adjusted when the study is complete.

Article 26 – Design and Permitting for a New Wastewater Pump Station and Force Main to Service the Fiske Hill Area – MH moved the motion to recommend Article 26 as written; JF seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

JB stated that currently the Fiske Hill flow goes to Southbridge and making this change would allow the flow to go to Sturbridge’s wastewater treatment plant in the future.

Article 29 – Emergency Services Radio System Evaluation and Technical Support for Implementation of a New Interoperable Radio System – KN moved the motion to recommend Article 29 as written; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

JB explained that this article funds the services of a public safety radio expert to evaluate the current radio system, the current repeater and tower locations. He said this will include a detailed list of what the Town needs to do to purchase a new system; provide detailed specifications; walk through the bidding process; evaluate the bids; construct the contract with the specified vendor; and assist in the construction and implementation of the new system.

Article 30 – Easement to National Grid/Mass.Electric for Utility Pole/Anchor and Guy-Wire, 65 Whittemore Road – JL moved the motion to recommend Article 30 as written; JF seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

Article 31 – Acceptance of Extension of Hillside Drive (2/3 vote required) – JF moved the motion to recommend Article 31 as written; BB seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

Article 32 – Easement of 77 Farquhar Road – this article was placed on hold for legal counsel to review.

Article 33 – Ministerial Amendments to the Town Charter (2/3 vote required) – LM moved the motion to recommend Article 33 as written – BB seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

JB explained that this is necessary due to the codification of the Town Charter; he added that this amendment will also be placed on the Town election ballot after it is accepted at Town Meeting.

Article 34 – Ministerial Amendments and Codification of the General Bylaws – JF moved the motion to recommend Article 34 as written; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

Article 35 – Accepting the Provisions of M.G.L c.60, Section 3F Establishing a Sturbridge Veterans Assistance Funds – JF moved the motion to recommend Article 35 as written; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

Article 42 – An Article Amending the General Bylaws of the Town Providing for the Keeping of Poultry and Other Fowl in the Town – this article is on hold.

Article 43 – Cleanwater (Stormwater) Compliance Program Massachusetts Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer (MS4) General Permit Compliance Program – JL moved the motion to recommend Article 43 as written; BB seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

Article 44 – Recreation-Site Plan and Concept Plan 58 Cedar Street, 60 Cedar Street, 70 Cedar Street, and 3 New Boston Road – this article is on hold.

Article 45 – Maple Street Water Line Replacement (2/3 Vote) – this article is on hold for more detail. BBa explained that the language of the article is very specific and written by bond counsel.

**Meeting Minutes**

JL moved the motion to accept the April 15, 2021, minutes as presented; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

JW moved the motion to accept the April 22, 2021, minutes as presented; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

**No New Business**

**Old Business**

JL stated that she had spoken with Linda Cocalis and the Community Health increase is for additional services due to the Covid pandemic.

**No Public Access**

JF moved the motion to adjourn; LM seconds. Motion accepted 7-0-0 and meeting adjourned at 8:58 pm.

Roll call vote:

BB, yes JF, yes MH, yes JL, yes LM, yes

KN, yes JW, yes

/jme