



MINUTES
of the
TOWN COUNCIL OPEN MEETING
TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE
February 27, 2023
7:00pm

CALL TO ORDER The Southbridge Town Council met on February 27, 2023, in the Town Council Chambers of the Southbridge Town Hall. Chair Daniel called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Pledge of Allegiance:** Chairman Daniel led the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. **Roll Call:** 8 voting members present.

Member	Present	Staff Present	Present
John Daniel, Chair	Yes	Charles Blanchard, Interim Town Manager	Yes
David Adams, Vice-Chair	Yes	Madaline Bonadies, Town Clerk	Yes
Joseph Daou	Absent	Shane Woodson, Police Chief	Yes
Scott Lazo	Yes	Paul Normandin, Fire Chief	Yes
Michael Marketti	Yes	Michael Brunelle, Recreation Director	Yes
Michael Montigny	Yes	Charles Diaz, Cable Access Department Head	Yes
Jasmin Rivas	Yes	Susan Peghiny, Recording Clerk	Yes
Jacquelyn Ryan	Yes		
George Steeves	Yes		

Motion: Councilor Adams moved to suspend the rules to add an agenda item to tonight’s agenda. Councilor Ryan seconded, and the motion passed by show of hands vote.

3. **Motion:** Councilor Adams moved to amend agenda item 37c passed at the Town Council meeting of February 13, 2022 by changing the words “Rule 4” to “Rule 5”. Councilor Ryan seconded, and the motion passed by show of hands vote.

3a. Consider and accept the Town Council Meeting Minutes, Monday, February 13, 2023

Motion: Councilor Ryan moved, and Councilor Steeves seconded to approve the Regular Session minutes of the February 13, 2023 meeting of the Town Council, as amended.

Additions/Corrections/Deletions: Councilor Steeves said that Ms. Clemence and Mr. Pollone’s names are misspelled throughout the minutes, and that a Mr. Collone is actually another Mr. Pollone (a father and son both spoke).

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

4. Subcommittee Reports

Department of Public Works: Councilor Marketti reported that a meeting had been cancelled, but he hopes to have one before the next Council meeting, and listed some items he would like discussed.

Education and Human Services: Councilor Montigny reported that there is not meeting scheduled at this time, but he will speak on Agenda Item 15 later in the meeting.

General Government: Councilor Steeves reported that there was a meeting and Agenda Items 9, 10, & 11 came through this Subcommittee. He said they had also discussed having a centralized billing system. No meeting is currently scheduled but he expects one soon.

Planning and Development: Councilor Adams reported that there has not been a recent meeting, but one is scheduled on March 7th.

Protection of Persons and Property: Councilor Lazo reported that items 16-19 on tonight's agenda are from this Subcommittee.

5. Chairman's Announcements

- Casella has announced one day delay in trash pickup due to expected snow.
- There will be a two-hour delay on Tuesday for Town Hall employees.
- Hazardous Waste Day is March 25. Mattresses will be accepted at the Oxford Transfer Station that day.
- Asked Councilors, Subcommittee Chairs and Department Managers for understanding and to be helpful to the Interim Town Manager as he works to prepare the budget in a short timeframe. He asked Subcommittee Chairs to hold budget meetings with only the budget line items on their agenda, with other issues held at other Subcommittee meetings.

6. Town Manager's Announcements. Mr. Blanchard reported that:

The request for proposals for curbside was issued on February 17, 2023 and a pre-proposal conference will be held on Tuesday, February 28th remotely. Responses are due on March 9, 2023 at 11am, with the contract being awarded on April 9, 2023.

7. Presentations

Bridge of Faith Youth Center: Rev. Esteban Carrasco, President, Bridges of Faith Youth Center presented on the proposed Bridge of Faith Youth Center that they hope to build, and what they hope to accomplish at the new center. He reviewed the history and programs of the organization and outlined some potential future programming and services. A series of questions from the Councilors followed, which Rev. Carrasco answered.

Councilor Montigny expressed his enthusiastic support for the project and the faith community in Southbridge.

Councilor Rivas expressed her support for needs the project has identified and asked several questions, especially around health services that will be provided and inclusion issues, which Rev. Carrasco answered.

Councilor Lazo reviewed the history of youth centers and youth programs in Southbridge and expressed support for this project.

Councilor Adams thanked Rev. Carrasco for bringing the project forward and expressed support for the project.

8. Citizen's Forum – no citizen's spoke.

9. Vote to approve the Town Manager's appointment of Kristine Russell to the Town Accountant position effective immediately. *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.*

Councilor Steeves outlined the employee development plan for Ms. Russell.

Ms. Russell spoke about looking forward to working as the Town Accountant.

Mr. Blanchard said that Ms. Harnois (the former Town Accountant) spoke highly about Ms. Russell's skills and expressed support for her appointment.

Councilors Adams and Lazo expressed support for Ms. Russell's appointment.

The motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

- 10. Vote to approve new Voting Equipment; the ImageCast Precinct Tabulators and discontinue the use of the old voting equipment beginning with the local Election scheduled for Tuesday June 13, 2023. The vote is according to Per M.G.L Chapter 54, Section 34. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Steeves to vote this item.**

Councilors Steeves and Ryan explained why the new equipment is needed. Ms. Bonadies explained the process for replacing the machines.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 11. Vote to approve an Elections transfer request for \$8,000.00 from #001162-512000 Seasonal Salaries to #001162-530000 Spec. Services to cover the cost of vendor mailing to all vacant properties. A motion was made by Councilor Steeves and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.**

Councilor Steeves explained the purpose of the mailings, and asked if the Board of Health will contribute to the mailing expense because the trash survey is being included in the mailing. Ms. Bonadies said the Board of Health will add approximately \$4000 to the effort.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 12. Vote to accept a donation of \$500.00 to the Fire Department from the Southbridge Italian Club to be used at the discretion of the Fire Chief. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Steeves to vote this item.**

Chief Normandin thanked the Italian Club for the donation and thanked them for the donation.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 13. Vote to accept an increase to ambulance billing rates and authorize the Town Manager to sign all related documents. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Adams to vote this item.**

Chief Normandin outlined the services provided by the ambulances in Town. He explained that 88-90% of transports who have MassHealth, Medicaid, or Medicare, and explained the financial implications of this.

Councilor Marketti explained why he is opposed to increasing the fees.

Councilor Rivas asked if the charges are different based on where the patient goes. Chief Normandin said they only get paid based on the fee structure, regardless of destination.

The motion passed 4-1-3 by a show of hands vote with Councilor Rivas abstaining, and Councilors Marketti, Ryan & Steeves opposed.

- 14. Vote to approve a Fire Department transfer request for \$1,500.00 from #001220-511000 Salaries & Wages Personnel to #001220-52300 Water/Sewer to cover costs accrued due to an undetected leak. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.**

Councilor Marketti asked who owns the Water Department. Councilor Lazo said the Town of Southbridge does but subcontracts to White Water. Councilor Marketti asked if the fee could be waived, and Councilor Lazo explained why this is not so and explained the financial situation.

The motion passed 6-2 by a show of hands vote with Councilors Ryan & Marketti opposed.

- 15. Vote to approve applying to the United Way Summer 2023 Grant with potential to award \$5,000.00 to \$50,000.00 and authorize the Town Manager to sign any related documentation. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Montigny to vote this item.**

Councilor Rivas recused herself from the discussion.

Mr. Brunelle explained the purpose of the request and the plan to use it for summer camp.

Councilor Montigny asked if there is a any cost to apply for the grant and Mr. Burnell said there is not.

Councilor Steeves asked several questions that Mr. Brunelle answered.

Councilors Montigny, Lazo and Adams expressed support for the motion.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 16. Vote to accept a donation of \$500.00 to the Police Department from the Southbridge Italian Club to be used at the discretion of the Police Chief.** *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.*

Police Chief Woodson explained that this is a regular donation, and how they use the funds.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 17. Vote to approve the Mutual Agreement for Investigative Assistance in Criminal Investigations and authorize the Town Manager & Chief of Police to sign the agreement.** *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.*

Police Chief Woodson explained the purpose of the task force and the need for a new contract.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 18. Vote to approve a Police Department transfer request for \$12,000.00 from #001132-578100 Town Council Reserves Fund to #989000-258200 Detail Account to cover a deficit due to uncollectable(s).** *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.*

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 19. Vote to approve a Police Department transfer request for \$250.00 from #001210-518100 Witlessness to #001210-571000 Mileage In-State Travel to cover costs of mileage reimbursement, tolls and other fees for officer mandated training.** *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.*

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 20. Vote to approve a Police Department transfer request for \$100.00 from #001210-518100 Witness to #001210-571100 Conferences & Meetings to cover fees to attend association conferences and meetings.** *A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Lazo to vote this item.*

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 21. Vote to approve the reorganization of the command staff of the police department.** *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.*

Chief Woodson explained that this is basically a change in duty assignments in order to be more time efficient. He then explained the details of the situation, why the change will be beneficial, and his staff development plans. He also explained the issues being faced regarding staffing in public safety in general.

Councilor Ryan expressed support for Chief Woodson's work and the proposal.

Councilor Steeves asked how the promotions will affect officers on the street. Chief Woodson explained how he would handle some expected short shifts and added that there will be no public impact. There was a discussion of how the police workload is balanced.

Councilor Marketti said he has problems with this item because residents have been asking that the Town reduce spending, and he believes there will be increased costs because of this change. He also recommended getting funding from the State for this.

Councilor Marketti referred to the Charter about reorganizing agencies in Town. He explained why he would not support the proposal.

Councilor Montigny asked how many candidates are available each year for the force, and Chief Woodson said the number is shrinking dramatically throughout public safety. Councilor Montigny expressed his support for the proposal.

Councilor Lazo explained the level of pushback that Chief Woodson received in Subcommittee and how well he handled it. Councilor Lazo explained why he supports the proposal.

Councilor Adams explained why he supports the proposal.

The motion passed 7-1 by a roll call vote with Councilor Marketti opposing.

- 22. Vote to approve \$130,000.00 in ARPA funds in support of the Recreation Department for new lighting at McCann Field utilizing MUSCO Sports Lighting and distribution of such funds will be overseen by the town's ARPA Administrator.** *A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Steeves to vote this item.*

Mr. Brunelle explained that this is the most used field in Town, why adding lights will be beneficial, and how the request came about.

Drew Paradis, President, Southbridge Little League explained the benefits the lighting will create, including creating another team, extending playing & practice time, etc.

Emilio Torres, Equipment Manager, Southbridge Little League also spoke about the benefits of adding the lights.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 23. Vote to approve \$25,864.00 in ARPA funds in support of the Cable Department for three self-service recording rooms utilizing Ockers Company and distribution of such funds will be overseen by the town's ARPA Administrator.** *A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Montigny to vote this item.*

Councilor Adams explained the reason for this request and the benefits of having more rooms functioning.

Mr. Diaz explained the process that was used to choose Ockers Company.

Councilor Ryan expressed her support for the proposal.

Councilor Montigny spoke about his enthusiasm for the proposal and suggested that Councilors have keys to access the equipment.

There was a discussion of committees and other users recording their meetings.

Councilor Marketti asked if the cable contract is still being worked on, and if Charter owed the Town money each year. Mr. Blanchard explained that the 10-year contract has expired and said he would follow up on the status.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 24. Vote to approve a transfer request for \$25,000.00 from #001132-578100, Town Council Reserve to #001123-530000, Town Manager Specialized Services to cover costs for the Town Manager Search Committee to engage a Town Manager professional search firm and other related costs.** *A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Steeves to vote this item.*

Councilor Adams provided an update of the Town Manager Search Committee, and explained how these funds would be used. He outlined the process and dateline that is being used for the search.

Councilor Ryan asked how much will be left in Council Reserves after this transfer. Councilor Daniel said the balance would be \$79,913.54 after this transfer.

Councilor Montigny expressed his lack of support for a particular search firm and asked that they not be used again. Councilor Adams explained that the Search Committee will make the decision and added that the Council is required by the Charter to financially support the Town Manager search effort. There was a discussion of using a search firm.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

25. Councilors Forum

Councilor Steeves:

- Discussed using State Law to go after corporations that are discouraging competition to address Charter's lack of cooperation..

Councilor Rivas:

- Encourage residents to view the video of the presentation held at the Jacob Edwards Library on changing the state seal, her support of this effort, and the process that was used to recommend doing this.
- Youth Voices with Councilor Rivas will film the first episode next week, and the theme will be Leadership.

Councilor Montigny:

- Said Senator Fattman had success getting the cable agreement settled in another town and suggested the Town Manager look into this.
- Discussed getting The Res ready and possible other uses.
- Wished his grandfather a happy 80th birthday.
- Reminded the DPW that there are special spots in Town that get extra snow and listed some of these areas and hopes an engineering project can be done in certain areas to correct road conditions.

Councilor Lazo:

- Welcomed Mr. Blanchard and expressed his desire to continue moving the Town forward.

Councilor Marketti:

- The Curbside Committee is meeting on Thursday, and a representative from Waste Zero will present on Pay As You Throw.
- He will be at the Community Center on March 15th at 10am to discuss curbside options.
- Mass DEP recycling coordinator said some people did not receive the survey, and Mr. Marketti reached out to the Downtown Partnership to try to address this.

Councilor Adams:

- There is a lot of interest in the Curbside.
- Recognized the HR Department because Ms. Robaina was able to get \$62,000 in fines cancelled.
- Welcomed Mr. Blanchard as Interim Town Manager.
- He has reached out to Amazon about the possibility of housing some of the large incoming workforce at the Hotel & Conference Center.
- ARPA meeting is on March 9th and there is a little over \$1,000,000 left.

DISCUSSION OF NEXT MEETINGS

- March 13, 2023

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Councilor Lazo moved to adjourn the meeting of the Southbridge Town Council.
Councilor Ryan seconded, and ***the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.***
The meeting was adjourned at 9:10pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Clerk