

**TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
MONDAY, MARCH 13, 2023
SOUTHBRIDGE,
MASSACHUSETTS**

A meeting of the Southbridge Town Council was held on March 13, 2023, in the Town Council Chambers of Southbridge Town Hall. Council Chairman Daniel called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.

Agenda Item #1. Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Daniel led the assembled in the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance.

Agenda Item #2. Roll Call. Councilors Present: Adams, Daniel, Daou, Lazo, Marketti, Montigny, Rivas, Ryan, and Steeves.

Agenda Item #3. Consider and accept the Town Council Meeting Minutes, Monday, February 27, 2023. A motion was made by Councilor Steeves, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #4. Subcommittee Reports:

- a. **Department of Public Works.** Subcommittee Chair Councilor Marketti described the March 8 meeting, with several items appearing on tonight's agenda.
- b. **Education and Human Services.** Subcommittee Chair Councilor Montigny said there has been no recent meeting, and they are waiting for the budget meetings.
- c. **General Government.** Subcommittee Chair Councilor Steeves said there are many items on tonight's agenda from the recent subcommittee meeting, and no meeting is scheduled.
- d. **Planning and Development.** Subcommittee Chair Councilor Adams said the last meeting in March resulted in many items for tonight's agenda. He said there is no meeting scheduled. Councilor Adams also described a recent ARPA meeting, with many resultant items on tonight's agenda. He also said there is a Town Manager Search Committee meeting this Thursday.
- e. **Protection of Persons and Property.** Subcommittee Chair Councilor Lazo said there is no report, and a meeting will be scheduled soon.

Agenda Item #5. Chairman's Announcements

Chairman Daniel said after tonight's meeting he will be away until March 21st.

Agenda Item #6. Town Manager's Announcements

Interim Town Manager Mr. Blanchard said the Town Hall will be closed tomorrow due to the pending snowstorm.

Mr. Blanchard described the FY24 budget. He said the Governor's estimates have been received, and talks have begun with Bay Path and the Southbridge Public Schools, and he is beginning talks with the Town's department heads.

Mr. Blanchard said the RFPs for both the Town Manager search consultant and to provide trash services for the town are due on March 16th.

Mr. Blanchard said on March 25th the American Society of Mechanical Engineers is to recognize the American Optical 1921 lensometer machine, used in measuring spectacle lens power, as an Historical Mechanical Engineering Landmark.

Agenda Item #7. Presentations

Consultant Mark Carron gave an update on Core District business improvement efforts. Mr. Carron said when he started there were 61 commercial building vacancies in the Core District, and this is down to 54. Mr. Carron described improving conditions downtown, and said upcoming new businesses are slated, including a retail furniture store.

Mr. Carron said they are looking to have the Tri-Community Chamber of Commerce relocate to Southbridge, as they are no longer able to keep their current site in Sturbridge.

Mr. Carron described the potential for movement in the Core District and the Town in general' as far as using commercial properties.

Councilor Marketti said a reduction from 61 vacancies to 54 is seven new occupants, and he asked who they were. Mr. Carron said the old Billis's Restaurant is now occupied, as well as two retail spots for furniture, the CFC Restaurant on Central Street, Central Pizza, and a music lessons business occupying a space adjacent to the Central Street Parking Lot.

Councilor Marketti asked if there is any movement on the vacant lot at 300 Main Street, and Mr. Carron said some infrastructure and utilities had been laid there. Councilor Marketti asked about the empty bank buildings, and Mr. Carron said the old Santander Bank building on Main Street has been claimed by Cornerstone Bank, with plans being made to occupy. Mr. Carron said the old Southbridge Credit Union building near Main and Everett Streets has an engaged and excited investor, and has just changed hands.

Agenda Item #8. Citizen Forum

Richard Pollone from Marcy Street said on February 13th an item was postponed from a prior meeting and is not on tonight's meeting, and he asked why not. Chairman Daniel said the newly hired DPW Director wants to examine this item prior to a vote.

Maureen Doyle from Lebanon Hill Road said the deadline for applying for a Chapter 61a agricultural exemption from real estate taxes is June 30th. She described some upcoming webinars where people can learn about conservation tools.

Agenda Item #9. Vote to approve the Town Manager's recommendation to appoint Layne Wandlear to the Liquor Licensing Board as an alternate effective immediately through June 30, 2026, pending successful completion of State Ethics. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Adams, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was 7 in favor, 2 abstaining (Daou and Lazo).**

Agenda Item #10. Vote to approve the Town Manager's appointment of Lani Criasia as Treasurer/Collector for an indefinite term effective immediately pending successful completion of pre-employment physical and background screening and State Ethics. A motion was made by Councilor Steeves, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. Mr. Blanchard described the candidate's resume, and said she will be testing for job certification in August. Mr. Blanchard said she will not now be assigned the additional task of Finance Director as the Town is not yet ready to appoint that position. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #11. Vote to accept the revised job description for Senior Public Works Foreman. A motion was made by Councilor Steeves, seconded by Councilor Adams, to vote this item. Councilor Marketti asked why this item was on tonight's agenda when it was previously voted down. Chairman

Daniel cited sections of Robert's Rules of Order and said as Chair he rules it appropriate for tonight's meeting. Chairman Daniel said he believes this is in the public interest, and the DPW Director was by assent of the Council offered the opportunity to review what was coming before the Council. Discussion was held. Mr. Blanchard said the DPW Director brought forth the recommendation for Glenn Ethier for this position, and he supports this recommendation, and is now recommending this to the Town Council.

Recess was held from 7:43 p.m. to 7:53 p.m.

Agenda Item #11, vote by roll call – Councilors in favor: Adams, Daniel Daou, Lazo, Montigny, Rivas, Ryan, and Steeves. Councilors opposed: Marketti. By 8 to 1 to vote passes.

Agenda Item #12. Vote to accept the changes to Schedule 1 VII PW Supervisory and PW Schedule for Trade, Craft, and Labor Positions not Covered by Collective Bargaining Agreements. A motion was made by Councilor Montigny, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. **Vote by roll call – Councilors in favor: Adams, Daniel Daou, Lazo, Montigny, Rivas, Ryan, and Steeves. Councilors opposed: Marketti. By 8 to 1 to vote passes.**

Agenda Item #13. Vote to approve the promotion of Glenn Ethier to the Senior Public Works Foreman position. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Montigny, to vote this item.

Nancy Graf Harwood questioned the way this was brought back to the Council, on the basis of waiting to hear from the new DPW Director. Ms. Harwood said the DPW Director was earlier in tonight's meeting hurling obscenities from the audience, and then stormed out of the meeting, and now the Council was predicating its decision on a man who behaved this way.

Mr. Blanchard said this candidate was recommended by the current DPW Director, and also the former DPW Director, the former Town Manager, and the interim DPW Director, so based on all of this he still recommends the Council go forward with this appointment.

Further discussion was held from Councilors about the candidate's qualifications.

Ms. Harwood said on February 8th the Town Manager said this position was created to keep the employee from leaving; she said tonight's appointment isn't a promotion but a gift.

Agenda Item #13. Vote by roll call – Councilors in favor: Adams, Daniel, Daou, Lazo, Montigny, and Rivas. Councilors opposed: Marketti and Ryan. Councilors abstaining: Steeves. By a vote of 6-2-1 the motion passes.

Agenda Item #14. Vote to accept the Amendment and Restatement of the Intermunicipal Sewer Agreement and to authorize the Town Manager to sign all related documents. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. A question was raised about Mr. Blanchard's prior involvement as a representative from Sturbridge for this agreement. Mr. Blanchard said there aren't any substantial changes to the contract, and this is the second or third renewal. Mr. Blanchard described assessments of \$250,000 and \$450,000 that Sturbridge has paid in the past for capital costs and a special assessment. **Vote by show of hands, 8 in favor, 1 opposed (Marketti).**

Agenda Item #15. Vote to approve applying for \$30,000.00 through the Massachusetts Preservation Projects Fund (MPPF) to complete a Town Hall Facilities Study for a total project cost of \$60,200.00 with the Town's 50% matching funds coming from Town Hall Renovations Project #63390, raising 75% of the project cost per the grant requirements to cover temporary cash flow, or

\$45,150.00 from Town Hall Renovations Project #63390 until reimbursed, and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork. A motion was made by Councilor Daou, seconded by Councilor Adams, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #16. Vote to accept the Department of Transportation's Safe Streets for All (SS4A) grant for \$60,000 to be coupled with a Complete Streets Tier 2 planning grant for a total project cost of \$98,000.00, and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. Economic Development Director Peg Dean described this project. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #17. Vote to apply for the Expression of Interest through One Stop for Growth to assess the eligibility of an Urban Agenda grant to fund lights at the Henry Street Baseball Field and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Daou, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #18. Vote to apply for the Mass Works grant for infrastructure work on town sidewalks next to commercial businesses and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork.

Councilor Adams made a **motion** to amend this item as follows, "Vote to apply for the Expression of Interest through One Stop for Growth to assess the eligibility for an Urban Agenda grant for infrastructure work on town sidewalks next to commercial businesses and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork." This motion was **seconded** by Councilor Lazo. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #18 (amended) Vote to apply for the Expression of Interest through One Stop for Growth to assess the eligibility for MassWorks grant for infrastructure work on town sidewalks next to commercial businesses and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork.

A motion was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Daou, to vote this item. Councilor Adams said any work like this has to be done in conjunction with the Town's DPW. Councilor Lazo said this is for sidewalks in front of commercial buildings only. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #19. Vote to approve payment of a prior year invoice to Telegram & Gazette in the amount of \$72.36 from #001180.530000 Specialized Services. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #20. Vote to rescind the motion from January 9, 2023, agenda item #23 to vote to approve entering into an agreement with either Childscapes or M.E. O'Brien & Sons, Inc. for playground equipment and surfacing at McCann Field for up to \$132,000.00 using Operation Services Division (OSD) contract FAC 104 funded with the Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork.

A motion was made by Councilor Adams, seconded by Councilor Lazo, to vote this item. Ms. Dean explained how several of tonight's votes were being done with an eye toward maximizing the amount of grant money the Town can use prior to the June 30th deadline. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Councilor Adams made a **motion** to suspend the rules and move Agenda Items #23, #24, and #25 to this point in the meeting, **seconded** by Councilor Lazo. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #23. Vote to approve funding the McCann Field playground using \$70,860.00 in CBDG FY20 grant funds and \$31,120.33 in ARPA and \$12,954.07 in Henry Street basketball courts funding, and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork. A motion was made by Councilor Adams, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #24. Vote to approve an extension for the CDBG FY20 grant from June 30, 2023 to September 30, 2023 to allow time for the installation of a playground partially funded by CDBG. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Adams, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #25. Vote to approve \$31,120.33 in ARPA funds for the installation and construction of playground equipment at Henry Street Park and distribution of such funds will be overseen by the Town's ARPA Administrator. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #21. Vote to approve funding the McCann Field baseball and basketball fences, not to exceed \$130,000.00, through the PARC grant to be completed by June 30, 2023, and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork. A motion was made by Councilor Montigny, seconded by Councilor Steeves, to vote this item.

Agenda Item #22. Vote to approve entering into an agreement with SiteScapes or comparable vendor for not more than \$25,000 to purchase site furnishings for Capillo Park/McCann Field. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Steeves, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #26. Vote to approve \$28,975.00 in ARPA funds for the GIS mapping and database upgrades and distribution of such funds will be overseen by the Town's ARPA Administrator. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Steeves, to vote this item. Town Assessor Ms. Carney described this as an enhancement of the Town's current database. **Vote by show of hands 7 in favor, 1 opposed (Marketti), and 1 absent (Ryan). Vote passes by a vote of 7-1-1.**

Agenda Item #27. Vote to approve \$50,000.00 in ARPA funds for the installation and construction for the new Senior Center generator and distribution of such funds will be overseen by the Town's ARPA Administrator. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Steeves, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #28. Vote to approve \$250,000 in ARPA funds for the reconstruction of the Bridge of Faith Youth Center located on Charlton Street and distribution of such funds will be overseen by the Town's ARPA Administrator. A motion was made by Councilor Montigny, seconded by Councilor Daou, to vote this item.

Councilor Rivas said she wants to know about any oversight to ensure that young people are not getting religious instruction with ARPA money. Esteban Carrasco, who is overseeing this project, said this funding is solely to help with reconstruction of the building and no ARPA funds will be used for programming. Mr. Carrasco said this facility will exclude no one. Mr. Carrasco said this is not a church but a faith-based organization. Mr. Carrasco said the overall cost of this project is estimated to be \$2.3 million dollars, and all of this money being voted tonight is to help with renovation of the existing building. Mr. Carrasco said there will be programming for the whole community.

Councilor Steeves said he would be more comfortable donating this money with a program that has a long track history. Councilor Daou said what Mr. Carrasco is doing is what the Town should be doing.

A motion to move the question was made by Councilor Adams, seconded by Councilor Lazo. **Vote by show of hands, 8 in favor, 1 opposed (Marketti). By 8-1 the vote passes.**

Agenda Item #28 – Vote by roll call, Councilors in favor: Adams, Daniel, Daou, Lazo, Montigny, Rivas, and Ryan. Councilors opposed: Marketti and Steeves. By 7-2 the vote passes.

Agenda Item #29. Vote to accept the Emergency Closing for Severe Weather Policy. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan, seconded by Councilor Steeves, to vote this item. Councilor Montigny said the current policy is fine and this item is superfluous, and as such he is voting no. Mr. Blanchard stated this new policy is similar to the old one, with a little more detail. **Vote by roll call, Councilors in favor: Adams, Daniel, Marketti, Rivas, Ryan and Steeves. Councilors opposed: Daou, Lazo, and Montigny. By 6-3 the vote passes.**

Agenda Item #30. Vote to accept proposed changes to the Senior Work-Off Program. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. Ms. Carney explained these changes. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #31. Vote to not pursue ownership of two parcels known as Lot 1 and Lot 2a Harwood Farm Road under the Town’s Right of First Refusal. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Ryan, to vote this item. Councilor Steeves said the Town should have been provided the opportunity to gain ownership of these 61a parcels prior to any sale to anyone else. Ms. Carney said a tax lien will be assessed to the new owner, for the 61a deferred taxes.

A **motion** was made by Councilor Lazo, **seconded** by Councilor Ryan, to amend this item as follows – “Vote to not exercise the Town’s right of first refusal of two parcels known as Lot 1 and Lot 2a Harwood Farm Road.” **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #31 (amended). Vote to not exercise the Town’s right of first refusal of two parcels known as Lot 1 and 2a Harwood Farm Road. Motion by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Ryan. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #32. Vote to approve amendment to Standard Operating Procedure #15 Capital Expenditure Policy, Capital Expenditure Defined, Original language: Any items or goods of \$10,000.00 or more, and with an intended useful life of 3 years or more regardless of funding source. Amendment: Any items or goods of \$10,000.00 or more, and with an intended useful life of 5 years or more, regardless of funding source. A motion was made by Councilor Steeves, seconded by Councilor Marketti, to vote this item. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

Agenda Item #33. Councilors Forum

Councilor Marketti gave an update on curbside pickup plans. He said the survey is showing that most people want the “pay as you throw” option; he said so far there are three companies that have returned the RFP for trash services, those being Barr, Casella, and Republic. Councilor Marketti said there is a meeting this Wednesday at the Senior Center that is open to the public, to address the upcoming changes.

Councilor Lazo said a petition will be circulating to place a nonbinding measure on the June ballot, to address whether or not there should be a Receiver for the Southbridge School District.

Councilor Rivas said the Southbridge Family Resource Center will begin a workshop on 3/22, for four subsequent Wednesdays from 4:30 to 6 p.m., to help parents who have difficulties getting students to school.

Councilor Rivas said the first episode of “Youth Voices,” is on the air, and the next episode is coming, and includes visits to a food truck and cooking with real chefs.

Councilor Ryan said the Southbridge School Committee budget hearing is rescheduled for 3/28/23, and she urged all Councilors to be there.

Councilor Steeves said the presentation for trash pickup changes is on 3/16 at the Senior Center.

Councilor Steeves said there is a joint Town Council/Planning Board public hearing scheduled for this Wednesday, to discuss potential zoning changes.

Councilor Steeves said maybe General Government should look at Town policies to see which ones are outdated.

Councilor Steeves said many people have taken out papers to run for Town Council, but the School Committee and the Redevelopment Authority also have openings, and he urged people to run for those boards. He said he is currently trying to coordinate candidate debates for the upcoming Town election.

Councilor Adams said he and Ms. Dean, along with Chip Norton of Franklin Realty, met with Jonathan from Amazon, and learned they are hiring 1,000 people for the new facility in Charlton. Councilor Adams said Mr. Norton was trying to bring them into the fold here in Southbridge.

Agenda Item #34. Discussion of next meeting date – March 27, 2023 – 7 p.m. Councilor Adams affirmed this is the next Town Council meeting date.

Agenda Item #5. Adjourn. Motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Lazo, seconded by Councilor Ryan. **Vote by show of hands was unanimous in favor.**

The meeting adjourned at 10:18 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Max
Gullekson
Recording
Clerk