

TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE
A JOINT MEETING OF THE D.P.W. SUBCOMMITTEE and TOWN COUNCIL
TUESDAY, APRIL 18, 2023 at 6 PM
VETERANS ROOM

Minutes

1. Call to Order 6:00 PM
2. Roll Call: DPW Subcommittee Members: Chair Councilor Michael Marketti, Gus Steeves. Citizen Members: Steve Lazo and Kevin Splaine.
Also in attendance: DPW Director Benoit, Water Dept. Steve Gregoire. Councilor Scott Lazo, Council Chair John Daniel, resident's George Chenier, James Pioppi.
3. Consider and approve Joint DPW/Town Council Meeting Minutes of March 29, 2023. Approved.
4. Citizens Forum: Steeves asked about the handicap ramp. Splaine said there was money left over in the Capital Budget. Benoit said there is a problem with an oil tank under the old ramp that needs a permit to remove.
5. Review/Discuss a transfer for \$45,000.00 from #610450-583000-91250 Water Capital Reserve to #610450-583000-23580 Water Capital Systems to pay for unexpected emergency repairs at two separate emergency power generators and to cover large stock purchases for the remainder of the fiscal year. Entertain a motion to Town Council for approval and to authorize the Town Manager to sign related paperwork. Motion by Splaine, second by Lazo. Vote 4-0

Discussion: Steve Gregoire said the Capital Account will be used up soon and he is asking for a transfer to fund the account through the end of the fiscal year. He would like to purchase large stock items that have increased in costs due to inflation, and there was also emergency repairs on diesel generators at the water filtration plant and Roosevelt Road pump station. Steeves asked several questions about the repairs, how long it would last and the need for new generators? Gregoire gave a detail explanation of the repairs and his plan to put them in his next Capital Budget. Steeves asked how many generators there are in the system and if they've all been checked? Gregoire said there are six generators and where they are located and inspected. Marketti spoke about last year's budget and all the capital line items to pull from. Gregoire explained the line items and what they are used for. Councilor Lazo asked if there is a surplus in an account, would it be fair to invest in more stock? Gregoire said if costs continue to go up, it might be a good idea.

6. Review/Discuss a transfer for a total of \$4,000.00 from #001499-521000-0499 Electricity- DPW Operations, \$3,400.00 to #001499-521000-0431 Electricity-Traffic & School Lights, and \$600.00 to #001499-521000-001 Electricity-Various Locations to cover National Grid and solar invoices through the end of the fiscal year until solar credits are redistributed. Entertain a motion to Town Council for approval and to authorize the Town Manager to sign related paperwork. Motion made by Splaine, seconded by Steeves. Vote 4-0

Discussion: Benoit spoke about the transfers needed to cover the costs to the end of the fiscal year. He said the current electrical account is close to being overrun with the charges and there will be insufficient funds to cover the electric fees, so they are pulling funds from accounts that still have money in them so that they do not have to come back and ask for more. Steeves commented that this is not uncommon.

7. Review/Discuss a transfer for \$3,100.00 from #001499-521000-0425 Electricity-Town Hall to #001499-521000-0431 Electricity-Traffic & School Lights to cover National Grid and solar invoices through the end of the fiscal year until solar credits are redistributed. Entertain a motion to Town Council for approval and to authorize the Town Manager to sign related paperwork. Motion made Splaine, second by Lazo. Vote 4-0.

Discussion: Benoit said this is the same explanation as the previous agenda.

8. Review/Discuss a transfer for \$500.00 from #001499-548000 MV Part & Accessories to #001499-558700 Parts & Non Vehc. Accessories to fund needed small equipment purchases. Entertain a motion to Town Council for approval and to authorize the Town Manager to sign related paperwork. Motion made by Splaine, second by Lazo Vote 5-0. (Councilor Daou arrived)

Discussion: Benoit explained this is another internal transfer for small equipment needs. Splaine spoke about the total left in this account and the next agenda item as he felt there was a discrepancy in the balances. Benoit said he does not have the budget with him but he took the information and will look at all the numbers and get back to the committee. Gregoire said sometimes payments end up in encumbrances that can skew the numbers.

9. Review/Discuss a transfer for \$2000.00 from #001499-530000 Specialized Services to #001499-533100 Maintenance on Trees to fund needed small equipment purchases. Entertain a motion to Town Council for approval and to authorize the Town Manager to sign related paperwork. Motion made Splaine, second by Lazo. Vote 5-0.

Discussion: Benoit explained that the detail is wrong in this agenda. The detail is the same as the last transfer. This is for tree maintenance. It will be updated for the Council meeting.

10. Review/Discuss a transfer for \$400.00 from #001499-514100 Longevity to #001499-569000 Licenses, Permits & Taxes to cover additional expenses for new hires. Entertain a motion to Town Council for approval and to authorize the Town Manager to sign related paperwork. Motion made by Steeves, second by Lazo. Vote 5-0.

Discussion: Benoit said because there are five new employees, this is to fund licenses and permits. Steeves asked about longevity. Benoit said there was one removed due to an employee resigning.

11. Discuss Ellis Road

Discussion: Committee spoke about the overall road improvement plan in town. Ellis Road has been worked on in-house. Benoit said the next thing to do is repave the road. The plan is not to widen the road, just mill and repave. Mr. Pioppi spoke about a glitch on the north side of Ellis Road with water drainage issues. Councilor Lazo said we should finish Ellis Road.

Splaine asked about North and Mechanic Street? Benoit said the work has been delayed due to National Grid need to finish gas line upgrades. There was discussion about the West St. gas line repairs. Chenier spoke about the lack of enforcement. Steeves asked if we will get Mechanic and North Street done this year? Benoit said once he finds out from National Grid he will be able to answer. Steeves asked if we should shift the funds? Benoit said he doesn't disagree but wondered how many times we want to shift funds around?

Daou asked about River and Crane St, and he agrees with Steeves to shift funds. Benoit said River/ Crane is a CDBG project and he hasn't been brought up to date yet. Councilor Lazo asked if we shift the funds would the project have to go out for a rebid? Benoit said the bids are a volume bid, so as long as we are not increasing quantities then we would not have to rebid. Chenier asked if National Grid was supposed to contribute funds to paving? Benoit said those funds are in lieu of them doing the paving.

12. Review/discuss the status of the Construction Inspector position.

Discussion: Benoit said due to the cuts in the budget, the position has been cut. He's not opposed to the position, but feels the position should be about more than just construction.

Steeves asked about having a Deputy Director serve as Engineer? Benoit said he would like to have an in-house engineer, which would solidify the department. He felt it would be good to have someone with boots on the ground, such as a civil project manager.

Daou spoke about being behind in road construction last year and asked if the Director can keep up with projects this year? Benoit said his background is in road construction and he wants to be the boots on the ground. What he would like is a qualified assistant director to help with office stuff. He also feels other positions can fill in to do inspections and feels we should restructure the department.

Councilor Lazo said he likes what he is hearing. We've had incompetence with the past leadership at DPW. He wants the Councilors to give the Director some time to tweek the job.

Splaine asked if we are going to put this on hold, what is the short term solution on trench permits going back three years. Benoit said he can set up some time with Phil Harding to go through the permits, see what the issues are and what needs to be accomplished. Splaine said he has the list of trenches. He also asked if the Director has reviewed the trench regulations? Benoit spoke about his past experiences with fines and enforcement officers. Councilor Lazo spoke about regulations and said fines don't work, while pulling someone's licensed is more powerful. What we need is enforcement and oversight. Splaine asked about the Main Street repair timeline. Benoit said the work will happen after Memorial Day to avoid holiday celebrations. Splaine talked about the problems with NewCo. Benoit said NewCo works for National Grid, so it's an issue that has to be brought up with National Grid.

Mr. Pioppi said he agrees with Councilor Lazo, we need to give Benoit a chance. The problems have been with the leadership in the past. He also spoke about the problem with lack of oversight on South Street.

Steve Lazo complimented Benoit on his future plans and spoke about the issue on Charlton Street last summer with an unattended trench.

Daou also said he agrees with Councilor Lazo and asks Benoit not to forget what he is saying tonight.

13. Adjourn. 7:21 PM

Respectfully submitted by Chair Marketti