



MINUTES
of the
TOWN COUNCIL OPEN MEETING
TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE
April 24, 2023
7:00pm

CALL TO ORDER The Southbridge Town Council met on April 24, 2023, in the Town Council Chambers of the Southbridge Town Hall. Chair Daniel called the meeting to order at 7:29pm.

AGENDA ITEMS

1. **Pledge of Allegiance:** Chairman Daniel led the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance.
2. **Roll Call:** 7 voting members present.

Member	Present	Staff	Present
John Daniel, Chair	Yes	Charles Blanchard, Interim Town Manager	Yes
David Adams, Vice-Chair	Yes	Peg Dean, Economic Development Coordinator	Yes
Joseph Daou	Yes	Eric Rumsey, Town Planner	Yes
Scott Lazo	Yes	Susan Peghiny, Recording Clerk	Yes
Michael Marketti	Excused	Steve Brady, Historic District Study Committee	Yes
Michael Montigny	Yes		
Jasmin Rivas	Yes		
Jacquelyn Ryan	Yes		
George Steeves	Excused		

3. **Consider and accept the Town Council Meeting Minutes, Monday, April 10, 2023.**

Councilor Lazo moved, and Councilor Ryan seconded to approve the minutes of the Monday, April 10, 2023 Regular Session of the Town Council. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

4: **Subcommittee Reports**

Department of Public Works: Councilor Daou (reporting for Council Marketti) reported on the activities of the Subcommittee.

Education and Human Services: Councilor Montigny reported on the budget activities the Subcommittee has carried out. The next meeting is April 26th at 7:00pm.

Planning and Development: Councilor Adams reported that the Subcommittee has met and has items on the agenda tonight. The next meeting is May 1st, with a budget meeting on April 27th.

ARPA Committee: Councilor Adams reported that there are items on tonight's agenda from this committee.

Protection of Persons and Property: Councilor Lazo reported on the activities of the Subcommittee.

5. Chairman's Announcements

- Thanked the Town Manager's staff for compiling a list of volunteer openings in Town. This information is available on the Town website and cable TV channels, and he invited residents to volunteer and participate.
- Beautify Southbridge is Saturday at 8:30am, and the rain date is Sunday April 30. He invited residents to participate.

6. **Town Manager's Announcements.** Mr. Blanchard had no announcements.

7. Presentations

Veterans Council Initiative: Councilor Adams provided a status update on the World War Memorial Park. He outlined some memorials that are located elsewhere in Town that are or have been moved to the new park and showed the design for the updated park.

Councilors Daou and Ryan thanked Councilor Adams and his team for their work.

Councilor Lazo said this was the first time there have been improvements that he can remember and thanked Councilor Adams for his work.

Councilor Adams said the Memorial Day Parade is May 29th, and shared details of the event.

8. Citizen's Forum

William Cody, Everett Street: Said he thought the Fire Station was a non-binding vote and later found that it was a debt exclusion vote. He asked that this type of vote be more clearly communicated.

Kevin Buxton, 149 Everett Street: outlined his volunteer experience in Town and said he had drawn his papers to run for Town Council.

9. **Move to approve the amendments to the Charter as proposed by the Charter Committee, with the revisions recommended by the Town Council, all as set forth in the document distributed tonight and authorize the Chair to submit the same to the General Court as a home rule petition in the form below, provided, however, that the changes to the Charter concerning a new proposed Section 4-2-5 shall be presented to the voters for acceptance at the next annual election occurring 35 days after the effective date of the act, or at a special election, and further, to authorize the General Court to make changes of form only to such petition unless first approved by the Town Council, and to confirm that the Council may approve such changes as are within the public purposes of the petitions. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Daou to vote this item.**

Councilor Rivas said Section 4-2-4 still contains the word "alone" even though the Council voted on December 19, 202 to strike this word.

Councilor Adams explained that this item will be on the ballot on April 25, 2023, and pointed out that it will limit future candidates for Town Manager.

The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

10. **Vote to approve the following gifts from the Veterans Council of Southbridge to be solely used at the World War Memorial Park as part of the Southbridge Veterans Monuments Initiative**

- a. **25' Fiberglass Flagpole**
- b. **Three – Concrete ADA Compliant Picnic Tables**
- c. **Two - 7' Benches**
- d. **Two – 12' Solar Lamp Posts.**

*A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Daou to vote this item. **The motion passed 6-0-1vby a show of hands vote with Councilor Adams abstaining.***

11. Vote to discontinue maintenance and abandon Morton Street as a public way to allow use of property for a new fire station. *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.*

12. Vote to approve the Local Historic District Study Committee to spend up to \$16,000.00 for supplies and services related to designing and constructing a downtown historic walking tour before June 30, 2023 using \$8,000.00 from the Massachusetts Office of Travel and Tourism (MOTT) grant and \$8,000.00 in matching funds donated to the Town, and to authorize the Town Manager to sign any related paperwork. *A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Daou to vote this item.*

Mr. Brady reviewed who had made donations to the project which totaled \$10,750.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

13. Vote to approve \$150,000.00 in ARPA funds for the Renaissance Medical Group (RMG) Primary Care Plan Proposal and distribution of such funds will be overseen by the town's ARPA Administrator. *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.*

Councilor Adams explained the background of this agenda item. He thanked the team at RMG for working with the Town on this partnership. He also thanked ARPA Administrator Abi Theberge for her participation in this effort. He expressed his frustration with the behavior of Family Health Center leaving the Town without services.

Councilors Ryan, Rivas, and Lazo expressed their support for this proposal and the services that will be provided by RMG.

George Chenier, Theresa Ave: Expressed his support for RMG and this proposal and spoke about the hardships that occurred when Family Health Center left Town.

Dr. Sarai Rivera, Renaissance Medical Group: Explained the way that RMG decided to partner with Southbridge. She pointed out that they are a for-profit organization so also be an addition to the tax base and that they try to hire locally. Dr. Rivera outlined the scope of services that she expects RMG to provide for residents.

Councilor Montigny thanked the speakers and expressed his pleasure that RMG has so many local employees. He thanked the ARPA Committee for making this happen.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

14. Vote to approve \$6,000.00 in ARPA funds for The WellStorm, Inc Bridge Fridge 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 Daou to vote this item.*

Councilor Adams reviewed the history of the request and the Bridge Fridge.

Councilors Ryan, Rivas, Lazo, and Daou thanked The WellStorm and Bridge Fridge for their work.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

15. Vote to approve \$4,515.98 in ARPA funds for the Health/Inspectors Department printer and distribution of such funds will be overseen by the town's ARPA Administrator. *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Montigny to vote this item.*

Councilor Adams explained the reason the printer is being requested.

Councilor Montigny thanked the ARPA Committee for filling this need.

Councilor Lazo expressed gratitude to the Health Inspector for his work and compassion for residents.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 16. Vote to approve \$20,000.00 in ARPA funds for the Health/Inspectors Department PPE and field equipment 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 Daou to vote this item.**

Councilor Adams explained the need for the requested materials and equipment.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 17. Vote to approve \$50,000.00 in ARPA funds for the Economic Departments Business Grant 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 Rivas to vote this item.**

Councilor Adams explained that this program has been very successful and would like to continue it.

Councilor Lazo said he likes that ARPA is being used for seed money for businesses and thanked the ARPA Committee for their work.

The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.

- 18. Vote to approve \$50,000.00 in ARPA funds for the Pay Study of Town Positions 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 Daou to vote this item.**

Councilor Adams explained how the Town Manager and HR Department were involved in this proposal, and explained what these funds would and would *not* do.

Mr. Blanchard explained that a large part of this effort is the Classification Study which will ensure what the responsibilities and qualifications are for each position.

Councilor Daou said he believes the Town is already paying fair wages and suggested other ways this money could be used.

Councilor Lazo said he would prefer that these funds be used for other purposes and spoke about what happens when studies are done out of house. He shared his experience with previous salary studies he had been involved in.

Councilor Rivas said that programs such as Bridge Fridge should be supported when the opportunity arises and does not think the two issues should be combined. She spoke about how important it is to be competitive, and that the Classifications are important.

George Chenier, Theresa Ave: Suggested that Council table the motion to grant time to see if there is a college intern that could do this type of work.

Councilor Montigny said he feels the \$50,000 is too much to spend on this study.

Councilor Daou said he believes the Town is overstaffed and that the study is not needed and would be a waste of money.

Councilor Adams moved the question. Councilor Lazo seconded, and the motion to move the question passed unanimously to move by roll call.

The original motion passed 4-3-0 by a vote with Councilors Daou, Lazo, and Montigny opposing.

- 19. Vote to accept the reimbursement in the amount of \$162,654.62 as reported in the Ambulance Certified Public Expenditure Reimbursement Program (CPE) FY22 report and authorize the Town Manager to sign all related documents. 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 Fire Department transfer for \$800.00 from #001220-546000 Building & Grounds Materials to #001220-530000 Specialized Services to cover costs for the remainder of FY23. 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 a Fire Department transfer for \$400.00 from #001220-546000 Building & Grounds Materials to #001220-545000 Janitorial/Housekeeping to cover rising costs for janitorial supplies for the remainder of FY23. 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.**
22. **Vote to approve a Fire Department transfer for \$125.00 from #001220-546000 Building & Grounds Materials to #001220-54400 Copier Leases/Maint. Contracts to cover costs for copier lease contract for the remainder of FY23. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Daou to vote this item. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.**
23. **Vote to approve a Water 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. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Daou to vote this item. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.**
24. **Vote to approve a DPW 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. 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.**
25. **Vote to approve a DPW 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. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Rivas to vote this item.**
- Councilor Lazo stepped away from the meeting 8:45pm.
- The motion passed 6-0-1 by a show of hands vote with Councilor Lazo absent.**
- Councilor Lazo returned to the meeting at this time 8:48pm.
26. **Vote to approve a DPW transfer for \$500.00 from #001499-548000 MV Part & Accessories to #001499-558700 Parts & Non Vehc. Accessories to fund needed small equipment purchases. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Daou to vote this item. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.**
27. **Vote to approve a DPW transfer for \$2000.00 from #001499-530000 Specialized Services to #001499-533100 Maintenance on Trees to fund tree maintenance for the remainder of the fiscal year. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Daou to vote this item. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.**
28. **Vote to approve a DPW transfer for \$400.00 from #001499-514100 Longevity to #001499-569000 Licenses, Permits & Taxes to cover additional expenses for new hires. A motion was made by Councilor Ryan and seconded by Councilor Daou to vote this item. The motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.**
29. **Vote to accept the recommendation of the Ad Hoc Trash Committee and move forward with a flat fee and creation of an enterprise fund. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.**

William Cody, Everett Street: Said he would not like to see a pay-as-you go system, saying that this would cause a lot of trash in Town.

Councilor Adams thanked the Committee for their work and expressed support for the Flat Fee.

Councilor Montigny said that after further research he has decided to support the Flat Fee, and that he had received feedback that the survey was confusing. He pointed out that the proposed pricing is much lower than private trash pickup.

Councilors Lazo, Daou, and Ryan explained why they have decided to support the Flat Fee proposal and thanked the Committee that worked on this proposal.

Councilor Rivas thanked the residents that reached out to her about this issue and said she had supported Pay-As-You-Throw because of its environmental benefits. She said she respects the desire of the residents for the user fee proposal and thanked the Committee for their work. She recommended that the conversation about reducing trash continue.

Kevin Buxton, Everett Street: He was a member of the Ad Hoc Committee and said there are other aspects that can be looked at in the future. He recommended working to improve to the program such as increasing landlord participation, etc.

The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

30. Vote to place the following Question on the ballot for the June 13th 2023 Town Election as a non-binding question:

“Shall the elected officials of the State of Massachusetts end the receivership of the Southbridge Public School District and return the control of the District to the Town of Southbridge?”

A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.

Councilor Lazo explained why this question is being placed on the ballot.

Councilor Ryan said she believes the School Committee should have been more involved in this question and recommended that the Council and the Committee work more collaboratively as this was an issue when the Receivership was formed. There was a discussion of this issue.

John Jovan, Jr, Highland Street: Said he supports the petition but recommended that it be amended to read *“Shall the Board of Education and the Mass Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and the Board of the Receivership of the Southbridge Public School District and return the control of the District to the Town of Southbridge?”*.

Councilor Rivas supported Mr. Jovan’s recommendation. She expressed concerns about the lack of formal collaboration between the School Committee and the Council and added that the Town is ready to take back control of the schools.

*Councilor Rivas moved to amend the motion to read “Shall the Massachusetts Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and the Board of Elementary & Secondary Education end the Receivership of the Southbridge Public School District and return the control of the District to the Town of Southbridge?”. Councilor Ryan seconded, and **the motion to amend passed unanimously by a show of hands.***

Councilor Adams outlined who he had invited to the Council of the Whole discussion the following night, saying that he had not received any response yet. He spoke about his frustration trying to work with the State and his feelings about the situation.

Mr. Jovan said he believes it is imperative that residents vote on this issue to send a message to the Council and the State, and explained the history of this issue and why he feels this is important.

Councilor Lazo pointed out that the State never created an exit plan for receivership and spoke about his feelings about the situation and the performance of the Receiver.

William Cody, Everett Street: Asked how the scores are, compared to before the State took over. He also asked if Chair Daniel had spoken to the State about this.

Chair Daniel said there had been discussions without must result. This is why they planned the Council of the Whole meeting for April 25th. He listed who was invited and said the response has been underwhelming.

Regarding Mr. Cody's question about scores, Chair Daniel said the Receiver has given presentations on the scores and said that his concern is that these presentations were to a limited audience. He said he feels that the larger population should be involved, and the communication needs to be better. He spoke about his concerns about the lack of response of the State. He also spoke about the efforts of other districts and their lack of success getting out of Receivership.

Councilor Ryan said that while the tests have changed over time so direct comparisons are difficult, the school system has gone from the bottom 10 to the bottom 3 in MCAS, which speaks for itself.

Councilor Rivas explained that there has been improvement in some areas, but the biggest problem is the lack of transparency and communication.

Councilor Lazo spoke about the residents seeing the problems in the schools, while the State does not. He spoke about the problems with the schools since the Receiver took over.

The amended motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

31. Amendments to Southbridge Zoning By-Law Section 5 Dimensional Regulations and vote to adopt said By-Law amendment. First Reading: The amendment was read by Councilor Adams.

32. Amendments to Southbridge Zoning By-Law Section 9-1 Flood Plain Overlay District and vote to adopt said By-Law amendment. First Reading: The amendment was ready by Councilor Montigny.

33. Amendments to Southbridge Zoning By-Law Section 10 Definitions and vote to adopt said By-Law amendment. First Reading: The amendment was ready by Councilor Rivas.

Mr. Rumsey shared some minor changes that the State has requested, but otherwise advised that they said everything looked good.

34. Councilors Forum

Councilor Montigny:

- Thanked the Council for their work this evening. He expressed his displeasure with Agenda Item 18, which requested money for a salary study.
- He will be at Beautify Southbridge this weekend.

Councilor Lazo:

- Suggested that a 6% salary raise be done instead of the Salary Study and that the Town would save money over the salary study.
- He thanked the readers of the amendments tonight and suggested there are other ways to get this information to residents.
- Praised Chair Daniel for his work.

Councilor Rivas:

- On Thursday the WRTA Advisory Board voted the budget which included the Fare-Free rides that are funded by the CARES act. She discussed the success and importance of the program.
- Encouraged residents to volunteer for committees and boards in Town and explained the importance of these roles.
- Advised that voter registration is still going on and encouraged residents to register and vote.

Councilor Ryan:

- Talked about her support of the Fare Free bus.
- Will be at Beautify Southbridge this weekend.

Councilor Adams:

- Opening Day is Southbridge.
- The Town Manager Search Committee is meeting on May 4th to review the most recent results from the consultant.
- Memorial Day is May 29th.
- Is looking forward to the election and learning who the Council will be working with.
- Thanked the Town Council for their service.

DISCUSSION OF NEXT MEETINGS

- Council of the Whole: April 25, 2023
- Town Council Meeting, May 8, 2023, 7:00pm

ADJOURNMENT

***Motion:** Councilor Ryan moved to adjourn the meeting of the Southbridge Town Council. Councilor Rivas seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote. The meeting was adjourned at 10:19pm.*

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Clerk