

**TOWN OF ALTON
BUDGET COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING
September 10, 2025 at 6:00 PM
Alton Town Hall**

MEMBERS PRESENT

Elizabeth Varney, Committee Chair
Greg Fuller, Committee Vice-Chair
Priscilla Terry, Committee Member
Jill Houser, Committee Member
Drew Carter, Selectmen's Representative
Christi Wood, School Board Representative

OTHERS PRESENT

Ryan Heath, Town Administrator

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Heath explained the purpose of this meeting is to organize and elect a chairperson. Ms. Varney volunteered to act as chairperson until one was elected and called the meeting to order at 6:06 PM.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

No changes were made to the agenda.

MOTION: To approve the agenda as presented. Motion by Ms. Varney. Second by Ms. Terry. Motion passed unanimously.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOARD

Mr. Heath explained that in the case of this Board, a Chair and Vice Chair need to be elected.

MOTION: To nominate Elizabeth Varney as Chair. Motion by Ms. Terry. Second by Mr. Fuller. Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION: To nominate Greg Fuller as Vice Chair. Motion by Ms. Terry. Second by Ms. Varney. Motion passed unanimously.

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Fuller asked about past meeting minutes needing to be approved. Mr. Heath responded the previous minute taker has resigned and he will check the status of any pending minutes. He explained in the past the Budget Committee always had a secretary and transcriber of minutes. A previous Board decided to eliminate that position and utilize an AI software instead. The software that was purchased did not work well with many errors which took members a considerable amount of time to go through and correct. The Board then went back to a transcriber and last year inquired about a secretary. There is a budget line item for a secretary which is funded at this time. Carol Long, Deputy Finance Manager is willing to take on this role.

This would be in addition to her current position. This is similar to the Building Secretary being paid to also be the Conservation Secretary. Ms. Long would attend meetings, do transcription after hours and work with Mr. Heath to coordinate the meetings. The fact that she works in the Finance Department will be advantageous since she has the ability to gather information for the Board herself without having to go through someone else. She is the only in-house option at this time.

Mr. Carter asked how much money is in the line item. Mr. Heath responded \$2,700. He added the last stipend for this position was around \$2,200-2,300. The reason for a stipend is to avoid issues with overtime.

There was discussion regarding the number of meetings and the amount per meeting. Mr. Carter expressed his belief that this was in line with other secretaries compensation per meeting. Mr. Heath added that other minute takers are not physically attending the meetings and are transcribing from videos. In addition to attending meetings, the secretary will also handle coordination of the Board, which has been difficult the last couple years.

MOTION: To secure Carol Long as Budget Committee Secretary based on a stipend not to exceed \$2,300. Motion by Mr. Carter. Second by Ms. Varney. Motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Fuller brought up concerns about how to contact the Board if he were running late, stating last year this was an issue. Mr. Heath stated having Ms. Long as secretary will resolve this issue due to her attending the meetings.

Future Meeting Dates:

September 24, 2025, 6:00 PM

October 22, 2025, 6:00 PM

October 29, 2025, 6:00 PM

November 5, 2025, 6:00 PM

OTHER BUSINESS

Mr. Heath shared it has been two years since employees have had an increase. The Selectmen decided not to give a COLA increase and to stick with a straight merit based increase. Department Heads were told to focus on necessities and no new projects or initiatives. The focus needs to be on getting an operating budget passed. His main goal is to get as much information out to the public as possible, such as a voting guide or podcast.

Mr. Heath discussed some of the significant increases to expect. For example, the Fire Department gained four new full-time firefighters with a warrant article last year. Absorbing those positions into the operating budget alone will cause a \$400,000-500,000 increase. Those wages are not carried in the default budget, therefore if the budget fails, causing another default, those new positions will be lost.

Ms. Varney stated she expects to see increases in items beyond anyone's control, such as health insurance and workers compensation insurance.

Mr. Heath explained one way we have been able to survive two years of default is not to fill vacant positions. For example, they are down four truck drivers at the Highway Department. This will cause a significant issue when winter arrives in regard to plowing roads. It is getting hard to maintain the normal level of service the public is used to with limited funds.

Ms. Houser asked what avenues have been explored to save money or possibly increase fees for services to offset the budget. Mr. Heath gave one example of the new rolloff truck as a recent money saving initiative. Waste Management tripled the hauling fees in their new contract. The Town purchased a rolloff truck for \$58,000 per year lease for four years. The Waste Management hauling fees would be \$112,000 next year. In addition, the Town will have the ability to shop the recyclables and get a better return.

Mr. Heath stated the Town received \$741,000 in FEMA reimbursement from 2023. The Board has not yet discussed offsetting the operating budget with those funds. He added that there is also \$5.2 million in the fund balance currently. Also, 2026 is a reevaluation year which will offset the tax rate significantly. He spoke about utilizing the fund balance for one time expenditures and not recurring expenditures to prevent having to make up for it the following year.

Mr. Fuller requested a list of encumbrances from last year.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:07 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Carol Long

Carol Long, Budget Committee Secretary