

Town of Alton
Budget Committee Meeting
Town Hall Meeting Room
September 15, 2016
Minutes
Approved October 25, 2016

1. Call to Order 6:30 pm

2. Pledge of Allegiance

3. Roll Call

Roger Nelson, Chairman
Greg Fuller, Vice Chairman
David Hershey, Member
Andrew Levasseur, Member,
Peter Leavitt, School Board Representative,
Terence O'Rourke, Member, Excused Absence
John Markland, Selectmen's Representative, Arrived 6:35 pm

4. Approval of Agenda

D. Hershey motioned to approve the Agenda as presented and was seconded by R. Nelson with all in favor.

5. Public Input I

S. Miller spoke to the Committee as an Alton resident and Chairman of the Alton School Board. He thanked the Budget Committee for the letter they sent wishing to give the School Board guidance in terms of preparing for the upcoming budget and requesting a 5% cut across the bottom line. Mr. Miller stated he is concerned and doesn't understand why the School Board would receive such a letter. Last year they presented a budget to the Budget Committee that was less than the previous year. From that same year we will be returning in excess of one million dollars to the townspeople. There was a considerable amount of staff turnover and the salary benefit lines were reduced by hundreds of thousands of dollars. It was somewhere in the middle six figures. In addition it was a mild winter and we saved a considerable amount of money on fuel and that was totally unanticipated. We also managed the budget and looked to save every possible dime. What you did not see was anything extravagant or not needed. There was significant debate on whether we should use the money to fix the boilers at the ACS school. Last year it was suggested by the Budget Committee that the repair was something the School Board should look at and possibly do it as a warrant article or start planning on a CIP basis to get it done.

S. Miller continued that the fact that we were very prudent last year and brought in a budget that was lower than the previous year he is at a loss at the request to reduce the budget by an additional 5%.

D. Hershey stated that the characterization of the request is not accurate from what he is hearing, and that the School Board received a request to present a budget that is 5% less than last year. D. Hershey stated his understanding of the request was to present an optional budget of 5% less than what the normally proposed budget is. We would like to see two budgets.

S. Miller stated that we turn in a zero based budget that we feel is lean and appropriate. The Budget Committee can decide to cut 5% out of it.

G. Fuller stated that the courts stated we can't just cut the budget and we need a reason. The Budget Committee was looking for alternatives.

R. Nelson stated that School budget that was presented was a little more than zero based the prior year. In the prior year you returned 500-600 thousand in unused funds. That was not reflected in the budget that was presented. If added to the budget that you presented you actually had an increase not a decrease from the prior year. This year you are saying that you are returning a million dollars so we would assume that you are taking that million off of the budget that you had last year and start with a budget less a million dollars.

S. Miller stated they do zero cost budgeting and the School Board goes through each account and every line and it is vetted three times. Every single line has to be defended.

R. Nelson asked if you return a million dollars from the prior year's budget how can you start with a budget from the prior year as a basis of where you go forward from.

S. Miller responded we start at zero base cost level. We do not start from the last budget.

R. Nelson called for a point of order and stated we are in Public Input and you addressed yourself as a resident and as Chairman of the School Board and asked Mr. Miller if he was speaking as a resident or as the Chairman of the School Board. S. Miller asked why couldn't he do both. He commented, so as the Chairman of the School Board he is not allowed to speak at Public Input and asked what about the first amendment.

R. Nelson stated last year the School Board budgeted for boiler repairs and you also had a warrant article for boiler repairs and you are stating that you are going to need more money for boiler repairs.

S. Miller responded that there are three boilers and the School Department decision was to replace all three boilers, around \$60,000.00 each. We decided to return the money to the town and we will either present a special warrant article or add it to the budget.

D. Hershey stated he believed the request for the optional budget with a 5% decrease is a legitimate request. It is not saying it will be an arbitrary decision made to summarily reduce the budget by 5%. The intent was to present with each department's input of a 5% option. It would allow individuals or other committees to pick and choose between the budget with the 5% reduction and recognizing that by choosing that budget certain specific services will be lost. Or as a Committee do you want the one without the 5% decrease which would then include the services regardless of what they are. It is not accurate if you are categorizing that the request for a 5% option is somehow challenging or questioning the credibility or accuracy in which a budget is prepared by the School Board.

S. Miller stated that the wording of the letter was perceived as essentially stating if you can't figure out the 5% then we will help you do it.

D. Hershey stated his recollection was the offering of assistance from a fellow taxpayer, a person who benefits from the schools, great, if not that is fine as well. If I have the skill and an expertise

that someone finds helpful I am more than happy to volunteer whatever time and energy is necessary to the extent that the other party finds beneficial.

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S. Miller stated there is a workshop open to the public that goes over the budget on a line by line basis. Any resident of the town or the Budget Committee are welcome to attend.

R. Nelson stated that the only authority the Budget Committee has is to approve or not approve a budget for the school, high school or town. We do not have the authority to change the budget, we can recommend changes but we don't have the authority to change the budget. We can only approve or disapprove.

S. Miller stated politically that is incorrect. You can stand up at the Deliberative Session and cut the budget from the floor.

There was a discussion on how it is presented at deliberative session.

G. Fuller stated that there is a 10% rule and it as enacted years ago. It was used once. J. Markland stated that the 10% rule is a state law.

J. Markland stated you can go on line to the NH website and pull the current rules and that there is also training for Budget Committee members.

R. Nelson motioned to close public input and was seconded by D. Hershey with all in favor.

Public Input I closed

6. Old Business

A. Meeting Minutes

P. Leavitt motioned to approve the meeting minutes of May 26, 2016 as presented and was seconded by J. Markland with all in favor.

B. Review of Town and School Financials

J. Markland informed the Committee that there has been a large expense for ambulance costs. Both ambulances are in disrepair. In addition some highway vehicles need repair.

G. Fuller asked if about the self-funded ambulance fund. J. Markland stated that it doesn't fund everything completely. It deals with the ambulance costs the EMT's that are currently on full time and equipment that is used per ambulance call. The Fire Chief will be able to explain it in more detail.

J. Markland stated that there are ambulance fees that they have been attempted to be collected and have not been collected.

There was a discussion on the Ambulance Fund.

There was also discussion on the Capital Improvement Plan with J. Markland informing the Budget Committee that the Board of Selectmen is recommending the re-implementation of the CIP.

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J. Markland stated that the big issue in town currently is the rumble strips and that he wanted the Committee to know that it was state funded.

R. Nelson asked P. Leavitt to get the information that was originally requested in June from the School Superintendents.

Peter Leavitt stated that the School has lost substantial teachers and they will have to add additional staff.

R. Nelson stated that the number of teachers has remained the same and the number of students has gone down.

D. Hershey stated maybe we should look at the student to teacher ratio. There was a discussion on the mandates for the ratio.

R. Nelson asked P. Leavitt to provide him with the names of the JMA members.

P. Leavitt stated we are on top of the issues. We are well aware of the issue of the ratios and the new superintendent is moving in the right direction and I believe she will put the resources where they need to be.

There was a discussion on the School Board budget with regards to teacher salaries.

R. Nelson informed the Committee that the assessment of lake front homes and down town properties went up 10-15%.

7. New Business

A. 2017 Budgeting Process

B. Proposed Meeting Dates

The Department Heads were polled on whether they would like to meet on a Saturday and at this time only the Water Department, Highway Department and Finance said no to a Saturday meeting.

J. Markland stated that the Department heads have their information into the Town Administrator and she is reviewing them.

Proposed meeting dates were discussed.

John Markland informed the Budget Committee that the funds for the outside agencies may be placed in the operating budget instead of having individual warrant articles.

There was a discussion on the number of warrant articles associates with outside agencies.

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The next meeting will be held on Thursday, October, 20th, 2016 at 6:30 pm at the Alton Town Hall Meeting Room.

8. Public Input II
None
Public Input II Closed

9. Other Business
J. Markland informed the Committee that the Cemetery Department is now under the Selectmen who have moved under Parks and Recreation.

10. Adjournment
G. Fuller motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by JM with all in favor.

The meeting adjourned at 7:45 pm

Respectfully submitted,



Peggy Hawksley
Budget Committee Secretary
Approved October 25, 2016