

**TOWN OF ALTON
ALTON BUDGET COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
APPROVED 10/28/08
OCTOBER 21, 2008**

Present: Steve Miller, Chair
Karen Painter, Vice Chair
Greg Fuller
Richard MacDonald
Elizabeth Dominick
Steve McMahon, Selectmen Representative

Absent: School Board Representative

I. CALL TO ORDER

S. Miller called the meeting to order at approximately 6:40 PM.

II. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

III. ROLL CALL

S. McMahon was present for roll call but excused himself to another meeting taking place upstairs in the Town Hall. He stated he was available if needed.

K. Painter entered the meeting at 6:45 PM.

IV. HOUSEKEEPING

There was discussion about the Budget Committee schedule. S. Miller noted that the meetings would start at 6:30 PM. S. McMahon reported that most department budgets would be level funded but would include merit increases, cost of living adjustments, etc.

S. Miller announced that The Basic Law of Budgeting 2008 was available for \$12.00. Anyone interested in a copy should contact S. Miller.

The Local Government Center will have a meeting on November 1, 2008 between 8:30 AM – 12:30 PM, in Concord, NH for preparing for a successful town meeting. The cost is free or \$25.00, and anyone interested should contact S. Miller.

S. Miller noted that there is a file cabinet in the downstairs meeting room in the Town Hall.

S. Miller announced there is a conference at the Raddison in Concord, NH about local government. The conference will be held November 12 – 15, 2008. Anyone interested in the conference should contact S. Miller.

There were no meeting minutes to be approved.

S. Miller reported that Jeff St. Cyr, Chair, Alton School Board, has requested that anyone who has an old budget book (binder) should turn them in to the SAU office to be reused.

S. Miller reported that he has talked with Jim Sessler, the town attorney, about the concerns that were brought up by G. Fuller. He stated he also gave J. Sessler the information he received from the Local Government Center. On the question on whether or not the school board has to appoint an ex officio member, a regular member, to the budget committee, that the answer is no. If they choose to have a different member every time, that is their choice. They cannot be compelled to attend a certain number of meetings because they are an ex officio member. S. Miller asked if there were any questions. S. McMahon stated he'd heard that they were not going to appoint anyone at all. S. Miller stated they had trouble appointing one person to the committee so they are sending someone as they can, as a representative. S. McMahon spoke about how the Selectmen appoint a representative and have a back up representative in case the representative is unable to attend. S. McMahon felt that it defeated the purpose of having a representative attending meetings if there was not consistency on who was representing the Board.

S. Miller spoke about the concerns that G. Fuller had presented about the payment of the School Board with the defeat of school warrant article number two, 2008. He read school warrant article number two, which lists the salaries of the Board. He stated that it was J. Sessler's opinion that the operating budget had been passed but that school warrant article number two had failed. The conservative legal advice flowing from the meeting's negative action is that no school officer should be paid during the year. However, the argument can be made that the purpose was not deleted from the budget nor did it reduce the amount appropriated in the operating budget to zero. The argument exists that the voters intended that a rejection of article two to mean that they would not pay the amount included in the operating budget plus the amount of the appropriation in the special article. The compensation should be set forth in the operating budget. In the end, the governing body of the school district, the school board, must make their own decision as to the meaning of these two votes. The conservative response is that nobody gets paid, but the intent, from the deliberation from the floor was probably that they should not get the raises. It is up to the governing body to decide.

There was a brief discussion about J. Sessler's decision.

K. Painter asked if the meeting was going to be videotaped. S. Miller stated that it was not possible because of the meeting taking place upstairs.

V. PUBLIC INPUT

There was no public input.

VI. HOUSEKEEPING

S. Miller stated that it is very difficult economic times right now and that the citizens of Alton are feeling the pinch from the uncertain times. He proposed that the Alton Budget Committee should take a stand for a flat budget in 2009. He stated that the Committee was in the position to help the citizens of Alton at this time, in these unique circumstances. He asked for a 4.6% reduction in the budget off what was submitted/recommended by the Selectmen. He stated that other municipalities in the state are doing this at this time. Staff gets trimmed and overtime gets eliminated during difficult times. He stated that non-essential things should be eliminated from the budget and made suggestions for how cost savings could be recognized. He stated that some departments have already accomplished this objective such as Water Department and the Solid Waste Department. He suggested that all committee members and selectmen should forego their stipends for one year, to set an example of sacrifice, saving the town \$26,955.00 or 10% of the 2009 budget. G. Fuller and R. MacDonald both stated they agreed with S. Miller's comments. S. Miller stated it was not his intention to violate a contract but that there were some variable budget line items that could be controlled or decreased to save money. He stated this is a different and unique time right now and they should look at how to better manage things. There was discussion about some of the projects around Alton and the justification for the cost of the projects. S. McMahon stated that every budget for every department should be looked at on an individual basis. G. Fuller stated that the school's budget should be held to the same standard. S. Miller stated that the warrant articles should be looked at as well. The Committee discussed some of the strategies they could use to identify areas where savings could be found.

[S. McMahon excused himself from the meeting.]

VII. HOUSEKEEPING

S. Miller asked if any Committee members wanted changes on the format of the department budget presentation. There were no comments.

S. Miller noted that he had received an information request from E. Dominick for the compensation, COLAs, and steps for the 2009 budget. K. Painter asked for information on the computers, including who has what kind of computer and the age of the machine. K. Painter stated there was a lot of discussion about information system for computer cost and the use of the copy machine. S. Miller stated he would like a break down of fuel costs for the year. K. Painter noted that there was supposed to be an energy use audit.

The Committee discussed the methodology of how questions would be asked to the various department heads. It was decided that questions would be asked at the meeting and not prior to the meeting.

There was discussion about when public input would be on the agenda. S. Miller stated it would be prior to new business on the agenda. R. MacDonald suggested that it should be after the department budgets were presented.

S. Miller motioned to have public input before new business and after new business. R. MacDonald seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (SM, RM, KP, ED, GF)

VIII. ADJOURN

R. MacDonald motioned to adjourn and E. Dominick seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (SM, RM, KP, ED, GF)

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:50 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Recorder