

TOWN OF ALTON
BUDGET COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING
October 30, 2024, at 6:00 PM
Alton Town Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

Brock Mitchell, Committee Chair
Greg Fuller, Committee Member
Priscilla Terry, Committee Member
Elizabeth Varney, Committee Member
Drew Carter, Selectmen's Representative
Carol Locke, School Board Representative

OTHERS PRESENT

Ryan Heath, Town Administrator
Seth Garland, DPW Director
James Reinhart, Fire Chief
MacDougall, Police Chief

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Mitchell called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Approval of Agenda

No changes were made to the agenda.

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

OLD BUSINESS

Mr. Heath stated the packets of information presented were a result of discussions at the last meeting, including requests for expenditures. He also explained there are restrictions with the BMSI software and how the information was printed.

The committee reviewed and discussed the overview presented for the proposed FY 2025 amounts which have been approved by the Board of Selectman. Mr. Heath noted the summary includes breakdown by departments, including default budget amounts for prior years and the total percentage increases for this year. He stated the largest budget increase was 9% with the employee benefit costs.

NEW BUSINESS

Department Reports

Account - Police Department

Chief MacDougall gave an overview of the department's proposed FY 2025 budget; he noted a majority of the increases are reflected in the payroll lines; a position was added for the school resource officer, which was previously funded by a grant and covered by a part time employee.

He also explained the changes in part time officer limits which were reduced and how this has affected shift coverages. Chief MacDougall stated the fuel and utility costs were based on a three year average; prices for fuel are not locked in any more with the state bid; it was noted an additional federal holiday was added for Juneteenth. The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented.

MOTION: To approve the Police Department budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$1,574,856. Motion by Mr. Fuller. Second by Mr. Carter. Motion passed unanimously.

Account - Fire Department

Fire Chief James Reinhart gave an overview of the department's proposed FY 2025 budget; he stated the majority of the increases are in wages including holiday pay for full time employees. The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented.

Mr. Heath gave some background on the department; he stated it is in transition from a call department to a full time department, a place put in place about three years ago with progressively adding full time positions until they reach eight. He stated a warrant article will be presented to add permanent positions. It was noted there are six full time positions currently.

Chief Reinhart explained the challenges with getting volunteers to respond to calls as many are currently employed with full time departments. He explained based on the call coverage they project eight full time employees including fire and EMS will be necessary; he stated the calls average 1400 per year, with a large increase in calls for EMS to the aging population. It was noted in FY 2024 there was \$170,000 in overtime to maintain the level of services. Chief Reinhart stated they are currently tracking the calls to determine the coverage and responses in more detail; at this point, about 3% of the calls require mutual aid. He explained when those are EMS calls, they are potentially losing revenue. There was discussion regarding the changes to the scheduling that may need to be made if the warrant article is voted down as well as the potential impact to the overtime lines.

MOTION: To approve the Fire Department budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$1,125,689. Motion by Mr. Carter. Second by Ms. Varney. Motion passed unanimously.

Account - Department of Public Works

Seth Garland, DPW Director, gave an overview of the department's proposed FY 2025 budget.

Mr. Heath stated three years ago the Town decided to create the Department of Public Works as an umbrella department to merge cemeteries, grounds and maintenance, highway department, solid waste and recycling. He noted all the wage lines for those departments were included in DPW.

The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented. It was noted vehicle fuel had a large increase in usage, particularly with the solid waste trucks for hauling waste and recycling; the town owns the containers; the cost of road salt was reduced, and sand has been saved from chip sealing work done over the summer. Mr. Garland noted there has been an increase in beaver problems so trapping costs are up.

MOTION: To approve the Department of Public Works budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$2,065,765. Motion by Mr. Carter. Second by Mr. Mitchell. Motion passed unanimously.

Account: Administration

The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented. It was noted the budget was overextended last year and the proposed budget is a significant increase over last year. Mr. Carter noted that for the overall operating budget, there is 25% remaining. Mr. Heath stated the current budget is tracking well; any funds remaining will go to the Unassigned Fund Balance. He noted the maximum level of that is 17% of assessed value; this is audited by NH DRA and factors into setting the tax rate.

MOTION: To approve the Administration budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$60,529. Motion by Ms. Varney. Second by Ms. Terry. Motion passed unanimously.

Account: Assessing Department

The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented. It was noted the only line with increases is wages.

MOTION: To approve the Assessing budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$171,055. Motion by Mr. Fuller. Second by Ms. Terry. Motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Terry asked about the assistant position for the Building Inspector. Mr. Heath explained that wasn't covered with the default budget; there was also a part time clerk for the vehicle registrations but that wasn't supported either however these will be included in the budget going forward as these services are needed.

Account: Insurance

The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented. Mr. Heath explained many of the costs associated with benefits and retirement contributions are mandated by the State; these can't be reduced unless wages are cut. It was noted the cost increase for insurance was about 8%.

MOTION: To approve the Insurance budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$344,929. Motion by Mr. Carter. Second by Mr. Fuller. Motion passed unanimously.

Account: IT Department

The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented.

MOTION: To approve the IT budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$190,783. Motion by Ms. Varney. Second by Mr. Carter. Motion passed unanimously.

Account: Recreation Department

The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented.

MOTION: To approve the Recreation budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$143,470. Motion by Mr. Fuller. Second by Ms. Terry. Motion passed unanimously.

Account: Planning Department

The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented. Mr. Heath noted postage costs increased as well as conference dues.

MOTION: To approve the Planning budget for FY 2025 in the amount of \$155,138. Motion by Mr. Carter. Second by Ms. Varney. Motion passed unanimously.

Account: Budget Committee

The committee reviewed the proposed budget presented. It was noted the annual costs for the meeting minutes aren't clear since switching back from using transcription software. Mr. Carter suggested reducing the budget although the Board of Selectmen have already approved the amount presented. It was agreed to postpone action at this time.

Application for Budget Committee

Mr. Mitchell stated an application was received for a member of the budget committee.

MOTION: To accept the application for ???? as a member of the Budget Committee. Motion by Mr. Mitchell. Second by Ms. Varney. Motion passed unanimously.

The committee discussed adding a public input session to the Budget Committee meeting agenda. It was the consensus to add a time at the end of the meeting for future meetings.

Future Meeting

November 6, 2024, 6:00 PM

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jennifer Riel

Jennifer Riel, Recording Secretary