

TOWN OF ALTON
ADVANCED COPY SUBJECT TO THE APPROVAL OF THE
ALTON BUDGET COMMITTEE
ALTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

ALTON BUDGET COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
(Approved 11/08/07)

November 1, 2007

Members Present: Steve Miller, Chair
Elizabeth Dominick
Gregory Fuller
Richard MacDonald
Karen Painter
Jeffrey St. Cyr, Alton School Board Representative
Peter Bolster, Alton Selectmen Representative

Others Present: Russ Bailey, Town Administrator
Krista Argiropolis, Recorder
Members of the Public

I. CALL TO ORDER

G. Fuller called the meeting to order at approximately 6:35 PM.

II. ROLL CALL

S. Miller was absent at the time of roll call but arrived at approximately 7:30 PM.

III. APPROVAL OF AGENDA

R. Bailey requested to add something to the agenda under "Housekeeping."

E. Dominick motioned to approve the agenda and K. Painter seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, PB / absent – SM)

IV. HOUSEKEEPING

R. Bailey announced the Town Clerk's Office would be moved into the Heidki Room for the next week during renovations. The Committee's meeting would need to be relocated. It was decided to have the next meeting at the

V. OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

VI. NEW BUSINESS
a. FIRE HYDRANTS

R. Bailey spoke about the history of the water hydrant issue. He explained that the Water Department charged the town for the hydrants but the Selectmen always disputed the bill and rejected it. P. Bolster explained that it is basically a use tax that the whole town is asked to pay. There was discussion by the Committee about some of the prior issues with the budgeting of Fire Hydrants.

R. MacDonald motioned to accept the requested budget for Fire Hydrants for FY 2008 at \$4,170 and E. Dominick seconded the motion. The motion passed by a vote of five, with one "no" and one absent. (ED, RM, KP, JS, PB / no – GF / absent – SM)

b. CEMETARY DEPARTMENT

Shirley Lane and Mark DeVito presented the requested budget for the Cemetery Department for FY 2008. She explained that the Cemetery Department is self-funding through trust funds. There is about \$329,000 in the principal of the trust fund. There is about \$270,000 for what they can spend. The trustees are elected and manage the trust fund.

The Committee reviewed the proposed budget. The trustees' salaries are not paid out of the trust fund and has to be in the budget.

K. Painter asked what the new equipment expenditure was in 2007 for \$3,946. M. DeVito explained it was to replace a tractor and was an unexpected expense. K. Painter asked why they were only asking for \$500 when they had already spent \$797 in 2007. M. DeVito explained that a worker had hit a granite headstone and caused damage to a mower. He didn't anticipate this kind of expense for the next year.

M. DeVito explained that he had budgeted for tires and replaced the tires on different vehicle each year. He spoke about the Fuel (4195-214; \$1,200) budget, which was reduced from the previous year and explained they are trying to conserve fuel.

R. Bailey spoke about the Workers Comp Insurance and Unemployment Compensation. He explained that because this department is self funded this has to be placed in the budget.

E. Dominick motioned to accept the requested budget for FY 2008 for Cemetery at \$92,570.00 and K. Painter seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, PB / absent – SM)

c. FIRE DEPARTMENT (4220)

Chief Al Johnson and Mary Jane Driscolli presented the requested Fire Department's budget for FY 2008. The Committee reviewed the proposed budget.

K. Painter asked why there was a decrease in the money requested for Fire Fighter Wages for 2008. Chief Johnson explained that they were trying to stay within the guidelines set by the Selectmen and run times were down. He spoke about some of the other budget line items where they had identified savings. Chief Johnson stated they felt they could drop that amount down. There was a discussion about the running costs for the ambulance and the revenues received from the ambulance service. He stated he was comfortable with the \$48,000 he had requested for Fire Fighter Wages.

Chief Johnson spoke about his request to hire two full time Fire Fighter/EMTs. This is a new budget line item and a new request. He spoke about the justification for the two full time positions. The way the school schedule works, they are not able to use them full time because they are students. There was discussion about the coverage the students provide. Chief Johnson stated they put a lot of trust and faith in the students but it was getting harder to keep ahead of.

P. Bolster spoke about the coverage that some of the surrounding towns have for fire fighters. He spoke about the commitment the fire fighters have to have. He stated the Selectmen recognize they are facing a critical issue with emergency response and the lack of volunteers who are now available to respond. He stated the Selectmen did not feel it was inappropriate at this point but they did want to reevaluate it next year.

E. Dominick and K. Painter both asked what criteria would deem this request appropriate. P. Bolster stated he could not go into this but they would be looking at it again in the future.

J. St. Cyr asked how long they could wait until this was an issue. Chief Johnson listed several communities who had full time coverage. P. Bolster explained that demographics were changing and the volunteer system was less expensive but the need for full time coverage was being reviewed. He explained that this would change the culture of the response team because there would be two fulltime employees who would also receive benefits.

G. Fuller asked if, hypothetically speaking, one or two personnel could be added to the Ambulance staff budget line item. Chief Johnson spoke about the coverage of the Ambulance. P. Bolster spoke about the impact that two full time Fire Fighters/EMT would have on the budget. There was an open discussion about the compensation the Fire Fighters receive for their services.

[Recorder's Note: S. Miller joined the meeting at approximately 7:30 PM.]

S. Miller asked if the intent was to turn the Alton Fire Department into a full time department. Chief Johnson stated that eventually it would need to happen and spoke about some other towns which have full time coverage.

S. Miller asked what Chief Johnson thought a full time, unionized fire department would cost. Chief Johnson responded that he had no idea what that would cost. P. Bolster spoke about the volunteer system the small towns used to have but noted that Alton had changed and was still holding onto the volunteer system longer than similar towns.

Chief Johnson spoke about the intense training the fire fighters receive. He noted this is a "young man's game" and stated there weren't many 18-40 year old fire fighters

available. He stated that many members of his staff were not getting any younger. There are two teens that are a part of the Explorers Program who will be able to be used when they turn 18 years old.

S. Miller asked about the over-time coverage and if the two requested positions was factored into the requested amount. Chief Johnson responded that they did but that might be money used for over time for any employee.

Chief Johnson spoke about the Jr. Fire Setters Program and intervention. He stated there had been quite a few kids in the program.

S. Miller asked about reductions done in the budget line item for Travel & Mileage. Chief Johnson stated he had reduced it when he had spoken with the Selectmen but was hoping to use the cruiser they had. He stated that if the town approved a new cruiser that he might be able to use the old cruiser. The cruiser could be used to transport students to and from classes or seminars. The cruiser is a 1998 SUV and has about 140,000 miles on it.

There was discussion about the justification for Office Supplies and Reference Materials. S. Miller asked if the Computer Expense included software upgrades. Chief Johnson confirmed it did and spoke about some of the upgrades he has requested for 2008. Laptops are going to be used the field, using the Fire Program's MOBILITY. This will be the main increase in the Computer Expense budget line item. Chief Johnson spoke about the benefits of the integration of the database on the field because it would help them to pre-plan going into an area.

S. Miller spoke about possibly having an Info Systems technician for the town. He spoke about the cost justification for the position. R. Bailey stated he felt that Alton paid out about \$20,000 a year and felt there was not justification for the position for a town the size of Alton.

S. Miller asked for a breakdown for mobile phones and landlines. Chief Johnson stated there were three mobile phones that are paid by the department. One mobile phone is the chief's phone and the other two are in the ambulances so that they can communicate with the hospitals. G. Fuller asked Chief Johnson if he could supply them with the information.

Chief Johnson spoke about the budgeted amount for Vehicle Maintenance. He stated he had reduced it by \$1,000. S. Miller asked if the budget had been reduced because of line-by-line mandates by the Selectmen or if this was a bottom line reduction and the Chief had just made the reductions on his own. Chief Johnson stated he was told to bring the budget in at about 3.5% and he had made cuts where he thought they could make them to meet that goal.

There was a discussion about vehicle fuel. Chief Johnson spoke about the cost of increase to fuel and felt the number should be up to about \$12,000. This is diesel fuel for the fire trucks and does not include the ambulance. There was discussion about possibly increasing this budget line item because of anticipated increases in fuel costs. S. Miller suggested having a Fuel Contingency Fund for extraordinary situations. R. Bailey stated if they did that, it would be money they would have to raise from taxes but if it wasn't used it would go into surplus, which they never use anyways. S. Miller stated that if it

was in the budget or in a warrant article, it would still come out of taxes. R. Bailey stated that if it was in a warrant article it could only be spent for that purpose but if it was in the budget then it could be spent for anything.

Chief Johnson spoke about the call boxes. The fire alarm system is not used anymore because it was decided that the maintenance on the system would be done away with. By mid-November any town building would be able to put in a radio system that would let them know what zone the fire was in. Laconia has bought the fire responder system and will be receiving the calls at their dispatch. He stated the responder could tell him the exact location of the alarm from the radio boxes. The call boxes are being put out of service and will be taken down.

S. Miller confirmed with R. Bailey that they had just heard from a department head at a previous meeting that there would be no increases in the rates for Electricity. R. Bailey confirmed that was correct. S. Miller thought the budget line item for Electricity should be flat from the previous year.

Chief Johnson confirmed that they had town water in two of the buildings they used.

Chief Johnson spoke about Building Expense expenditures for 2007. He spoke about unexpected issues with the septic and the need to replace a furnace.

There was a discussion about the need to replace pagers. Chief Johnson spoke about the cost of repairs and replacement.

Chief Johnson spoke about the Pre-Employment Screening. He stated that they keep \$500 in that budget line item to keep it open but the screenings were usually paid for out of the town's budget. He spoke about the Infectious Disease Control budget line item, which is now used for flu shots and Hepatitis-B vaccines/titer.

d. INSURANCE (4196)

R. Bailey presented the requested budget for Insurance for FY 2008. There is a deductible of \$1,000. They are insured through LG Insurance and will be signing a new three-year contract that will lock rates for the town. He spoke about some of the insurances the town carries and stated that we are in a pool with some of the other towns for self-insurance. There was an open discussion about what insurance covers or does not cover. K. Painter asked if an increase in premiums was anticipated and R. Bailey responded that there was not a premium increase expected.

K. Painter motioned to accept the requested budget for Insurance for FY 2008 at \$140,471 and E. Dominick seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, PB, SM)

e. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

R. Bailey presented the requested budget for Emergency Management for FY 2008. He spoke about the satellite phone that was needed incase landline were down and mobile phones were down. He spoke about the Homeland Securities Grant.

S. Miller motioned to accept the requested budget for Emergency Management for FY 2008 \$3,528 and K. Painter seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, PB, SM)

f. VOTE ON REQUESTED BUDGETS REVIEWED

The requested budgets for FY 2008 for Cemetery, Insurance, Emergency Management, and Fire Hydrants were voted on at the time the Committee reviewed the budget. (See above sections.)

S. Miller felt that budget line item 4220-449 should be reduced to \$1 from \$500 and felt the Chief did not try to recruit people. E. Dominick seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, PB, SM)

S. Miller asked what the argument was against the two full time employees. P. Bolster stated the Selectmen felt it was not the right time for this change to take place right now. E. Dominick stated she understood the position the Selectmen were taking and asked if they were weakening their ability to respond to the citizens in need of emergent services. R. Bailey stated that was not the case and spoke about the part-timers who worked coverage in the summer months. P. Bolster stated the Selectmen are trying to create to conditions so they can move in that direction in the future.

K. Painter spoke about the budgeted amount for vehicle amount and her concern about it being enough money to cover expenditures. R. Bailey stated it was based on call volume. He felt that \$12,000 was kind of on the "high" side. K. Painter motioned to increase the budget line item for fuel by \$1,000, and to raise it from being \$9,000, as requested, to \$10,000. G. Fuller seconded the motion. S. Miller suggested the Committee should wait until they had "harder" numbers for fuel before they made any changes and suggested having a fuel contingency fund. R. Bailey noted that diesel was not bid for. There was a discussion about the possibility for fuel contingency fund. K. Painter withdrew her motion and G. Fuller withdrew his second.

S. Miller motioned to reduce the requested budget line item for Office Supplies from \$2,500 to \$2,000 and G. Fuller seconded the motion. S. Miller felt that this budget line item was never spent beyond \$2,000. The motion passed by a vote of six, with one "no" vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, SM / no - PB)

There were discussion about the Fire Fighter Wages and Vehicle Expenses budget line items.

S. Miller motioned to accept the amended requested budget for the Fire Department for FY 2008 and R. MacDonald seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, PB, SM)

g. VOTE ON REQUESTED BUDGETS REVIEWED

G. Fuller motioned to increase the requested budget line item for Contracted Services from \$1,000 to \$1,500 and P. Bolster. There was a discussion about the anticipated expenses for contracted services for the Alton Budget Committee. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, PB / abstain - SM)

VII. PUBLIC INPUT

There was no public input.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

S. Miller motioned to adjourn and E. Dominick seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote. (ED, GF, RM, KP, JS, PB, SM)

The meeting adjourned at approximately 9:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Krista Argiropolis
Recorder, Public Minutes