

Town of Alton
Budget Committee Meeting
Town Hall Meeting Room
November 17, 2015
Minutes
Approved December 9, 2015

I. Call to Order 6:32pm

II. Pledge of Allegiance

III. Roll Call

Andy McLeod, Chairman
Roger Nelson, Vice Chairman
Lou LaCourse, Selectmen's Representative
David Hershey, Member
Steve Miller, School Board Representative
Terence O'Rourke, Member, Excused Absence

IV. Approval of Agenda

R. Nelson motioned to approve the agenda as presented and was seconded by L. LaCourse with all in favor.

V. Public Input I

None
Public Input I closed

V. New Business

A. New Member Discussion and Vote

Melissa Christianson approached the Committee with her interest in becoming a member of the Budget Committee. She provided the Committee with her experience stating she is currently a business manager for the University System. She has an MBA and a graduate certificate in Accounting.

Ms. Christianson answered questions as presented to her about her current position and her experience.

The Committee asked Ms. Christianson her reasons for wanting to join the Budget Committee and asked if she could be objective. She responded that she approaches things with an open mind and takes things into consideration.

A. McLeod motioned to approve Ms. Christianson and was seconded by L. LaCourse.

Alton resident John Markland asked for a point of order and stated he was also interested in the position and was waiting for the position to become available again. He had not applied out of respect for the Chairman's decision to bring Greg Fuller to the Committee.

S. Miller requested a point of order and would like to nominate John Markland for consideration of the open Budget Committee position and he would like to ask for a second to be fair in the voting process. Mr. Miller stated that John Markland has shown up at every meeting that he be given the opportunity to compete for the open position.

S. Miller motioned to add J. Markland to the pool of candidates for consideration for the open Budget Committee position and was seconded by R. Nelson with L. LaCourse, A. McLeod in favor and D. Hershey voting against.

J. Markland approached the Committee and spoke on his desire to join the Budget Committee. He believes things should be looked at in different ways and he takes great pride in processing the information and making a decision on how he believes the Town would like to vote. He also believes the information should be put out there and discussed.

The Budget Committee asked J. Markland various questions about his reasons for wanting to join the Committee and his experience.

There was a discussion regarding both candidates and it was agreed to rescind both current motions and to take a vote on both candidates.

S. Miller motioned to rescind his motion and R. Nelson rescinded his second to S. Miller's motion.

A. McLeod rescinded his motion and L. LaCourse rescinded his second to A. McLeod's motion.

A. McLeod polled the Committee and asked for a show of hands in favor of electing Ms. Christianson as the new Budget Committee member. L. LaCourse and A. McLeod voted in favor of Ms. Christianson.

A. McLeod polled the Committee and asked for a show of hands in favor of electing J. Markland as the new Budget Committee member. David Hershey, Roger Nelson and Steve Miller voted in favor of John Markland.

John Markland was voted in as the new Budget Committee Member.

B. School Budget Public Hearing

S. Miller introduced the ACS representatives including, Kathy Oblenes, Business Manager, Chris Blackstone, Principal, Maureen Ward, Superintendent, Jennifer Katz-Borin, Director of Special Education, Deb Brown, Administrative Assistant, and Bill Leonard, IT Director.

S. Miller presented the Committee with highlights of the 2016 ACS budget.

There was a discussion and explanation by Ms. Oblenes on the return of the \$770,387.85 surplus from the previous year's budget.

Representatives of the School and the Budget Committee agreed that the School Board would make a statement available to the public at the Deliberative Session explaining on how the surplus is processed.

The Committee reviewed the budget, asked questions of various school personnel and discussed various line items.

Break taken at: 7:59pm
Meeting resumed at: 8:07pm

The Committee continued the review of the School Budget, asked questions of various personnel and discussed various line items.

VII. **Public Input II**

Alton resident Chris Macstravic approached the Committee and wanted to point out a couple of inaccuracies that were noted earlier. With regards to the decline in student population the actual percentage is 19% percent not 25%. He also stated that Mr. Miller spoke about the student teacher ration being 5:1 that is also inaccurate because you can not include paraprofessionals. You can only include certified staff members. Taking the number of 480 current students with the 47.5 certified staff that is 10:1 ratio.

Alton resident Andrea Christo stated she also wanted to clarify some inaccuracies and that there are 48 students who are in the Quest program, the Enrichment Program and the Pull Out Program during the day for each grade level. In terms of activities that are offered after school, last year 38 different programs were offered for a total of 420 students participating in those programs. The 420 represents 187 different students. The 48 children in the Quest Program is not accurate and there is actually well over 200 children. She explained the noted number of 48 children is the number of how many children are receiving enrichment during the day. There are two days a week where there is a Pull Out Program from the classroom while some children are getting Gifted and Talented services, some children are having speech and some children are having other activities. That is the 48 children that are receiving that program. There are also a myriad of offerings for after school that the Enrichment/Quest director is responsible for. So moving it to a half time position seems almost like impossibility. There is a full time teacher for Quest, a full time teaching assistant and 3/5 times STEM teacher currently.

S. Miller asked the superintendent to address Ms. Christo's comments. Dr. Ward responded that she believes there we are on two different pages. We talked about the Gifted Program in the budget this evening and that was the 48 students. The Quest Program has not come up in the budget and will be addressed when we get to it. The After School Program is part of the Enrichment Program but not the school day program. That is the difference. The Board put more money into the After School Program.

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S. Miller stated that Mr. Macstravic was correct and that it is 19%. Mr. Miller apologized for his bad math. He stated he added the staff and added the teachers. He stated I said adult per student which is 5:1. Mr. Macstravic stated the confusion would lie in people misinterpreting, as I did, adult to student as teachers to student and he wouldn't want information out there that ACS has a 5:1 student teacher ratio. We have a 10:1 student teacher ratio which is still low but not 5:1.

Andrea Christo stated that it is her understanding that when we are talking about Quest/Enrichment that it is all the same. A. McLeod responded that these are two different budget lines.

Linda Willem asked the ACS representatives if tomorrow afternoon at the School Board meeting if there would be any financial or any budget information being discussed. S. Miller responded that yes there are two budgetary items that need to be discussed. One is the snow plow bid and the walkway project at ACS.

Ms. Willem asked when the meeting was posted and was informed that the meeting was posted the morning of November 17. She stated she was curious as there were other items on the agenda which are dealing with public input and at the last School Board Meeting it was total chaos because many people wanted the opportunity to speak. I think if the public knew a little further in advance that there was going to be discussion about the budget and there was going to be a last minute School Board meeting tomorrow during the day when people are not available in order to speak to the issues that are on the agenda. She feels that it is inappropriate especially when we haven't even finished the discussion on the budget tonight and that it will be done tomorrow. We were told at the last meeting on October 26th that there would not be any November meeting because people's schedules are too tight. She wanted to state for the record that you should consider rescheduling the Board meeting so that there is more public, which is our goal here, and that is what the School Board has said over and over again and I know the Budget Committee feels the same way that you want the public here. I think it is an opportunity to have the people in this town to get up and speak their mind about what is going on with the budget and other items.

Mr. Miller responded we need to have the meeting because of the snow plow bid. We need a quorum for that and I think we are going to get three people there and we hope to have a quorum.

Ms. Willem asked the timeliness of the meeting she assumed that it had to be done before the December 14th meeting. Is there a timing on the bid? She would like to request that the Board change the agenda and not include any public input policy. She stated she did not think it was fair.

S. Miller responded we would have two readings for public input. There will be one possibly tomorrow and then there will be a second probably at the December meeting. Ms. Willem stated it is only fair to the public that they have the opportunity to hear that one on one.

A. McLeod informed Ms. Willem that he was going to stop her at this point as her issue related to the School Board and not the Budget Committee. Ms. Willem stated that she understood.

Alton resident John Markland stated he believed that it was in the newspapers that there was going to be a 3.2% tax increase. L. LaCourse responded by saying they made a decision to take \$500,000.00 out federal surplus funds and move it to the taxes and that dropped the tax rate to a little over 7%. Mr. Markland stated he was curious as he has heard several different amounts.

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K. Oblenes stated that there are four different components. There is the town rate, there is the local school rate, there is the state school rate and there is the county rate. Over all the rate is 14.27% up 3.03% from last year. The town rate of 3.85 is down to 3.57%; the local school rate was 6.28% and increased to 6.94%, the state school rate stayed the same at 2.35% and the county rate was 1.37% and increased to 1.41%.

Andrea Christo asked why there was going to be a \$500,000.00 warrant article for the roof when they have already done construction over a large portion. A. McLeod responded by saying that as they are fixing it and it is falling apart behind it.

Public Input II closed

VIII. Old Business

R. Nelson motioned to approve the meeting minutes of November 4, 2015 with all in favor.

R. Nelson motioned to approve the meeting minutes of November 5, 2015 the vote was 4-0-1 in favor with L. LaCourse abstaining.

X. Adjourn

R. Nelson motioned to adjourn the meeting with all in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00pm

Respectfully submitted,



Peggy Hawksley
Budget Committee Secretary

Approved December 9, 2015