

Town of Alton
Budget Committee Meeting
Town Hall Meeting Room
December 6, 2016
Minutes
Approved January 11, 2017

1. Call to Order at 6:30 pm
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Roll Call
Roger Nelson, Chairman
Andrew Levasseur, Member
John Markland, Selectmen's Representative
David Hershey, Member
Terrence O'Rourke, Member, Excused Absence
Greg Fuller, Vice Chairman, Excused Absence
Michael Ball, School Board Representative, Absent

Other Attendees:

Liz Dionne, Town Administrator.

4. Approval of Agenda
D. Hershey motioned to approve the Agenda as presented and was seconded by A. Levasseur with all in favor
5. Public Input I
None
Public Input I closed
6. Old Business
 - A. Meeting Minute Review
G. Fuller motioned to accept the Meeting Minutes of November 9, 2016 as presented and was seconded by R. Nelson. The Vote was 4-0-2 with G. Fuller and T. O'Rourke abstaining.

R. Nelson motioned to accept the Meeting Minutes of November 10, 2016 as presented and was seconded by G. Fuller. The vote was 5-0-1 with T. O'Rourke abstaining.

R. Nelson read into the record a letter received from the school board stating that Mr. Miller would be in attendance for tonight's meeting. Mr. Miller was not in attendance. R. Nelson noted that the letter was dated November 17, 2016 and stated he did not receive the letter until tonight's meeting.
 - B. Review and Approval of Alton Town Budgets by Department
G. Fuller had question about maintenance for the requested folding and stuffing machine requested by the Assessing Department. T. Sargent explained he was unsure at this time how much and for how long the warranty is for.

R. Nelson stated that he would like to make a correction and that tonight's meeting was to discuss the budget not the individual departments.

R. Nelson stated that in reviewing the budget he is concerned that we are going from a full time person to a part time person it appears that we are spending more money for the part time than we were for the full time person and believes it should be cut back to \$30,000.00. He also believes the requested new equipment should be placed under General Government and not a specific department. T. Sargent stated that the machine will be centrally located near the postage machine so that any department could use it.

There was a discussion on how to proceed with approval of the budget.

T. O'Rourke motioned to accept the 2017 Town of Alton budget as presented and was seconded by A. Levasseur.

D. Hershey is recommending that the Welfare Department Budget be defunded in its entirety and seek to submit an insurance claim based on the local statute is submitted on the apparent lack of collecting reimbursements as outlined in the statute and make it an insurance claim. D. Hershey continued that his recommendation would be the period of time for the claim submission for the first time benefits were issued under that statute and didn't make any effort to collect reimbursement. The Town would have insurance to protect the public officials for the omission in the administration of the policies and procedures to the extent those policies and procedures or possible breach of those and if it was determined there was a breach then that would constitute an insurance claim. Based upon D. Hershey's review of the Alton's guidelines for General Assistance there is a requirement that anybody that receives Town Welfare benefits is required to either work off the benefits for the town or repay the amount. We have not been collecting those reimbursements and that would appear to be a breach of the public official's fiduciary responsibility. The dollar amounts that have been paid out in benefits should be tallied on an annual basis and submitted to the town insurance company as reimbursement for a claim. If there is coverage for that Mr. Hershey does not feel there is a need to fund the Welfare Department until such time that we get a decision on how we are going to run it and put a policy and procedure in place that is followed.

R. Nelson stated that you could not just get rid of it. You would have to leave line items open.

D. Hershey stated to the extent that we are looking at part time labor for other departments as the current statute stands we would look to reduce those based upon the anticipated future benefits to be paid out in the Town Welfare program.

T. O'Rourke stated that the discussion is out of order and this is beyond the power of the BC. The BC does not direct Town policy. We have authority over approval of the bottom line budget.

D. Hershey motioned to reduce the Welfare line item by \$67,363.00 and was seconded by G. Fuller.

L. Dionne informed the BC that it is a state law that requires municipalities to provide welfare assistance. We are legally required to provide welfare assistance and there is one word in the Town policy as far as the work program is concerned. The policy was created years ago and they used the word "shall versus "may". The wording makes a difference and the guidelines are currently being amended and updated. State law trumps local policy.

J. Markland stated he would be cautious about allowing recipients to work it off in terms of liability to the criminal record of the person who may be receiving help and where they should be and shouldn't be, if they are on Town property or shouldn't be on Town property; If they are near children and they shouldn't be. These are all questions that would open a huge can of worms if we chose that route.

D. Hershey stated any employer when considering an employee would assign duties accordingly. In terms of terminology "shall" versus "may" I would question that and read from the record under Employment Eligibility there is a section that states "must continue for as long as it takes for the recipient to fully reimburse the Town for all of the general assistance that was received." That can be found on Page 22, Section 9.4.

**The Budget Committee voted 1-4-1 with D. Hershey voting in favor and R. Nelson abstaining.
Motion failed.**

R. Nelson stated that the town proposed budget for 2017 is \$7,131,958.00. He feels the budget is overstated and noted that in June the BC asked for the Town to consider a 5% secondary budget and the proposed budget is almost 5% higher. He stated he went through the budget line by line and came up with \$6,994,043.00 which is a reduction of \$7,915.00.

R. Nelson motioned to accept his proposed budget of \$6,994,043.00 and was seconded by G. Fuller.

R. Nelson provided the Committee with a spread sheet and reviewed the line items that he is recommending being reduced.

D. Hershey stated he read the State Welfare statute and it says "the overseer of public welfare may require a person who is receiving support under this chapter who is physically able to work to participate in the municipality's work program as a condition of continued eligibility for assistance." In the Town portion it appears that the Town has taken the word "may" and made a decision and said the town is taking the word "may" and turning it into "must". The Town has made the decision we are going to interpret the word "may" for the Town of Alton to be "must". It also states that "if any applicant who fails to report to work upon 24 hour notice by the town has been deemed to refuse to work and shall be ineligible for General Assistance for a minimum period of 30 days." It seems that these issues have already been thought about and discussed and formulated in the plan but for whatever reason doesn't seem to have been executed.

D. Hershey would like to defund the town portion of the welfare benefits until such time a decision is made on how it should be administered or a program is created for a person to pay off their debt as they are required to in accordance with the Town statute. If we are talking about after the fact changing the rules, the rules seem really clear, RSA 165.31

J. Markland stated that it should be brought before the Board of Selectmen.

D. Hershey asked how this can be brought up to the Board of Selectmen and J. Markland stated that he could make an appoint to meet with them.

R. Nelson stated that D. Hershey should speak to Mary Jarvis about setting up a meeting with the BOS.

J. Markland stated it is hard for him to comprehend R. Nelson's proposed budget because it doesn't go into detail exactly what each line item is. Secondly we asked our department heads to base it on a zero based budgeting process and the cuts that are being made are being based on five year averages on the past five years. It is almost like a different process that you are conducting versus what we asked the department heads. Were there any budget freezes during these five years that you provided us with, during that time were there any emergencies that arose that the town had to not spend in certain areas because they had to fund other areas?

J. Markland stated without out doing all of the research he could not support it.

D. Hershey stated when we started the budget process was to ask the department heads to submit alternative budgets which was declined. It would have been a great opportunity to discuss the budget alternatives. There was no opportunity for questions to be asked or answered leaving it up to the BC to make decisions based upon our interpretation of the materials that were submitted.

J. Markland stated in defense of the department heads, they were never instructed to propose the 5% decrease. That was a Selectmen's decision not to do that.

**The Budget Committee votes 3-3 with D. Hershey, G. Fuller and R. Nelson voting against.
The vote was a tie.**

**G. Fuller motioned to reconsider the previous motion to eliminate the Welfare Department budget.
There was no second.
Motion failed**

**T. O'Rourke motioned to approve the 2017 Town budget as presented by the BOS and was seconded by J. Markland
The Budget Committee voted 3-3 with D. Hershey, R. Nelson and G. Fuller voting against.
The vote was a tie.**

7. Public Input

Police Chief Ryan Heath wanted to state that he respects the proposed budget cuts and in the manner they were taken but wanted to take a moment to mention the five year average per line. That is not always an accurate method because we operate on a bottom line budget. Speaking on his experience Chief Heath stated that every year one of the common issues that arise is we try to be fiscally responsible with our budget. We always encounter one emergency or unforeseen event that occurs in town and we all pull together so that we maintain that bottom line. There are a lot of years where we have had to freeze the budget and we have to under spend certain lines and forgo other items in order to cover the emergency events. It is like robbing Peter to pay Paul. By cutting to the absolute bottom line when you under run fuel right to the line there is no flexibility. The Police Department ran into that problem when fuel prices spiked up to over \$4.00 we actually had to maintain stationary positions in our cruisers. That is counterproductive for a law

enforcement agency not to be actively patrolling. We could not take money from other departments because they were in the same boat. Years ago we had a series of arson fires and the Fire Department had to respond numerous times with specialized foam. The cost was 50,000.00-70,000.00 dollars that was never budgeted for. The rest of the departments all had to under run line items which affect that five year average. We could run into another event like that every year, storms, floods, etc. for anyone of our departments. The cuts will not leave any flexibility. It will be more of an injustice to the Town of Alton not to be able to provide services.

D. Hershey stated that he empathizes and doesn't think anyone here wants to be put in a position of deciding whether to chase someone or shutting off the cruiser. He believes there should be a pool for unforeseen contingencies. That would be funded and if a situation comes up that would trigger a discussion on why we are taking the funds.

R. Nelson stated that his proposed cut to the Police Department was \$12,500.00 and is not a significant amount. Chief Heath stated that if he has to contribute to some other issue, somewhere else on the Town budget it does not leave much flexibility.

G. Fuller asked L. Dionne for the amount of the surplus funds for 2015. L. Dionne will provide this information at the next meeting.

K. Roberts stated he has been here 22 years. I am a department head and any time I can be requested to answer any questions that come up about my budget. That is the reason we are here to answer these questions. It is unfortunate what I have seen here tonight for someone to present a budget that cut contract items that were awarded by the BOS. It would have been easy for me to tell you that what you are cutting is a contract and you can't cut it. This tells me that the justification sheets and some of the items that were brought up in my budget particularly are contract items. How do you cut a contract item when it's been awarded by the BOS? I don't understand how you can do that? It was in the justification and I sat here and explained all of that. If you need to go back through our budgets, I guarantee any department head would be happy to answer any questions you have. I have always been readily available for anyone to come to my building to actually see what is going on. How many departments have the BC visited before you cut them. When you start to deal with million dollar budgets and you are trying to decide it in one hour that is tough. You have a tough job. If you have other questions I'm sure any other dept heads would be more than available to answer your questions. I hope in the future that this is utilized.

L. Dionne stated that the default budget was approved last night and the difference between the default budget of 2016 and the proposed budget for 2017 is \$7,000.00

K. Treondel would like to request that the Budget Committee read the technical sheet for the Technical Assistant position before you decide that the position is not needed. With the additional workload that has been assigned to me I believe the position is needed. I recommend that the additional help is funded. I am the Department Head for three departments and I need help. Eighteen hours a week for an assistant secretary is not enough. She invited the Committee to come to her office to see what is needed.

Public Input Closed.

**T. O'Rourke motioned to approve the 2017 Budget as presented by the BOS and was seconded by J. Markland
The Budget Committee votes 3-3 with D. Hershey, R. Nelson and G. Fuller voting against.**

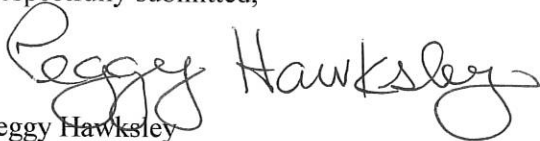
The budget will be re-voted at the next meeting on December 13, 2016.

8. Other Business
None
9. Adjourn

R. Nelson motioned to adjourn and was seconded by D. Hershey with all in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm

Respectfully submitted,



Peggy Hawksley
Budget Committee Secretary
Approved January 11, 2017

05/13/2017

NOTA