

**TOWN OF ALTON  
BUDGET COMMITTEE PUBLIC MEETING  
December 15, 2022, at 6:00 PM  
Alton Town Hall**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Reuben Parker, Chair of Budget Committee  
Jacob Bemis, Member  
LeAnn Laplante, Member  
Guy Maloney, Member

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Ryan Heath, Town Administrator  
Timothy Broadrick, Superintendent of Schools  
Heidi Duford, Business Administrator

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chair Parker called the meeting to order at 6:00PM. Roll call taken for members present.

**OLD BUSINESS**

None.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Review of Town of Alton FY 2023 Default Budget**

The Committee reviewed the proposed FY 2023 default budget. Mr. Heath explained default budget is based on the actual operating budget, less any one time expenditures, in addition to any contractual agreements. He stated there is a decrease for the water line as a final payment was made on a contract.

**Mr. Bemis motioned to approve the default budget for the Water Department in the amount of \$480,764. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

The Committee reviewed the Town's Operating Budget for FY 2023. Mr. Heath outlined the budget lines which did not change; he stated the first reductions are seen in Elections as there are no primary elections; the IT line was increased due to a contractual agreement for cloud-based document storage. Mr. Heath stated there is a reduction in the annual maintenance fee for the Fire Department software; the GIS software had an increase with the contractual agreement.

Mr. Heath stated the majority of changes are seen in the benefits which are required to be maintained by State law; he stated this includes retirement benefits which are also mandated. Mr. Bemis asked what drives increases if wages remain the same. Mr. Heath explained they have to budget for new personnel which were hired last year.

Mr. Heath noted there was an increase in the assessing line due to an increase in the contracted services. He stated there was no increase in grounds and maintenance.

Mr. Heath stated the unemployment compensation insurance as well as workers compensation had a small reduction although the property liability insurance increased.

Mr. Heath stated the Solid Waste, Fire, Police, Emergency Management departments remain the same; there were some reductions in the Public Works Department due to encumbrances from the prior year. There were also no changes to Parks and Recreation, Library, Museum, Conservation, Welfare and Short Term Interest.

### **Review of School Budget**

The Committee reviewed the proposed FY 2023 budget for the school district.

Mr. Broadrick explained the preparation of the budget and strategy for moving forward are closely aligned; he presented summary of the enrollment history over the last 15 years and noted overall it has declined; he stated the three schools which include Alton and Barnstead, are down by about 24%. He stated Alton Central School has declined about 30%.

Mr. Broadrick stated the school board has been discussing the “great restart” in response to significant changes over the last couple years; he stated the public perception of public schools has continued to decline and this is has been the trend for the last 30 years. He stated a significant number of families changed to homeschooling during the pandemic and they have not returned to public schools, with only about 60% returning. He stated there are numerous factors which are impacting society and will pressure voters to keep spending down; he stated that with that in mind, the school board and administration are looking for ways to retain labor and still provide services. Mr. Broadrick stated they had the goal of level funding while maintaining the services and assets. He stated the Barnstead and Alton school boards have worked together to share some common services and facilities to be more financially and operationally efficient; he outlined the various items and positions which have become shared.

Mr. Broadrick noted there was a reduction in some benefits, as well as a reduction in out-of-district tuition. He noted that overall there is a decrease in the budget of about 1%. He stated enrollment is the largest problem the district is currently facing; the school board recently presented a tuition agreement to the Gilmanton school district, however that was turned down by voters. A tuition agreement was also presented last year to the Milton school board, but this was not pursued by Milton. Mr. Broadrick stated the school board intends to place an article on the school district warrant to operate as an open enrollment district; if adopted by voters in Alton and Barnstead, any student in New Hampshire could apply; this is allowed by RSA and should be at little to no additional cost to the district.

Mr. Broadrick stated they are working on an alternative to VLAC, Virtual Learning Academy, to provide online and blended classes.

Mr. Maloney stated he will be looking into Safe Grant opportunities and asked if the Committee felt that would be a conflict with him continuing to review this budget. Mr. Broadrick stated the grants are jointly administered by the Department of Homeland Security and Department of

Education, it is federal funding and would not impact the school budget or local taxation. The Committee agreed it would be fine for him to continue.

Mr. Broadrick stated they are going to need to do a significant infrastructure upgrade for the technology and that is planned for next summer; he stated some of the work may need to be subcontracted out.

Mr. Broadrick explained the professional services lines are increased for special education, noting these are needs-based for behavioral specialists; he stated some districts outsource this service but they have found that employing their own professionals, can be cost saving as the service can also be shared between the schools.

Mr. Broadrick explained there was an increase in the enrichment line but it was a move of positions from another departments.

Mr. Broadrick stated SAU 72, which includes Alton Central School, has a collective bargaining agreement for educators and some support staff; he stated there are some employees who aren't covered by either contract and there is a wage adjustment line included in the budget for those employees and is distributed on a merit basis with recommendations to the school board for approval. It was noted there was a pay scale adjustment across the board.

**Mr. Bemis motioned to approve the Town of Alton default budget in the amount of \$8,854,314. Mr. Maloney seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

#### **Approval of Minutes**

None.

#### **Public Input**

None.

#### **Other Business**

The Committee discussed scheduling future meetings.

Next Meeting: January 12, 2023, 6:00PM, Alton Town Hall

**Chair Parker made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Bemis seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

The meeting was adjourned at 7:23PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Jennifer Riel*

Jennifer Riel, Recording Secretary