

**TOWN OF ATKINSON
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, October 27, 2015**

Members Present:

Bill Smith, Chair
Wendy Barker, Vice Chair
Sue Carroll
Peter Torosian
Tom Mealey
Harold Morse, **Selectman Liaison** ex-Officio
Kay Galloway

Others Present:

Barbara Snicer, Asst. Town Administrator
Kathleen Friel, Cemetery Trustee
Robert **Pertuto** **Patuto**, Cemetery Trustee

Chair Bill Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Agenda: Review minutes, review budget

General Discussion: Health Agencies, Police and Fire, and Cemetery

Cemetery - Account Number 41951:

Ms. Friel and Mr. **Pertuto** requested to come before the Committee to discuss the Cemetery budget. Ms. Friel informed the Committee that the October 20, 2015 minutes state that the Trustees charge \$75.00 to open a grave, however the correct charge is \$500 and \$600 on a weekend. Ms. Friel also informed the Committee there is no volunteer that is retiring, Mr. **Pertuto** is a Cemetery Trustee and he can no longer assist with manual labor. He has been a cemetery trustee for 12 years. When he first started, there were 2 workers. There was also a jail release trustee. There is only one worker at the Cemetery at present and she works 30 hours. The Trustees want to hire one other worker for 10 hours. They do not want to give the present employee more hours because that would make her full time and they would have to pay benefits. Mr. **Pertuto** is an active member of the Board of Trustees who volunteered many hours for many years and can no longer do the labor. This is why they are asking to hire another person for 10 hours per week.

Ms. Friel informed the Committee that the Trustees do not want to go up on the cost of a single plot. It is currently \$300.00. There are many elderly people who cannot afford more. As of this year, only residents can purchase plots. If it is a family plot, then someone who does not live in Atkinson can be buried there. Mr. Mealey asked about the Perpetual Care Trust. Ms. Friel explained that the Trustees use the Trust. They can only spend the interest. They used the money to trim trees and they also use it to purchase flowers for people who have trusts. Ms. Snicer informed the Committee that the Trustees used about \$27,000 from the Perpetual Care Trust. She also explained that some of the older Trusts are very small amounts. Ms. Friel pointed out that the Cemetery is not a private cemetery and is run by the Town and State.

Mr. Mealey reiterated that the Trustees could charge more for plots. Ms. Snicer informed the Committee that the Cemetery makes money. Money earned goes into the general fund. If the Trustees increased the price of plots, all the money would go into the general fund. Mr. Smith asked if revenue exceeded costs. The Committee was informed that revenue does not exceed costs but it offsets the cost of burial. Mr. Smith stated that if the price were higher, then it would offset more of the costs. Mr. Smith stated that in a few years the cemetery will have to expand and the taxpayers have to pay for it. The cost of burial in Atkinson is well below market rates. The Committee discussed rates for plots at other towns and private cemeteries. Mr. Mealey informed the Committee that the Catholic cemetery charges \$800 for a single plot. Ms. Friel reiterated that the Trustees do not want to raise the price. The Committee feels raising the cost of the plots would offset expenses and the cost of expanding the cemetery. Ms. Galloway volunteered to call Hampstead, Plaistow, Kingston and Salem to see what they charge for a plot.

The Committee also would like to know what the revenue is for the Cemetery. Ms. Snicer stated she could get the numbers for them. Mr. **Pertuto** offered to leave a copy of the cemetery regulations for the Committee to

look at. There is a 29% increase in the Cemetery budget. Ms. Snicer pointed out that the number of people who will want to buy plots and the number of people who are going to pass away are unknown. Ms. Carroll asked if the Trustees could use some of the land that is donated to the Town for the Cemetery. Ms. Friel agreed that if a resident wanted to donate land in order to expand the cemetery it would be great. Ms. Friel explained that the cemetery does have land but it needs to be developed. It needs to be cleared, then an engineer has to survey it and mark out the plots. There are 10 singles left, 79 doubles and 34 four plots. It would be hard to split doubles because everything is mapped out. Mr. Torosian asked if cremation would help. Mr. **Pertuto** explained that a wall to put urns in would cost \$250,000. Ms. Friel informed the committee that four urns will fit in a single plot.

Other Professional Services - Line Number 41951.390: Selectman Morse informed the Committee that the \$9,900 to expand the cemetery was taken out of the budget and put into a warrant article. That will drop the Other Professional Services line to \$13,000, the same as last year. That line is to pay for digging the graves and the cemetery charges that money back.

The roads also need to be repaired after every rain storm. Ms. Friel explained that the money in Perpetual Care can only be used to take care of plots that have perpetual care trusts. Mr. **Pertuto** informed the Committee that they have spent almost \$30,000 to repair the roads. The Road Agent cannot fix the cemetery roads. It would cost \$64,795 dollars to **hardtop** **hottop** the cemetery. Mr. Torosian asked about swales. Ms. Friel explained that the Trustees spend about \$2,000 every year to maintain and improve the roads.

Care of grounds - Line Number 41951.650: \$18,000 is in the budget. The Trustees requested \$21,000 but Selectmen reduced that amount to \$18,000. \$3,000 was taken out and is going into the warrant article along with money taken from Other Professional Services. It was to clear trees to expand the cemetery. The Perpetual Care Trusts can only be used to maintain the plots that have a Perpetual Care Trust. The Committee discussed if the Trustees would spend all the money in care of grounds this year. Mr. **Pertuto** explained that they still have clean up, so the money will be used.

The Trustees have a contract with **Miessan Ne-san** to dig graves. The money comes from Other Professional Services.

Ms. Snicer has the revenues to the end of August, it was \$16,500 for burials. The full year revenue should be about \$24,000. \$8,300 was revenue for sale of property. Total revenue is about \$34,000 yearly. This is about two thirds of the Selectmen's budget.

About 30 plots are sold each year. The cost of a plot was raised to \$300 this year. The cost of cremations has also increased. It is \$300 to dig on a weekday and \$500 on a weekend or holidays.

Chair Smith informed the Trustees that the Committee would like to wait until information on the cost of plots in surrounding towns is obtained to make a decision. Ms. Snicer stated that before purchasing a plot was restricted to residents, very few people from surrounding towns purchased plots. Most of them came from Haverhill and North Andover.

Mr. Mealey recommended that the Trustees raise the price of a single plot to \$500.00 and make purchasers purchase perpetual care.

Health Agencies:

Greater Salem Care Givers - Line Number 44156350.05: The Town gives them \$2,000 per year, but they have not provided the Town services since Elder Services was started. Therefore, we should cut them out. Ms. Snicer informed the Committee that there are a couple of people that do not use Elder Services. The Selectmen recommended \$1.00

Rockingham Community Action - Line Number 44152.350.03: They have informed the Town that they will still provide services even if we do not fund. Chair Smith has had emails from people who are aghast at the salary of the director. They assist with food stamps, head start and food assistance. Ms. Snicer informed the Committee that many people use them. She would estimate at least a dozen residents have used their services. This is

where the Town Administrator refers applicants for relief. Ms. Snicer explained that if the need is immediate, the Town can help them, otherwise the Town has to deny them and refer them to Rockingham Community Action. Ms. Snicer also refers applicants to Service Link. They can get people into shelters and emergency housing. 211 is also another referral agency. Mr. Torosian asked if Rockingham Community Action gets State funds. Mr. Smith surveyed the Committee. Mr. Mealey recommended \$0 to \$200, Mr. Torosian recommended \$1,000.

Mr. Torosian made a motion for the Atkinson Budget Committee to recommend \$1,000 for Rockingham Community Action. Mr. Mealey seconded the motion. Four members of the Budget Committee voted in favor, 2 voted against and one abstained. Vote: 4/2/1. The motion carried.

Vic Geary Center - Line Number 44156.350.01: \$5,450 was proposed and the Selectmen recommended \$5,450. Mr. Mealey stated there are about 2,000 seniors in Town. The agency gets about \$100,000 from surrounding communities. They provide rides, host special events and serve lunches. They offer a number of programs for seniors and the Seniors enjoy going there. Ms. Carroll agreed to call to see how many residents use the programs. There was no vote.

Lamprey Health Care - Line Number 44152.350.01: Ms. Carroll asked to discuss Lamprey Health Care. They are requesting \$1,800. The Selectmen recommended \$2,400. The report from them states that Atkinson residents made 52 visits and received \$84.00 of free or reduced medical care. The Committee questioned the figures. Member Torosian agreed to call and verify the figures. Ms. Snicer pointed out that it is the healthcare aspect. Seacare Health Services is no longer in business. It is 25 miles to Newmarket. The Committee agreed to check further.

Center for Life Management - Line Number 44154.350.01: They requested \$7,500. The Selectmen proposed \$1.00. Mr. Morse stated it was because they get money from other agencies. The Committee agreed. There was no vote.

Police Department - Account Number 42101:

\$937,412 is requested for 2016, a 4.2% increase or about \$13,000.

Dispatch - Account Number 42992.390: Member Torosian asked about dispatch. He has a letter from the head of communications from Derry Fire Department. They are primarily interested in Fire Dispatch. Plaistow handles Atkinson after hours Police Dispatch. Also, Rockingham dispatch provides service to all Towns at no charge. The issue is how services would be implemented if they were split up. Mr. Torosian informed the Committee that the letter states that Derry could provide Fire dispatch with better service and less money. Ms. Snicer informed the Committee that the Selectmen are having a discussion with Fire, Police and the Road Agent on Monday. Selectman Morse informed the Committee that the Selectmen are looking for alternatives. Derry is one option, but they decided not to.

The Police Department is requesting \$40,000 for dispatch. The Fire Department is paying \$47,000 for dispatch.

All dispatch services increased from \$41,668 budgeted in 2015 to \$47,717 for 2016, a 14.5% increase. Part of the increase is the annual fee for the tower. Chair Smith summarized that the dispatch services account on page 11 is for Police Fire and Highway **out of hour** **after hours'** services.

Chair Smith asked if there were more questions about the Police Department.

Mr. Mealey returned the discussion to pay raises and asked why they did not go on the warrant. Selectman Morse informed the Committee that the Selectmen decided to put the raises in the budget. Mr. Torosian agreed with Mr. Mealey, he has been informed that pay raises for elected officials should go on a warrant. Selectman Morse replied that New Hampshire Municipal also informed the Selectmen that the raises could stay in the budget.

Selectman Morse pointed out the biggest increase is retirement. It is mandatory. The Committee agreed that the State is pushing more of the retirement expense on the Towns. The \$13,000 increase was for salaries, uniforms and gun replacement.

Mr. Mealey returned to pay raises and COLAs.

\$973,412 was proposed by the Police Department and the Selectmen recommended \$937,412. Ms. Carroll made a motion for the Atkinson Budget Committee to recommend \$937,412 for the total Police Department budget. Member Peter Torosian seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. Vote: 7/0/0.

Chair Smith informed the audience that he had agreed not to make decisions on the Police Department or the Fire Department budgets, but since there were no changes, the Committee voted.

Fire Department:

The Fire Department is requesting a 3.2% increase or a \$312,437 total.

The Committee discussed salaries and COLA. Retirement is not an issue for the Fire Department because there are no full time employees. Selectmen Morse explained that since the Police were getting a 2% COLA increase, the rest of the Town employees should get a 2% COLA increase; and, some employees will also get a 1% merit increase.

Chair Smith asked if it were possible to recommend decreases in the COLA lines and using the money for merit increases. The Committee favors merit increases. The Committee discussed pay raises in 2014 and 2015 and reviewed the discussion at the 2014 meetings.

Chair Smith asked the Committee about COLA increases two years in a row. 2 members would like to remove it. Ms. Barker also suggested a warrant. Ms. Snicer pointed out that the Selectmen have control over salaries, the Budget Committee does not. The Committee discussed a warrant for salaries. Ms. Snicer informed them that they could formulate a warrant and give it to the Selectmen or formulate a warrant by petition.

The Committee agreed to discuss salaries later. Mr. Morse suggested taking out the 2% to see what the figures would look like.

Fire Department - Account Number 42201:

Electricity - Line Number 42201.410.00: The percent increase is 38%, rather than 21%. The budget for 2015 was \$10,000 and \$13,866 is proposed for 2016.

Heat - Line Number 42201.411.00: The spread sheet shows a 5% increase and Mr. Torosian is seeing decrease. Ms. Snicer stated the budget was done before the bids were accepted. This line should decrease now that the bids are in. The Committee agreed to ask the Town Administrator.

The Committee agreed to wait for answers on the Electricity and Heat lines and also COLA raises.

The Committee agreed to discuss Highway, Care of Grounds. Ms. Snicer pointed out that the bids are coming in next week and was not sure if there was enough turn around. Also buildings. If there are no changes, the Committee will take a vote. If there are changes, they will wait until Mr. Innes returns.

Minutes: September 29, 2015 - deferred, October 20, 2015

October 20, 2015

Page 1 under Cemetery - Mr. **Pertuto** is an active member of the **Cemetery** Board of Trustees who volunteered many hours for many years and can no longer do the labor. This is why they are asking to hire another person for 10 hours per week.

Page 2 - 3rd line from the top - instead of Chair Smith wants a 0% increase say in a range of 0% to 2%.

Page 2 - next sentence, pension recipients generally do not get increases and seniors with bank accounts are getting near zero interest, therefore it is hard to justify a big increase in the Town budget.

Chair Smith made a motion to accept the minutes of the October 20, 2015 meeting of the Atkinson Budget Committee as corrected. Member Torosian seconded the Motion. All members voted in favor. Vote: 7/0/0.

Member Peter Torosian made a motion to adjourn the October 27, 2015 meeting of the Atkinson Budget Committee at 9:20 PM. Member Kay Galloway seconded the motion. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee voted in favor. Vote: 7/0/0.