

**TOWN OF ATKINSON
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
Thursday, December 21, 2017**

Members Present:

Bill Smith, Chair
Wendy Barker, Vice Chair
Sue Carroll
Bob Worden
Peter Torosian
Bob Malo

Others Present:

Alan Phair, Town Administrator
Diane Heer, Library Director

Agenda:

Minutes: December 12, 2017

Chair Smith made a motion to accept the minutes of the December 12, 2017 meeting of the Atkinson Budget Committee as amended. Member Carroll seconded the motion. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee voted in favor. Vote: 6/0/0.

Chair Smith invited the Committee to make comments on the FY18 budget.

Worker's Comp – Line Number 41552.260.00: Member Torosian had a question about workers comp. He asked why only \$16,563 was expended for FY17. Mr. Phair stated he would check.

Buildings:

Member Torosian asked about the septic system lines. He asked if it was done every year and if the Kimball House septic system needed to get pumped every year since it does not get high use. Also, some of the septic systems were not pumped for FY17. Mr. Phair would prefer to leave the septic lines in the budget. There were no changes.

Community Center – Account Number 41948:

Plantings, Care of Grounds – Line Number 45202.730.00: \$3,000 was requested for FY18. \$3,000 was expended in FY17. In the past all that has been spent is \$2,000. Member Torosian proposed that the Budget Committee recommend \$2,000 for this line.

Discussion: Mr. Phair responded that he would like to spend more to make the Town more attractive. Mr. Phair also informed the Committee that the Town gets a lot of volunteer work for Care of Grounds.

Chair Smith responded that the budget increase was 4.81% at the 12/19/17 meeting. It is now down to 4.68%.

Member Torosian made a motion for the Budget Committee to propose \$2,000 for Plantings, Care of Grounds, Line Number 45202.730.00. \$3,000 was requested and the Select Board proposed \$3,000. Chair Smith seconded the motion. The Atkinson Budget Committee vote 5/0/1 with Vice Chair Barker opposed.

Community Center – Minor Equipment – Line Number 45208.740.00: Less than \$600 has been spent for the past five years. \$1,000 was requested and the Select Board proposed \$1,000.

Member Torosian made a motion for the Atkinson Budget Committee to propose \$600 for Community Center, Minor Equipment, Line Number 45208.740.00. \$1,000 was requested and the Select Board proposed \$1,000. Member Carroll seconded the motion. The Atkinson Budget Committee voted five in favor and Vice Chair Barker opposed. Vote: 5/0/1.

Heating – Library Line Number 45501.411:

Member Torosian made a motion for the Atkinson Budget Committee to propose \$12,000 for Heating – Library Line Number 45501.411. \$13,065 was requested and the Select Board proposed \$13,605. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee voted in favor. Vote: 6/0/0.

Long Term Debt – Library – Line Number 47211.981.01:

Mr. Phair explained that there was a mistake in FY 17. The present debt is \$40,800 for FY2018.

Cable Operations – Staff Salary – Line Number – 458892.110.00: Mr. Wolfe explained that new directors were hired. The cost will be \$50.00 for each meeting. \$68,017 has been expended for FY 17. Mr. Wolfe explained that the directors will help out with deliberative and other meetings. The cost also includes directors to help out at meetings. This will enable Mr. Wolfe and Mr. Williams to work on TV content and admin. Mr. Wolfe also explained that there are approximately 250 meetings per year. Mr. Williams is the coordinator. Mr. Wolfe's salary is included in the staff salary.

Vice Chair Barker remarked that the Town purchased robotic and laid off the directors. Mr. Wolfe explained that instead of 3 directors, there will only be one at each meeting. Mr. Wolfe explained that the Town will save \$40 per meeting. In the past, there were three directors at each meeting. With the robotic cameras, only one director will be needed at each meeting. Vice Chair Barker pointed out that \$17,000 was requested to hire directors for FY17 and that amount was not expended. The new staff will not be hired until March, and the Committee does not know how many new staff will be hired.

The figure reflects \$50 for one director for each meeting, not the number of personnel. Member Malo explained that the Town is having more meetings. Hiring Directors will allow the Coordinator and Mr. Wolfe to do more things. Member Worden summarized that there are 200 meetings per year to cover. The Coordinator and the Assistant Coordinator are on salary. Mr. Wolfe works 10 hours per week and if he covers 2 meetings, this will give him only 4 hours per week for other tasks. Mr. Worden explained that there are also special events. Mr. Wolfe explained the Mr. Williams counts every meeting.

Mr. Wolfe explained that \$70 per director was budgeted for FY17, and \$50 per director is being budgeted for FY18.

Member Torosian made a motion for the Budget Committee to propose \$13,295 for Cable Operations, Staff Salary, Line Number 45892.110.00. \$15,295 was requested and the Select Board proposed \$15,295. Member Carroll seconded the motion. The Atkinson Budget Committee voted five in favor and one opposed. The motion carries. Vote: 5/0/1.

Member Torosian remarked that some departments go up more than others. Elder Services is up 150%. The Police Department is up 81%. The biggest increase for the Police Department is the contract. Member Torosian asked how the contracts are negotiated. Departments that go up more than others have union contracts. The Atkinson Town budget increases faster than most people's salaries.

Elder Services – Account Number 42151:

Elder Services Payroll - Line Number 42151.110.00: Mr. Phair stated that he has the answer to the question on the increase in salary. The correct number should be \$71,522. The reason is in FY17 there was a merit increase. The Director had put in 2% and then the Select Board added a 2% COLA increase.

Chair Smith made a motion for the Budget Committee to propose \$71,522, for Elder Service, Line Number 42151.110.00 including the corresponding FICA and Medicare adjustments. \$72,365 was requested and the Select Board proposed \$73,757. Member Torosian seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. Vote: 6/0/0.

Vice Chair Barker stated that Elder Services has gone up \$60,000 and Recreation has gone up \$7,000 in the same amount of time. These are not essential services.

Member Carroll stated that many elderly people are having difficulty paying their taxes. Also, many elderly people rely on Elder Services. Vice Chair Barker questioned why the amount requested from 2011 to now has gone up \$60,000. Member Carroll also stated that the number of cars is capped at 5. Chair Smith pointed out that someone donated \$850 to Elderly Services. Mr. Phair informed the Committee that someone donated \$10,000 several weeks ago. Money is donated to Elderly Services every week.

Mr. Torosian informed the Committee that \$96,093 was budgeted and \$81,360 was spent in FY17. Vice Chair Barker informed the Committee that without donations, Elder Services would have cost \$150,000.

Vice Chair Barker also remarked that parents pay for Sun and Fun and it might be a good idea for Elder Services to charge a fee for rides and services.

Member Carroll pointed out that not everyone in Atkinson is affluent. Member Torosian pointed out that most companies do not give a private pension however Atkinson does.

Mr. Phair stated that there are a lot of elderly in Atkinson who paid their share of taxes. There are certain things in this Town that make people want to live here. Elder Services is one of the programs that the Town offers.

Member Worden pointed out that Elder Services supports active taxpayers living healthy in their homes and paying taxes. Also, models in town planning have services like Elder Services built in. These people get back the taxes they paid from Elder Services, the Community Center and the Library. Member Worden stated that everyone in Atkinson gets value in their property from these programs. Also, this was a great year for funding for Elder Services.

Member Malo stated that other Towns who offer these services are becoming a magnet for people who require these services. He believes that at some point it will be necessary to put a cap on spending for Elder Services.

Member Carroll stated that the Town did put a cap on Elder Services. She was opposed to expanding Elder Services. They have put a cap on the number of cars and have done fund raising. When the program originally started, it was almost completely funded by donations. There was a conflict of interest issue and the program was taken away from the Police Department. Since then, the cost to the

Town has increased. Member Torosian stated that some money was taken from drivers' salaries and also from gas. This should be a conversation for some of the civic clubs to volunteer rides.

Vice Chair Barker has spoken to people in other Towns who have similar programs and who have volunteers to drive. There are other options for Atkinson residents. Mr. Phair stated that these programs are struggling because they cannot get enough volunteers.

Vice Chair Barker agreed that Elder Services has done a good job of fund raising and keeping costs low, but she is concerned about the increase in salaries for drivers. Also, her taxes have gone up every year.

Chair Smith suggested that in theory when the price of anything is \$0, the demand increases. When the price goes up, the demand decreases. A possibility would be charging a small fee for rides. Donations and charging for rides are not the same. Vice Chair Barker agrees, we charge a fee for Sun and Fun. Chair Smith would like to see a survey of all the people who have moved to Atkinson because of free rides by Elder Services.

Chair Smith pointed out that there are many less affluent people in Atkinson who will never use Elder Services. Member Carroll stated that the number of rides times a charge of \$5.00 per ride would reduce their budget.

Member Malo stated that Atkinson is not the only Town to offer this service. Massachusetts and most of its towns offer rides to a much greater extent and charge \$3.00 per trip. A round trip costs \$6.00.

Chair Smith informed the Committee that Cavalry Christian School went out of business in 2009. A consultant informed him that it went out of business because the tuition was too low and the church could no longer afford to subsidize it.

Member Torosian suggested that the Committee write down these ideas for the next budget season.

Legal Services:

Defense Proceedings-Other Professional Services-Line Number 41532.390.00: Mr. Phair explained that the Town puts a number in that line in case there is legal action. The line is for legal expenses. Mr. Phair has one case right now. The Town gets charged for Court costs and other expenses.

Member Torosian made a motion for the Budget Committee to propose \$500 for Defense Proceedings-Other Professional Services-Line Number 41532.390.00. \$1,000 was requested and the Select Board proposed \$1,000. Chair Smith seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. Vote: 6/0/0.

Legal Services – Other Professional Services - Line Number 41531.390.00: Member Torosian requested the Budget Committee review this line and suggested \$9,500.

Member Torosian made a motion for the Budget Committee to propose \$9,500 for Legal Services, Other Professional Services, Line Number 41531.390.00. Member Carroll seconded the motion.

Discussion: Chair Smith stated that Selectman Ex Officio Grosky made an argument that \$10,000 was needed even if it is not spent as a contingency in case there is a law suit. The Committee agreed that it was a hypothetical number. Chair Smith stated he would propose \$5,000.

Member Carroll made a motion to amend Member Torosian's \$9,500 motion for Legal Services, Other Professional Services, Line Number 41531.390.00, to change the proposed amount to \$9,000. Chair Smith seconded the amendment to Member Torosian's motion.

Chair Smith requested a vote on Member Carroll's amendment. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee voted to amend the original motion to \$9,000 for Legal Services, Other Professional Services, Line Number 41531.390.00. The Atkinson Budget Committee voted five in favor and one opposed with Member Worden opposed. Vote: 5/1/0.

Chair Smith then requested a vote on the amended motion of Member Torosian. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee voted to propose \$9,000 for Legal Services, Other Professional Services, Line Number 41531.390.00. The Atkinson Budget Committee voted five in favor and one opposed with Member Worden opposed. Vote: 5/1/0.

Planning and Zoning:

Public Notices - Line Number 41913.860.00: Mr. Malo asked if public notices have to be posted in one or two newspapers. Mr. Phair explained that public hearings need to be posted in one newspaper. RFPs and bids need to be posted in two.

Member Torosian stated that he is willing to introduce a bill to change the requirements for posting public notices.

Library:

Materials of Trade, Line Number 45501.670.00: Member Carroll recommended that this line be cut by \$5,000. Vice Chair Barker stated that the Library Director has cut everything the Budget Committee has requested. Also, she gets the money back every year in the Deliberative Session and she requested that she be notified before any cuts are made. Member Carroll stated that the Library is not supposed to be a free Barnes and Noble. Member Torosian and Vice Chair Barker agreed that the Library Director be consulted before any more cuts were made in the Library Budget. There was no vote.

Conservation Commission – Account Number 46111: Mr. Worden requested to discuss the Conservation Commission budget. This is one section that gets put back at the Deliberative Session every time it is cut. The Conservation Commission was planning on purchasing some of the Gordon Brown land. It is not going to happen, so it is a possibility that this line can get cut. Member Malo was informed that the Conservation Commission does not wish to discuss land purchases publicly so that private enterprise does not get involved. As far as he knows, the Gordon Brown property is the only acquisition on the table.

Care of Grounds – Field Mowing – Line Number 46111.650.00: \$3,000 is proposed every year. It was not spent this year. Vice Chair Barker agreed that historically \$3,000 has never been spent. Member Worden explained that it was not done in FY17. Member Malo explained that it might not be necessary for it to be done every year. Mr. Phair informed the Committee that the Conservation Commission expects to spend \$3,000. Member Malo stated that there should be an agenda item for it to be done every two years rather than every year. The FY17 amount budgeted can be carried over to FY18.

Member Torosian made a motion for the Budget Committee to propose \$2,500 for Care of Grounds, Field Mowing – Line Number 46111.650.00. Member Carroll seconded the motion. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee voted in favor. Vote: 6/0/0.

Member Malo suggested an agenda item for this expense be budgeted for every other year. It is not necessary to field mow every year.

Other Professional Services – Line Number 46111.390.00:

Member Torosian made a motion for the Budget Committee to propose \$2,000 for Other Professional Services, Line Number 46111.390.00. \$2,500 was requested and the Select Board proposed \$2,500. Member Carroll seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. Vote: 6/0/0.

Police – Legal Services – Line Number 42101.320.00: The Police Department negotiated a new contract and saved some money. Mr. Phair stated that the new contract is less but it does not show on the spreadsheet. Mr. Phair will check.

Member Torosian made a motion to adjourn the December 21, 2017 meeting of the Atkinson Budget Committee at 9:06 PM. Vice Chair Barker seconded the motion. All members voted in favor. Vote 6/0/0.

The next meeting of the Atkinson Budget Committee will be Thursday, December 28, 2017 at 7:30 PM.