

**TOWN OF ATKINSON
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2018**

Members Present:

Bill Smith, Chair
Wendy Barker, Vice Chair (by telephone)
Sue Carroll
Bob Malo
Peter Torosian
Jason Grosky, Selectman Ex Officio

Others Present:

Alan Phair, Town Administrator
Barbara Snicer, Asst. Town Admin
Michael Murphy, Fire Chief
Diane Heer, Library Director

Agenda: Review of minutes, review of warrant articles

Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 7:35 pm.

Fire Department – Account Number 42201:

Chief Murphy came before the Budget Committee and stated that he spoke to the Select Board at their last meeting. At the meeting, a new article for fire department staffing was written. What the Budget Committee has before it is a warrant article bringing two fire fighters in as full-time employees during FY2018. Chief Murphy had originally requested 4 full time firefighters. Chief Murphy also explained that the business inspector and the fire administrator are resigning. The full-time firefighters will take over those positions. This way there will be people in the station doing the clerical work.

Ms. Snicer read the proposed warrant for the Budget Committee.

Article 2018-8 Fire Department Staffing

Shall the Town approve the addition of two (2) full-time Firefighter/EMT's to supplement the existing part-time Paid/Call personnel at an annual cost, including benefits of one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) beginning July 1, 2018; and to raise and appropriate the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000), Sixty thousand five hundred (\$60,500) to be raised by taxes and Fourteen thousand five hundred to be saved from the Operating Budget?

Recommended by the Board of Selectmen 5 – Yes, 0 – No, 0 - Abstain

Discussion: Chief Murphy explained that the money from the Operating Budget would come from the Clerks Line, Line Number 42201.110.03, and the Inspectors Line, Line Number 42203.110.00. The Inspectors line can be reduced by \$2,500. Ms. Snicer advised not to reduce this line in case the article does not pass. Chief Murphy agreed that once the article is passed, the money will be used from the Clerk and the Inspectors lines.

Member Carroll asked if new people would be hired or if someone already in the department would begin. Chief Murphy explained that there are firefighters in the department that might be qualified, but there will be a hiring process.

Chair Smith clarified that \$12,000 would be used from the existing clerical line and \$2,500 from the inspectors line without changing those lines. Member Torosian stated the total would be \$14,500. Chief Murphy stated that he was trying to show where there could be savings in the last six months.

Member Torosian asked about grant money. Chief Murphy stated that there would be a better possibility to hire two more firefighters with grant money in FY19. Member Torosian asked if Chief Murphy could look for grants now and Chief replied that he could not get a grant if hiring the firefighters was already funded. Chief said he would check with his consultants.

Chair asked if anyone else had comments. There were none. Chair Smith requested a vote.

Chair Smith made a motion to recommend Article 2018-8 Fire Department Staffing, Shall the Town approve the addition of two (2) full-time Firefighter/EMT's to supplement the existing part-time Paid/Call personnel at an annual cost, including benefits of one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) beginning July 1, 2018; and to raise and appropriate the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000), Sixty thousand five hundred (\$60,500) to be raised by taxes and Fourteen thousand five hundred to be saved from the Operating Budget? Member Carroll seconded the motion. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee voted in favor. Vote: 6/0/0.

Discussion: Ms. Snicer commented as a point of order that a roll call vote must be done on every motion since Vice Chair Barker is voting remotely.

Vote: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Barker, Member Carroll, Member Torosian, Member Malo, and Selectman Ex Officio Grosky all voting in favor.

Chair Smith asked if there were discussion on any other warrants and that he believes that the Budget Committee had already voted on all warrants involving money.

Member Torosian asked about the Heritage Fund. Ms. Snicer explained that the fund was started to protect the Kimball House. The Heritage Committee met once but instead it was decided that the Town would take over maintenance of the Kimball House. Ms. Snicer stated that she has a note from Mr. Dziechowski, Heritage Committee Chair, stating that the Committee no longer serves a purpose.

Member Torosian had one comment on Article-8 and asked if \$60,500 would cover all expenses. Ms. Snicer explained that the total cost would be \$75,000 to hire two full time fire personnel. \$60,000 would be paid by taxes and \$14,500 would come from the Operating Budget to offset some of the cost. For FY19, the cost will be \$150,000.

Member Torosian then asked if the Fire Department repair article could be revisited and could it be done half and half to save some money. Article 8 will bring the budget increase to 5.7%, not including the other warrants.

Selectman Ex Officio Grosky asked first, if the Budget Committee had already voted on the warrant article to repair the Fire House last week. Chair Smith replied yes. Second, the Budget Committee is talking about changing a warrant article that the Select Board had already put forward. Member Torosian stated that he was looking at changing it to see if it would be appropriate to change it. Member Carroll stated that Member Torosian is asking if the Budget Committee could make the recommendation and send it back to the Select Board.

Selectman Ex Officio Grosky asked if there is an agenda and stated that seems that discussions seem to occur on the fly without any research. Chair Smith explained that he has a to do list but never makes a formal agenda. He also notices that Selectman Grosky runs the Select Board meetings more formally. Chair Smith stated that he prefers to run a meeting more informally.

Member Torosian stated that the Budget Committee is tasked to look closely at the budget to keep it from increasing too much and it has increased 10% for FY18.

Selectman Ex Officio Grosky stated that it seemed unfair to make decisions when the department heads are not at the meeting and used the discussions about the library discussion as an example.

Member Torosian stated that first, the Budget Committee tries to contact the department heads and second, the Budget Committee has the authority to recommend cuts. He looks at the percent increases. The motion on the library budget failed. Member Torosian stated that the Budget Committee discussed charging for library cards and he made some suggestions at the last meeting regarding library fees among other things.

Chair Smith stated that regarding fairness, the meetings are televised, minutes are forwarded to others and there is a public comment session at the January 16, 2018 meeting. Chair Smith also stated that the library discussion of January 2, 2018 was a continuation of the previous week. Another factor is the Budget Committee usually has two-three passes on the Budget and they are trying to catch up and make some last minute adjustments.

Member Torosian stated that due to the late decision on the solid waste contract, the Budget Committee did not have a feel for the operating budget bottom line. Mr. Phair stated that the solid waste contract budget for FY18 will be lower than anticipated.

Ms. Snicer has two points, first she asked how the Budget Committee has figured out that the budget is up 10% when they have not considered revenue.

Second, Ms. Snicer also asked why the Budget Committee would consider spreading the fire department repairs over two years. She informed the Committee that the Town Administrator has discussed it with consultants and professional builders and was informed that the total cost would be more if it were spread over two years. Member Torosian explained that it came up in conversation and he is not necessarily in favor. This is a public meeting and he thought it was appropriate to bring it up.

Chair Smith asked if there were more discussion. There was none.

Minutes: January 2, 2018

Discussion: Ms. Snicer asked Chair Smith to review the votes and offered to do the warrant articles if Chair Smith would do the summary. Chair Smith agreed.

Vice Chair Barker asked Ms. Snicer if the phrase “to be transferred to the Elder Services’ Department” be removed and Ms. Snicer affirmed that the phrase has been removed.

Chair Smith made a motion to accept the minutes of the January 2, 2018 meeting of the Atkinson Budget Committee as amended. Member Torosian seconded the motion. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee present voted in favor with Selectman Ex Officio abstaining. Vote: 5/0/1. Chair Smith, Vice Chair Barker, Member Torosian, Member Malo and Member Carroll voted in favor with Selectman Ex Officio Grosky abstaining. Member Worden absent.

Selectman Grosky requested that the Budget Committee return to page 3 of the January 2, 2018 meeting and the vote is on page 3 and page 10. The recorder explained that it was a typing error.

Library Admin – Account Number 45501: Ms. Heer asked about the Library budget. Chair Smith explained that nothing was changed and he would send her the figures.

Member Malo explained that the Committee spent some time asking about \$35,000 for Materials of Trade, Line #44501.670.00. Member Malo stated that the Kimball Library is a consortium of two other libraries and asked if the Director works with other libraries to select titles. Ms. Heer explained that books from each library in the consortium are available in all three towns, but the towns cannot share funds. She works with the consortium to get better deals, but each library has to decide what books to buy. They get about a 45% discount. Each library has to purchase its best sellers, depending on the holds queue. She also explained that the collection of each library varies, mainly in nonfiction. Member Malo asked if the Library considers sharing books with other libraries for books that are not in high demand. Ms. Heer explained that she does not contact the other libraries every time she purchases a book, but the Library Directors meet monthly and they do work together. Also, some vendors do not allow the library to share with other Towns, especially e-books. Member Torosian asked if the Director would consider the fine schedule. Ms. Heer responded that the Trustees can look at all the policies. The Library also tries to be consistent with the other libraries with fines. The library charges \$.10 for a late book and \$1.00 for a late video.

Member Torosian explained that this is the biggest budget increase for the Town of Atkinson in the past two years and the increases will continue to grow.

The Committee then discussed the Town's portion of the tax rate and the cost of living index. Ms. Snicer explained that the budget has gone up but revenues have also gone up. The Budget Committee does not look at the whole picture. Ms. Snicer asked Chair Smith if he had given the Committee the comparison and Chair Smith replied no. He agreed with Ms. Snicer that revenues have gone up. Member Carroll added that the Town cannot provide every service that residents request. Member Torosian agreed.

Elder Services – Account Number 42151: Member Carroll asked if Chair Smith had received an email from the Elder Services Director requesting to reconsider the reduction in the gas and vehicle maintenance lines.

Chair Smith informed the Committee that he and Member Carroll met with Jean LoPizzo, Elder Services Director and Ted Houlihan. Trustee of the Trust Funds, Barbara Snicer, was also present. There was some concern in the adjustment of some of the lines. Chair Smith stated first, the Budget Committee had no intent to disparage anyone, especially seniors. What the Budget Committee did say that some members think there should be a minimal charge for rides. Chair Smith used the analogy of a copay for doctor visits. Member Carroll pointed out that raising taxes will hurt the people that Elder Services is trying to help. Also, paying two dollars for a ride is not unreasonable.

Selectman Ex Officio Grosky stated that it is a bad analogy. Ms. Snicer stated that the revenue cannot go back to the operating budget.

Chair Smith stated that he asked Ms. LoPizzo about Elder Services Trust Funds. Chair Smith explained that there are two Town trust funds. One is the Elder Services' Transportation Purpose-Restricted Trust. It takes in about \$15,000 yearly. The money does not go into the Towns' General Fund. It is managed by the Trustees of the Trust Funds and the Selectmen approve any donations and expenditures. It is established to buy vehicles. There is also the Elder Assistance Purpose-Restricted Trust Fund with a balance of approximately \$18,000. This fund is for the purpose of assisting elder and disabled citizens in need. The Budget Committee

suggested charging a \$2.00 fee for rides or as a minimum donation. Another idea would be to take the money from the Transportation Fund to buy new vehicles or to repair the old one.

Ms. Snicer explained that the reason that these funds are outside the scope of the Town General Fund is because their use is limited. The trustees manage the funds and the trustees will decide if any requests for money can be granted. Then, the request goes to the Selectmen. Ms. Snicer will give Chair Smith the original funds. Chair Smith inquired if the transportation trust fund can be used for repairs. Ms. Snicer explained that the money is for Elder Services vehicle replacement and Elder services unanticipated vehicle maintenance (BoS 6/1/2015). The funds are for extraordinary expenses or for expenses that people require and cannot afford, not for routine operating expenses. The trustees would need to look at the proposed request to see if it fit within the scope of the fund.

Selectman Ex Officio Grosky stated that the Trust Funds were set up to pay for extraordinary items. Elder Services is being encouraged to raise money outside the operating budget. Now, the Budget Committee is trying to trim the operating budget even more by using the Elder Services trust funds and he does not think residents who donate would like their donations going to ordinary expenses. Also, he does not think the Budget Committee should cut the Elder Services budget in order to force the use of these funds.

Chair Smith informed the Committee that there was about \$96,093 was budgeted for FY17 and \$88,180 was spent, leaving about \$8,000 in unspent funds in the Elder Services budget for FY17. Last week the Budget Committee voted to reduce the amount it recommends by about \$4,420. Even assuming that FY18 is similar to FY17, there may be money left over.

Selectman Ex Officio Grosky stated that some of these items are fluid. If there is a department that did not have any significant repairs or has a tight budget and there is money left over, the Budget Committee is sending the message that the department had better spend all the money in each line.

Member Carroll stated that the Elder Services Director would be willing to return and talk to the Committee. Chair Smith suggested that she return for the January 16, 2018 meeting. Member Carroll suggested that she come half an hour before the public hearing. The Committee agreed to start at 7:00 PM.

Ms. Snicer commented that the thing that is being missed is that a budget is not absolute. Member Torosian asked about the budget surplus for the last five years. Ms. Snicer informed the committee that the average operating budget surplus over the last five years is \$178,000.

Chair Smith explained that the Budget Committee is trying to limit the increase due to the solid waste budget, the new firefighter personnel and the repairs to the Fire House. Chair Smith pointed out that the budget increase is too big, the voters would not approve and the Town would have to use the default budget. Member Torosian and Member Carroll agreed that they moved to Atkinson because of the lower tax rate.

Ms. Snicer commented that trash pick up is part of the operating budget and the Town has no choice as to the amount. The contract should also be part of the default budget.

Member Torosian commented that he appreciates that Chair Smith allows anyone to speak. In many committees, anyone who wishes to speak has to be put on the agenda.

Member Torosian also mentioned that he went to the Scout Awards program and spoke to the Scout Master who informed him that they could contact the Scouts about any projects that needed to be done. Ms. Heer stated that she would make a list of projects for the Library. Ms. Snicer informed the Committee that the Town has a list of projects for the Scouts.

Marty Finn, Library Trustee, asked if there were a list of all the trust funds in Town and their parameters. Ms. Snicer has a list of the more recent funds. Ms. Finn further stated that people will know ahead of time what they can go to. Ms. Snicer can get a list of most of them.

Chair Smith made a motion to adjourn the Tuesday, January 9, 2018 meeting of the Atkinson Budget Committee at 10:00 PM. Member Torosian seconded the motion. All members of the Atkinson Budget Committee present voted in favor. Vote: 6/0/0. Chair Smith, Vice Chair Barker, Member Torosian, Member Malo, Member Carroll and Selectman Ex Officio Grosky voted in favor.

The next meeting of the Atkinson Budget Committee will be Tuesday, January 16, 2018 at 7:00 PM.