

TOWN OF ATKINSON
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, September 17, 2019

Members Present

Bill Smith, Chair
Wendy Barker, Vice Chair
Ray Fournier
Bob Malo
Peter Torosian
Bob Worden

Others Present

Leslie Barbera
Dave Cressman, Town Administrator
Debbie DeSimone, Tax Collector
Susan Killam

Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 7:34 p.m.

Agenda: Correspondence, Spreadsheet Update, Department Presentations, Action Items, Minutes, Future Agenda

Chair Smith went over the correspondence:

- Rockingham Planning Commission requesting \$6,979
- Vic Geary Center requests \$2,400

Chair Smith stated that the spreadsheet has been updated with numbers given by our Town Administrator with the drafts from the joint meeting with the Selectmen. There was a slight change in the Cemetery numbers making it 2.82% rather than 2.81%.

Conservation – Paul Wainwright
Unavailable for presentation

Cemetery – Susan Killam

Minor Equipment is down which brought up Care Grounds because the mowing contracts consume most of the care grounds funds

Vice Chair Barker asked why Care Grounds is increasing since nothing has been expended.

Trustee Killam stated that this spreadsheet shows up to August; mowing is almost up to December.

Vice Chair Barker asked if there is a proposal for an increase of \$1000

Trustee Killam stated that was not for the mowing but there were other things that need to be purchased.

Member Torosian asked if this was a new contractor.

Trustee Killam said they have worked the Town's grounds for quite some time.

Member Torosian asked about the cost of digging the plot and keeping it simple.

Trustee Killam stated that there are two contractors: one for excavation and one for hand digging for cremation. She does not feel the need for anyone choosing a contractor; we need to be in control. She stated that everything is tightly controlled by the caretaker.

Member Torosian felt that, if the money is passed "in and out", maybe the Budget should not be involved.

Member Malo asked if the cemetery volume was that great.

Trustee Killam stated that grave openings, in the last six years, have ranged from 28, being the highest, to 24 this year.

Member Torosian posed the question about more and more people are being cremated.

Trustee Killam said that we are right at 50%.

Member Torosian stated that should be saving some money even though the Town does not pay for it.

Trustee Killam stated that hand digging for a cremation is half the price of an excavation.

Tax Collector – Debbie DeSimone

The only reason the budget would change is:

- if the vendor decides that fees will increase
- if postage increases

Member Malo asked if the software would be under Technology rather than affect the Tax Collector budget.

Collector DeSimone stated that the Selectmen's Office and the Tax collector's office are working together to complete a contract to implement the \$750 purchase (has already been approved) which would allow residents to pay their taxes online. The fee next year would be \$50 per month and would cover processing fees and maintenance.

Member Torosian asked about the cost to the residents for this convenience.

Administrator Cressman stated that there are two software vendors: Avatar and Interware. Avatar would be charging the Town \$50 per month and Interware would be charging the resident \$1.50 per transaction for the use of the software. When paying online, basically, there would be a charge of around 3% when using a credit card or a debit card. But there is the option of paying by e-check which would be a bank account charge of less than \$1.00.

Member Torosian asked if there would be an additional cost to the Town.

Collector DeSimone stated \$50/month.

Chair Smith stated that the fees don't get deducted from the taxpayer.

Collector DeSimone said that she came to an agreement with the Town Treasurer and Bookkeeper with some tax service companies that we would accept ACH deposits. The goal is to get the money into the Town coffers as fast as possible *seamlessly*. This means no bumps or issues. Fortunately, last year, it was absolutely seamless. Therefore, working with Avatar, the funds will get into the Town's coffer quicker and seamlessly.

Member Torosian asked if there was a choice of two vendors.

Collector DeSimone and Administrator Cressman both explained that mentioning Avatar and Interware was only a comparison. The preference is to use Avitar.

Chair Smith asked when the online software will start.

Administrator Cressman stated that it will be ready for the December tax bill payment.

Vice Chair Barker clarified that this year's cost would be coming out of the Technology Budget. She also asked what the percentage of people that would actually use this convenience.

Collector DeSimone said through her experiences about 50%.

Chair Smith asked how prevalent is it for people who are having trouble paying their taxes.

Collector DeSimone corrected previous Budget Committee Minutes stating that we do not foreclose, we deed. Ten tax deed notices are going out and consist of \$43,305.07. Out of the ten, there are three that are not in a payment plan. It is preferred that the money is obtained rather than deal with taking a residential property. By the end of September, Collector DeSimone is required to place a lien on properties of unpaid taxes. Collector DeSimone has chosen May to set the lien. These properties cannot be disposed of until the taxes are paid. This year there were 32 properties. The total of the principal was \$135,209.32.

Member Torosian asked how far behind before a lien is placed.

Collector DeSimone responded that this year it would be five months. But eventually the list went down to 10 which means most of the 32 paid the taxes due.

Chair Smith asked if there is a trend of things getting better so that there are fewer situations like this. He also stated that there are 98%-99% of taxpayers who are not struggling to pay property taxes but undoubtedly there are others close to the edge.

Collector DeSimone believe it's decreasing because the populous of the residents is aging out and the younger are moving in.

Member Malo asks about the process of using the e-check option.

Collector DeSimone is hoping that it will all be done by e-mail.

Member Malo suggested talking to the vendor and asking if we could do an ACH to the bank. He also asked who the card service company was going to be with the software.

Collector DeSimone said don't know yet. But when it happens it will be quick and done.

Member Malo was concerned that, once this program is in place, how will it differentiate which department is depositing money if several departments are using the same card service company.

Collector DeSimone stated that the program will not move forward until all issues are resolved.

Member Torosian was concerned about long-term maintenance costs.

Member Malo stated that most of these companies develop a usage-based fee which means it does not come out of our budget.

Elections – Leslie Barbera

Coming into 2020, we have five elections. So it's difficult to compare it to 2019, where there was only one election. So we are doing a comparison with 2016. There is a rate increase of \$274 and there's an extra 59 hours in the 2020 proposed budget

Member Torosian asked about the 6% rate increase.

Supervisor Barbera said rate increase was 1142 in 2016 and it's 1212 in 2019. There won't be a rate increase in 2020, just using the 2019 figure.

Member Malo asked if she was expecting the Selectmen to decide what the cost of living increase is going to be.

Supervisor Barbera said that would be the difference. This is all based on the 2019 rates of 1212. This reflects 452 hours at 1212.

Regarding supplies, looking back at 2016, \$169 in supplies was spent. \$95 is being budgeted for 2020. \$23 in postage was spent this year. The only postage that is planned for 2020 is sending out 30-day letters.

Chair Smith mentioned that the Selectmen approved a 2% COLA.

Member Worden stated that he was under the impression that the Budget Committee and the Selectmen came to an agreement to wait for appropriate data before making a final decision.

Vice Chair Barker stated had the Selectmen liaison been in attendance at tonight's meeting, there would have been a conversation about this decision.

Member Worden stated that he did not want to be put in a position between the Board of Selectmen, employees in town and the valued people that work in our community for us. As far as he is concerned, any COLAs are tabled until the federal COLA levels are set in late-Fall, until there is a comparison of same-size towns as a reference, until there is more data.

Chair Smith asked where we stand on the Police contract.

Administrator Cressman said it was close to a tentative agreement; one item is outstanding.

Member Worden mentioned that at the meeting with the Selectmen about healthcare for Town employees, we were offered to join the Teamsters through the Police. He felt this should be a future discussion especially since the Police are very happy with their healthcare.

Member Malo stated that it would be in our best interest to have access to a volunteer insurance consultant on an annual basis.

Chair Smith asked what other contracts do we have:

Garbage removal	2028
Electricity	2022
Propane	2019
Heating Oil	2020
Cleaning	
Roads	
Mowing	
Insurance	
Legal	

Chair Smith asked for a motion to approve the minutes of September 10, 2019. Member Torosian made the motion to approve the minutes; Member Fournier seconded the motion. All attending members were in favor. Vote: 6/0/0

Chair Smith noted the departments scheduled for next week:

- Cable
- Recreation
- Town Clerk
- Community Center
- Conservation

Vice Chair Barker expressed her concern for the Board of Selectmen not having a representative at our meetings and hopes, going forward, that there will be a better showing.

Chair Smith said he spoke with Administrator Cressman and Selectman Spero and they planned to alternate between the meetings and, hopefully, Selectmen Spero will be in attendance next week.

Vice Chair Barker said last year when the Town Administrator was in attendance, he could not answer some of the questions. A Selectman *WITH* the Town Administrator would be very helpful.

Member Worden made a motion to adjourn and Member Torosian seconded the motion. All members were in favor. Vote: 6/0/0

The Atkinson Budget Committee adjourned at 9:00 p.m.