

TOWN OF ATKINSON
BUDGET COMMITTEE MEETING
Tuesday, December 1, 2020

Members Present

Bill Smith, Chair
Wendy Barker, Vice Chair
Ray Fournier

Bob Malo
Peter Torosian
Mark Sakakeeny

Others Present

Dave Cressman, Town Administrator
Bob Worden, Selectmen Liaison
Paul Wainwright, Conservation Chairperson

Ted Houlihan, Interim Elder Services Director
Noriko Yoshida-Travers, Recreation Director

Chair Smith called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Agenda: Reading RTK Checklist, Attendance, Selectmen Liaison's Report, Proposed Numbers and Possible Adjustments

Chair Smith read the public notice regarding COVID-19.
Attendance was taken.

Selectman Worden reported the following:

- Reminder of the Lions' food drive on Saturday, December 5, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
- COVID numbers continue to rise: 21 residents with COVID in 18 households

Conservation Commission – Paul Wainwright

Chair Wainwright provided the following:

- Asking for support for the proposed Warrant Article which will allow the Commission to fund other organizations to protect the Town's land.
- There is about \$600,000 in the Conservation Trust Fund which came from the Land Use Change Tax
- A piece of land was purchased in 2010. It's been a couple of years since land was purchased.
- The Town holds three (3) easements. One created in 1982 on Hemlock Heights Road; the other Two were created in the last ten (10) years: one is off of Willowvale and the other is off of Maple Avenue
- There are 20 parcels on Atkinson Conservation Land.
- Will provide the historic list to the Budget Committee
- Will make sure the wording reads that the money is used for the Town of Atkinson only thus protecting it from future discrepancies. See Warrant Article 1974-23.
- Will also reword to show that the money will be spent on a "case by case basis as needed".
- The Moose Plate Grant was a one-time thing and provided \$9,000 to be spent over five (5) different phases of the planning effort.
- Most of the trust fund money came from taxpayers.
- The tax rate will be whatever it is now; there is no reduced rate.
- There is a plan, moving forward, with the Moose Plate Grant and the Rockingham Planning Commission which will be in writing.
- Easements can be written several different ways; he recommends that easements be open to the public. Generally, it's not kosher to limit use of conservation lands to one community of people.

Elder Services – Ted Houlihan

Director Houlihan shared the following concerns:

- Budget Committee is not open to what is being done
- Asking how the committee got to cutting the Elder Services budget by 12%
- Seniors don't always have a tremendous voice in town.
- On Friday there will be 12 rides, three to Boston and none can be shared

Member Torosian stated that the Committee is very transparent and public. Anyone can attend the meeting unannounced. He further explained, step-by-step, how the Committee comes to its decision.

Director Houlihan said he would not have been here now if he knew the Committee was going to discuss the Elder Services budget. He suggested that he be informed ahead of time.

Member Torosian said the Committee doesn't always know, on a particular night, what areas of the budget will be cut. He feels the Committee is very professional in their pro bono duties. The Committee has no intent in cutting the services of Elder Services; it is just trying to align the resources.

Director Houlihan is concerned with Other Professional Services. Elder Services not send out a letter to residents asking for donations due to COVID. They also did not hold the picnic and band concert in the Library which was another fundraiser. Had he been at the meeting, he would have been able to share this with the Committee.

Member Malo said the Committee made a slight cut with the understanding that it would be discussed and would be put back, if needed.

Director Houlihan stressed that this is one of the reasons why it would have been efficient to inform him ahead of time so that he might attend the meeting.

Chair Smith stated that there are residents who have lost their jobs and may lose their homes; the last thing they need this year is a tax increase. The job of the Budget Committee is to balance the needs of the Town with the needs of the taxpayers and to provide a second opinion, in addition to that, of the Selectmen which are what the Committee attempts to do. He also reminds everyone again that anyone may attend the meeting without appointment, may join by Zoom; there is no fixed agenda and anyone is allowed to speak.

Director Houlihan said that he would not want the Town budget to be on the backs of cutting the senior program.

Chair Smith states that he believes that no Atkinson senior will be denied. In the unlikely event that more money is needed, the Board of Selectmen would move funds where needed.

Various members shared comments as to how and why the Committee makes the responsible decisions.

Director Houlihan asked the following:

- The reduction of \$500 for vehicle maintenance needs to be re-examined. There is \$390 remaining and oil changes and other maintenance are expected.
- The drivers' payroll increase, voted by the selectmen, to be reduced to \$65,000 is problematic. There has been a matrix that has been established for payment.

Director Yoshida-Travers felt that the Committee should contact the department when planning to reduce funds.

Member Malo explains the Budget Committee's process to get to level funding.

Chair Smith explains further that the Committee does not ask permission to adjust the budget. After looking over the 2020 budget for Elder Services, he feels that the Committee, based on the information received, did a responsible job in reducing the budget. He resents the implication that the Committee is accused of being unfair.

Director Houlihan is concerned that the 12% is a significant reduction. Over the past two weeks, rides are increasing and the schedule is starting to get back to normal.

Member Malo suggests that two weeks does not show a trend. It would more likely be two or three months to show consistency of a significant increase which would provide some credibility.

Selectmen Worden asked which lines were of concern.

Director Houlihan listed Gas, Maintenance, Payroll and Other Professional Services which were adjusted.

Member Fournier stated that in order for the elderly to afford to live in Atkinson, taxes need to be lowered; otherwise there may not be a need for Elder Services. It's a delicate balance.

Vice Chair Barker shared the following:

- We have the luxury of Zoom
- It's a transparent process
- Meetings are televised
- Meetings are on the Town website
- Take the emotion out of it
- The Committee was elected by the Town to protect their money

Member Malo suggested when out of town, the meeting is streamed on Facebook.

Minutes for 11/24/2020

Chair Smith made a motion to approve the minutes as amended.

Member Torosian seconded the motion. All members were in favor. **Vote: 6/0/0**

Member Fournier made a motion to change **Line 42151.390.00** Elder Services Other Professional Services from \$1,000 to \$1,300.

Chair Smith seconded the motion. All members were in favor. **Vote: 6/0/0**

Chair Smith said the new Fire Chief will not be able to attend next week's meeting until 8:00 p.m. He proposes that the Committee spends the time to go over the budget before he arrives.

Vice Chair Barker suggests the Committee spends some time next week on the Health Agencies.

Chair Smith made a motion to adjourn. **Member Fournier** seconded the motion. All members were in favor. **Vote: 6/0/0**

The Atkinson Budget Committee Meeting adjourned at 8:37 p.m.