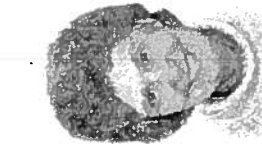


Engine still running on auto talk

Atkinson Notes

Margo Sullivan



Selectmen Chairman Philip V. Consentino held his tongue for most of Tuesday's showdown with the Budget Committee.

Consentino, who is also police chief, came under fire a few weeks ago for leasing a 2005 Ford Expedition without going through the normal channels of putting the question to Town Meeting or getting an official authorization from his own board.

The chief stepped up to the table finally to insist he didn't make a "mistake" when he picked up a 2005 Ford Expedition without the usual authorization from Town Meeting. But he will not do the same thing again, he said.

Consentino also said he thought the Budget Committee was "overstepping" its bounds by asking other police departments questions about the size of their fleet.

"I don't think it's right your board is doing that," he said.

When it was all over, Budget Committee members walked away with the answers they were seeking, even if they didn't get all the answers they wanted to hear.

For instance, Selectman Fred Childs was absolutely frank when he told the Budget Committee how he found out the new car was in the Police Department parking lot.

"The SUV was talked about," Childs said, referring to meetings when selectmen debated buying the all-wheel drive vehicle. "Did we know that he bought it? No, he went out and got it."

But Childs also said the Budget Committee should not have padded the Police Department budget if it really had not wanted Consentino to get the new car.

"Why did you give him so much money if you didn't think he was going to buy it?" Childs said.

Fred Thompson, Budget Committee vice chairman, said he had never seen the town acquire an expensive item, like a car, without going to Town Meeting, but he agreed it was time for the Budget Committee to back off earlier charges that selectmen

acquired the car illegally. Chairman Mark Acciardi said afterward he now agreed the selectmen had the legal right to use money for leasing cruisers to get the Expedition, even though they really should have voted on the lease or taken it to Town Meeting. He was satisfied because the subject had been aired in public.

Red ink and videotape

Erica Jordan, general manager of Atkinson's cable TV studio, went a few rounds with selectmen Monday over their plan to start a video archive of their meetings.

Jordan, estimating the cost of buying VHS tapes for the video library would come to about \$150 annually, wanted to know about finances.

"Would that be coming out of my budget?" she asked, prompting a response from Selectman Jack Sapia.

"You're talking like a real department head," Sapia replied. Selectmen Chairman Philip V. Consentino favored taking the videotape money out of the selectmen's budget, but Town Administrator Russell McAllister said it would be better budget policy to let Channel 20 take the money out of cable operations. This might mean going into the red in that line item, he said. But the town would gain an accurate number for the real cost of the archive, he said, making that option best as long as Jordan did not have to overspend the bottom line.

Selectman Fred Childs said that

could be avoided easily, even if Jordan had to "take a week's vacation without pay" to balance her budget.

Jordan was good-natured about the ribbing, bursting into laughter when Consentino paid her a wry compliment.

"You're doing a good job," he told her, adding "not that it's going to get you a raise."