

**TOWN OF FRANCONIA
PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING**

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 13, 2018 AT TOWN HALL

TOWN OFFICIALS PRESENT: Eric Meth, Jill Brewer, Jeff Blodgett

TOWN OFFICIALS ABSENT: None

The meeting was called to order at 7:03pm

DISCUSSION: After a brief overview of changes to this year’s budget, Chairman Brewer opened the floor to discussion.

A resident asked about the Budget Summary reflecting a 22% increase to the operating budget, and wanted to know the effect on the tax rate. After the figure was confirmed by Town Administrator Burbank, Chairman Brewer confirmed the tax increase is \$1.36 per thousand dollars of valuation.

The next discussion initiated by a resident was regarding the increases to Executive Wages and Personnel Administration. Chairman Brewer explained that these items are increasing due to salary increases for the Town Administrator and Administrative Secretary positions, as well as the proposed additions of New Hampshire Retirement System for 13 full time employees, Dental Insurance for all full-time employees, and a proposed professional Wage and Compensation Study. The resident also stated that while she supports the Town treating employees well, she doesn’t think it is being considered that the Town pays more towards employee insurance than is typical in the marketplace. The resident also opined that the Board is trying to do too much in one year.

Chairman Brewer thanked the resident for sharing her concerns and said there were other infrastructure issues that were not brought to the taxpayers this year, and that while personnel issues seem optional compared to infrastructure issues, the Board felt personnel issues were important and should not be shelved in favor of other projects.

A resident then asked why it was being proposed to spend \$7,000 for a Wage and Compensation Study when there are people in the community that are willing to reinstate the former Wages and Benefits Committee, and would have the taxpayers in mind as well as employees.

Chairman Brewer said she personally felt the \$7,000 for the study was justified to have a professional and objective study done by an impartial party.

Another resident inquired about the Executive Wage increases. Chairman Brewer said the total wage increase was \$13,055. Chairman Brewer said that after two years since the Town Administrator position was created, the Board had a chance to observe the scope of the position, acknowledge accomplishments and finished projects over that time period, and had done a comparison of other towns in the area with similar positions and felt the increase was warranted. The resident stated that he thought significant increases should be spread out over a couple years rather than given in one year.

A local business owner spoke to support the Executive Wage increases, stating that he feels they are

well deserved and in today's employment climate he sees the value of retaining good employees that would be difficult to replace.

A resident commented that she felt the Board should consider delaying some projects for future years, suggesting delaying the adoption of New Hampshire Retirement System until there are less infrastructure improvements to address.

Chairman Brewer said the Board did put some infrastructure improvements on the backburner this year and that she understands the resident's concerns. But that she also feels retirement and dental plans are important, and are past due, and it is unfair that only certain employees have access to NH Retirement. Selectman Meth said he agreed with Chairman Brewer. When asked by a resident what his opinion was, Selectman Blodgett said he felt the salary increase was too much over the span of one year and didn't support it.

A resident next asked about Article 15 – Demolish 192 Main Street, wondering why the Town didn't just sell the property as is and make the buyer pay to demolish the building. Chairman Brewer said the Board had discussed some ideas for the property and felt it was more valuable with the building removed. Selectman Meth said it was also a factor that if the Town holds the property for three years, rather than just selling it right away, it could be sold at a profit rather than just recouping the past taxes. Another resident said he felt the building was detracting from the Town's beauty and a detriment to the Main Street area. Selectman Blodgett said the building is also a safety issue.

A local restaurant and motel owner commented that the addition of low income housing would be helpful as it is difficult to find workers who can afford to live in town. Selectman Meth said it is hoped that Article 2 Zoning Ordinance Amendment will help to address the housing issue.

A resident then brought up Article 16 – Repairs to Bickford Hill Bridge, suggesting that Highway Funds and funds allotted for the Sidewalk Project could be applied to the Bickford Hill Bridge repairs, citing that the bridge would take priority over improved sidewalks and the Town's roads are in decent shape right now.

The Board was asked about Article 21 – Capital Purchases for Transfer Station, with the resident wanting to confirm that the projected cost covered all aspects of the scales, housing and installation. Transfer Station Supervisor Tim Blake said yes, the projected cost of the scale includes installation and the scale house.

The Board was next asked about Article 24 – Acquisition/Sale of Property. Town Administrator Burbank said the Article gives the Town the ability to rent or sell property for up to five years without having to go to Town Meeting. She said while there is currently no plan to do that, it is good to enact this RSA in case it is needed for the future.

The Board was asked if they were going to reevaluate anything after hearing the concerns and ideas from the townspeople on the Draft Budget. Chairman Brewer said "Of Course. We always do."

Another resident asked about the Town's planning process and whether or not there is a five year spending plan. Town Administrator Burbank said the Town does have a Capital Improvement Plan Committee that plans capital purchases around 5-10 years in advance. She said while there is no formal 5 year operating budget, it is always appropriate to be looking ahead.

A resident then commented that she had read in meeting minutes that repairs on Town Hall are being mandated by the State Fire Marshall before an Assembly Permit (to allow more than 49 people to gather) can be issued. She then asked how much those repairs were expected to be. Town Administrator Burbank said the Town has not yet sought an estimate from a contractor, but loosely speaking it is expected to be over \$200,000 to make the basement up to code. Selectman Meth commented that the Town Hall is an example of a significant capital project that has been delayed for this year.

A resident inquired about the increase in the Life Squad Budget. Chief Paul Schmucker said it is predominantly caused by an increase in Materials and Supplies. Another resident stated that some of the surplus the Life Squad generates should be put towards funding their capital purchases.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 8:19pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary