

TOWN OF FRANCONIA
PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2018 AT TOWN HALL

TOWN OFFICIALS PRESENT: Eric Meth, Bernadette Costa, Jill Brewer

TOWN OFFICIALS ABSENT: None

The meeting was called to order at 7:03pm

DISCUSSION: After a brief welcome and introduction Chairman Meth opened the floor to questions.

Steve Plant asked if the legal fees under capital reserve are for general legal fees or for Northern Pass related fees? Chairman Meth explained that those are for general legal fees and there is a warrant article to supplement the Northern Pass Defense Fund with some tax dollars on top of \$22,900 of funds raised in the donation campaign.

Dawn Steele referenced the January 29th Select Board minutes where Holly Burbank proposed a \$3000 article to contract a new website design and host company and wondered why that wasn't being pursued via warrant article. Dawn feels the site is lacking and would like to see it updated to the level of quality other towns have.

Dawn also asked about the change to town employee's insurance plans, in that new hires insurance plans are fully covered for them individually, but there is no coverage available for spouses or family members. Dawn feels this may hinder the town's ability to attract quality hires. Dawn encouraged the Board to devote more thought to this decision.

Lastly, Dawn requested the Board take three hours from Sunday morning's hours at the Transfer Station and reopen on Wednesday for a few hours instead.

Selectman Jill Brewer said the Board did look at other communities transfer stations with similar populations and this is the schedule they use.

After more discussion, Chairman Meth requested a show of hands for people that would use the Transfer Station on Wednesdays. 9 out of 22 attendees said they would use the Transfer Station on Wednesdays.

Chairman Meth said the Board would keep monitoring the situation.

Lydia Cumbee said she had similar concerns that the funds to update the town's website were taken out of the budget. "It is very important to have a professionally maintained site—it is the face of our town" and "Its time that we have a professional website." Chairman Meth said he agrees it is an important part of the town's improvement plan.

Karen Foss inquired regarding the Life Squad. She said they are projecting a surplus and asked where those funds go.

Town Administrator Holly Burbank explained that they go in the General Fund. Karen then asked if a surplus should instead be placed in a Capital Reserve Fund for future purchases.

Selectman Costa said it had been discussed in the past but a CRF had not been established for the Life Squad.

Karen Foss then asked about a 2017 surplus from the Transfer Station, and asked where those funds go?

Holly Burbank said they go into the Tri-Town Transfer Station Special Revenue Fund, held by the Treasurer. Holly said a warrant article from all three towns is needed to expend the funds, and it was discussed at the Tri-Town Budget Review but it was too late to go forward with it at that point.

Lydia Cumbee then asked about money raised from the Recreation Department fundraisers. "Can that go back into the operating budget instead of the expendable trust?" Lydia said other towns do this and use the funds to lower their taxes.

Selectman Costa said the funds they raised are used for the things they raise them for or need.

Lydia asked why they don't use it for operating expenses, such as payroll. Selectman Costa said the way things are currently done has worked very well historically for the Tri-Towns.

Kevin Johnson commented that he didn't see why it would make sense to disincentivize the Recreation Department by telling them that any funds they raise will be incorporated into their operating budget, and called the program "The Shining Star of the North Country."

Selectman Costa said people like to know where their money is going when they make a donation.

Karen Foss asked Fire Chief Gaudette regarding the line item for SCBA bottles replacement as there was no request made in 2016. Chief Gaudette said they had done maintenance on the SCBA bottles previously, but they now needed replacements, and the prices have increased as well.

Ann Foss asked about the article regarding RSA 79E Community Revitalization Tax Incentive, and how it would affect the tax rate.

Selectman Costa advised that it had not been determined how much it would affect the tax rate, the Planning Board would have to develop a policy for applying the RSA.

Cornelia Lorentzen addressed the Board to say it would be useful if the town had town sewage.

Russell Cumbee responded, and said that was his assignment to investigate. He said they had to convince the state that the need was there, and it would have put every business in the crosshairs of a state agency and incurred a massive expense.

Cornelia Lorentzen said the town would be more financially prosperous and it would benefit the town to take a more progressive attitude towards the idea.

Karen Foss commented regarding overtime hours to say that she thought the availability of such should be managed very tightly and overtime hours given only in true emergencies.

Chairman Meth said the Board agreed and have been looking at it very closely, but some departments went over their allowances.

Police Chief Mac Cashin commented to say that one reason that Police Department went over their budgeted overtime hours was coverage of vacation. He said another reason was a large drug bust that required a lot of overtime to process the crime scene in order to build a federally prosecutable case.

Karen Foss said that she understood that, but in the instance of the Transfer Station, overtime hours should be avoided.

Public Works Director Scott Leslie said Transfer Station overtime hours are largely caused by the employees working on holidays. Holly Burbank then said the town's policy is to pay employees that work on holidays double time and a half.

Virginia Mike expressed her discontent with the town using hand written time cards and asked if the town is going to address the issue of employees that are not accounted for getting overtime hours?

Holly Burbank said the issue is being addressed.

Dawn Steel then asked if the Town had considered an automated system for timekeeping.

Holly said yes, and she had looked at what Presby uses, is still looking, and would like to find something that communicates directly with QuickBooks.

Ann Foss then asked how cash is accounted for. Holly Burbank said a daily cash drawer is maintained at the Transfer Station, receipts are provided, and the drawer is balanced daily and weekly.

John LaChapelle asked if there had been any discussion about getting a scale for the Transfer Station.

Holly Burbank said the Board had been looking at it—scales are very expensive, and a portable scale was a possibility. Scott Leslie said that it was impossible to accurately estimate some loads and a scale were being considered.

Peter Grote inquired if anyone had done a study on best practices for Transfer Stations, to take a more systematic approach.

Scott Leslie said it was being worked on and a lot of changes were underway.

Steve Plant asked about articles 17 and 18, asking voters to approve funds for Fire Department turnout gear and Life Squad turnout gear. Steve asked why the coats for the Life Squad are \$2000 and Fire Department coats and pants are less expensive.

Mark Taylor said that historically EMS gear is either too stiff or bulky for medical or not strong enough for vehicle extractions. He added that biohazardous materials are another issue, and the interior lining

on the coats is protective against those materials. He said they also protect against synthetic opiates, when asked by Virginia Mike.

Steve said he had seen some extrication suits that were less expensive, and protect against biohazards as well. Mark asked him to forward him the information.

Steve said future purchases should come through the Capital Improvements Plan committee so they can be planned for. Holly Burbank explained that it was a budget line item but was removed by the Board and put on a warrant article.

Karen Foss then asked for a summary of the Water Department's priorities. Joan explained much continued focus on Mittersill, three hydrants, interior and exterior tank cleaning, a new ladder for a tank. She said the Water Department plans to have a public meeting soon. Karen also asked what would happen if there was a deficit? Holly Burbank said they could pull money out of another fund to cover it.

Russell Cumbee suggested a reward based plan to incentivize saving money among town employees.

Lydia Cumbee asked if there were any changes to the budget. The Board advised her, no changes.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 8:14pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary