

**TOWN OF FRANCONIA  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S REGULAR MEETING  
MARCH 25, 2019 AT TOWN HALL**

\*\*\*\*\*

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Eric Meth, Jill Brewer, Jeff Blodgett.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Holly Burbank, Jenny Monahan, Ginny Jeffreys, Peter Grote, Mary Grote, Dawn Steele, Karen Foss, Ann Foss, Kim Cowles, Bob Whitney, Russell Cumbee, Lynn Terres, Sandra Blodgett.

**The meeting was called to order at 3:02pm.**

Chairman Brewer opened the meeting with remarks regarding the public input at recent meetings. She said she was disappointed with the public input at the March 11, 2019 meeting and said she felt there were more respectful ways to communicate questions or concerns. She reminded that the purpose of the meeting is for the Board to conduct Town business and some boards have found it necessary to restrict public comment when it is not constructive. Selectman Meth said he would hate to see that happen, but if public comment becomes unconstructive he would agree. Selectman Blodgett said civil discourse is an important aspect of democracy.

**SIGN/APPROVE:**

The March 11, 2019 meeting minutes were approved as amended.

The March 28, 2019 Transaction List was reviewed and signed.

MS-232 – DRA Report of Appropriations Actually Voted was signed by the Board.

The Contract with Spear's Brothers for the Demolition of 192 Main Street was reviewed by the Board and signed by Chairman Brewer.

The Agreement with HEB Engineers for the engineering of the Handicap Lift was reviewed by the Board and signed by Chairman Brewer.

Bickford Hill Bridge Repair – Town Administrator Burbank said the contract had been amended to reflect the changes (narrowing bridge and making it officially one lane). She clarified that the bridge repair would be paid for as follows: \$48,700 Bridge Construction Fund, \$75,000 Highway Improvement Fund, and the remaining money would come from the Highway Block Grant. Town Administrator Burbank said she needed the Board's permission to move forward with the project, the contract signed, and votes to use the funds.

Chairman Brewer made a motion to use \$48,700 of Bridge Construction Funds for the Bickford Hill Bridge Repair. Selectman Blodgett seconded the motion. All were in favor. **Motion passes.**

Chairman Brewer made a motion to use up to \$75,000 of Highway Improvement Funds for the Bickford Hill Bridge Repair. Selectman Meth seconded the motion. All were in favor. **Motion passes.**

Chairman Brewer made a motion to use up to \$89,905 from the Highway Block Grant towards Bickford Hill Bridge Repair. Selectman Blodgett seconded the motion. All were in favor. **Motion passes.**

The Board also gave Town Administrator Burbank approval to contact HEB Engineers to move forward with the project.

Timber Tax – Map 1 Lot 2 – The Board signed the Timber Tax warrant for \$1,656.59.

A Current Use Application – Map 14 Lot 129-1 – was reviewed and approved.

A Septic System Application – Map 12 Lot 15 - was reviewed and approved. This was an amended plan approval.

Quitclaim Deed – Deer Pass Road – The Board gave their approval to execute the sale on this previously tax deeded property that was recently put out to bid.

Computer Services Contract Amendment – The Recreation laptop was added to the maintenance services contract with Certified Computer Solutions.

Record of Appointments: The Board signed the Record of Appointments for Arthur Daly to the Conservation Commission & Charles Lucasik to the Energy Committee.

### **TO DISCUSS/REVIEW:**

**Tri-Town Board Meeting Schedule (re Transfer Station):** The Board briefly discussed what dates they would be available for a meeting with the Tri-Town Boards to discuss the Transfer Station articles that were voted down in Franconia. Town Administrator Burbank will offer dates of availability to the other boards.

**Northern Borders Regional Commission Grant Opportunity** – Town Administrator Burbank said there is a grant opportunity for infrastructure improvement from the NBRC if the Town has a qualifying project. After a brief discussion, it was decided that this would be reviewed next year when the Town may be more ready to bring a project forward.

**Park View Drive – Road Takeover** – Town Administrator Burbank received a letter from Samaha, Russell and Hodgdon on behalf of the Park View Drive HOA requesting to have their road be taken over by the town. The Board agreed that Town Administrator Burbank could consult Scott Leslie and Red McCarthy in regards to the takeover of Park View Drive.

**Pay Increases – Dental Insurance - Town Employees** – Chairman Brewer prefaced this discussion by saying that she feels that the Town’s retirement plan is an embarrassment and not close to comparable with what other towns offer, but the recent budget cut makes trying to implement any improvement difficult. She suggested possibly seeking feedback from employees to see if Dental Insurance or an improved retirement option is preferred at this time.

After a brief discussion about dental plan costs, Town Administrator Burbank asked if it would be helpful to bring in the Town’s representative from Healthtrust for questions. The Selectmen said that would be helpful.

Chairman Brewer suggested researching how the currently used Valic retirement program could be improved for the employees with increased town contribution.

Selectman Meth said he had done some reading on state pension funds and learned that every state has an underfunded pension fund – not just NH. He also shared some statistics that reflect a trend of improvement and stabilization in the NH Retirement Fund. Selectman Meth concluded that he didn’t think NHRS was a bad option based on that research and feedback from several local State Representatives that do not share the same grim outlook that Senator Starr promoted at Town Meeting.

The Board then discussed employee pay increases. Chairman Brewer said that while the bottom line of the budget will have to be closely monitored throughout the year, she was comfortable moving forward with approving the employee increases for all departments. Selectman Meth said he had voted for it and still supported the pay increases. Selectman Blodgett said he would stand pat, and then when asked for clarification, verbally approved the merit raises for all departments.

Town Administrator Burbank asked to confirm that pay increases would be brought forward in the next pay cycle as the first second quarter paycheck is typically when that happens. The Board confirmed.

**CORRESPONDENCE:**

**Red Listed Bridge Report** - Town Administrator Burbank said she received the State's Red Listed Bridge Report and Franconia's Red Listed Bridge Report and that it is available for review.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

**Cable Consortium:** Did not meet this past week, will meet in April.

**Chamber of Commerce:** No update – Selectman Blodgett said the newly hired marketing associate has started and will be doing some fieldwork soon.

**Conservation Commission:** Next meeting is May 21<sup>st</sup>, 3:30pm. Chairman Brewer said during their recent meeting with NEMBA they had discussed the Borderlands collaboration and shared the mountain biking trail map.

**Energy Commission:** Selectman Meth said discussion of developing an Energy Policy for Franconia was ongoing and members were currently researching the policies of other towns. Selectman Meth said solar ideas are also being discussed and researched. Town Administrator Burbank said an energy project may be a NBRA grant possibility in the future.

**Northern Pass:** Selectman Meth said the opposition brief to the NP appeal was submitted on March 21<sup>st</sup> and the NH Supreme Court will now review the briefs and decide whether they want to take oral testimony.

**Planning Board:** Next meeting is March 26<sup>th</sup>.

**OTHER DISCUSSION:**

Chairman Brewer thanked the Town Hallinators, police and others for their participation in Lafayette Elementary School's Spelling Bee.

**PUBLIC INPUT:**

Russell Cumbee said that he is of the opinion that the Town Administrator contract negotiated in advance of Town Meeting may be in violation of Municipal Budget Law. He advised the Board that he had submitted his complaint to the Grafton County Attorney's office and was awaiting their response. Russell also said that he agreed the Town should improve the employee pension plan but that the state plan puts taxpayers at too much risk. He also suggested the Town should begin planning extra funding for the Semiquincentennial celebration in 2026.

Sandra Blodgett said she was taken aback by the intense acrimony at Town Meeting and felt better explanations of the warrant articles to voters may be helpful. When she asked if more controls should be put in place, Town Administrator Burbank said that would not be appropriate for Town Meeting in NH.

Karen Foss asked if the Board was considering reinstating the Compensation & Benefits Committee. Chairman Brewer said it had not been discussed. Karen said she thinks the committee could devote more time than the Board to research and provide more objectivity. Chairman Brewer said she had been in support of the professional study that had been removed from the budget at Town Meeting.

Jim Alden said the previous committee was professional and objective and he didn't understand why using a professional company to do a study would be better, or why the former committees recommendation's had not been followed.

Ginny Jeffreys asked for clarification about what had been decided about employee retirement. Chairman Brewer said there had been no decisions made today about employee retirement. Ginny also said the Board should consider removing the line items that were associated with the budget cut. Ginny also said she thinks there is distrust in the Board's decision making currently and that was reflected at Town Meeting.

Karen Foss commented that specific aspects of the 2019 Proposed Budget could not be disputed until after the Budget Hearing because a line item budget was not provided.

Jim Alden said he was disappointed that the Town Administrator's contract had been executed prior to Town Meeting and he did not feel the general public had been made aware of that, and feels the information was willfully withheld from voters.

Chairman Brewer said the new contract was discussed at the budget hearing and the explanation of the raise was stated as a new two year Town Administrator contract.

Dawn Steele said she thinks Town Office should be open hours that are similar to Ashland, Holderness, Thornton, and Campton, if salary comparisons are going to be drawn from those towns. She also said that if Town Hall will be closed outside of normal operating hours it should be posted to the Town's website in advance, because the day Town Office was closed for 6 hours for training, a number of people brought it to her attention.

After asking the Board for permission to comment, Town Secretary Jenny Monahan stated that she felt the campaign against raises for two employees (Town Administrator and Town Secretary) had become abusive and tarnished the reputation of the Town rather than promote it as a great place to live and visit. She said a non-resident who attended Town Meeting mentioned to her that they were glad they did not reside in Franconia. She also questioned as to why significant merit increases in other departments went undisputed while she and Town Administrator Burbank's were repeatedly shared with the local news outlets and published on the "Get to Know Franconia" Facebook page.

Sandra Blodgett said that she felt Town Meeting became somewhat vicious and antagonistic, and while she knows everyone involved loves the town, wishes there was more focus on the positive things happening in town currently.

With no further input, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous voice vote at 5:05pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Monahan  
Administrative Secretary