**TOWN OF FRANCONIA**

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN’S REGULAR MEETING**

**MONDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2022 AT 6:00PM AT TOWN HALL**

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**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT:** Dan Walker, Jill Brewer, Eric Meth

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Kim Cowles, John Brooks, Allan Clark, Steve Plant, Kevin Johnson, Jim David, Tom Ganse, Jim Fitzpatrick, Jayne O’Connor, Tim Cowles, Anne Cowles, Paul Schmucker, Eric Rasmussen, Dawn Steele, Virginia Mike, Janice Cole, Larry & Karen Plate, Mary & Peter Grote, Ann Foss, Karen Foss, Lynn Terres, Mike & Tina Betley, and Jim & Carol Walker.

**The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm**

**APPOINTMENTS/WORK SESSIONS**:

**Tom Ganse, Franconia Soaring Foundation**, gave a presentation on the history of the air field/airport and the proposed plans for a new building at the Soaring Center that will be used for educational opportunities for the Soaring Center as well as general community use. There was lengthy discussion on the building use, safety issues, and noise from the aircraft and its impact on residents.

**Paul Schmucker, Life Squad Chief**, came in to discuss plans moving forward with the Life Squad and what the Board sees as their responsibilities. Is the Life Squad going to transport or act as a First Responder and then Littleton will transport? There was lengthy discussion regarding the lack of volunteers, lack of housing for people who would be interested in volunteering, and the need to know that an ambulance will be coming when it is needed. Paul also noted the importance of having one person be in charge of both fire and ambulance, which is done in other towns, but not here in Franconia.

**PUBLIC COMMENT**

There were comments made regarding the importance of having someone in town act as a First Responder at a scene while waiting for an ambulance to arrive from Littleton. It was also suggested to think of alternative incentives to get people to volunteer such as offering a season pass at one of the ski mountains.

Allan Clark stated that he spoke to five of the seven members of the Life Squad that live in the area and they are willing to go as non-transporting EMS/First Responders as long as they do not go to Lafayette Center or Cannon Mountain in the winter. He would propose that the town maintain the ambulance as a licensed transport so if you have a person that needs to get to the hospital immediately or an accident with multiple people, you have a licensed ambulance here. He will be putting together a proposal in that regard.

There were many comments centered around the Town Administrator position, the proposed salary and job responsibilities.

There was concern that the Administrative Secretary recently resigned and if an agreement is not reached, the current TA will be leaving. It takes time to find the right person for a position, time to train them and bring them up to speed, so it would be better to pay the extra money and keep the town moving forward. Several residents spoke in favor of the Board doing what is necessary to keep the current TA in the position by meeting her salary request.

It was stated that the Selectmen are voted in by the residents and when the Board makes a decision, it needs to hold with that decision whether people agree with it or not. The Board should move forward and not come back and have discussions about something that has already been decided.

**TO DISCUSS/REVIEW;**

**Town Administrator position –** The Board decided to address this matter at this time since it was brought up during public comment.

Kim stated that discussions to transition to a full-time TA began in November of 2021; however, it was agreed to wait until the end of the contract, which is this month. Kim stated she met several times with the Board and offered concessions each time in an attempt to find an agreement. Kim stated the previous TA was on par to make $70k in 2020, and with COLA adjustments, would have been making $75,700 this year, which is a $.60 an hour difference in the salary she is requesting. She noted that the previous TA position did not include DPW responsibilities which are now included in her position. Kim also noted that she is a resident and taxpayer, has given over 30 years of service to this community and has demonstrated a willingness to help across all departments and work with everyone in town. She believes these traits and additional job responsibilities warrant the salary she is requesting.

Kim stated that the Board has not formally accepted her resignation and has denied her request to meet with them. She is willing to work with the Board to find a solution.

Eric discussed some of Kim’s qualifications and accomplishments, her devotion and love for the town and community. He stated if the Board cannot defend Kim and her resume then the Board is not fulfilling its duty and commitment to serve the community of Franconia to the best of its ability. Eric stated that a resident wrote to him that a smart, knowledgeable administrator is the backbone of the town. He considers Kim’s salary request a well worth investment for our community.

Jill stated that this has been the most difficult thing she has had to deal with on this board. Jill agreed that discussions started last year but started in earnest on this budget in October. There were several non-public discussions with the entire Board as well as a couple of one-on-one conversations between Jill and Kim. Jill stated she considers Kim to be a good friend and an extremely devoted community member and she understands what Kim has brought to this town, things that would not have happened without Kim; however, the Board is tasked to adhere to the TA position right now. Jill feels they have had two months of negotiations during this budget season and there were no concessions on Kim’s part, and any sort of negotiating or talking needed to happen during that time and not after the letter of resignation was submitted.

Jill made a motion to accept Kim’s letter of resignation that was submitted last Monday, December 12th, from the Town Administrator position. Jill stated the Board could not accept it for the Rec Director position because that is not in the Board’s purview. There was no second to the motion and no vote was taken.

Dan stated that the Board is aware that Kim is overworked doing the two positions and she gives more time to both than what she’s paid for. He has been struggling with how to solve that by getting Kim down to one job that is 40 hours. When Jenny gave her notice Dan thought some of that money could be used to get Kim’s salary up, but then we’re asking Kim to do two jobs again so we’re right back where we were.

Dan asked if a decision had to be made tonight. Kim stated she doesn’t know how long she can hang on. Eric reiterated that he felt the Board was doing a disservice to the town if we let someone like Kim go. Jill stated that it is not Kim, it is the salary being offered for anyone for that position. It is a really high salary according to the data they have collected and that is what she feels can be defended at town meeting.

**TO SIGN/APPROVE:**

The December 19, 2022, Transaction Report was reviewed and signed by the Selectmen.

The December 12, 2022, Transaction Report was re-signed by the Selectmen because the previous report was missing the check numbers.

The minutes of December 5, 2022, were approved as amended.

The minutes of December 12, 2022, were approved as amended.

**TOWN ADMINISTRATOR UPDATE:**

Kim stated she received an invoice from Smith & Pospesil which needs to be discussed. Jill stated the Conservation Commission is hoping to do a survey on the piece of property that was purchased on Route 18 (Tax Map 17-2 and 17-3) which is part of the process to hopefully approve at town meeting an easement being put on this property. The Conservation Commission is asking the Select Board to authorize payment for this deposit, which is a 50% deposit of $2,400.00 towards the survey and this would come from the Conservation Fund.

Jill made a motion that the Select Board authorize payment from the Conservation Fund in the amount of $2,400.00 to pay Smith & Pospesil Land Surveying Company for their surveying. Second by Eric with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Kim stated the skid steer for the transfer station has not yet been delivered but they are promising it by the end of the week. The one issue is the solid tires on it. Kim has the invoice and the check is actually in the transaction list the Selectmen just signed. This is the last week that we can put it in to go to the Trustees of the Trust Fund to have the money come out of the capital reserve fund as it was voted on. Kim spoke with Steve Plant and Janice Cole to make sure they are following the correct procedure, but if the Selectmen are amenable to this, we will have the check ready to go and if it gets delivered before the Trustees of the Trust Fund meet on Wednesday, we’ll accept it and pay for it. After that it’s too late to get it in for this calendar year. I am asking the Selectmen to sign off on the invoice right now so if it all goes through then

it is ready, but we are not going to hand over the check until it’s delivered. The Board agreed to have Jill sign the invoice.

Kim stated the legal budget is overspent by $7,482.10 and she is requesting a motion be made to take that much money out of the capital reserve fund, which the Selectmen are agents to expend on, and that will keep us on budget.

Eric made a motion to expend $7,482.10 from the Legal Capital Reserve Fund to the legal budget, second by Jill with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Kim stated she received a check for $250.00 to be used for charitable purposes which she would like to deposit into the General Fund and put it in the welfare line. Since it is the end of the year, perhaps we should hold on to the check until after the first of the year to deposit it. Since it is under $5,000.00, we do not need to get the voters involved, but the BOS need to agree to accept the donation of $250.00.

Eric made a motion to accept the $250.00 charitable check, second by Dan with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Kim stated she received the invoice for the license plates, which is $9,032.00. She did not get a chance to look up how many plates have been sold already, but 400 were ordered. She requested the Select Board sign off on paying the invoice.

Dan asked to go back to the December 12th, minutes and the cost-of-living increase of 3%. The Board has not discussed it, but it seems reasonable in terms of letting department heads know so they can move forward as far as planning and presenting budgets. The Board was in agreement. Jill stated it can always be adjusted.

**Town Administrator Position:**

Dan stated after reviewing his own feelings, listening to Eric tonight and input he received from the town, he is willing to support the salary Kim is requesting. He acknowledged this is only the first step and it has to be presented at town meeting; however, he will support it with Eric.

There was additional discussion regarding the negotiation process, the lack of compromise on both sides during negotiations, the effect this request will have on town meeting, and much of the same discussion that had previously taken place.

The next BOS meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, January 3, 2023, at 6:00pm

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Wills