

**TOWN OF FRANCONIA
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S REGULAR MEETING
DECEMBER 28, 2020 AT 3PM HELD REMOTELY VIA ZOOM**

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Kim Cowles, Jenny Monahan.

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

APPOINTMENTS:

3:00 – Town Moderator Jim Walker – Town Meeting Format: Jim said he considers there to be several different options for this year's town meeting: conduct the meeting normally but with PPE, hold a segregated meeting where groups would be in separate rooms and audio would be wired in, hold an entirely virtual meeting or postpone the meeting until it can be held more safely.

Chairman Brewer said the board hasn't discussed methods for holding town meeting and do not have a formal opinion at this time. Jim said legislation is being drafted that may give towns more options for conducting the meeting. Chairman Brewer suggested that Jim attend another selectmen's meeting to discuss the options after the proposed legislation is finalized. Jim said he would do some more research and update the board at a later time.

There was then a brief discussion about what the warrant is looking like. Town Administrator Cowles said currently it is mostly appropriation requests. Jim said if the warrant could be trimmed to just a few articles and didn't include any articles that require a ballot vote the meeting could be delayed more easily until it can be held outside or more people have been vaccinated. He said that if the meeting was delayed, the town could conduct regular business but there could be no new spending that was to be proposed in the warrant.

3:15 - Discussion on draft letter to dining establishments to recommend curbside and outdoor service:

Chairman Brewer said Covid cases in the area do not seem to be escalating at the rate they were at last discussion and the previously proposed letter to eating establishments asking that they consider curtailing indoor dining for a time does not need to be sent at this time. The selectmen briefly discussed that there was a rumor that the board was mandating that restaurants close, but the proposed letter was going to ask that restaurants consider not offering indoor dining, not mandate that they do not offer indoor dining.

TO SIGN/APPROVE:

The December 28, 2020 transaction list was reviewed and signed by the Selectmen remotely.

The December 14, 2020 minutes were approved as amended.

TO DISCUSS/REVIEW

Town Administrator Update: Town Administrator Cowles said she has been working with Life Squad Chief Paul Schmucker to finalize his plan to purchase a storage shed for the Safety Services Building. She said the funds for the shed can come from the Life Squad budget surplus and that their budget has been offset by Covid grant funds.

Town Administrator Cowles said she spoke with the City of Portsmouth attorney about the education funding formula. She said it is being reconfigured and may affect the town's education tax in the future. She will keep the board abreast of this as she learns more.

CORRESPONDENCE: None.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Cable Consortium: Selectman Meth said he received an invite to the Grafton County Broadband Committee and attended their meeting remotely. For the time being, the committee is being kept small but it is anticipated that more towns will be invited to participate in the near future. There will be a zoom meeting tomorrow at 8:30pm attended by local residents, officials and Representative Tim Egan regarding reliable broadband/internet access for our local communities.

Chamber of Commerce: Selectman Blodgett said the Chamber is having a virtual meeting on Thursday the 17th.

Conservation Commission: Chairman Brewer said Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust closed on the Van Pelt's property and is currently working on some plans for driveway improvements and a kiosk.

Energy Commission: Selectman Meth said the Energy Committee met on the 15th and mainly reviewed previous business.

Planning Board: Selectman Meth said there is a meeting scheduled for December 29th at 7pm via Zoom for an application for a Wireless Telecom Facility.

CIP: Selectman Blodgett said CIP has not met recently and is working on their recommendations for the selectmen.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION: Selectmen Blodgett said Bob Montagno of the Franconia ArtWalk Association is considering alternate sites for art exhibits due to the proposed paving of Main Street. He suggested using the lower meadow next to the river across from Hillwinds and spoke with Scott Leslie about the feasibility of installing a ramp for public access. It was briefly discussed that permitting would likely be needed due to the proximity to the river. Chairman Brewer suggested having Bob attend a meeting to further discuss what he is considering.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Cornelia Loritzen commented that she was contacted by someone who told her the rumor that the restaurants were being shut down. Cornelia requested that if the topic of the town's eateries comes up again that restaurant owners are informed that it is on the agenda so they can attend. Town Administrator Cowles said the town is publishing a weekly newsletter that would be a good way for residents and businesses to stay informed.

Jade Monahan said she felt the omission of the word “consider” in the minutes made it seem like the board was mandating restaurant closures. Jade also said that she didn’t think restaurant owners need Covid safety reminders and with mental health issues on the uptick due to the pandemic, having less social venues could exacerbate that issue.

Karen Foss said that she would like the town to have a Salary & Benefits Committee look into the proposed increase to employee’s retirement contribution to match the amount that members of NH Retirement System receive.

John DeVivo, General Manager of Cannon Mountain Ski Area, commented that the mountain has worked very hard to be compliant with state safety mandates during the pandemic but keeping indoor dining open is critical to their many employees and local economy.

Dawn Steele commented about the proposed retirement increase and offered her professional experience to assist with that committee. Dawn also asked about the department budgets not currently being on the website. Town Administrator Cowles said she is updating them and will put them up as soon as they are done.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:20pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary