

TOWN OF FRANCONIA
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2021 AT 6:00PM AT TOWN HALL

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Kim Cowles, Jenny Monahan, Dawn Steele, Mary & Peter Grote, Lynn Terres, Dr. Ginny Jeffryes, Duffi Pratt, Aaron Johnson, Janice Cole, Jack McEnany, Peter Gignac, Trevor Presby, John DeVivo, Paul Rivera, Thad Presby, Gene Young, Officer Pomeroy.

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm

APPOINTMENTS/WORK SESSIONS

6:00pm – Dr. Duffy – Town Wide Mask Mandate: Dr. Duffy consulted with the board to share his opinion on whether or not a town wide mask mandate would be effective in preventing the spread of Covid-19. He said that while he supports mask wearing indoors in small spaces, he does not believe that a town wide mask mandate for indoor public spaces would affect much due to the mandate only being within the town and not in surrounding towns, or statewide as well. Selectmen Meth asked Dr. Duffy if the National Guard and FEMA coming to the state to assist the state with handling the current outbreak gives him pause, and Dr. Duffy said yes, but the big difference between this year and last is the vaccine and at this point in the pandemic, while we are dealing with the prevalent strains, this is a pandemic of the unvaccinated. He said that while he is a strict public health person, he does not feel that a mask mandate in the town would have much effect and from a practicality standpoint, enforcement would be difficult.

Dr. Ginny Jeffryes commented that per the CDC, mask wearing indoors in public spaces is recommended in places of high transmission, and NH and the North Country area are currently places of high transmission. She said that in some stores, very few people are masked and some areas aren't well vaccinated. Dr. Duffy said we should wait until the Omicron strain is present and reevaluate, as we are currently dealing with the Delta strain and for that strain, the vaccine is very effective in preventing serious illness and hospitalization.

6:30pm – Trevor Presby – Regionalization: Trevor said that there has been interment discussion for some time about regionalizing safety services with surrounding towns but there hasn't been active pursuit in making this happen. He said there are large capital purchases for the Life Squad and Fire Department on the horizon and the towns should be discussing the future of safety services proactively so they can be ready when regionalization becomes a necessity due to the present issue of shrinking departments regionally. The board said this could be revisited at the next tri-town meeting in January.

TO SIGN/APPROVE:

The December 13, 2021 transaction list was reviewed and signed by the selectmen.

The December 6th, 2021 minutes were approved as written on a motion from Chairman Brewer and a second from Selectman Meth with all voting in favor.

CONTINUED DISCUSSION – MASK MANDATE: The board briefly discussed the mask mandate again. They said resident feedback on the issue was about 50/50, generally with businesses voicing their opposition and private residents voicing their support. Selectman Walker asked Chief Cashing for his input, and Chief stated that enforcement wasn't a big issue last time, with few issues occurring. He said the consequences can be tricky to leverage because its predominantly removal of the offending individual which doesn't yield much long-term affect.

Cannon Mountain Ski Area General Manager John DeVivo commented to say that Franconia Ski Club has a mask mandate in place as well as the food service company at the mountain. He said he had wanted to put one in place for the Tucker Brook Learning Center but did not have he authority. He said he was not there to request that the town institute a mask mandate or not institute a mask mandate and that watching the situation closely was in order and at some point, it may become necessary as his main objective is protection of the mountain's employees. He said that currently, approximately 60-80 percent of visitors to the ski area are masking on their own accord.

The board agreed to revisit the topic regularly and reevaluate as necessary.

TO DISCUSS/REVIEW:

Northern Pass Defense Fund: Town Administrator Cowles said she had researched the expenditures on Northern Pass legal defense and there were \$78,363 over the course of three years. She said \$70,000 was raised through taxation, \$26,748 were received by donation and after the expenses, there remains \$18,384 to be dispersed respectively to 133 donors. She has sent this information to town counsel for evaluation and assistance with drafting a letter to be sent to the donors asking what they would like to do with the remaining portion of their donation; re-donate to the town for something else or receive a refund? She will update the board when advisory is received.

Employee Handbook: Town Administrator Cowles said she is working on updating and clarifying the employee policies and handbook and the PTO portion in particular so she can provide accurate and clear policies to the two new full-time hires at the Highway Department. She asked the board to review the PTO policy and this will be revisited at a later date.

Correspondence: Correspondence received was already discussed during the Mask Mandate portion of the meeting.

Stale Check Letter: Town Administrator Cowles said she and Treasurer Steve Plant have been on working on cleaning up the checking account. She said there are numerous stale checks since 2017. The board reviewed the 2021 Quickbooks Journal Entries and approved. The board also approved adding a "void after 180 days" date to the next order of town checks.

Town Administrator Update: Town Administrator Cowles said the Dept. of Revenue Administration (DRA) made a mistake on the tax rate for all towns in the Profile School District. For Franconia, this meant a difference of \$3,000 that would need to be collected via a second issue tax bill. However, DRA allowed Town Administrator Cowles to change the Capital Overlay amount by \$3,000 which prevented the need for a second round of tax bills.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Broadband Initiative: Selectman Meth distributed the contract for the NH Broadband Planning Network (NHBPN, which he hopes the town will become a part of with Sugar Hill as previously discussed. He corrected that the joint contract amount he gave before is incorrect; he initially said \$3,500 each but it is actually \$3,750 each. He said he hopes the town will become a part of this initiative, especially in light of the meeting Senator Shaheen had on Friday, where it was stated that NH expects more than 100 million dollars from the federal government for broadband investment. Selectman Meth added that contracting with Carol Miller (NHBPN), would employ her assistance in applying for those monies and grants as well as other guidance.

Chamber of Commerce: No update at this time.

Conservation Commission: Chairman Brewer said the CC is planning to meet December 16th at 4pm at town hall.

Energy Commission: Selectman Meth said the EC has not confirmed their next meeting date yet.

Planning Board: Selectman Meth said the Planning Board meets tomorrow, Tuesday the 14th at 7pm at town hall.

CIP: The CIP met with Chief Cashin last week to review the estimate for a replacement Dodge Charger Cruiser and gave him their approval to order the car so he is hopefully able to have the replacement in 2022 rather than 2023. He said the PD will be keeping the old cruiser as the trade in offer was extremely low.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Dawn Steele said she recalled that when John Monaghan was hired as Chief of Police, the town approached Sugar Hill and Easton about regionalizing police services and said she would be happy to talk to Town Administrator Cowles about what happened.

Dawn Steele asked for more detail about the duties of the two new full-time employees (one for Highway Department, one for multiple departments)

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:12pm on a motion from Chairman Brewer and a second from Selectman Walker with all voting in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary

These minutes of the Town of Franconia Select Board have been recorded by its Secretary. Though believed to be accurate and correct they are subject to additions, deletions and corrections by the Select Board at its next meeting when the Board votes its final approval of the minutes. They are being made available at this time to conform to the requirements of New Hampshire RSA 91-A:2.

DRAFT