

TOWN OF FRANCONIA
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S REGULAR MEETING
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2021 AT 3PM VIA ZOOM

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

OTHERS PRESENT: Kim Cowles, Jenny Monahan, various online attendees.

The meeting was called to order at 3:00pm.

TO SIGN/APPROVE:

The February 1, 2021 meeting minutes were approved as amended.

The February 8, 2021 transaction list was reviewed and signed by the Selectmen remotely.

APPOINTMENTS:

Final Budget Review before Budget Hearing: Chairman Brewer remarked that regarding the Police Department Budget, the Part-Time Wages line has been reduced by 50% but that residents may expect that line to be reduced more due to the addition of the fourth full-time officer. It was briefly discussed that as one full-time officer is deployed, the part-time wages need to be more substantial than originally anticipated. Town Administrator Cowles said that the deployed officer's regular wages must be retained in the budget in the event that the officer returns to work.

A petitioned warrant article, Article 3, was also discussed. This article states that COLA increases or stipends for employees would not be granted retroactively back to January 1st but would begin on April 1st instead. Town Administrator Cowles commented that this article is detrimental to employees financially and to employee morale. She said the amount of money saved is around \$3,000 total and does not provide a meaningful tax savings for residents, but the money is meaningful to employees. Other comments were made by the article's petitioner, Dawn Steele, but technical difficulties with the zoom meeting's audio prevented Jenny Monahan from being able to hear what was stated.

Town Meeting Plans: Town Administrator Cowles said the Budget Hearing will be held on Tuesday, February 16th at 6:00pm at Lafayette Regional School in the multi-purpose room. The election will be held on Tuesday, March 9th from 1pm-7pm at town hall. Town Meeting is currently proposed to be held on either Friday, April 2nd or Friday, April 9th at Profile High School at 6:00pm. Profile School's advisory committee is meeting Thursday to discuss and will provide their recommendation to Town Administrator Cowles thereafter. Town Administrator Cowles said Profile's gym can seat 120 people socially distanced at 6' apart and the floor space can accommodate another 200 people socially distanced at 6' apart.

TO DISCUSS/REVIEW

Tax Abatement Recommendation – Map 18 Lot 8 – 1251 Profile Road: The town's assessor, Dave Woodward of Avitar Associates of New England, recommended this property be granted an abatement due to the removal of several outbuildings that resulted in a \$5,500 reduction in the total parcel value.

Chairman Brewer made a motion to approve the abatement for a \$5,500 property value reduction for 1251 Profile Road for the 2020 tax year. Selectman Blodgett seconded the motion with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Chairman Brewer will sign the abatement paperwork at town hall.

Draft Warrant: Chairman Brewer said there are 27 articles on the warrant this year. Town Administrator Cowles said the warrant is on the website in a slide show format for viewing by the public.

CORRESPONDENCE: None.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Cable Consortium: Selectman Meth said the Broadband Initiative Committee met on January 29th with residents from Franconia, select board members from Easton and a select board member and a resident from Sugar Hill as well as State Representative Tim Egan. The warrant article seeks to establish a committee to participate in the North Country Local Communications District. Funding options for broadband infrastructure were also discussed.

Chamber of Commerce: Next meeting is February 17th.

Conservation Commission: Chairman Brewer said the CC is meeting February 17th at 3:00pm at the circle at the end of McKenzie Woods Road to visit a 65 acre parcel that was recently purchased by T&T Investments as well as a 94 acre parcel that includes the majority of acreage of conserved land by the airport that is currently listed for sale. The parcels are involved in the Profile Trail network in that area, which the committee would like to discuss with Planning Board Chair Thad Presby and a representative from the McKenzie Woods Homeowners Association.

Energy Commission: Selectman Meth said the next meeting is scheduled for February 16th at 4:30pm.

Planning Board: Selectman Meth said the Planning Board meets tomorrow the 9th at 7pm via Zoom and the only agenda item is the Master Plan.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Mary Grote asked which room at Lafayette Elementary School the budget hearing will be held in. Town Administrator Cowles said it will be in the multi-purpose room.

Dawn Steele asked if the CARES grant funds awarded to the town were used entirely. Town Administrator Cowles said the funds were used entirely. Dawn also commented that regarding the discussions she has initiated about employee wages/salary increases, she also thinks some people should make more than they currently are and it is not her intent to punish people.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION

Chief Cashin, having joined the meeting after it was in process, commented that he is available for any questions about his budget. Chairman Brewer updated him on the earlier discussion about the Police Department's Part-Time Wages budget being reduced by 50% but that it may be still perceived as too high by residents after hiring the fourth full-time officer. Chief Cashin said that as one full-time officer is currently deployed, the part-time officers will be instrumental to the department to provide coverage and assist during unanticipated times of need.

There was also a brief discussion about absentee voting and when a new selectman would be seated—before town meeting or after town meeting. Town Clerk/Tax Collector Carol Wills said due to the election being held prior to town meeting, a new selectman would be in effect at Town Meeting.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 3:50pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary