

TOWN OF FRANCONIA
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S REGULAR MEETING
FEBRUARY 1, 2021 AT 3PM HELD REMOTELY 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.

APPOINTMENTS:

None

TO SIGN/APPROVE:

The February 1, 2021 transaction list was reviewed and signed by the Selectmen remotely.

The January 25, 2021 meeting minutes were approved as amended.

TO DISCUSS/REVIEW

Draft Warrant Article Review:

Chief Gaudette – Airpacks Purchase: Following up on a previous discussion with the selectmen, Chief Gaudette reported that the ten air packs that are needed to replace the expiring air packs will cost \$103,850. He said there is approximately \$97,000 in the CIP capital reserve fund but does not know if those funds should be used entirely or partially with the remainder coming from a warrant article. Chief Gaudette said air packs have a fifteen year useful life regardless of whether or not they are still testing effectively and after that age are supposed to be destroyed. He also stated that the National Fire Protection Agency standard for the amount of air packs a department should have is greater than the ten that Franconia's department has and the number of packs should be increased in the future. Chief Gaudette said grant inquiries were made with FEMA but he was informed they would likely not qualify. It was discussed that \$10,000 from the Fire Department budget's SCBA Bottle and Turnout Gear line items and approximately half the capital reserve fund as well as a warrant article for \$50,000 may be a good way to fund the purchase.

Draft Warrant Article Review: Town Administrator Cowles sent the selectmen the draft warrant via email for their review over the weekend. She said there are two more appropriation requests to be added that were just received. Town Moderator Walker suggested combining the appropriation requests into one article for this year in an effort to shorten the meeting due to the pandemic. He said the selectmen have the authority to make this change if they wish. Town Administrator Cowles said the non-profit appropriation articles used to be condensed into one vote but this was changed by a floor vote at a previous town meeting. She will check with town counsel to make sure the change can be made by the selectmen.

Town Administrator Update: Town Administrator Cowles said Tina Peabody has resigned as treasurer effective immediately after the election. She said that if she is elected she will not continue to serve. Town Administrator Cowles said Tina has been the town's treasurer since 1981. The selectmen remarked what a tremendous service Tina has done for the town.

Town Administrator Cowles said she and Carol Wills took some measurements at Lafayette Elementary over the

weekend to see if it would be a good space to hold town meeting. The multi-purpose room is 50' x 75' and the stage could also be used. This should accommodate 100-130 people. She also measured the fire station and said it is 40' x 106' which would fit 30 more people than the school. There are parking challenges with the fire station though. Regarding setting the date, Town Clerk Carol Wills said she would prefer having the election on the second Tuesday in March and town meeting in April. Town Moderator Jim Walker said he prefers a later meeting date and would be concerned that if more people than could be safely accommodated with social distance came to the meeting this could create difficulties for some residents. The budget hearing was also discussed, and the selectmen decided to schedule the budget hearing for February 16th at 5:30pm to be held at the Safety Services Building. A decision was not made regarding when town meeting will be held.

CORRESPONDENCE:

Franconia Soaring Foundation sent a letter to the selectmen informing them of their plan to replace their existing shack with a multi functional operations center.

Dawn Steele wrote to the selectmen requesting to discuss the \$2 an hour pay increase given to Administrative Secretary Jenny Monahan. Chairman Brewer said the position has grown since the town no longer has a full time town administrator. Chairman Brewer noted that the Administrative Secretary is handling accounts payable and we were formerly paying a Municipal Resources Inc. (MRI) employee \$45 an hour to do it instead so are using MRI less than was estimated, saving the town money.

Dawn remarked that she would like the town hall to be open more hours if more funds will be spent on wages. Dawn also noted that the Administrative Secretary position wage has increased 20% over three years while another position has increased by 4%. Dawn also said that Chief Mac Cashin is only making 1.5% more than his predecessor, John Monaghan was at the time of departing employment with the town. Dawn is concerned that the police department is not receiving COLA increases this year and also that the proposed COLA increase is 2% instead of the 1% that federal employees receive. Dawn questioned proposed stipend of \$1000 annually for each selectman. Town Administrator Cowles said she researched other towns and many other towns pay stipends to their selectmen significantly higher than \$1000. She also remarked that for the Administrative Secretary position the average pay in this area is \$19.50 per hour and inter-department salary comparisons are not reasonable comparisons.

Jayne O'Connor commented that the Woodstock selectmen are each paid \$4,800 annually.

Dawn also commented that the new transfer station employee is at \$14.79 and perhaps should be raised to \$15 as there has been discussion of a federal mandate for a \$15 minimum wage.

Mary Grote commented that she did not think it was fair that Administrative Secretary Jenny Monahan had to listen to herself be discussed and also that she does not support the selectmen receiving a stipend. Chairman Brewer said that Jenny Monahan was consulted and it was her decision to discuss the matter in public session rather than non public session and opted to attend rather than be absent. Regarding the stipend for the selectmen, Chairman Brewer said that the issue would be decided by the voting body. Town Administrator Cowles said that it was she that proposed providing a stipend for the selectmen and not the selectmen themselves.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:

Broadband/Internet Initiative: Selectman Meth Grafton County Broadband Committee had planned to meet on 1/27 but did not. He said the local committee (which may soon be officially named North Country Communications District Committee) met on Jan. 29th and discussed a variety of relative topics to include new construction, fiber to driveway versus fiber to door, state level initiatives and others with Representative Tim Egan in attendance. Selectman Meth said he learned there is fiber optics strung down Rtes 116, 18 and 302 but they are not able to be accessed at this time.

Selectman Meth said the committee would like to have a warrant article establishing a communication district planning committee.

Chamber of Commerce: No update.

Conservation Commission: No update.

Energy Commission: The next meeting is February 16th but it may need to be rescheduled due to the budget hearing being held on the same day and close to the same time.

Planning Board: Selectman Meth said the Planning Board met last Tuesday the 26th and discussed the Master Plan. They are seeking a new member. The next meeting is Tuesday Feb. 9th at 7pm.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Mary Grote commented that she would like to see town meeting be later, such as June, as she thinks people will be afraid to attend.

Jayne O'Connor asked if the meetings could be conducted via zoom or a hybrid zoom/in person combination and this idea was briefly discussed as a potential possibility.

Dawn Steele asked if it is financially beneficial to do the sidewalk project at the same time NHDOT is paving the road. The answer was yes.

Jayne O'Connor suggested advance education about zoom so voters could have the app downloaded and familiarize themselves with its functioning.

Dawn Steele asked if the \$15,000 that is recommended in the warrant article to be used to fund Life Squad equipment is the amount recommended by the CIP. Kim said this is the amount that is under spent in their expenditures. Dawn had additional questions about this and Town Administrator Cowles invited her to call her or email her to discuss as she did not have the information handy.

Dawn next asked for the Dept. of Labor report to be put on the website.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 4:31pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary

****Correction: Page 2, paragraph 1 – The budget hearing was later rescheduled for February 16, 2021 at 6pm at Lafayette Elementary School.**