

TOWN OF FRANCONIA
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S REGULAR MEETING
TUESDAY, JANUARY 18, 2022 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 Jeffries, Larry Plate, Virginia Mike, Mike Betley, Rick Gaudette.

The meeting was called to order at 6:02pm

APPOINTMENTS/WORK SESSIONS

6:00pm – Building Official Allan Clark – Welcome Center: Allan said he has been working with Town Administrator Cowles on the plan for the proposed Welcome Center. He said the plan is for a 1600 ft, multi-purpose building with office space for the Chamber of Commerce, a foyer for pamphlets and other information, a warming area to replace the current warming hut, two public bathrooms and a storage area. He noted that an RFP was published in the fall but only one proposal was received and with current pricing of materials and increased labor costs during the pandemic, the proposal was almost twice what the town had available for funding. Allan said the RFP is being revised and the scope limited in the hopes of getting better pricing. He says the building will be very energy efficient and he recommends radiant floor heat is used as it would not allow above floor fixtures to become damaged and because it's a very comfortable heat. He said there was originally discussion of the building being solar powered but he sees this as a separate project. He would not recommend roof mount solar and feels that a ground mount solar array could be done at a different time and there are other options for locations. He said the building would be heated with electricity with propane as a back-up. Energy Commission Chair Jim Fitzpatrick commented that there has been discussion of creating a warrant article in the future asking voters to support a ground mount solar array that the building could be tied into.

Corey Rush – Buildings & Grounds Budget Review: Corey said New Equipment was underspent but he would like to keep the line the same as he will need to purchase some attachments for the new mower he is scheduled to purchase this year. He said Buildings Maintenance was a little over budget due to seal coating the Safety Services parking lot and putting in the new walkway at town hall. Town Administrator Cowles said the proposed wages include a 5.5% COLA increase.

Jeremy Hall – Highway Department Budget Review: This budget is largely the same as last year. Jeremy said Wages are increased in the 2022 budget due to the addition of a new employee who is a certified mechanic and the proposed COLA increase. His fuel line was overspent due to increased prices but he is not requesting an increase in that line as he can get better pricing from the state. He has increased his culverts line in the hopes of replacing some failing culverts this year. The Vehicle Maintenance/Repairs line was overspent but he is hoping the new employee will offset those expenses in the future as much of the work can be done in-house. Town Administrator Cowles noted that Wages are also increased as the former Road Agent/Public Works Director's salary was taken from three budgets rather than just the Highway Budget. Selectman Walker commented that there should be

savings across multiple departments as the town's new mechanic can work on all town vehicles, not just the Highway Departments.

Paul Schmucker – Life Squad Budget Review and Life Squad Run Card: Paul said the Life Squad's 2022 budget will be very similar to the 2021 budget. He does not anticipate needing to raise his budget but expects some funds will need to be recategorized. He said that in 2021 his department had a surplus of \$47,000. He would like to raise the wages for his employees to \$20 per hour.

The board discussed the response times and run card with Paul. The board is concerned about the increased response times that are being caused by understaffing. The current run card tones Bethlehem after Franconia and then Twin Mountain. Town Administrator Cowles said Littleton is willing to be toned first after Franconia. Paul is not sure this would effectively fix the issue as he says Littleton tones Bethlehem first as well and he says the main problem is declining volunteerism which affects the entire region. He says there has been discussion with another local Life Squad chief about starting a program at the high school next year that would award a first responder certificate to participating students that fulfilled the criteria. The hope for the program is that it would help recruit more volunteers in the future. There was a brief discussion about the increase in short term rental properties possibly contributing to the issue as there is less housing available for people to move into the community as full-time residents that may serve as volunteers. Chief Schmucker said he is open to change and further discussion. No decisions were made at this time.

TO SIGN/APPROVE:

The January 18, 2022 transaction list was reviewed and signed by the selectmen.

The January 3rd, 2022 minutes were approved as written on a motion from Chairman Brewer and a second from Selectman Meth with all voting in favor.

A Septic Application – Map 15 Lot 13 – 124 Ridge Road – was approved by the board.

A Septic Application – Map 13 Lot 26-2 – Meadow Rue Lane – was approved by the board.

A Septic Application for Map 20 Lot 2-18 - Point of View Drive – was approved by the board.

The board approved the November 15, 2021 Planning Board minutes as written.

Records of Appointment: Chairman Brewer made the following motions:

Motion to appoint Mark Ober to the Conservation Commission through March 2025. Seconded by Selectman Meth with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Motion to appoint William McCarthy to the Conservation Commission through March 2025. Seconded by Selectman Walker with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Motion to appoint Mark Hessler to the Planning Board through March 2024. Seconded by Selectman Meth with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Motion to appoint Thad Presby to the Planning Board through March 2025. Seconded by Selectman Meth with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

As Chairman Brewer was making a motion to reappoint Phil Krill to the Zoning Board, Dawn Steele interjected that she had emailed the board about the pending ZBA reappointments of Phil Krill and Susan Retz, stating that she feels these appointments should be tabled due to the ZBA not meeting during 2021 and ZBA members not attending selectmen meetings with the exception of Peter Grote. A lengthy discussion ensued about the statutory requirements of the ZBA and when it is appropriate for them to meet. Dawn Steele and Virginia Mike asked that the board table the ZBA appointments to allow other residents an opportunity to express interest in joining the ZBA. The selectmen agreed to table these appointments for one week.

Chairman Brewer made a motion to appoint Patricia Garvin to the Planning Board through March of 2025. Selectman Meth seconded the motion with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

The selectmen signed the appointment records for the aforementioned appointees after the motions were passed. Appointment records for Virginia Jeffryes and Chris Nicodemus were also signed by the board. Motions to approve these two appointments were made at a previous meeting.

Abatement of Property Taxes:

974 Profile Road – Fransted Campground: The board approved three abatements for campers at the campground in the amounts of \$45, \$93 and \$104.

Trevor & Isabel Hardy – Ski Pine Club Road: Town Administrator Cowles said the Hardys met with Assessor Dave Woodward to review the assessment for their property at Ski Pine Club Road. Their assessment was decreased by \$9,500 between their two parcels and their taxes abated accordingly.

Michael D. Eddy – 25 Meadow Rue Lane: This abatement request was not recommended for approval by Avitar Assessing and was denied by the board.

Lovett – 558 Wells Road: The board approved a reduction in assessed value of \$20,100 for this property and abated the taxes accordingly.

Updated Employee Handbook: Selectman Walker said he and Town Administrator Cowles have been working on updating the Employee Handbook. The draft was sent to the selectmen for their review prior to the meeting. Town Administrator Cowles said PTO and overtime policies were clarified and revised and a section was added to allow employees to contribute part of their Paid Time Off (PTO) to a PTO bank that could be utilized by other employees when approved. After a brief discussion, Chairman Brewer made a motion to approve the Personnel Policy & Benefit Plan of December 2021. Selectman Meth seconded the motion with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Town Wide Mask Mandate: The board revisited this topic as planned as the mandate was set to expire today. Chairman Brewer read a letter from Health Officer Dr. Duffy recommending that from a number's perspective, the mandate should be extended stating that the ICU at Littleton Regional Hospital is essentially full every day and the regular inpatient load is significantly above average. He said that all-patient percentage of Covid related care is approximately 40% and there still is not the usual

expedited pathways to transport patients as needed. He said the standard of care has not been diminished but considering these factors it is not the time to allow the mandate to expire. The selectmen said they have received primarily positive feedback about the mandate and John Devivo, General Manager of Cannon Mountain wrote to the board asking the mandate be continued through February. Tim Clough, proprietor of Iron Furnace Brewery also contacted the board requesting that the mandate be continued through February vacation at least. After discussing, the board agreed that the mandate should continue. Chairman Brewer made a motion to extend the town wide mask mandate through March 14th, 2022. Selectman Meth seconded the motion with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

TO DISCUSS/REVIEW:

Correspondence: John Devivo (Cannon Mountain General Manager) invited the board to attend a public input session tentatively scheduled February 7th at 6pm at the Peabody Base Lodge regarding the tram overhaul/tram replacement/gondola decision. As this is scheduled during a select board meeting, Town Administrator Cowles will ask John if there is another date that would be suitable.

Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust wrote to the board thanking them for allowing their monitoring visits to the Lawrence Family Forest in October 2021.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Broadband Initiative: Selectman Meth said the North Country Communications District is meeting via Zoom on January 26th at 5pm and plans to discuss the subcommittees they recently formed.

Chamber of Commerce: No update at this time.

Conservation Commission: No update at this time.

Energy Commission: Selectman Meth said the EC plans to meet on Thursday the 20th at 4:30pm at town hall.

Planning Board: Selectman Meth said the Planning Board is scheduled to meet on the 25th at 7pm at town hall to follow up on a recent lot line adjustment that came before them.

CIP: The CIP is next meeting this Thursday the 20th at 4pm at town hall.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Mary Grote commented that there is an explosion of airbnb's in the town and that Dawn Steele and Virginia Mike had researched the number of short-term rentals in town and found 18-19 that had not completed the voluntary registration process with the town. Dawn provided a spreadsheet to the board and said that town employees could visit short term rental websites on a monthly or bimonthly basis to update the spreadsheet of short-term rentals and send letters to unregistered properties. Dawn thinks that there may be applicable portions in the zoning ordinance that could give the town some better control over short-term rentals. It was mentioned that state Senator Erin Hennessey is sponsoring a bill that would prohibit municipalities ability to restrict short-term rentals. Dawn said she would write a letter to the state senate about this proposed bill.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:49pm on a motion from Chairman Brewer

and a second from Selectman Walker with all voting in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary