

**Town of Franconia
Board of Selectmen's Regular Meeting
Monday, September 11, 2023 at 6:00PM
at Franconia Town Hall**

**Board Members Present: Jill Brewer, Eric Meth, Dan Walker
Others Present: Libby Staples, Jenny Monahan, Peter & Mary Grote, Virginia Mike, Dawn Steele, Lynn Terres, Jan Cole, Karen Foss, Mike Betley, Steve Schwartz, Susan Moore, Chris Dube**

The meeting was called to order at 6:03PM and Chairman Brewer opened the public hearing.

APPOINTMENTS/WORK SESSIONS

Public Hearing for Proposed Use of ARPA Funds: Selectman Meth said the Broadband Initiative Committee would like to continue the town's contractual relationship with the National Collaborative for Digital Equity (NCDE) and Carol Miller to oversee the fulfillment of the contract with Consolidated Communications (CCI) for the installation of fiber infrastructure throughout Franconia. The cost for the continuation of the contract is \$3,750 which was paid with ARPA funds last year and is proposed to be paid with ARPA funds for the contract renewal for this year. He said the forty million dollars of federal ARPA funds awarded to CCI for fiber to door infrastructure means that there will be no cost to the town. Selectman Meth said there will be an informational session on the project held at the Sugar Hill meeting hall with CCI and other providers on September 20th from 6pm to 7:30pm.

Selectman Meth made a motion to use \$3,750 of ARPA funds to continue to employ the National Collaborative for Digital Equity and Carol Miller to oversee the fulfillment of the project. Chairman Brewer seconded the motion with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Chairman Brewer then opened the floor for public comment.

Virginia Mike asked how much money the town has in ARPA funds. While it was unclear whether the additional ARPA funds awarded this year have been received yet, it was discussed that \$115,000 was originally awarded and \$30,000 was used for water infrastructure, \$3,750 was used for last year's contract with NCDE, \$8,000 was approved for police department retention bonuses and approximately \$2,250 was approved for the purchase of AED's for town hall and Franconia Market & Deli.

Karen Foss proposed that some of the funds be used for the Water Department so they may join the Dept. of Environmental Services Asset Management program.

Mike Betley asked about the proposal to use some ARPA funds to cover the overage in the overspent welfare budget. Chairman Brewer said it was discussed that the town could wait until later in the year to have an exact amount to apply to the welfare budget, so this will be revisited later this year.

Chris Dube asked about stipulations for using the funds and if the conditions have been met. It was discussed that the town has been diligent in making sure the ARPA funds have been used appropriately. Steve Schwartz commented that ARPA funds must be obligated by December 31, 2024 and spent by December 31st 2026, and encouraged the board to confirm that information.

Dawn Steele asked how much the welfare budget is overspent. She was advised approximately \$5,000.

Virginia Mike asked if some of the funds should be used to offset the town's EMS expenses with Littleton. It was discussed that the additional ARPA funds awarded may be used for the purpose as those funds have different conditions than the originally awarded funds.

Mike Betley asked if every property in Franconia will be wired for fiber to the door. Selectman Meth will seek clarification on this at the next Broadband Initiative Committee meeting. He also asked if consumers will be able to use other internet service providers and how long the project will take to be completed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Dawn Steele asked if there has been any progress on employee benefits research and if the police department has hired any new officers.

TO SIGN/APPROVE

The meeting minutes of August 28, 2023 were approved as amended.

The September 8th to September 14th, 2023 transaction list was reviewed and signed by the selectmen.

Septic Application – Map 24 Lot 55 – Juckett – Rockwood Road - was approved by the selectmen.

Septic Application – Map 16 Lot 15 – Popeo – Old County Road - was approved by the selectmen.

Petition for Pole License – Utility Poles/Conduit – Slalom Lane – After a brief discussion, the pole license petition was approved by the selectmen.

TO DISCUSS/REVIEW

Inclusivity Resolution – Chairman Brewer said she and Selectman Meth were both contacted by residents in regard to the situation in Littleton where comments were made by a Littleton select person about publicly displayed artwork supporting LGBTQ+ persons being inappropriate. Chairman Brewer said she contacted the town of Bethlehem about a resolution they made and asked if Franconia could adopt the same resolution. Selectman Meth asked that the resolution be amended from “LGBTQ” to “LGBTQ+”. The resolution as amended by Selectman Meth is as follows:

Town of Franconia Proposed Resolution

Whereas, the Town of Franconia welcomes all people regardless of age, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or any other variable that makes us who we are.

Whereas, the Town of Franconia has a responsibility to all its residents to keep them safe from discrimination, harassment, or from those who want to marginalize others for being different than themselves through prejudice and bigotry.

Whereas, recent events in the North Country have singled out the LGBTQ+ community and other minority groups as not welcome.

Now, therefore, be it resolved by Town of Franconia Select Board that the Town of Franconia will welcome all to our community and that our Town services, amenities, and properties are available to

all who live here and to our visitors passing through, following guidelines and policies that apply equally to all persons.

We are committed to promoting a secure, welcome and safe environment.

We are committed to modeling respectful dialogue.

Voted by the Select Board of the Town of Franconia, NH this 11th day of September, 2023.

Chairman Brewer made a motion to approve the Inclusivity Resolution as amended by Selectman Meth. Selectman Walker seconded the motion, **motion passes.**

Transfer Station Furnace Proposal – The board reviewed a proposal for a new propane furnace system from Presby Energy. The total cost for the system is \$6,547. It was discussed that the cost could be paid from the Town Buildings Maintenance Fund and that this would not be a tri-town expense per the tri-town agreement.

Chairman Brewer made a motion to approve the proposal from Presby Energy for a new propane furnace system at the transfer station for \$6,547. Selectman Meth seconded the motion with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Town Hall & Library Handrails Proposal – The board reviewed a proposal from Erinn Fanning Metalwork to fabricate and install a metal handrail at the library and on the walkway at town hall. It was discussed that a proposal for \$7,500 was received from Wilco but they have been unavailable to do the work. A donor has offered to pay the library portion of the \$4,000 proposal.

Selectman Walker made a motion to expend up to \$4,000 for handrails at the town hall and library from the Town Buildings Maintenance Fund and accept the proposal from Erinn Fanning Metalwork. Selectman Meth seconded the motion with all voting in favor. **Motion passes.**

Audit Schedule – Town Administrator Staples said it is her understanding that having the annual financial audit in February is detrimental to the functioning of the town office as there are other deadlines and obligations to be met at that time. She said she understood why the change was initially made two years ago but wonders if returning to the former schedule of having the audit in April would be better for the functioning of the office and asked the board to consider changing it back to April. There followed a brief discussion that the initial decision to change the audit to February was in the hope that the audit report would be available sooner and the financials would be more accurate for the annual report but the receipt of the audit report has not been expedited. The board approved changing the audit back to April from February.

Police Department Report to Dept. of Safety – Chairman Brewer signed a report from Chief Cashin detailing the traffic stops and patrolling data in Franconia to be sent to the Dept. of Safety.

MS-1 – The board signed the MS-1 report.

Correspondence

Chairman Brewer read a letter from Dr. Charles Wolcott stating that he hopes the sidewalk work will continue in the future so the businesses and residents on the west end of Main Street will also get to enjoy upgraded sidewalks.

Committee Reports

Broadband Initiative – Discussed during public hearing. Informational session on September 20th at 6pm at Sugar Hill Meeting House.

Chamber of Commerce – Meets next Tuesday at 9am at Woodsville Guaranty.

CIP Committee – All departments have been interviewed except the two museums and the library. They hope to have their recommendation ready for the selectmen by November 3rd.

Conservation Commission – Chairman Brewer said the CC hopes to use their conservation fund monies to hire Elise Lawson of Watershed to Wildlife for a Natural Resource Inventory for the town. The cost is \$7,500. The CC also supports budgeting for a town forester this year.

Energy Commission – Next meets Tuesday the 19th. Selectman Meth also reported that the solar array is now operational. Energy Commission member Chris Dube said he is preparing a report that outlines the reasons the process took so long.

Planning Board – Meets tomorrow evening at 7pm at town hall and there will be a presentation from Tara Bamford on the master plan and a youtube seminar.

Additional Public Comment

Dawn Steele asked if the planning board has done anything to address banning casinos. Dawn Steele asked about the status of a letter to unregistered short-term rental property owners.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:07pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Executive Assistant