Town of Franconia
Informational Website Session
Tuesday, May 1, 2018 at Town Hall
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Town Officials Present: Jill Brewer, Eric Meth, Jeff Blodgett
Others Present: Holly Burbank, Jenny Monahan

Chairman Brewer called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

After thanking the approximately 35 public attendees for coming to the meeting, Chairman Brewer provided the meeting rules: No negative discussion about Town employees and a two minute speaking time limit for public comment.

Chairman Brewer then began a PowerPoint presentation that first detailed the origin and history of the Town of Franconia website. Following that, the results of the online survey were reviewed. Lastly, the process that would be involved with outsourcing the development of a new website was discussed.

A price comparison of a new site to the current site was presented: New site through Virtual Towns and Schools, $15,000 for three years. This breaks down annually to: development of the site - $1500, ongoing technical maintenance of the site - $1500, ongoing development and maintenance of content of the site - $2000.

The current site costs $6,000 for three years, with the only expense being paying a Town employee to maintain it.

Chairman Brewer then explained the timeline for implementing a new site, which was between 12-15 weeks in total including a planning/strategy session, design phase, content development, user training, and site deployment/going live.

Chairman Brewer explained that the development and maintenance of site content would require one or two site administrators, a position that would require being very aware of town events and happenings. There would also be content editors that could upload meeting minutes, agendas, etc.

Chairman Brewer said the pros of the new site would be a more polished, professional site. The cons would be the increase in cost, implementation time and training time, and while she agrees that it would be nice to have a new site, it is the duty of the Board of Selectmen to ensure that the $3000 added to the budget is used to the best benefit of the Town. Chairman Brewer then opened the floor for comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Sandra Blodgett commented that template based sites are easy to use and do have available features. She suggested we could stay with the free option and build on that.

Jim Forrest commented that the site is great and does everything he needs.

Dawn Steele inquired, regarding the $2000 figure for development of site content: Is that paid to Virtual Towns & Schools or an employee? Chairman Brewer responded that the $2000 would be paid to Town employee.

The purpose of the site was discussed. Is it mainly for residents or visitors? Those that chose to speak to the issue were divided - some feel it is predominantly for residents to get town information and others feel that tourists would use the site as a way to locate lodging, restaurants, etc.

Nick Mike expressed concerns that because the current site is not professional it would deter businesses from wanting to move to Franconia, and that the site is not secure.

Chairman Brewer said that she did ask Virtual Towns and Schools if it was necessary for a town's site to be secure and was advised that it is not necessary, adding that all content on the Town of Franconia site is public information. If a resident is registering their car or paying taxes, they are linked to the secured State of NH site.

Several residents spoke positively of the recent updates to the site, and said that they find the site fulfills their needs as residents.

Jim Alden commented that having a professional website would give the town more design options as well as content management tools. He also said that the current Weebly site is written in javascript, and a professional site would be HTML, which would make the site more searchable on the internet.

There was further discussion about the purpose of the site. Some would like to see links to local businesses and others feel that it is not the role of a Town site to promote businesses – it is there primarily to provide information and services to residents. Chairman Brewer commented that she feels that the Chamber of Commerce site is more appropriate for providing information on local businesses to visitors.

A resident sought clarification regarding the expense associated with contracting Virtual Towns & Schools. Selectman Meth explained that the cost to develop the site is $4500, and that is spread out over three years ($1500 a year.) In addition to that, there is a $1500 per year fee to maintain the site. Then, there is the $2000 paid to a Town employee/s to maintain the content on the site, and these are the figures that comprise the $5000 annual cost for the first three years.

Claudia Lachappelle asked if the $2000 paid to the Town employee is hourly. Town Administrator Burbank explained yes, and there are 1.5 hours allotted to work on the website per week that equates to the $2000 annual stipend.

There was further discussion about whether visitors would seek to use the Town site to find resources such as food, lodging, trip planning, etc. Several residents said they would actively seek out a Chamber site before visiting a Town site. Another resident felt that using a Chamber site is outdated and not something younger people would do.

 Nick Mike commented again regarding the site being unsecured and said that could lead to viruses. Another resident said he was not concerned about security but inquired if Weebly backs up the site. If there was an issue on Weebly's end, would we lose our site's data?

Virginia Mike commented that Google is changing their search results in a month and will show secured sites first over unsecured sites. She asked why anyone would choose to click on an unsecured site?

Kevin Johnson said that as a local motel owner, he would encourage people not to think of the Town site as a vehicle to usher in tourism, as that is the Chamber of Commerce's role, on which he sits on the Board of Directors.

One resident said she was not fully informed when she voted in favor of the motion to add $3000 to the budget for the purpose of contracting a professional website company at Town Meeting, and now felt differently.

Bernadette Costa said there likely were others that weren't fully informed when they voted on the issue at Town Meeting and perhaps the Board didn't need to spend the funds this year at all.

Dawn Steele advised the Board that Weebly has been bought out and will be making changes.

With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 7:02 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jenny Monahan
Administrative Secretary