

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
May 26, 2021**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, May 26, 2021, at the Municipal Building, 2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, MA; residents could attend and participate via the Zoom platform. Councilors present: Andrew Bissanti, Brian Chandler, Robert Dellorco, Cobi Frongillo, Melanie Hamblen, Glenn Jones, Matthew Kelly, Thomas Mercer, Deborah Pellegrini. Councilors absent: None. Administrative personnel in attendance: Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Mark Cerel, Town Attorney (via Zoom); Chrissy Whelton, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

CALL TO ORDER: ► Chair Mercer called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM. Chair Mercer called for a moment of silence; all recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: ► Chair Mercer reviewed that due to the continued concerns regarding the COVID-19 virus and Governor Baker's declared State of Emergency, we will be conducting a remote/virtual Town Council meeting for all public access and participation. The public will not be permitted to enter the building or participate in person. Only pre-approved participants on the meeting agenda will be allowed to enter the building and participate in person. In an effort to ensure citizen engagement and comply with open meeting law regulations, citizens will be able to dial into the meeting using the provided phone number, or citizens can participate by clicking on the link provided on the agenda. The provided link and phone number will be active for the duration of the meeting for citizens to ask questions/voice concerns. If residents are just interested in watching the meeting, it will also be live-streamed by Franklin TV and shown on Comcast Channel 11 and Verizon Channel 29. This meeting is being recorded by Franklin TV and may also be recorded by others.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: ► Mr. Dale Kurtz, Veterans' Services Officer, reminded everyone of the Memorial Day Service to be held on Monday, May 31, 2021, beginning at 12:00 PM on the Town Common. He stated that there will not be a parade this year; however, the honor guard will go to the Dean College Memorial, Union Street Cemetery, and St. Mary Cemetery to honor veterans.

Chair Mercer declared a two-minute recess.

HEARINGS: 7:10pm. ► **FY 2022 Budget Hearing.** ► Chair Mercer opened the public hearing. He thanked and congratulated the municipal and school staff for an incredible job done over the past year. He noted that COVID restrictions will begin to be removed this coming weekend. ► Councilor Kelly stated that it was an honor to be part of the Budget Subcommittee this year. He thanked everyone for all the work they did during the past year. He stated that he was presenting the FY 2022 Voting Budget. ► Mr. Hellen thanked the municipal and school staff for their work over the past 15 months; he stated that they were the best team in Massachusetts. He noted all the milestones that were achieved during the past year due to the resiliency of the staff. He stated that this budget puts the community in a position to succeed. He asked the public to look at what is in the budget rather than what is not. He stated that the Town of Franklin is in an excellent financial position. He noted that budget information is available on the Town's website. He thanked the Finance Committee for their four nights of public meetings on the budget. He thanked the Town Council's Budget Subcommittee for their work. ► Chair Mercer reviewed the budget hearing process.

► Councilor Jones read each *Town of Franklin Operating Budget FY 2022 Voting Document* line item.

► Hold on Line Item 155: Information Technology. ■ Councilor Chandler questioned the cybersecurity specialist being hire. ■ Mr. Tim Rapoza, Director of Technology Services for Town of Franklin and

Schools, confirmed it is a new position and will be half for the Town and half for the schools. He reviewed the job description for the cybersecurity specialist. ■Councilor Pellegri asked why technology was also listed in other departments; she stated that she could not provide an example at this time. ■Mr. Rapoza stated he is not aware of that. He noted that in the Police Department and/or Fire Department, they may have a line item for technology for radios and police equipment that the Technology Department does not support; for instance, those departments may be calling a Taser technology. ■Mr. Hellen noted that Mr. Rapoza's entire personnel budget is in the School Department except for the proposed half position that Mr. Rapoza just spoke about. Mr. Hellen explained the ratio of technology of school to Town and discussed that based on square footage, technology will always be higher for schools. ■Councilor Jones asked for an overview of the 17.5 percent increase in expenses. ■Mr. Rapoza stated the large majority of that is licensing costs. ■Councilor Bissanti confirmed that Mr. Rapoza oversees all IT for both Town and Schools.

► Hold on Line Item 164: Election & Registration. ■Councilor Kelly noted that there was a \$70,000 increase in this budget from FY20 to FY21. He further noted that the FY22 line total is less than FY20; he thanked the Town Clerk's department for the 30 percent decrease.

► Hold on Line Item 192: Public Property & Buildings. ■Chair Mercer thanked Mr. Michael D'Angelo, Director of Public Facilities, and his staff for an incredible year and being an integral part of keeping the employees and the public safe. He asked if Mr. D'Angelo's budget includes the reductions associated with the School Committee's closure of Davis Thayer School. ■Mr. D'Angelo stated yes it does. He reviewed the budget expenses for the past few years for Davis Thayer. He noted it still has to be heated, lighted, and maintained. ■Chair Mercer stated that the upkeep of all buildings is in the Town budget, not the schools' budget. ■Mr. D'Angelo stated that the FY22 budget adds back in items that were reduced last year due to the pandemic such as watering the fields, electric, heat, etc.; he stated that his budget was cut \$540,000 last year. ■Councilor Jones and Councilor Dellorco thanked Mr. D'Angelo and his staff for all the work his department did to manage COVID last year. ■Mr. D'Angelo confirmed \$135,000 was removed from Davis Thayer; the current Davis Thayer budget is \$60,000 which includes utilities and a small amount to fix anything needed. ■Councilor Hamblen asked about the UVGI air filtration units. ■Mr. D'Angelo reviewed that they were obtained from the COVID Cares Act funds and explained how the UVGI filtration units work. ■Councilor Bissanti asked if Mr. D'Angelo had any future concerns regarding mechanical, electrical, etc. ■Mr. D'Angelo noted that last year the Town Council approved a bond authorization for capital projects; he reviewed some of the projects. ■Councilor Chandler reviewed the staffing numbers and noted the overtime numbers are very low. He asked if it would be better to reduce the number of part-time staff and hire full-time staff. ■Mr. D'Angelo stated that none of the part-time staff are on the Town's health insurance.

► Hold on Line Item 210: Police. ■Chair Mercer asked Police Chief Thomas Lynch to provide a synopsis of what it took to obtain the Police Department certification/accreditation. ■Deputy Police Chief James Mill reviewed the certification/accreditation process and noted that every policy and procedure is reviewed during the process to make sure they are up to industry standards/best practices. ■In response to questions, Chief Lynch stated that in this budget they are adding one officer; they are going from 52 to 53 officers. Adding this officer will cost \$1,000; he reviewed how he was able to achieve this through a combination of expense changes. ■Councilor Jones asked about increased costs for ammunition. ■Chief Lynch confirmed that costs have gone up, and there is a shortage of ammunition. ■Councilor Dellorco asked if there are a lot of retirements coming up in the future. ■Chief Lynch stated there were probably six to eight retirements coming up in the next three years; he has been working on a succession plan. ■Councilor Kelly thanked Chief Lynch and his officers for the great job they do. ■Councilor Hamblen asked if there were enough funds in the safety equipment line item. ■Chief Lynch stated that this item includes supplies/items for onboarding officers. ■Councilor Frongillo highlighted some of the items in the police budget including the jail diversion program. ■Chief Lynch stated that it is a ten-year grant, and

they are in year three. In response to questions, he explained how new officers are recruited. He noted there is a police exam every three years; many of these candidates do not have a police background. He stated they also take lateral transfers from other towns which is a much faster process to have the officer fill the vacancy. He explained the increase in vacation coverage expenses. ■Councilor Bissanti commended Chief Lynch and his department for the great work they do. He asked about the pay scale of the officers and noted that they are relatively low. He asked about response times for emergencies. He stated that he has heard from residents that it can be six to 10 minutes. ■Chief Lynch stated that it was a couple of minutes, and it depended on what it is; for instance, a domestic violence call would be attended to right away whereas a fraud issue may take longer for a response. He stated that he has not heard any response time complaints. He noted they are dealing with more calls for service than in the past. He reviewed that Franklin is still one of the safest towns. ■Councilor Chandler noted that Chief Lynch said he would like to get to 57 officers. He discussed the drone that the Police Department used to help during the fire at Franklin Crossing. ■Chief Lynch confirmed the budget is 97 percent salaries. He confirmed he would like to get to 58 officers. He stated that the drone has been used for many situations. He thanked his department for their work on the certification.

► Hold on Line Item 220: Fire. ■Chair Mercer thanked the department for their heroic work during the fire at Franklin Crossing. He asked for a personnel status of the department and how revenues were brought in to offset the cost of new staff. ■Fire Chief James McLaughlin stated that they were going into FY22 at full staff with 56 uniformed firefighters and one civilian. He discussed ambulance billing and their competitive rates; there has been an increase. He reviewed the pending SAFER Grant; they expect to hear back soon. If it was received, it is good for three positions for three years with no matching from the Town; then the Town would need to budget for the positions. He discussed the fire at Franklin Crossing and the good work of the battalion chief. ■Councilor Bissanti expressed confidence in the Fire Department. ■Councilor Frongillo asked about the four new hires and non-scheduled overtime and holiday overtime. ■Chief McLaughlin explained that for non-scheduled overtime they look at trends and try to determine what it will be. ■Councilor Kelly thanked Chief McLaughlin for the increase in morale in the Fire Department. He stated that he is an advocate for a new fire station or sub-station. He asked if Chief McLaughlin thought it was time to bring in another front-line ambulance. ■Chief McLaughlin reviewed how many times they received mutual aid. He stated that he does not think another ambulance is needed right now. ■Councilor Jones thanked the Fire Chief for the positive attitude in the department. ■Chief McLaughlin stated that it is a group effort. ■Councilor Hamblen noted the Fire Chief's commitment to training. ■Chief McLaughlin explained the EMS training line item. ■Councilor Chandler discussed training for the officers. He asked about the number of calls. ■Chief McLaughlin stated that in FY20 there were 4,466 calls; today, they are at 4,210 calls and project 4,700 through the end of the fiscal year. He provided an update on the ISO certification. They were previously rated class 3; in 2020 they were rated class 2. In five years, they will be reviewed again; however, he hopes that based on the significant upgrades and changes, the auditors will come back sooner to review the ISO certification.

► Hold on Line Item 225: Regional Dispatch. ■Councilor Kelly asked about the expense increase. ■Mr. Hellen stated that the towns of Mendon and Millville were added to the regional dispatch which includes Franklin, Norfolk, Plainville, and Wrentham. He reviewed the assessments for FY20. He stated they have applied for a five-year development grant; he reviewed the possible grant funds. He discussed the stabilization account for the regional dispatch. If the full grant is received from the State, the money indicated in the budget for the regional dispatch will be put in the stabilization fund to save up for the time when the Town will have to pay their full assessment. ■Councilor Dellorco asked if there had been any complaints about the MECC. ■Mr. Hellen stated that everything has been improving and becoming more efficient. There is an extensive training program. There has been some turnover, but the response times have held stable in Franklin; they are under six minutes. He stated they welcome the towns of Mendon and Millville. He discussed the SAFER Grant. ■Councilor Jones confirmed the goal was to save

up for one full year of assessment for three fiscal years from now when the Town has to pay the full amount.

Chair Mercer declared a five-minute recess.

► Hold on Line Item 510: Board of Health. ■ Councilor Jones asked Health Director Cathleen Liberty about the 21 percent increase in the budget. ■ Ms. Liberty stated that they went up with the Visiting Nurses Association for an increase of \$3,500 monthly due to COVID. ■ Mr. Hellen confirmed Ms. Liberty's explanation. He stated that the Town is required by State statute to have someone on staff to deal with the infectious disease database. Mr. Hellen stated that between this appropriation of \$41,500 and an addition of a \$300,000 per year grant for three years that the towns of Franklin, Norfolk, and Wrentham applied for, they are putting out a job posting at a very high rate for a full-time public health nurse to be onsite as a Franklin employee who will be officed in the Senior Center. He stated that through this pandemic it has been pretty obvious that there has been a demand. He stated that most towns contract out for this service. He thinks Franklin will get a bigger bang for the buck with having a full-time public health nurse on staff. ■ Councilor Dellorco asked how much an RN costs. ■ Ms. Liberty stated between \$72,000 to \$82,000. ■ Councilor Bissanti asked why an RN is needed. ■ Ms. Liberty stated that they have contracted with the VNA for a very long time. She stated that between COVID and communicable diseases, along with the community, we really thought a public nurse would offer more and be an asset for the Town. They also work with the schools. ■ Mr. Hellen stated that he felt that the idea of having their own public health nurse on staff would have made the pandemic situation better; with the grant for three years, this is a no-brainer. ■ Councilor Bissanti discussed that during the onset of COVID there was a disconnect with Ms. Liberty regarding case number reporting, mask requirements, and her heavy-handedness with how some of the businesses were treated. He asked how she was treating restaurants and businesses at this juncture. ■ Ms. Liberty stated they are treated professionally and respectfully, and we like to educate and also provide prevention. She stated that they follow the governor's mandates. ■ Mr. Hellen noted that the governor's State of Emergency is getting repealed on June 15, 2021. ■ Ms. Liberty stated that there is not a separate budget line item for enforcement of mandates for restaurants and businesses. She stated that some of the CARES Act money was used to hire a food consultant so they could go out and do COVID and routine inspections. ■ Councilor Pellegrini stated that she is not sure if a full-time RN is necessary at this time. She asked if they could go regional. She said that most of these people have their own doctors, and there are many clinics in Town that people can go to, as well as urgent care centers, EMTs, and a nurse at the Senior Center. ■ Mr. Hellen explained that currently they are paying for a part-time person as required by State law; he received a regional grant with the towns of Norfolk and Wrentham for three years for \$900,000 to do a regional initiative. He stated that Wrentham has two full-time public health nurses. ■ Councilor Frongillo stated that he appreciates the work of Health Director Cathleen Liberty and her staff.

► Hold on Line Item 690: Historical Museum and Hold on Line Item 691: Historical Commission. ■ Councilor Pellegrini introduced archivist Rebecca Finnigan who has worked at the museum for more than two years. She reviewed the budget and wanted to make a motion to take \$3,000 off Historical Commission expenses and add it to Historical Museum so Ms. Finnigan will have \$4,000 and leave \$1,000 for the Commission as they have seminars and conferences to go on. She stated that Ms. Finnigan is actually running the museum and cannot do what she would like to do with only \$1,000. ■ Mr. Hellen reviewed that it is within the jurisdiction of the Town Council to make an amendment. ■ Councilor Jones asked what has been expended of the \$4,000 listed in line item 691 in the past. ■ Mr. Hellen stated that he will have the Finance Director provide that information tomorrow night.

► Hold on Line Item 300: Franklin Public Schools. ■ Chair Mercer thanked the entire School Department for their work during the past school year. He stated that it is known that the school district has a significant declining enrollment. He asked for the current student enrollment and the projections for

FY22. ■ Superintendent of Schools Sara Ahern stated that this year they have 4,850 students in Franklin and are forecasting a decrease over the next 10 years. She stated that they are tracking a little lower for this year than forecasted and noted the impact of the pandemic. She stated that FY22 anticipated enrollment is approximately 4,750. The enrollment decline is important to think about by level. In the elementary schools the forecast done leaves it rather stable. The decrease they are currently experiencing is at the middle school level. That will make its way to the high school. She stated they are keeping tabs on the enrollment decrease as it relates to the budget. She stated they would like to bring in a consultant regarding re-districting. ■ Councilor Jones asked if they can put a number behind the unfunded mandates. ■ Superintendent Ahern stated that it seems like most of what they do is an unfunded mandate at times. They have tried to quantify the unfunded mandates, but she does not have a number tonight; she can provide it tomorrow night. ■ Councilor Kelly stated that he has heard there are about 100 students leaving Franklin public schools and going to private schools next year. ■ Superintendent Ahern stated that is a larger number than she thinks. ■ Councilor Kelly discussed the decreasing enrollment, and stated that the school budget continues to rise each year. He asked for the comparison of the number of students in the town to the number of students attending Franklin schools. He asked where are the students going who are not attending Franklin schools and why are they not attending Franklin schools. He suggested the schools have an exit survey for any students who are leaving the Franklin schools for another school. ■ Superintendent Ahern stated that they are doing their best regarding the special education costs. She stated that, for example, if there is a decrease in classroom size from 24 to 22, it costs the same to run the classroom; however, they do not receive the same Chapter 70 money for the students. She stated health insurance and transportation are escalating costs. She stated that she did not know the number of students in town; she can provide that tomorrow night. She stated that there are many choices for students today. She stated that in order to be competitive, they need to look at what they are offering and meeting those customer requests. ■ Councilor Kelly discussed that he and about 300 other families took their children out of Franklin schools last year and a big reason was that nobody listened. He noted that this year's budget request from the schools was \$3.1 million more than last year. He stated they got it down to \$2.2 million more. He stated that families that pull their students out of Franklin schools still pay taxes and pay an additional \$10,000 more per year for the private school. ■ Councilor Bissanti asked for information on the spending per student. He stated that he thought that the schools take 70 percent of the Town's budget. ■ Superintendent Ahern stated they are in the lowest 25 percentile; seventy-five percent of school districts in Massachusetts spend more per pupil than Franklin does. She stated the solution is more dollars, more teachers, and more programs. ■ Mr. Hellen stated schools are about 54 percent of the Town's budget. He stated the School Committee this year decided to close the Davis Thayer School and re-allocated some of that funding. He discussed that there are some other reforms that the schools can do. He noted most of the budget is employee expenses. ■ Councilor Bissanti asked about digital learning integration. ■ Superintendent Ahern explained that there are three teachers who are digital learning integrationists. ■ Councilor Pellegrini asked how do we explain an increase in the budget of \$2.2 million when a school is closing, we are losing teachers, and have fewer students. She stated that a lot of departments are using COVID as an excuse. We are looking to save pennies. There must be savings from closing Davis Thayer. ■ Superintendent Ahern stated that health insurance rates are going up 9 percent this year; transportation is another area that escalates in cost. She stated that they have documented \$775,000 savings from closing Davis Thayer. She stated that the State expects the local contribution to increase by two percent each year. ■ Mr. Hellen confirmed Superintendent Ahern's explanation of the expected local contribution. He reviewed Chapter 70 funding. ■ School Business Administrator Miriam Goodman explained that Franklin is a minimum aid community. ■ Councilor Frongillo stated that the School Committee has done a lot with very little. ■ Councilor Chandler asked who was mentoring the young teachers. He questioned that they just had a retirement in the central office and hired two people as replacements. ■ Superintendent Ahern stated they are required to have a mentoring program; it is line item 2350. She stated the hiring of the two people was budget neutral. ■ Councilor Jones asked for the per pupil expenditure. ■ Ms. Goodman stated that as of FY20, per pupil expenditure is \$14,697. ■ Chair Mercer asked Superintendent Ahern to provide the unfunded mandate costs tomorrow night.

► Hold on Line Item 390: Tri-County Regional Schools. ■ Councilor Kelly pointed out that there are a lot of Franklin's students there.

► Hold on Line Item 395: Norfolk Aggie Voc Ed Tuition. ■ Councilor Kelly stated that he is a little concerned that the number went down slightly. He would like some students to go there; they are the future farmers. ■ Mr. Hellen noted that new superintendents were recently hired for each school.

► Hold on Line Item 422: DPW-Highway. ► Hold on Line Item 422: DPW-Park & Tree. ► Hold on Line Item 422: DPW-Snow & Ice. ► Hold on Line Item 422: DPW-Central Motors. ► Hold on Line Item 422: DPW-Recycling. ► Hold on Line Item 422: DPW-Administration. ► Hold on Line Item 422: DPW-Storm Water. ► Hold on Line Item 424: DPW-Street Lighting. ■ Chair Mercer congratulated Director of Public Works Brutus Cantoreggi on the opening of the new Water Treatment Plant on Grove Street. He asked what the benefits of the plant to the community are. He asked about the DPW's budget proposal and the substantial changes. ■ Mr. Cantoreggi reviewed the benefits of the new Water Treatment Plant including fully able to access additional gallons of water per day allowed by permit, provides redundancy in case another well goes down, and can rest the wells as needed. He provided an overview of the changes to the DPW's budget. He stated that he had to make adjustments on personnel. He discussed unfunded mandates that have to be done. He stated that they created a stormwater division and showed the real costs; they had to take funds from the other general funds to do this. He stated that his budget has increased \$338,000. In order to meet the need, he had to cut two personnel: one from highway and one from grounds. Some road work, tree work, and maintenance also had to be taken out. He stated that spraying of weeds on the curb line was removed from the budget. ■ Town Council members asked questions. ■ Councilor Bissanti asked about the reduction of two people. ■ Mr. Hellen reviewed how the two positions were removed from the budget in order to shift the money around to pay for the stormwater needs; no one got laid off. ■ Councilor Bissanti confirmed that these positions were never filled, not that they had to let people go; this was due to stormwater. ■ Councilor Chandler confirmed the two vacancies are not in the budget. ■ Mr. Hellen reviewed that a new full time GIS employee was hired in addition to the current GIS employee. ■ Mr. Cantoreggi explained that some of the stormwater items are already being done; he noted there are new stormwater items that are required to be done. He reviewed some of the budget items that decreased from last year. He explained road maintenance needs and solid waste. He stated that water and sewer use has gone up; therefore, the water and sewer collections have gone up. There will be surplus. ■ Mr. Hellen stated that any excess funds will be retained earnings. He noted that traditionally they have paid cash for the water main replacements; they will use extra retained earnings on this. ■ Mr. Cantoreggi stated that they run a lean ship at the DPW; losing two people is a big deal for the DPW. Some things will take longer now. He stated that most likely he will get calls from residents about the weeds.

► Chair Mercer stated that this hearing will be continued to tomorrow night.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: ► Councilor Hamblen thanked the Police Department for helping with another issue today. She thanked all the staff and volunteers who ran the Town during COVID.

► Councilor Pellegrini thanked all the department heads who attended tonight's meeting. ► Councilor Bissanti gave thoughts and prayers to all the condominium residents who lost so much as a result of the fire. He said he was impressed with the state of community he saw to help with the situation. ► Councilor Kelly thanked all who worked to put the budget together. ► Councilor Dellorco thanked all the staff and committees who worked on the budget. He discussed the illness of 14-year-old resident Nick Gaspar; a GoFundMe page has been set up to help the family. ► Chair Mercer thanked everyone for attending this very late meeting. He said that setting the budget is the most important thing the Town Council does.

ADJOURN: ► **MOTION to Adjourn by Kelly. SECOND by Dellorco. No Discussion. ► VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0. Meeting adjourned at 11:09 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary