

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
February 26, 2025**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, February 26, 2025, at the Municipal Building, 2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, MA. Councilors present: Brian Chandler, Theodore Cormier-Leger, Cobi Frongillo, Melanie Hamblen, Glenn Jones, Deborah Pellegrini, Thomas Mercer, Patrick Sheridan. Councilors absent: Robert Dellorco. Administrative personnel in attendance: Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Amy Frigulietti, Deputy Town Administrator; Mark Cerel, Town Attorney.

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 the following as posted on the agenda. A Note to Residents: All citizens are welcome to attend public meetings in person. To view the live meeting remotely, citizens are encouraged to watch the live stream on the Franklin Town Hall TV YouTube channel or the live broadcast on Comcast channel 9 and Verizon channel 29. Meetings are also archived by Franklin TV on the Franklin Town Hall TV YouTube channel and shown on repeat on Comcast channel 9 and Verizon channel 29 for those who miss the live meeting. To listen to the meeting remotely, citizens may call-in using the provided number. This will not permit participation in the meeting. To participate in the meeting remotely, citizens are able to join a Zoom webinar using the information provided on the agenda. Any participants who wish to speak during the webinar must enter their full name and email address when joining the webinar. All participants will be automatically muted upon joining the webinar. In order to speak, participants who have entered full name and email address will need to select the “raise hand” function to request to be unmuted. All speakers will be required to state their full name and street address before commenting. ► Chair Mercer announced Councilor Dellorco will not be attending tonight’s meeting. ► Chair Mercer announced the Joint Budget Subcommittee will be holding their next listening session on March 4 at 9:30 AM at the Franklin Senior Center. Please join us for open discussions on the fiscal year 2026 budget, feedback on last year’s override budget question, the structural deficit this coming year, and the priorities of the community. The Franklin Senior Center will be temporarily closed from March 5 through March 14 to allow for necessary building repairs. Vital services will continue to take place in varying alternative locations. A list of the alternate locations can be found on the Franklin town website. The Town of Franklin is excited to welcome Michael Bobbitt, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Cultural Council, and Emily Devlin, LICSW-Head of Strategic Partnerships and Clinical Innovation at Art Pharmacy, for a community conversation on how the arts can play a vital role in supporting health and well-being in Franklin. Join for a community conversation Wednesday, March 5 from 12 PM to 2 PM at the Blackbox Theater.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: ► Mr. Steve Sherlock, 13 Magnolia Drive and Franklin Matters and Franklin Public Radio, said the Joint Budget Subcommittee sessions are available on a watch, listen, read format. They have the TV video and the audio available, and a transcript is now available. He said the radio station has enhanced its radio schedule. He said you can go to WFPR FM which is available anywhere, anytime on the Internet or 1029 in the Franklin area. He said the expanded hours start at 7 AM although they do not have a show at that time, but it starts at 8 AM to 5 PM. He said the schedule and details are on Franklin news. He explained the new schedule. He said changes are coming, and there will be a press release to let everybody know. ► Mr. Dave Callaghan, 30 Plain Street and Chair of the Franklin School Committee, said he will come to Citizen Comments and use this opportunity to let everyone know what is happening with the schools. He said he will take a three-hour meeting and condense it down to three minutes. If people want more, he and Steve Sherlock do Chalkboard Chats where they recap every meeting, and this is on Franklin Matters. He said at the last School Committee meeting they voted to approve Superintendent of Schools Lucas Giguere’s budget which is really following in line with what the town administrator was

projecting for line item 300 for the schools. He said if you have any questions about the budget, it is all on the website. The entire book is there as well as budget presentations and the line-item breakdown. He noted the transformation from 10 schools down to 7 schools. He explained it is going to provide a better educational opportunity for the kids and saves the taxpayers about \$2.5 million annually. He said a lot of meetings in March will deal with the reorganization, and there will be transportation updates. He said the bus company is going to increase their fees next year by almost 13 percent. He discussed transportation is being looked at to maximize efficiency to both drive down the cost and also try to minimize traffic congestion. This will happen at the next meeting on March 11. He said to tune in or come down to Council Chambers for the meetings.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: ► *February 5, 2025.* ► **MOTION** to **Approve** the February 5, 2025 meeting minutes by **Hamblen**. **SECOND** by **Jones**. **No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITIONS: ► None.

APPOINTMENTS: ► None.

PUBLIC HEARINGS - 7:00 PM: ► None.

LICENSE TRANSACTIONS: ► None.

PRESENTATIONS / DISCUSSION: ► None.

LEGISLATION FOR ACTION:

Note: Two-Thirds Vote requires six votes; Majority Vote requires majority of members present and voting.

- a. *Bylaw Amendment 25-924: A Bylaw to Amend the Code of the Town of Franklin at Chapter 82, Fees, Municipal Service - Second Reading (Motion to Approve Zoning Bylaw Amendment 25-924 - Majority Roll Call Vote).* ► **MOTION** to **Waive** the reading by **Cormier-Leger**. **SECOND** by **Chandler**. **No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.** ► **MOTION** to **Approve** Bylaw Amendment 25-924: A Bylaw to Amend the Code of the Town of Franklin at Chapter 82, Fees, Municipal Service by **Hamblen**. **SECOND** by **Jones**. **Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen said this is the second and final vote required to update the ALS and BLS rates that the Town Council unanimously approved at their last meeting. ► **ROLL CALL VOTE: Chandler-YES; Cormier-Leger-YES; Frongillo-YES; Hamblen-YES; Jones-YES; Mercer-YES; Pellegri-YES; Sheridan-YES.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**
- b. *Resolution 25-05: Free Cash To Stabilization Accounts Transfers (Motion to Approve Resolution 25-05 - Majority Vote).* ► Councilor Jones read the resolution. ► **MOTION** to **Approve** Resolution 25-05: Free Cash To Stabilization Accounts Transfers by **Hamblen**. **SECOND** by **Cormier-Leger**. **Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen reviewed from his memo to the Town Council dated February 21, 2025, this will authorize the transfer of free cash to stabilization accounts for the purpose of continued funding of the stabilization funds per Town policy. These are part of the FY25 Capital Plan. Stabilization accounts transfer legislation is voted on annually along with the respective year's Capital Improvement Plan. At their February 5, 2025, meeting the Town Council approved the appropriation of funds for the FY25 Capital Improvement Plan with Resolution 25-04; however, Resolution 25-05 was inadvertently left off of the agenda. He noted that they are going out soon to borrow for the fire truck and in the future for police station and Remington Jefferson and this will be looked on very favorably from our bond rating agencies. ► Councilor Hamblen thanked the administration for putting the \$1 million back into the budget stabilization fund, and she thanked the Capital Budget Committee as well. ► Councilor Jones asked how are they doing on the bond rating. ► Mr. Hellen explained that the bond rating is AAA. By June 30 we will have to borrow the money for the fire truck. He said the bigger issue is the Police

Station Remington Jefferson Horace Mann borrowing. He explained that a AAA bond rating is the highest rating. He explained that interest rates take up capacity in the budget and increase cost for taxpayers. Having a AAA bond rating ensures that we get the most competitive interest rate when we go out to borrow. ► Councilor Chandler said he thinks some councilors took some grief when they took that money last year to save some jobs, and it worked out, and he wants to tell people they are very happy that they are putting it back in. ► Chair Mercer said the three most important letters the Town Council gets to deal with are those, and we need to maintain those three letters. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

- c. ***Bylaw Amendment 25-925: Amendment to Sewer System Map (Raymond St.) - First Reading (Motion to Move Bylaw Amendment 25-925 to a Second Reading - Majority Vote).*** ► Councilor Jones read the bylaw amendment. ► **MOTION to Move** Bylaw Amendment 25-925: Amendment to Sewer System Map (Raymond St.) to a second reading by **Hamblen. SECOND** by **Cormier-Leger. Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen said the next two votes are to extend the water sewer map up to the end of Raymond Street. He explained the location of Raymond Street. He said if you read the letter from the town engineer and DPW director, there are some easement issues where some of the other property encroaches upon this property. The applicant has agreed to give the Town all the property easements that deal with the drainage situation up there, and this is really their only ability to get water and sewer as the site is not large enough to deal with their own private situation. He said this is the last parcel on that road. ► Councilor Jones asked if 40 ft. of PVC sewer line is the norm. ► DPW Director Brutus Cantoreggi said this is kind of unique. It is actually the existing sewer pipe we have there, and it is actually 10 ft. from the property line, so it is going to be extended 40 ft. so that way they can tie in; the 40 ft. extension is ours. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**
- d. ***Bylaw Amendment 25-926: Amendment to Water System Map (Raymond St.) - First Reading (Motion to Move Bylaw Amendment 25-926 to a Second Reading - Majority Vote).*** ► Councilor Jones read the bylaw amendment. ► **MOTION to Move** Bylaw Amendment 25-926: Amendment to Water System Map (Raymond St.) to a second reading by **Hamblen. SECOND** by **Cormier-Leger. Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen said same. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**
- e. ***Resolution 25-11: Cable Funds in Support of PEG Service and Programming per MGL Ch. 44 §53F3/4 (Motion to Approve Resolution 25-11 - Majority Vote).*** ► **MOTION to Waive** the reading by **Cormier-Leger. SECOND** by **Chandler. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.** ► **MOTION to Approve** Resolution 25-11: Cable Funds in Support of PEG Service and Programming per MGL Ch. 44 §53F3/4 by **Hamblen. SECOND** by **Jones. Discussion:** ► Councilor Frongillo said this is the receiving of funds from the local TV providers which helps fund our Franklin TV. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT: ► Mr. Hellen said March 5 is his preliminary budget update. He said the numbers will have changed since the budget sessions. He said on March 5 he will present this and go through his traditional slideshow with all the numbers and highlights. He announced that Mirchi, who the Town Council approved for a liquor license, withdrew that license application. He said they wrote to us, the chair, and the town attorney this week. Mr. Hellen said he wanted to make sure the minutes reflect that. He said we did send the approved version from the Town Council to the ABCC. There was nothing that the ABCC sent back to us that was any red flag. He said that license is not going forward. He said they received official confirmation from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts about one week ago that on August 31, 2025, the Best Western Hotel will be closed for the emergency shelter system. He noted this is the day before school starts. He said that the Town of Franklin, the local government, and the School Committee may have done our job like we do in any type of situation that has an emergency affiliated with it, but we have zero control over this, and there was no public input on this; this was a decision that the governor and/or other state officials made. He said he still gets emails blaming the town for this. He said the Town of Franklin never had any role in making these decisions; these were state decisions. He said as

this is wrapping up, it is warranted again to say this, that many volunteers, organizations in town, and residents, and organizations in the community stepped up, and he thanked them for all that they did.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS:

- a. Capital Budget Subcommittee.** ► None.
- b. Economic Development Subcommittee.** ► Councilor Hamblen said they met this evening, and we had two items on the agenda. One will come before the Town Council where we are adding to the use table and a description of shared kitchens and shared kitchen bylaw. She said Gus Brown and Cathy Liberty worked really hard on that for us. She said they also are discussing renaming the Commercial I zoning area around Union Street and Cottage Street to rename it to the Crossing Neighborhood District and hopefully take the Master Plan and then try to push a little bit of the zoning to follow the Master Plan there.
- c. Budget Subcommittee.** ► Chair Mercer said we are deep into our Joint Budget Subcommittee listening sessions. He said we have had three and have three more to go. The next one is Tuesday morning at 9:30 AM at the Senior Center. The next one is on Saturday, March 8 from 10 AM to 12 PM, virtually. The final one is on March 12 at the Franklin High School. He said the listening sessions have been going very well. He said to please come out and ask questions and tell us your concerns.
- d. Master Plan Update Committee.** ► None.
- e. Davis-Thayer Reuse Advisory Committee.** ► None.
- f. Police Station Building Committee.** ► Chair Mercer said they met last evening with the architect and project manager. It was an introduction of the architectural team. They will be looking at different sites. The Police Station Building Committee probably will not get together again until sometime in summer. He said they are beginning to evaluate three sites: Davis Thayer, Parmenter, and a site on Grove Street, but we decided last night that site was not really big enough. He said as information comes in he will bring it forward.
- g. GATRA Advisory Board.** ► None.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: ► None.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: ► Councilor Hamblen thanked everyone for respectful discussion during the Joint Budget listening sessions. She said Monday night at the legislative forum for the School Committee everyone was very respectful, and we got a lot of answers. She said at the Planning Board, it was a different scene. She said she wants to support her elected officials on the Planning Board and say they are volunteers, trying to do their best, following the rules, and the processes they have to follow, and it makes her sad that they were treated like that. She wants to apologize for that. That is not the way we want to do things. She said Planning Board Vice Chair Beth Wierling said that when you disrespect one of us, you are disrespecting all of us. She said that needs to be said. ► Councilor Frongillo said he wanted to underline a few of the upcoming discussions if you want to jump in. One is the arts discussion at the Blackbox at noon next Wednesday. He said Senator Rausch is hosting her small business roundtable at 1 PM on March 11. He said you can reach out to him or her office if you are interested in being a part of that. He noted the budget listening sessions. He said if you have not been to a listening session, you are missing out on fantastic conversation and really a showcase of the best of what Franklin has to offer in terms of civic engagement. Really, really insightful, thought out, respectful comments, questions, feedback, and dialogue. He said if you have not gone, he encourages you to go. He said anyone who cares about this town should be talking about how our budget, for the services you got in the past year, in order to offer those services again, that would take \$3.6 million more than we have right now, and however you feel about the way to deal with that, you should be talking about how we are going to move forward. He said we are not talking about expanding our services, about restoring our services, just the services that you got to enjoy in the past year, \$3.6 million short in delivering that, so that should be top of mind for any person who cares about the health of this community from now until we solve it. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said he echoes Councilor Hamblen's remarks. He said we are all volunteers, and we are working really, really hard. He reviewed that there is a lot that goes into these jobs, and we need the public to be respectful and engaged in an

appropriate way. He said he is sorry about what happened at the Planning Board meeting and hopes to find a more mature way to talk about our differences. He thanked all who have come to the meetings: the legislative forum and the listening sessions. He said we are so lucky to have what we have in our town. He reviewed the cost of some of the athletics. He said tomorrow night is the public meeting for the town administrator's review at 7 PM at the Council Chambers. He said he chaired that subcommittee this year. ► Councilor Pellegri asked when the ZBA is going to restore their meetings for the public not on Zoom, but in person. ► Mr. Hellen said the discretion is unilaterally at the ZBA chair's discretion. He said he has made it clear to ZBA members about the meetings, and members have also said they want in person meetings, but the ZBA still has not had an in person meeting in years. He said it is disappointing. He said the members have to tell the chair they want to meet in person, and the chair has the right under current state law to choose remote only. He noted that there are still boards of selectmen in other towns that have still not met in person since the pandemic. He said the only board in Franklin that does not meet in Council Chambers is the ZBA. ► Councilor Pellegri said she is hearing some very bad stories about the chairman as far as being here in Franklin and being away out of the state. ► Mr. Hellen said for this section of Councilor Comments there should not be such questions to the town administrator and having a dialogue; it is not posted on the agenda. He said he hears Councilor Pellegri. He noted that the ZBA chair's appointment expires on June 30. Mr. Hellen said the ZBA chair knows where he stands on the issue. ► Councilor Jones said ditto to everything that has been said. ► Chair Mercer reiterated what Councilor Hamblen and Councilor Frongillo said for upcoming events and how important the Joint Budget Subcommittee listening sessions are. He said as far as the Planning Board goes, folks, we are all here as volunteers because we love our community. But, to be verbally abused is something that should not happen to any board. He said he apologized to the Planning Board that they had to deal with that.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

► *a. Exemption: To review and approve minutes from Town Council Executive Sessions.*

► *b. Exemption #3: Collective Bargaining (all Municipal unions) - To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body and the chair so declares.*

► Chair Mercer stated there is a need for an executive session with two exemptions: 1. Exemption: To review and approve minutes from Town Council Executive Sessions, and 2. Exemption #3: Collective Bargaining (all Municipal unions) - To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body, and the chair so declares, and we will not return to open session. ► **MOTION to Enter** into executive session for two exemptions: 1. Exemption: To review and approve minutes from Town Council Executive Sessions, and 2. Exemption #3: Collective Bargaining (all Municipal unions) - To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining position of the public body, and the chair so declares, and we will not return to open session by **Jones. SECOND** by **Hamblen. No Discussion.** ► **ROLL CALL VOTE: Chandler-YES; Cormier-Leger-YES; Frongillo-YES; Hamblen-YES; Jones-YES; Mercer-YES; Pellegri-YES; Sheridan-YES.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

Open Session ended at 7:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary