

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
March 5, 2025**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, March 5, 2025, at the Municipal Building, 2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, MA. Councilors present: Brian Chandler, Theodore Cormier-Leger, Robert Dellorco, Cobi Frongillo, Melanie Hamblen, Glenn Jones, Deborah Pellegrini, Thomas Mercer, Patrick Sheridan. Councilors absent: None. 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 the Joint Budget Subcommittee will be holding their next final two listening sessions this Saturday, March 8 at 10 AM in the Municipal Building in Council Chambers and on next Wednesday, March 12 at 7 PM in the Franklin High School Auditorium. 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.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: ► Mr. Dave Callaghan, 30 Plain Street and Chair of the Franklin School Committee, said he was using this opportunity to talk about the work of the schools and School Committee. He said a transformative reorganization has been undergoing in the Franklin public schools including right sizing and school buildings brought down from 10 to 7 which will provide a greater educational experience for the students and will save the taxpayers about \$2 million annually. He said in addition to all these benefits there is a potential for an expansion of our revenue base. He said ECDC is a pre-K program. He said he will talk to anyone offline about the benefits of having a robust pre-K school system in town. He said since he has been on the school committee, he has heard they have been busting at the seams at the space they have on Oak Street. Starting next year because of the reorganization, they will be able to expand at the Pond Street location. He said ECDC does charge a number of the students tuition. So, as they are able to expand the center, they will be able to expand the revenue base as well. He said additionally, Superintendent Lucas Giguere said in the future there is a potential of also opening a daycare center at the same location for Franklin teachers; this is a revenue opportunity and recruitment and retention tool for a lot of the teachers.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: ► None.

PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITIONS: ► ***Police Department - Swearing In of New Patrol Officer Steven Dejoie.*** ► Chief of Police Thomas Lynch said this new officer is replacing Jimmy Lawrence who retired. He said this is not an addition; it is filling the gaps that we currently have. He introduced new Patrol Officer Steven Dejoie and reviewed his background, education, and career. He noted Officer Dejoie's wife and family members were pinning the badge. ► Town Clerk Nancy Danello performed the swearing in.

► ***Proclamation & Performance: Franklin Fine & Performing Arts Students.*** ► Ms. Diane Plouff, music director/performing arts director for the Franklin Public Schools, thanked the Town Council for inviting them. She introduced the members of the string quartet of Franklin High School who gave a performance. She said she wanted to point out that this level of performance comes from years of strong music education. She said the reason they are here is to acknowledge that many students have been accepted into senior central districts this year; she explained the process and read aloud the names of the students accepted, many of whom were in the audience. She said the top members of the central district then receive an invitation to audition for all state. She read aloud the names of students selected for an audition, many of whom were in the audience. She recognized the seventh-grade student participating in the American Choral Directors Association. She said congratulations to all the students. ► Chair Mercer read aloud a proclamation honoring Fine & Performing Arts Students from the Franklin Public Schools.

Chair Mercer declared a two-minute recess.

APPOINTMENTS: ► ***Cultural District Committee - Peter Rochat.*** ► Councilor Jones read the appointment. ► **MOTION** to ratify the appointment by the Town Administrator of Peter Rochat to serve as a member of the Cultural District Committee with term expiration June 30, 2026, by **Jones. SECOND** by **Dellorco. Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen explained this appointment came in from the Cultural District Committee. Mr. Rochat is also a business owner downtown. ► Councilor Jones said thank you for stepping up. He said he enjoys his shop downtown. ► Councilor Frongillo thanked all who step up to volunteer and noted other events that Mr. Rochat is involved in. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

PUBLIC HEARINGS - 7:00 PM: ► None.

LICENSE TRANSACTIONS: ► None.

PRESENTATIONS / DISCUSSION: ► ***Other Post-Employment Benefits (OPEB) Actuarial Update - Dan Sherman.*** ► Mr. Hellen thanked the presenters for joining the Town Council tonight for the presentation. ► Mr. Sherman (via Zoom) presented the Post Retirement Benefits Actuarial Valuation of The Town of Franklin, June 30, 2024, Actuarial Valuation Report GASB 74 & 75, which was provided in the meeting packet. He reviewed page 3 showing the change in net position of the assets. It started at \$12.3 million in the beginning of the year and finished at \$14.4 million. He said the \$1.2 million of investment gain is about \$300,000 greater than expected. It was an outstanding year on investments. This will help decrease the unfunded liability. He explained on page 4 it shows a roll forward year; it is an off year. He explained in this year, there is no assumed changes in the demographic in the groups beyond what is expected. It is assumed to roll forward. He explained the liability is expected to be \$78.8 million. He discussed the enterprise funds shown on pages 4 and 5. On the bottom of page 5 is the assumption that the healthcare costs will be 1 percent higher or 1 percent lower than what he expects which he explained. He said he is assuming 4.5 percent increase in healthcare costs, and he explained the liability. He reviewed the benefits of keeping healthcare costs down. He said at the top of page 6 shows the expense for the year which comes in at approximately \$1.9 million. The previous year that expense was at \$3.3 million. So, it is a huge drop. He said the big nut is on the experience on the change of assumptions. He said this is only a paper entry and does not mean the actual cash is \$1.9 million. He pointed out the volatility that is inherent in the design of Government Accounting Standards Board (GASB) pronouncements. He noted that in 2023 the funded ratio Plan Fiduciary Net Positions as a percentage of the Total OPEB Liability was 16.8 percent, and it is now at 18.2 percent. He said this was quite good and a good thing compared to peers. He said the

next page goes through the various amortizations. He said they are assuming a 7.5 percent return. He explained their expected claims costs, and the town shows significant gains, regarding mitigating cost increases on the medical front. He noted the remainder of the exhibits in the information packet. He said the bottom line is the town is doing a good job keeping up. ► Councilor Frongillo said this is difficult for him to understand, and he needs a refresher every time. He asked if anything else besides healthcare expenses are included in this. He asked if our liability went up or down this year. He asked why is 18 percent funded a good job. He asked for the ramifications of not being fully funded. ► Mr. Sherman said life insurance; 99 percent of this liability is medical with a little bit of life insurance. He said on page 6 the liability is about \$64.4 million, and a year ago it was at \$61.2 million. He explained the reason for that is that it is roll forward and assuming all assumptions are met. He said the absolute dollar amount did go up. ► Mr. Hellen explained the liabilities will go up and down; it is the percentage that you are looking at. He said you want a higher percentage of what is funded. ► Mr. Sherman explained that he has 26 to 30 OPEB clients, and most are anywhere from 0 percent to 5 percent. He noted a study regarding OPEB reports and explained the cities he works with are less than 5 percent. He said in talking to rating agencies, those who are setting money aside, it helps with the bond rating as 18 percent is a positive. He explained that as the GASB is fairly new, the fact that the town is at 18 percent is good as to be fully funded at this time would be unrealistic. He said to increase the percentage each time is the chart you want to run; it is not an instantaneous fix. ► Councilor Chandler explained the last two years they have actually put in less of the Free Cash to the OPEB because they have needed it to cover all the other expenses. He said he feels when they look at the budget for next year, they are going to have to get back on track with this. It will be the will of the people come spring with what they want to do. ► Councilor Jones noted that we had been making contributions eight to ten years ago toward OPEB. He thanked Mr. Sherman for the information. He confirmed this is a responsibility of all cities and towns for this obligation. ► Mr. Sherman explained all but a few have to do this including the state. He said a majority are not funding this. He explained that it seems that towns do a better job at funding than cities. ► Councilor Dellorco said that by putting money in this, it shows the higher ups that we are doing a good job, and if we keep contributing, it is a good thing. ► Mr. Sherman said that is correct. He said he does not think any towns, except possibly Wellesley which he explained, are fully funded. ► Chair Mercer asked how Franklin stacks up to other towns. ► Mr. Sherman said he thinks in the top 25 percent. ► Chair Mercer thanked Mr. Sherman for his hard work.

► ***FY26 Budget Preview - Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator.*** ► Mr. Hellen narrated a slideshow presentation of a preview of the FY26 Budget. He noted that presentation and related materials were to be distributed at the meeting and also posted on the Town website. He noted the revised budget memo and revised budget model. He said he was going to walk through two models. He said this is also on the Town budget webpage. He said he wants to be transparent with people, and any time the budget model changes, he wants to make sure it is explicitly explained as detailed in his budget memo. He noted this is a preliminary budget; the official filing will not be until mid-April. Model A is a level service budget with a \$3.862 million structural budget deficit. He reviewed slide Model A: Revenue: Tax Levy, Slide 1. He noted there is a large deficit and explained how the revenue is done with the levy. He explained Slide 2 includes the debt exclusions which are ballot initiatives that were approved by the voters to increase property taxes to pay for a specific project; all those projects are listed on this slide. He said the Horace Mann first borrowing is fully paid off. Keller-Sullivan is the same thing. He said people will not see or notice a tax break, but they are actually partially seeing one. He said the second Horace Mann will be paid off soon. This leaves some capacity. As these are staggered, it does not overwhelm the taxpayer too much. He said the big piece is \$1.6 million added to the tax roles this year for the Tri-County School. He noted the high school debt exclusion will go on for quite a few more years. He noted more information on this is included in his memo. He explained Slide 3 which reviewed local receipts. He said local receipts for the town are equivalent to school revolving funds. They are generally fees for service such as the Recreation Department and ambulance. He explained they are assuming a \$1.7 million increase in local receipts. He said they are rebounding from the pandemic years. He explained other available funds and one-time revenues to balance the budget as shown on the slide. He said because of this, they knew that coming into FY26, there would be a minimum of \$3 million in deficit. He reviewed Slide 3.1 showing the actuals over the last 10 years of

local receipts. He explained they are estimating \$15.3 million in local receipts. He noted this is the 250th anniversary of the state, the World Cup, and the town anniversary which is good for hotels and meals. He discussed that the final revenue source in the budget is state aid. He reviewed Slide 4. He discussed chapter 70 aid under the governor's budget. He explained cherry sheets. He reviewed the Charter School assessment is now up to almost \$6 million which is due to the Charter School capacity more than doubled, and a lot of students went there. He said Governor Healy's proposal is a \$272,000 increase. He explained that is good news. He said they will have to wait and see regarding the budget cuts from the federal government. He said when you add it all up, you are at a \$3.862 million deficit given the expenditures. He reviewed Model A: Expenditures: Slide 1 Overall Summary. The Total Town Budget FY26 is \$150,112,064. A full breakdown of budget categories can be found in the materials available online. He also showed the information in pie chart form. He explained that about 70 percent of the budget goes to public education. He reviewed the main expenditure highlights which were provided on one slide labelled as such. He discussed that this Model A represents a \$3,862,672 structural deficit that has to be approved by the Town Council or evaluate the implementation of Model B. He explained that Model A is a level service budget. He mentioned that unfortunately superintendent Lucas Giguere was unable to attend tonight's meeting. He explained that 71 percent of the entire town budget consists of salaries and employee benefits. He explained that when you look at cuts in Model B, you really cannot cut a lot of expenses. He discussed that regarding cuts in Model B, there is a reason why staff and benefits are usually the most likely to be reduced because almost three-quarters of the entire town budget goes to salary and benefits. He explained Model B is everything is on the table. He reviewed a menu of budget reduction options to avoid, or lessen, an override figure or likely cuts if the structural deficit is not solved. He reviewed Model B: Menu of Potential FY26 Budget Reductions slide. The list is a first draft of potential cuts. These are presented as a menu of sample cuts that are at stake if the structural deficit is not addressed. The amount on the slide is higher than the deficit to illustrate the most likely cuts and changes that would have to occur. The list on the slide totals \$4,255,282. This information is all available online. He said these reductions will be seen and felt by the community. He reviewed each item listed on the slide. He reviewed that there is not one position that they have in the municipal side that if it were eliminated, you would not see an impact, which he gave examples. He said everything on this list will be felt throughout the community. He said we are not seeing calls for fewer services, they are calling for more. People have an expectation to do things like plowing right away. If any of these reductions happen, there will be impacts. He reviewed Model B: DPW Cuts 1 slide. He said this is impacting public safety. He reviewed the listed Highway Division and Grounds Division potential cuts; these will be noticeable impacts. He reviewed Model B: DPW Cuts 2 slide and discussed line items listed in Central Motors Division, Recycle Center Division, and Administrative/Engineering Division reductions. He reviewed the Override 101 slide, and he explained the full process for an override. He reviewed the One-Slide Override Sample slide. He reviewed that a \$3,862,672 override would cost an average homeowner \$312 per household annually, based on FY25. The slide contained a "Calculate Your Override Here on DOR Override Estimate Calculator" link. He explained that the Proposition 2 ½ combined with the \$3,862,672 override results in an approximately \$538 increase annually per household. He reviewed the Upcoming Property/Ratepayer Increases for FY26 slide which includes items already approved including Tri-County School and the water and sewer rates. He pointed out what people are getting for their money including the replacement of the 105-year-old sewer pipe. He discussed Foreseeable Capital Costs Requiring Revenue – 2025-2030 slide. He reviewed and explained that the following projects are the next in line capital projects on the foreseeable future which includes School and Town Facility debt exclusions for Police Station, Remington Jefferson, Horace Mann Roof, and for Public Works mandatory water tank repairs and general pressure from federal and state mandates including PFAS, stormwater and managing trash and recycling costs. He noted that these projects are in the beginning stages of design and no date or timeline has been scheduled with an estimated vote in two to three years. He reviewed upcoming dates of note regarding budget discussions and meetings. ► Town Council members asked questions and made comments. ► Councilor Dellorco discussed how devastating it would be to lose police and fire. He asked DPW about buying vehicles and parts. He said he knows how difficult it is to do what DPW does. ► In response, DPW Director Brutus Cantoreggi said if the override does not go through, there will be instant impact for public safety. He said a lot of his items would not be instant. He discussed

road maintenance and pot holes. He said the DPW does have great preventive maintenance program. They use the money to extend the roads with preventive maintenance which eventually would cost more money if they do not do the maintenance. He explained this is the same situation for the ball fields. He discussed the specialized pieces of equipment they have for maintenance. He reviewed his tree pruning maintenance program which is better than waiting for the tree to fall over which costs even more money. He said his budget has already been cut. He said the town looks great and people have pride in the town and it reflects property values. ► Chair Mercer reviewed that the \$3.862 million is a town-wide structural deficit.

► Councilor Chandler said the \$3.8 million is the highest we can go, everything would be whole, and there would be no layoffs. ► Councilor Cormier-Leger talked about the information provided by the two chiefs at yesterday's presentation at the Senior Center regarding the reality. He said this is not easy to ask of the public. He said we are listening and need everyone's help. ► Councilor Jones reviewed yesterday's presentation at the Senior Center. He said he understands people's fears and today's expenses. He said we need to explain to citizens what we are getting for this \$3.862 million increase. ► Councilor Hamblen said she has listened. She said she is trying to find commonalities. She said we all can agree we like the services we have today and want to keep them, and there are people who wonder how do we keep it. She said we need to have our services or everything will collapse including property values. She said she wants to reiterate what the School Committee has done, and that should be celebrated. She said she thinks everyone is doing what they can to keep services level after last year's cuts. She said if you want to keep your services, we need a \$3.862 million override. ► Councilor Frongillo thanked them for the budget listening sessions. He said anytime we are asking residents to pay more it is difficult, but the piece he is wrestling with is this is the bare bones. He said we have gone away from and we were looking at what we know around the bend is further increases to expenses. He said he wants to get back to fully funding roads and maintenance. He said he wants to get to a place to have fully funded music and sports. He said why not use this opportunity to get ahead of some other expenses that are right around the corner and to chip away at some of the restorations or other things needed; why not use this opportunity to add a little more and not just put ourselves at the razor thin margin. ► Mr. Hellen said it is the Town Council's decision, and if they want to do that it is a discussion they should have. He said he has heard people's concerns about affordability and the pressure of not being able to afford to live here. He said they have heard a lot of different input. He said at some point you have to win something and what that number is and what is that service level is up to the Town Council, the Joint Budget Subcommittee, and the School Committee. He discussed that he thinks the issue is what is the balance of what you need to do and what is most affordable for everybody. ► Councilor Frongillo said all residents should be talking about the structural deficit. ► Ms. Celia Courtright, 213 Peck Street, discussed the \$3.8 million override and confirmed it would make level service. She discussed it is like having a slow leak in the tire. She asked how will this be for the following year and how much would we be short and would we have to go through another override for the next year. ► Mr. Hellen said he has shown in budget models there are big variables. He said what is going on in DC is a factor. He said we do not know what it will be like. He said healthcare is a systemic problem in Massachusetts. He discussed healthcare costs in Franklin. He discussed the county pension obligation. He said he cannot say Ms. Courtright is wrong; however, he also looks at the alternative such as a \$4, \$5, \$6, \$7, or \$8 million override. He said people need to recognize that people in the community have had a very turbulent five years. He said the next five years will be turbulent. He noted inflation. He said affordability is a concern of those in the community. He said citizens seem to be saying that regarding the cuts, they will pay for them because they want the services. He said he thinks Massachusetts in the next few years is going to be in a severe withdrawal and not be able to finance all the ideas and be back to basics. He would hate to see an override fail. He said everyone has been a part of the school redistricting project. He said this is a potential opportunity for the schools to be on their best footing in years. He discussed continuing to look out for the next five years. He said this is a community decision. ► Mr. Mark Minnichelli, 31 Longfellow Drive, commented on a slide that showed there are legal reasons Mr. Hellen and paid staff cannot take a position, but it did not say anything about Town councilors. He said he wanted to share that he has heard tonight more continuity among councilor comments than he heard last year. He said he was encouraged to hear this more uniformed understanding. He said he has been listening to the listening sessions. He said he has heard people having concerns about just making ends meet today. He said what if we asked for more

than we need and use that excess to try to fund more means of relief for people who need the relief. He said today people can volunteer in different areas of the town. ► Mr. Hellen said he does not know how that would work. He said you would essentially be setting up another department to try to come up with criteria for eligibility to get rebates on something. He said Mr. Cerel is saying no. He explained you could do what Acton did and created a reserve account with additional funds to offset future costs. He could look that up. He explained the associated costs based on the value of the house. ► Mr. Cerel explained there is a specific state statute that authorizes the senior work-off program. ► Mr. Steve Sherlock, 13 Magnolia Drive, reviewed a perspective of what OPEB used to seem like 15 years ago; he said there is a plan. He noted the Master Plan document and said it was great reading. There are a couple of pages that specifically talk about affordability. He said that of the rental residents, 20 percent are already between 30 percent and 49 percent of their income going toward their housing and another 24 percent are above 50 percent of income going toward housing. So that is 45 percent of rentals that are really on the edge. He explained that homeowners are not immune. He said they have to have the right number to maintain the services. ► Meghan, resident of Winthrop Drive (via Zoom), said she emailed Mr. Hellen asking for information about the likely debt exclusions and how much each of those may cost. She said Mr. Hellen responded but did not provide the costs but then it was provided tonight. She said no one wants to see cuts, but as he said, it is extremely important what is on the horizon in terms of increases. She said it is important given the fact of these listed debt exclusions were included in the documents for a total of \$37 million and likely could be more than that, it would be helpful to give folks an idea, and she is aware there are different factors, but a rough idea of what the increases could be. She said this is important to see the other likely debt exclusions in upcoming years. She said if we are taking on another \$100 or \$200 per household, that may make a big difference. She noted the phosphorus control plan and the costs and that people should see those costs so people can see a full picture. She said people want to see the full picture. She said she keeps hearing about the sports fees, and it is her understating that there has been no decision made on sports fees yet; there are not details on that. She said that it makes it seem like even if an override did pass, we could still spend the same amount on sports fees. ► Mr. Hellen said he cannot speak to the sports fees. He said she needs to follow up with Superintendent Giguere and the School Committee about that. He said it is difficult to determine the future costs. He is not going to calculate specific numbers of the costs because in two years it will be a different world; he does not know what is coming such as interest rates or tariffs. He said this is the best assessment he has at this time. He noted that the federal government information may change. He said he is not going to put out hypothetical costs. ► Meghan asked what is the reason we can give this idea for an override but not for a debt exclusion. She said to give people an idea of what \$40 million would look like based on today with a disclaimer that it is unknown. ► Mr. Hellen explained regarding the issue of the override, he is using FY25 certified data; he is using factual numbers and not hypotheticals. He explained the structural deficit is a real number and not a hypothetical. He said these projects may not happen and not go before the voters. There may be so much that happens before these projects come up. He said there are so many unknowns. He said he has tried to be very transparent with the public. ► Chair Mercer thanked Mr. Hellen, the administration, staff, School Committee, and others for all their hard work. He said the schools did what they asked them to do. He said we asked them to move their budget process forward one and a half months to help us. He said the budget process has been a really good process, and we have reached a lot more residents than ever before in the past with information. He reviewed the upcoming meetings and listening sessions. He said he may cut the last listening session on Wednesday a little short so the committee can then deliberate and discuss a recommendation to send to the Town Council. Then on the 12th the Joint Budget Subcommittee will vote in a recommendation to present to the Town Council on March 19 for the Town Council's deliberation that night. He said those are the three most important dates left as far as getting us to a ballot question or not. He reiterated that Superintendent Giguere had planned to attend but was unable to attend tonight's meeting.

LEGISLATION FOR ACTION:

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

- a. ***Zoning Bylaw Amendment 25-927: A Zoning Bylaw to Amend Chapter 185, Section 3 of The Code Of The Town of Franklin, Definitions (Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen) - Referral to the Planning Board (Motion to Refer Zoning Bylaw Amendment 25-927 to the Planning Board - Majority Vote).*** ► Councilor Jones read the zoning bylaw amendment. ► **MOTION to Refer Zoning Bylaw Amendment 25-927: A Zoning Bylaw to Amend Chapter 185, Section 3 of The Code Of The Town of Franklin, Definitions (Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen) to the Planning Board by Dellocco. SECOND by Hamblen. Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen said items a. and b. refer to the same topic. He said the definition just read is a perfect summary. ► Councilor Hamblen said this was on the goals list and on her goals for seven years. She said we can do this here referring to the shared kitchen. She thanked the health director and building commissioner who worked really hard on this. ► Building Commission Gus Brown said some of this will tie into the budget. He said this is for a small business owner who dreams of having a culinary business. He said every dollar they make will put more value into this town. He noted the EDC is still working on potential bylaws and changes even during the budget season. He said he appreciates all the staff and EDC for what they have done. He discussed that what is coming up is a lot of work and potential development that the Planning Board and planning staff is going to see coming before them. He said as those projects come into the pipeline, there is maybe an answer to some of the unknowns, and he knows it is a sore subject with some people because of the traffic. He noted the Neighborhood Crossing District; he said these things make the glass half full. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- b. ***Zoning Bylaw Amendment 25-928: A Zoning Bylaw to Amend Chapter 185, Attachment 3, Use Regulation Schedule, Part II Principal Uses (Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen) - Referral to the Planning Board (Motion to Refer Zoning Bylaw Amendment 25-928 to the Planning Board - Majority Vote).*** ► Councilor Jones read the zoning bylaw amendment. ► **MOTION to Refer Zoning Bylaw Amendment 25-928: A Zoning Bylaw to Amend Chapter 185, Attachment 3, Use Regulation Schedule, Part II Principal Uses (Shared-Use Commercial Kitchen) to the Planning Board by Dellocco. SECOND by Hamblen. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- c. ***Resolution 25-12: Receipts Reserved for Appropriation from Parking Fund (Motion to Approve Resolution 25-12 - Majority Vote).*** ► Councilor Jones read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 25-12: Receipts Reserved for Appropriation from Parking Fund by Dellocco. SECOND by Hamblen. Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen said this is to pay the bill for the kiosks; we are obligated to pay it out of this fund. He said this is the first time we are doing this. He said we will have to do it each year. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- d. ***Resolution 25-13: Authorization to Grant Easement to Commonwealth of Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation and Recreation to Enable Construction of Rail Trail Extension (Motion to Approve Resolution 25-13 - 2/3 Majority Vote).*** ► **MOTION to Waive the reading by Hamblen. SECOND by Dellocco. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.** ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 25-13: Authorization to Grant Easement to Commonwealth of Massachusetts Dept. of Conservation and Recreation to Enable Construction of Rail Trail Extension by Dellocco. SECOND by Hamblen. Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen reviewed his memo to the Town Council dated February 18, 2025, provided in the meeting packet which stated if approved, this resolution will authorize the Town to grant an easement to the state Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) to enable construction of an extension of the SNETT Rail Trail. He said the DCR is committing \$1 million to construct some parts of the trail. This will take one to two years to go through the entire process and we still will need federal approval. He thanked Mr. Cerel for his work on this. ► Councilor Hamblen thanked everyone for their hard work. ► Councilor Sheridan said he seconded that. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- e. ***Resolution 25-14: Acceptance of Gifts - Senior Center (\$250) (Motion to Approve Resolution 25-14 - Majority Vote).*** ► Councilor Jones read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 25-14: Acceptance of Gifts - Senior Center (\$250) by Dellocco. SECOND by Hamblen. Discussion:** ► Chair

Mercer said continued thank you to all the donors for their continued support. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT: ► Mr. Hellen announced the Art Pharmacy event with Micheal Bobbitt at the Black Box today. He said the program is an alternative to traditional health to help people with mental health and substance abuse problems. He said they are proud that they are the first town in Massachusetts to spend opioid settlement money on art therapy and use money on arts and culture. He said we should also feel proud as a community. He said he is going to do a webinar on this. He said Franklin is leading the way on this. He discussed the Regional Dispatch Center. It has been six years since it started. He said the board is comprise of the town managers from the six towns. Through the leadership of the towns involved in the MECC and the Semrecc facility in Foxboro, we just took a vote that in the next 60 days they are going to sign an intermunicipal agreement to regionalize both of those facilities to become the largest regional dispatch center in all of New England. He noted the rest of the country operates this way. He said we are just catching up. He said our state-of-the-art facility will be combined with their state-of-the-art facility. He said it is a truly historic and monumental thing. He said it is important because we already work together with mutual aid. He said like redistricting, there will be future economies of scale. He said this will make us eligible for additional five-year grant programs. By regionalizing, both centers will be eligible for the grants and can save millions of dollars over the time period. He discussed why regionalizing is beneficial.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS:

- a. **Town Administrator Evaluation Ad Hoc Subcommittee Report.** ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said they met last Wednesday. He said they had a robust and positive discussion. He said he was proud to hear from many department heads who shared stories of great leadership and support they receive from Mr. Hellen. He said they overwhelming recommended, and put glowing recommendations in the report, which you can find in here. He said there was one area we asked him to look at for some improvement, but it was just minor. He said overall, we are very lucky to have Mr. Hellen and the team he has put together leading the town. ► Councilor Hamblen said she already spoke about the people who were here watching it and enjoying it, and she thinks that is what she wanted to add. ► Councilor Jones said if everyone takes the opportunity to watch the replay on YouTube, you will find that Mr. Hellen has done a great job as town administrator, but I think what came out of it, this is what team effort is, he has a great staff. He thanked them all for their hard work. ► Chair Mercer said he wanted to add a few comments. He said he spends a lot of time with Mr. Hellen. He said how proud and happy he is with the town administrator and the whole team. He said it is not only his team, it is the team that is sitting right here. He said he thinks there is a lot of time that we do not accept the credit that we should be accepting for the work that we do. He said he thinks part of this is because we set those goals, and the town administrator's evaluation is based on how he addresses the goals that are set by this council. He said we put some difficult and many goals, and very challenging goals, on the two-year plan. He said Mr. Hellen and the entire team have done a great job in addressing those goals. He said he applauds Mr. Hellen's effort and all the work he has put in as well as the work put in by the entire team.
- b. **Capital Budget Subcommittee.** ► None.
- c. **Economic Development Subcommittee.** ► None.
- d. **Joint Budget Subcommittee.** ► None.
- e. **Police Station Building Committee.** ► None.
- f. **GATRA Advisory Board.** ► None.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: ► Councilor Cormier-Leger said he asked a while ago about getting a report on the water. ► Chair Mercer said it was on the list. ► Councilor Jones said just the facilities update. ► Chair Mercer said that was also on the list. ► Councilor Dellorco said he has been getting texts. He asked what was the progress on voting on Ricky Martini to get his time over. ► Mr. Hellen said he emailed Rich a couple of days ago. He said the original bill that Representative Roy filed was incorrect. He said he talked to Norfolk County, and he said he was working with the staff, Sandy McGuire he thinks, and he sent her

analysis he had from both the town attorney and Norfolk County. He said basically they drafted a bill to the Franklin Retirement Board; we do not have a retirement board. He said they copied and pasted one from Quincy that has their own retirement board. So, essentially because they put in the Franklin Retirement Board that does not exist, the legislation has to be redrafted which is not difficult. Discussion commenced on pension processes/situations.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: ► Councilor Cormier-Leger congratulated the students presenting music tonight. He thanked the Joint Budget Subcommittee and everyone who attended yesterday at the Senior Center; the Q&A and conversations were great. He noted the event at the Black Box today and thanked everyone for coming and launching the Art Pharmacy program. He explained this is creative way to use the opioid funds. He said he applauded Franklin for being the first. ► Councilor Chandler said he thinks the young musicians changed the tone of tonight's meeting, and it was very positive. He discussed the new Police Department hire and reviewed that it was to replace James Lawrence and not a brand-new hire. ► Councilor Pellegrini said thank you to the exceptional students in the string quartet; they were fantastic. She thanked Mr. Hellen for the ZBA that is coming back face-to-face with people rather than on Zoom. ► Mr. Hellen said they would be back on March 27 and opening the Stobart's public hearing. ► Councilor Pellegrini noted March 2, the town's birthday celebration, and said there were no councilors there at the event. She said only 19 people showed up. She discussed we need to get more people involved with the museum. She said the town is 247 years old. ► Councilor Sheridan thanked Mr. Hellen for the presentation and the musicians. He said it is great news about the rail trail. ► Councilor Frongillo said there is a Downtown Partnership meeting tomorrow morning. He said one piece of the town administrator evaluation that he was going to add was interaction with the public and how do we maintain public trust and just to that extent he thinks that is an important part of the town administrator role. He said to that extent he thinks in particular the strides that you have made over the past few months to be very professional and proactive and transparent and putting together all the information around the budget together, and patient and respectful, and very often the same questions over and over. He said he could not image the stress he has to go through all the time. He said for the most part he thinks Mr. Hellen has done a terrific job particularly this budget season. ► Councilor Hamblen thanked the students and their teacher for tonight. She said she went to the Art Pharmacy conversation today and said that the fact that we are number one is super exciting. She explained this is a great way to use the opioid settlement funds. She said it also brings together an economic development component because someone can come and get a pharmacy prescription for a show at the Black Box, and then the Black Box sells a ticket to the Art Pharmacy, so it continues to keep everyone in the community. She said that for every dollar spent in the Art Pharmacy, it decreases health costs by \$4.48. She discussed staff using this. She noted Fairmount Fruit Farm Farmers Market this Saturday from 10 AM to 2 PM. ► Councilor Jones discussed that he adopted another rescue dog. He said in all his years of sitting here, working toward overrides and the collaboration needed, he has never seen the level of collaboration and cooperation between the town administration and the School Department and how well they have been working together. He said he gave kudos to Chair Mercer. He explained that he does not think people realize how much personal time and effort go into making for what is a three-hour meeting it is countless hours behind the scenes. ► Councilor Dellorco said Mr. Hellen does a great job. He congratulated Mr. Hellen for becoming president of the MMA. He gave condolences to the Horrigan family for the passing of Cheryl Ann. ► Chair Mercer thanked Councilor Jones for the comments. He said he reiterates having the students come to the Town Council and having the police and fire departments swearing in of new officers done at the Town Council meetings is really a good thing. He said it is good for the Town Council and good for the community. He thanked Ms. Diane Plouff for bringing the students here and congratulated the students on their achievement. He thanked Mr. Hellen for the presentation tonight. He said the presentation and preview of the budget was a great job. He said they are really in a good spot and headed in the right direction.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: ► None.

ADJOURN: ► MOTION to Adjourn by Dellorco. SECOND by Hamblen. No Discussion. ► VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.

Meeting adjourned at 10:38 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary