

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF MEETING  
April 22, 2020**

*As stated on the agenda, due to the growing concerns regarding the COVID-19 virus, this meeting will be conducted as a Remote/Virtual Town Council meeting. 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 using the Zoom link provided on the agenda.*

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, April 22, 2020 as a **Remote Access Virtual Zoom Meeting**. Councilors present: Andrew Bissanti, Brian Chandler, Robert Dellorco, Eamon McCarthy Earls, 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; Chrissy Whelton, Assistant to the Town Administrator; T. J. Lynch, Chief of Police; Jim McLaughlin, Fire Chief; Gus Brown, Building Commissioner; Bridget Sweet, Chair, Board of Health; Cathy Liberty, Health Department Staff; Ginny McNeil, Health Department Staff; Bryan Taberner, Director, Planning and Community Development.

**CALL TO ORDER:** ► Chair Mercer called the **Remote Access Virtual Zoom Meeting** to order at 4:30 PM. Chair Mercer called for a moment of silence. He confirmed via roll call that Town Council members and Administrative personnel were present and could hear the Chair.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:** ► Chair Mercer stated this meeting is being conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's executive order of March 12, 2020, regarding the current state of emergency in the Commonwealth due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. In order to mitigate the transmission of the COVID-19 virus, we have been advised and directed by the Commonwealth to suspend public gatherings and as such the governor's order suspends the requirements of the open meeting law to have all meetings in a publicly accessible physical location. Further, all members of public bodies are allowed and encouraged to participate remotely. He stated that this meeting will feature public comment. He noted the availability of the posted call-in number and Zoom meeting link provided on the agenda for the public to join and participate in the meeting. He reviewed the remote meeting ground rules. He announced this **Remote Access Virtual Zoom Meeting** is being recorded by *Franklin TV* and available for viewing on Comcast Channel 11 and Verizon Channel 29; this meeting may also be recorded by others.

**PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS:** ► *Coronavirus Updates: When will Franklin Businesses Reopen, When and How? A Community Conversation with a Town Department Head Roundtable including Town Administrator Jamie Hellen; Town Attorney Mark Cerel; Board of Health Chair Bridget Sweet; Health Department Staff Cathy Liberty and Ginny McNeil; Chief of Police TJ Lynch; Fire Chief Jim McLaughlin; and Building Inspector Gus Brown.* ► Mr. Hellen stated that at the last Town Council meeting discussion ensued as to when and how businesses and other organizations may open. They are working on this on a day-to-day basis. He stated that he asked department heads involved in any type of enforcement to join this meeting. He stated the members in attendance all have professional associations with which they communication regarding COVID-19. This roundtable will be very informative for the community. He thanked all Town of Franklin staff for the hard work they have been doing. ► Chair Mercer thanked the department heads and community for participating in this meeting. He noted the governor is giving updates almost daily. The governor decided to close schools through the remainder of the school year. He stated this pandemic is an ongoing crisis with ongoing issues. Many questions have been received by the Town Council members about when businesses will be allowed to open. ► Mr. Bissanti asked if any businesses are ready to open in the near future. ► Chair Mercer said that he is sure there are businesses that

are ready to open, but unfortunately, because of the governor's decree, they may not open, yet. He noted the governor said Massachusetts is plateauing. Chair Mercer said that it is his opinion that the governor will start to loosen up some of the restrictions on some businesses, but he does not know what that will be. ► Mr. Bissanti asked for the latest COVID-19 numbers. ► Chair Mercer stated the numbers have not been posted yet. ► Ms. Sweet confirmed the numbers have not been posted today. She said the contact tracing initiative just kicked off. They want to be very cautious and not move things too quickly. ► Mr. Chandler stated that everyone has been working hard during this situation, and he hopes people will not point fingers whether they agree or disagree with decisions. He has received many inquiries about wearing masks and whether Franklin is going to enforce that. ► Mr. Cerel stated that is a Board of Health decision. ► Ms. Sweet stated they have not made that determination yet. She thinks that it is a mob mentality where if a person is not wearing a mask when in public, others are not pleased. She requested the Town Council's feedback as to if they would like the Board of Health to create an order to wear masks in public places. She is cautious about this as she thinks if the mask order is in place, people may stop social distancing. ► Mr. Cerel stated that the Town of Randolph just made a statement requiring mandatory face masks or cloth face coverings. ► Chair Mercer said an individual supermarket could decree the need for patrons to wear a face mask or face covering without it being mandatory by the Town. ► Ms. Sweet said that many grocery stores are encouraging the use of face masks for those entering the store. She is hesitant to mandate something without feedback from Town Administration and Town Council. ► Mr. Cerel said it is private property so the store can require it; this then becomes an issue of enforcement. However, his take on this would be that if clear signage is posted by the private property owner and it was a condition of entering the premise or a person would be considered a trespasser, then there may be some enforcement rights. ► Mr. Earls concurred with Chair Sweet; a mask mandate may be too prescriptive. He believes masks will be important, but a blanket mask ban may not apply to every situation such as walking alone in the State forest. ► Ms. Hamblen said she has an essential business that is open. Her employees wear masks and everyone is asked to use cash. She has put up signage requesting customers entering the store to wear masks. However, if a business is trying to stay in business, people cannot be sent away if they are not complying with the store's request. If there was a mask mandate, then it would not be the store/business requiring the mask; if it was mandated to wear a mask in an essential store, then the public may take it seriously. She asked when all information about reopening businesses is received, how will the Town provide it to the businesses. ► Ms. Sweet said the Health Department staff have been working hard. She said there is a way to craft a mask order for essential businesses requiring that if a person/customer cannot be six feet from another, a mask/face covering is required. She stated that there are six criteria being looked at to open the State. There must be a downward trajectory of documented cases in a two-week period, and the capacity of the healthcare system is considered. She will send the information to the Town Administrator. ► Ms. Liberty stated concern that face masks give a false sense of security during this pandemic and it may stop people from social distancing. She will take the advice of the Town Council and the Board of Health. ► Mr. Kelly said he does not feel masks are necessary and thinks it gives a false sense of security. He noted there was a meeting yesterday with the Downtown Partnership regrading businesses; their conversation included discussion about washing hands and social distancing. Requiring masks in Franklin may make people who are already mad pick a bigger fight. He thanked all the emergency first responders for their hard work. He applauded Franklin's citizens for what they have done. ► Mr. Hellen stated that the State's numbers just came out; there are 55 confirmed cases in Franklin. He stated that Franklin has done really well for a community of this size. This is reflective of the work of the citizens and Town staff. With more testing, there will be more confirmed cases. ► Chair Mercer discussed that it would be nice to know how many of those cases are cured. ► Ms. Pellegri said she thinks supermarkets should mandate that people entering wear a mask and thinks wearing a mask will keep us safer. She would vote to mandate the wearing of masks in Franklin. She does not want to lift restrictions to soon and said we need to listen to the governor. She recommended the Town Council take a vote about wearing masks. She encouraged people to stay in. ► Mr. Jones stated that some questions that came up while he was participating in the meeting with the Downtown Partnership, Chamber of Commerce, and Representative Jeff

Roy included what measures are currently working, and what can the public do to safely protect themselves while interacting with the community. He showed illustrations of stores implementing policies to maintain social distancing including signage, masks, and other safety measures. He wants to try to start to implement measures now for businesses that are not yet opened to have them ready for when they are allowed to open. He suggested that the Town create a guidebook providing information and guidance that can be given to businesses and those in Town to begin the reopening. ► Mr. Brown provided some information about useful measures they could take in the Building Department. He stated that he sees plexiglass being used in many businesses right now. If the implementation of plexiglass is a good idea, then he is all for it. He does not know what changes the governor will make when it is time to open businesses. He does not know how plexiglass would work in all businesses such as the Town Hall and restaurant's, but he will begin to think about it. ► Chair Mercer said it would be great to have a list for businesses to do to start to reopen. But, if we tell them they have to do something, and in the governor's mandate it is not required, then we have cost the businesses money. ► Ms. Sweet said guidance will be welcomed, but not required until it is known what the governor is going to mandate. She said some things such as decal signage on the floors of businesses are for perception only. She would be hesitant to mandate something without all the information, and she would want it to be based on science and facts and not on perception. ► Mr. Jones said he is not looking to mandate anything without information from the State and US government. He stated it is important to educate the public in proper hygiene. His point is to start thinking about measures that can be taken now. ► Mr. Dellorco agreed that they have to wait for the governor. He agreed with Mr. Kelly about the masks. He believes social distancing is important. If a mask law is put in, who is going to police it. He discussed testing for first responders. He thanked the first responders and Board of Health. ► Chief Lynch stated 35 members got an anti-bodies test. He thanked the first responders and Board of Health for their work. He stated the public has been great. ► Chief McLaughlin said the fire department and police department are at full staffing. They have been doing well with social distancing and wearing PPE. He stated the run volume is down about 15 percent which is good because interaction with the public and hospitals has been reduced. He said the first responders were doing a great job. ► Jane, resident, noted that 222 new deaths in Massachusetts were reported today. She thanked everyone for their hard work. ► Ms. Roberta Trahan, 1 Green Street, thanked everyone in Town. She understood concerns about making the wearing of masks an order. She said she believes residents should protect themselves as they see fit. For anyone in a high-risk category, this virus is terrible. She said social distancing and hand washing is important, but if masks are not made mandatory, they should encourage people to wear them. ► Mr. Steve Sherlock, Franklin Matters, asked if PPE supplies are good ► Chief McLaughlin said the PPE quantity is good at this time. ► Chief Lynch said they are in good shape with PPE at this time. ► Mr. Bissanti stated that it is important to review the data to be able to chart if the virus numbers are going down. ► Chair Mercer stated that the charts and data available from the State are very good. ► Ms. Jackie Maciel, 95 Elm Street, stated she is frustrated that the State will not give transparency and provide the number of recovered cases. From other sources, she believes it is about 11 percent recovered in US. Franklin is at the western edge of Norfolk County. She does not think it is fair to keep the cities/towns with low numbers hostage in the same way Governor Baker has done with Boston because they still have a problem. She wants to open some businesses and asked if the Town of Franklin could defy the governor if they felt it was safe to begin to reopen. ► Ms. Sweet reviewed how the cases were identified and contact tracing. The priority is to control the disease and protect public health. She stated that at this time there is no way to track recovered cases. ► Chair Mercer stated that speaking for himself, he would not defy the governor's orders. As the governor declared a state of emergency, the governor has control. ► Resident, 67 Cottage Street, psychology consultant, stated the concern has been raised that people are mentally crumbling. She would like a proactive way to support these people. ► Chair Mercer said the community comes together and supports each other. ► Mr. Jones stated he thinks these types of meetings are helpful to show everyone that the Town Council is here and listening. ► Mr. Sherlock noted there are resources listed on the Town's and School's portal. ► Ms. Liberty thanked the resident of 67 Cottage Street for being proactive and indicated there may be a way for her and the board of Health to start a partnership.

► Ms. Lisa Piana, 6 Matthew Drive, Downtown Partnership, thanked all Town Council members. She said this is a very difficult time for the business members. They are looking to move forward when the governor gives the okay to open. She expressed the importance of testing. She noted that there is a list of Franklin businesses on the Downtown Partnership website; this list includes updated hours and what each business is doing. She encouraged the public to purchase gift certificates from local businesses. ► Ms. Ariel Doggett, 36 Plain Street, discussed people who are asymptomatic but positive for COVID and are not wearing masks. She urged being proactive and both sick and healthy people wear masks in addition to social distancing. She asked how we can maximize protection from asymptomatic people. ► Ms. Sweet said the challenge is that people perceive this illness only affects the elderly population. Educating the public is important. She is going to have an emergency Board of Health meeting regarding having face coverings when interacting in a public place. ► Mr. Cerel stated that based on his conversation with Randolph, if the Board of Health is inclined to require face coverings in public, it is important to specify the facial covering covers both mouth and nose. ► Mr. Hellen suggested those in the community interested in the businesses reopening view the governor's press conference on Monday. The governor closed schools through June. He was asked when non-essential businesses would open. The governor he would gauge decisions on health and safety of people. He said when he and his advisory board determine a certain business type is ready for re-entry, each business type will have a set of associated guidelines. Mr. Hellen said he is hoping for additional information from the governor by the end of the week. He thanked all the Town staff for their great work. ► Mr. Sherlock reinforced that health is most important. Health may be at risk if we open prematurely. He noted that with the train to Boston, Franklin is easily accessible. If Franklin opens prematurely, we may put Franklin at risk. He noted the virus is highly contagious. He thanked the DPW for keeping water and sewer going as they are critical for a healthy environment. ► Ms. Sweet said she thinks there is still much misinformation in the community regarding food and said the virus is not transmitted via food. There is no additional risk from ordering takeout food and people can continue to support their local restaurants. ► Mr. Jones asked for thoughts about what it is going to take to get the schools up and running and keep social distancing within the public schools. ► Chair Mercer said the Facilities staff has done a great job with the buildings keeping them sanitized and cleaned. He does not know what is going to be required going forward. He is sure they are having the discussion at the State House as to how to open the schools in September. ► Ms. Sweet said the challenge is going to be the social distancing piece. She pointed out there has been no single case of this virus spread through a contaminated surface. She said there is not enough information at this time to make plans to reopen the schools in a safe environment. ► Mr. Hellen said from the municipal side of things, he has spoken to all department heads about what reentry would look like. He spoke with Recreation Director Ryan Jette about spring programs which will likely be closed. They talked about summer programs and what that looks like for the programs, supplies, and recreation area disinfecting. There are questions for Town Hall such as do all employees need masks, do we need plexiglass, can we do lunch pick up for seniors. All departments are having these conversations with other towns and professional associations. We want to be prepared when we reenter. ► Chair Mercer said as more information is received from the State House, it will be shared through the Town's website. If there is a need, he will call another special meeting about where things are going. He thanked everyone for participating in this roundtable discussion.

**ADJOURN: ► MOTION to Adjourn by Jones. SECOND by Dellorco. No Discussion. ► ROLL CALL VOTE: Bissanti-YES; Chandler-YES; Dellorco-YES; Earls-YES; Hamblen-YES; Jones-YES; Kelly-YES; Mercer-YES; Pellegrini-YES. ► VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0. Meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Judith Lizardi  
Recording Secretary