

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
March 19, 2020**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, March 19, 2020 at the Franklin Municipal Building, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, Massachusetts. Councilors present: Andrew Bissanti, Brian Chandler, Robert Dellorco, Eamon McCarthy Earls, Melanie Hamblen, Glenn Jones, Matthew Kelly, Thomas Mercer. Councilors absent: Deborah Pellegri. Administrative personnel in attendance: Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Alecia Alleyne, Administrative Assistant.

CALL TO ORDER: ► Chairman Mercer called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM with a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance.

ANNOUNCEMENTS: ► Chair Mercer read aloud a message to the residents that was also posted on the agenda: Due to the growing concerns regarding the COVID-19 virus, only Town Council members and authorized members of the staff will be allowed in the Council Chambers/Municipal Building, tonight. In an effort to ensure citizen engagement and comply with open meeting law regulations, we will have a hotline for citizens to call during the meeting and ask questions/voice concerns. He provided the call-in phone number. He further announced the 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.

► Chair Mercer reviewed the physical meeting set up to meet the social distancing guidelines of six feet apart, use of hand sanitizer, and reduced staff at tonight's meeting. He discussed that the municipal building may not be available for future meetings and that staff is working to have remote meetings. He stated that future Town Council agendas will be light; Legislation for Action will be taken on items that are required as critical work cannot be left undone.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: None.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT: ► Mr. Hellen provided a Coronavirus update and discussion. He stated this is a constantly evolving situation. He thanked the community and departments as they have done an amazing job on this situation. He discussed each of the Town departments and services in regard to the coronavirus emergency situation. He stated that trash and recycling pick up will continue on the regular schedule. The playgrounds and parks have been closed and the gates have been locked. He stated Governor Baker ordered most child care faculties closed as of this coming Monday. The Franklin Public Library staff has put together a set of programs through streaming which can be found on the library website; he thanked the staff for providing this great service. He stated the Town Hall staff is continuing to do everything they normally do; it is just not being done in the public building. There is an online portal for building permits and excise tax processing. Building inspections are still being conducted. The white drop box at the Town Hall is still being utilized for checks and cash payments for bills. The Fire Department is processing burn permits. All the main department phone numbers are still being used; citizens can leave voicemail messages and their calls will be received and returned. There is a point of contact for each Town department; an email contact for each department is listed on the Town website. He stated three staff members of the Senior Center will continue to do out reach to high risk citizens in Town. They will still be working with people regarding medications, food, and transportation. GATRA bus service announced they are suspending their service beginning next Monday. He discussed the needed behavior modifications that everyone needs to do to stop the transmission of the virus. ► Chair Mercer noted they have received calls from high school students volunteering to help; they have been directed to the Senior Center. ► Ms. Hamblen stated she has received calls about teenagers congregating in groups. She suggested some people may not understand the urgency of

the social distancing. She asked if a reverse 911 call could be put out to remind people of the social distancing need. ► Mr. Dellorco thanked everyone for their hard work during this situation. He agreed that people need to continue social distancing. He asked if there was anything that could be done for the people and seniors that normally use the GATRA system. ► Ms. Alleyne stated that if someone were high risk, they have a phone number to call. ► Mr. Hellen discussed the need for test kits so people will know if they have the virus. ► Mr. Earls discussed the global nature of the coronavirus. He discussed that there is the potential for as much as 20 percent unemployment nationwide. He asked if there was anything the Town could do to pause payments or scale back because the Town could face serious budget shortfalls. He wanted to make sure essential services continued. ► Mr. Hellen stated he is pushing back the budget debate as far as he can. He is working on rescheduling the various budget meetings. He noted they will want to look at the revenue projections going forward to make sure they can be met. He stated permits and licensing fees and local receipts and state aid are big concerns. He would like to see the state numbers in order to help make future projections. He stated that right now he is looking at April 7th to go back to business, as usual. However, he does not think this is likely. In terms of staff, there will not be any reductions in payments at this time. He is hoping they will not have to deal with any of this in this fiscal year regarding cutbacks. In terms of FY21, they will have to wait and see. ► Mr. Earls encouraged citizens to get all the information they can from reliable sources and follow all social distancing guidelines. ► Mr. Chandler asked if Meals on Wheels is ongoing. ► Mr. Hellen stated he would look into that. ► Mr. Chandler stated that Mr. Hellen was handling all this very well. He expressed concern about first responders. ► Mr. Hellen stated he is continually updated by state agencies. He stated that there has been a major lobbying effort in the state for needed protective gear. He said Chief Lynch and Chief McLaughlin have written a letter to the state recommending the state not just double their efforts, but triple their efforts regarding the protective equipment needed. He said he thinks state officials are doing what they can on both the test kits and protective gear. ► Mr. Kelly stated that some Town Council members took the FEMA class; therefore, they understand what is going on today regarding first responders. He discussed the current unemployment numbers which he expects to climb. He stated there are people in Town available to help, and encouraged citizens to reach out. He thanked Mr. Hellen and the staff for the cleaning/sanitizing of the Council Chambers. He asked the citizens of Franklin to go outside in their yards and wave or say hello to their neighbors. He encouraged teens to not hang out with their friends as they could end up getting someone else sick. He stated the Food Pantry cannot take food currently, but they can take money; please donate to the Food Pantry. He thanked Mr. Hellen for pushing the budget off. He thanked the Town departments and employees for their hard work. He reminded people to use the call-in number for citizens comments. ► Mr. Bissanti thanked Chair Mercer and the Town Administrator for their leadership under these circumstances. He is proud of the people of Franklin during these times. He asked if the Town Common is open for walking. ► Mr. Hellen stated the Town Common is open for walking as well as the trails in the state forest; people cannot stop and congregate. He encouraged the need to maintain social distancing. ► Mr. Jones stated he appreciates the Town's effective communication regarding this situation. He hopes people will avoid non-factual information. The Town Council and Town Administrator will get information to the citizens. He supports a reverse 911 call. He encouraged people not to panic and to avoid large groups. ► Mr. Earls stated this is not an airborne disease, it is a droplet disease. He recommended to keep surfaces clean, if sick stay home, and wash hands constantly. ► Mr. Dellorco hoped everyone stays safe. He encouraged the kids out there to be careful about the virus as they could give it to someone else in their family. ► Mr. Hellen stated that Ms. Chrissy Whelton is not in attendance; however, she sent him a text with an update about the GATRA services that are still available. ► Ms. Sue Reagan, resident, via call-in, asked if Town Hall employees were supposed to show up for work. ► Mr. Hellen stated that municipal buildings will be not accessible by the public or employees beginning tomorrow at noon; no employees will be allowed to report to work in the building unless they are authorized by the School Superintendent or the Town Administrator. Every department has a work plan to work from home. However, as first responders, Fire, Police, and DPW will be working. ► Chair Mercer thanked Mr. Hellen and the Town staff for all the effort and work they have done during this situation, the Facilities Department for all the cleaning and

disinfecting they have done, and the Town Council members for their phone calls and support they provide to the community. ► Mr. Hellen stated the Fire Chief notified him that for those who may need ambulance services, the AeroClave that disinfects the ambulances was delivered last Thursday. He stated that due to the prohibition of coming into the building, some boards and committees will have challenges scheduling meetings. They are making sure that the remote meeting system that they will be using is reliable. This will take a lot of effort; he is hoping the state will give more guidance on this. The state will also be taking up the election and Town Meeting issues and providing guidance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: None.

PROCLAMATIONS/RECOGNITIONS: None.

APPOINTMENTS: None.

HEARINGS: None.

LICENSE TRANSACTIONS: None.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSIONS: None.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS: None.

Chair Mercer stated these Legislation for Action items had already been started and are in process; therefore, they needed to be on the agenda.

LEGISLATION FOR ACTION:

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

- a. ***Zoning Bylaw Amendment 20-854: Changes to §185-40. Water Resource District - Referral to the Planning Board (Motion to Refer Zoning Bylaw Amendment 20-854 to the Planning Board - Majority Vote).*** ► Mr. Jones read the zoning bylaw amendment. ► **MOTION to Refer Zoning Bylaw Amendment 20-854: Changes to §185-40. Water Resource District to the Planning Board by Dellocco. SECOND by Kelly. Discussion:** Mr. Hellen stated this is a housekeeping item that the Town is required to do by the MassDEP to update the Water Resource District map that has been out for the past 12 to 13 years. He stated that included in the Town Council members' packets are memos outlining the changes. ► Mr. Bissanti noted that development can still occur in the Water Resource District. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**
- b. ***Resolution 20-17: Acceptance of Conservation Restriction to Protect Well 3A (Motion to Approve Resolution 20-17 - Majority Vote).*** ► Mr. Jones read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 20-17: Acceptance of Conservation Restriction to Protect Well 3A by Dellocco. SECOND by Hamblen. Discussion:** Mr. Hellen stated that approval of this Conservation Restriction will help protect the drinking water supply for Well 3A as part of the new Water Treatment Plant and well rehabilitation projects. The amount of land is slightly more than a half-acre. ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**
- c. ***Bylaw Amendment 20-855: Chapter 82, Water Fee Increase - First Reading (Motion to Move Bylaw Amendment 20-855 to a second reading - Majority Vote).*** ► Mr. Jones read the bylaw amendment. ► **MOTION to Move Bylaw Amendment 20-855: Chapter 82, Water Fee Increase to a second reading by Dellocco. SECOND by Hamblen. Discussion:** Mr. Hellen stated these are the proposed water service

fee increases for the next two years. The increase is mainly to fund the debt service required for the new Water Treatment Plant and reconstruction of Wells 6 & 9 projects on Grove Street which has already commenced. As well, the increase is to keep up with the general cost of doing business for the department including a five-year water main replacement program. ► Mr. Kelly stated that he opposes the water fee increase. This proposed increase raises the fee almost \$1.50 over two years. Before starting to raise citizens' fees, they need to have discussions about how residents could have a double meter with one for irrigation, the ability to split water meters for multiple dwelling units, and the new buildings going up in town and how those will come into play. He questioned why this fee increase would be put toward the Water Treatment Plant. ► Mr. Hellen stated this has to do with the new Water Treatment Plant at Grove Street. He stated the project already went out to bid. If they decide not to do it now, the Town will get sued for breaking a contract. They can look into the double meter and splitting the meters as separate issues. ► Mr. Kelly reiterated that this is a very large increase in fees especially for seniors. He thinks this is a bad vote on a night like tonight. He recommended this be pushed out a few weeks from now. ► Mr. Dellorco agreed with Mr. Kelly. He stated that no one knows the direction of the country at this time; he cannot raise anyone's fees at this time. ► Mr. Jones agreed with the other Town Council members. He recommended this and the following items be tabled until the economic situation of the country due to the coronavirus issues can be evaluated. He suggested these items be tabled to a later date. ► Mr. Earls concurred with the previous comments by Town Council members due to the current uncertainty. ► Mr. Bissanti stated he will vote no on this item as it is bad timing. He confirmed the water fees were raised two years ago. ► Mr. Chandler agreed with Mr. Jones on tabling this item. ► Ms. Hamblen agreed this item should be tabled. ► Mr. Hellen stated the con on the water fee is a devastating decision. He noted it is a tiered system and there is an economic hardship provision in the bylaw for water/sewer/trash. He will get more information for the next meeting about what this would cost the Town as the Town would default on a multimillion-dollar policy improvement contract. He understands the concerns of the Town Council members about where the economy is going. He stated this fee increase is to pay off a borrowing payment that this body voted for, and he signed a \$11 million contract for the project. He needs to make people aware that this is a contract that the Town Council has already voted for. This will cause the Town to default on the contract. He noted this is an enterprise fund. This does not affect anyone with a private well. ► Chair Mercer confirmed that if this item were pushed to a future meeting to be discussed, the Town would not default. ► Mr. Hellen stated this increase is for FY21; the rates would go into effect on July 1, 2020. This item can be discussed at a future meeting. He stated the new fees amount to an approximate increase of about \$40 annually to a resident's bill. ► Mr. Kelly requested to push this item out for two meetings, and he requested to speak to the DPW Director about this. He asked if there should be a one-tier system. ► Mr. Bissanti suggested tabling this for a few meetings. ► Chair Mercer confirmed he would like to discuss this further when the DPW Director can be present. He requested Mr. Hellen provide the numbers as to what would happen if the Town were to default. ► Mr. Hellen said that if the Town went to a one-tiered system, the people who use less water would be punished more than the residents using higher water amounts. He suggested the Town Council at least raise the rates for FY21 and then consider the FY22 increase at a later time. ► Mr. Kelly stated he is happy to vote on FY21. ► Chair Mercer stated he would rather push this item forward one meeting so Mr. Hellen could provide the additional requested information. ► **Mr. Dellorco Withdrew his motion. Ms. Hamblen Withdrew her second to the motion.** ► **MOTION to Table** Bylaw Amendment 20-855: Chapter 82, Water Fee Increase to the next scheduled Town Council meeting by **Jones**. **SECOND** by **Earls**. **No Discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

- d. ***Bylaw Amendment 20-856: Chapter 82, Sewer Fee Increase - First Reading (Motion to move Bylaw Amendment 20-856 to a second reading - Majority Vote).*** ► Mr. Jones read the bylaw amendment. ► **MOTION to Move** Bylaw Amendment 20-856: Chapter 82, Sewer Fee Increase to a second reading on April 15, 2020 by **Dellorco**. **SECOND** by **Earls**. **Discussion:** Mr. Hellen stated this is a similar

discussion to the previous Legislation for Action item. He noted that these proposed rates have nothing to do with the Beaver Street Interceptor. He stated it is his job to tell the Town Council and the citizens what it will cost to keep things running and projects moving forward. ► Town Council members asked questions. ► Chair Mercer confirmed that water generally goes along with sewer. He asked if the water fee increase and sewer fee increase proposed bylaws should stay together. ► Mr. Hellen stated that all three of these policies and votes are critical. These are policy decisions and projects that are in the works for years; all three of these increases are necessary to keep going with those projects. He understands this is coming at a very bad time. ► Chair Mercer confirmed that he is hearing from the Town Council that all three of these fees should be pushed to the next meeting for discussion. ► **Mr. Dellorco Withdrew his motion. Mr. Earls Withdrew his second to the motion.** ► **MOTION to Table** Bylaw Amendment 20-856: Chapter 82, Sewer Fee Increase to the next scheduled Town Council meeting by **Dellorco. SECOND** by **Earls. No Discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

- e. Bylaw Amendment 20-857: Chapter 82, Trash and Recycling Fee Increase - First Reading (Motion to Move Bylaw Amendment 20-857 to a second reading - Majority Vote).* ► Mr. Jones read the bylaw amendment. ► **MOTION to Table** Bylaw Amendment 20-857: Chapter 82, Trash and Recycling Fee Increase to the next scheduled Town Council meeting by **Jones. SECOND** by **Dellorco. No discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1.**

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: None.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: ► Mr. Bissanti stated he is proud of how the Town of Franklin has come together during this crisis. ► Mr. Earls discussed that social distancing does not have to mean social isolation. Citizens can call the Town Council members if they have concerns. ► Mr. Kelly encouraged people to check on other people to make sure they are okay; look out for your neighbors. ► Mr. Chandler stated the Town has done a great job with this situation. ► Ms. Hamblen thanked the Town Council members who participated in the stormwater information forums and the Town Administrator and community members who came out to the meeting. She stated that stormwater out reach will continue. She noted that the Agricultural Commission is collecting Glyphosate opt out forms; information available on the Town website. She wished everyone stays safe. ► Mr. Jones encouraged everyone to keep the faith. He thinks advanced technology is a great thing during these difficult times. ► Mr. Dellorco thanked Mr. Hellen and his staff for all the work they have done. He read an alert from the Boston Police that there are people going door-to-door saying they will test your house for coronavirus. Do not let them in; they will rob you. ► Chair Mercer thanked Chris from Franklin TV for coming out tonight to record the meeting, the Town Administrator and his staff and all department heads who have stepped up during this crisis, and the first responders. He wished everyone to be safe.

EXECUTIVE SESSION: None.

ADJOURN: ► MOTION to Adjourn by **Dellorco. SECOND** by **Jones. No Discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-8, No-0, Absent-1. Meeting adjourned at 9:09 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary