

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
May 27, 2021**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, May 27, 2021, at the Municipal Building, 2nd Floor, Council Chambers, 355 East Central Street, Franklin, MA; residents could attend and participate via the Zoom platform. Councilors present: Andrew Bissanti, Brian Chandler, Robert Dellorco, Cobi Frongillo, Melanie Hamblen, Glenn Jones, Matthew Kelly, Thomas Mercer, Deborah Pellegrini. Councilors absent: None. Administrative personnel in attendance: Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Chrissy Whelton, Assistant to the Town Administrator.

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

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

CITIZEN COMMENTS: ► Ms. Jane Callaway-Tripp, 607 Maple Street, stated that she met with Mr. Hellen a few weeks ago regarding stormwater and now has a greater understanding. However, this is not the time to impose more fees on the citizens. She noted that many people in Town are still struggling to make ends meet. She stated agreement with Councilor Bissanti that any fees would have a trickle-down effect onto the townspeople. Maybe the Town should cut back on beautifying the Town to make sure functions such as stormwater are being met. She discussed last night's budget item regarding hiring the nurse for the Town. She stated that this is a want for the Town; there are already areas in the Town such as the DPW that could use those funds. The Town needs to work within its budget. Allocating money for the nurse, and then putting in a stormwater fee on the citizens, cannot be afforded. She asked that since the COVID restrictions are being lifted, will citizens be able to attend the Town Council meetings in person. ► Ms. Ruthann O'Sullivan stated that as a taxpayer, it was frustrating to witness the Town Council members' confusion over the school budget, the State's funding formula, and the responsibility of the Town regarding contributions at last night's budget meeting. She stated that the Town must rely on local contributions to support the school budget. She discussed the advocacy for school needs by the School Committee and Superintendent Ahern.

HEARINGS: 7:10pm. ► *FY 2022 Budget Hearing.*

► *Chair Mercer reopened the public hearing on the FY2022 budget.* ► Chair Mercer reviewed that they got through all of the budgets last night; they were left with a few questions which will be addressed tonight.

The following line items from last night's meeting were continued to tonight's meeting due to questions from the Council members.

► Hold on Line Item 690: Historical Museum and Hold on Line Item 691: Historical Commission.

■ Councilor Pellegrini stated that she learned that the Historical Museum has a capital line item of about \$11,000 that can be used for the museum. She now understands that archivist Rebecca Finnigan has money to work with. She withdrew her motion from last night's meeting to take \$3,000 off Historical Commission

expenses and add it to Historical Museum so Ms. Finnigan will have \$4,000 and leave \$1,000 for the Commission as they have seminars and conferences to go on. ■Councillor Jones stated that he hoped that there would be appropriate representation at the budget meeting for each line item discussed; last night there was not appropriate representation at the meeting for this line item.

► Hold on Line Item 300: Franklin Public Schools. ■Chair Mercer explained the Town Council's role regarding the school budget. The Town Council sets the bottom-line number for the school budget, but then it is up to the School Committee to decide how those dollars are spent. The Town Council does not have control of line items within the school budget. He stated that this is why it may seem like there are more questions for the School Department than for other departments. Not only is it the largest piece of the Town's total budget, but the budget hearing process is the Town Council's opportunity to ask line-item questions regarding the school budget. ■Superintendent of Schools Sara Ahern handed out follow up information that was requested at last night's meeting and discussed each document. She reviewed Franklin residents' children not attending Franklin Public Schools and the Franklin Public Schools enrollment over the past five years which has been decreasing. She discussed that the number of births in 2015 was 213. There are 267 enrolled in kindergarten in 2021. This is a decrease as the current graduating class was 425. She reviewed the per pupil comparisons for similar towns and stated that Franklin is in the bottom third with per pupil expenditures of approximately \$14,700. She reviewed unfunded mandates. She stated they quantified what they could, and it was in the millions of dollars. Some unfunded mandates are difficult to quantify. ■Councillor Jones discussed birth rates and trends. He thanked Superintendent Ahern for her information on unfunded mandates. ■Councillor Kelly reviewed the entering class and graduating class number of students. He stated that he is concerned about the vocational numbers dropping. He wondered whether at the high school conversations were being had with students about the Tri-County Vocational School. ■Superintendent Ahern said that Tri County comes to the eighth-grade class and makes a presentation. ■Councillor Kelly stated that there are four big budget departments: police, fire, DPW, and schools. He discussed the unfunded mandates. ■Councillor Dellorco and Councillor Chandler agreed that the information provided was great. ■Councillor Bissanti stated that he did not like the fact that some towns were spending more per pupil than Franklin. ■Councillor Jones asked what would be a perfect per pupil expenditure number. ■Superintendent Ahern stated that was a hard number to pin down. ■School Business Administrator Miriam Goodman stated that to put Franklin at the State average of \$16,893 per pupil, it would require Franklin to spend an additional \$18 million. ■Chair Mercer thanked Superintendent Ahern for her information. He stated that they have to start lobbying state and federal legislators regarding getting the unfunded mandates funded or rescinded. ■Councillor Pellegrini asked if the formula used for the per pupil expenditure is the same for each town. ■Superintendent Ahern stated that overall, in the big picture, it is the same formula.

► Chair Mercer asked Town Council members if they had any questions regarding the budget before he allowed the audience members to ask questions. ► No Town Council members had additional questions. ► Ms. Jane Callaway-Tripp, 607 Maple Street, stated the schools are getting \$67 million in their budget and there are unfunded mandates. However, she is hearing comparisons about how much other towns are getting. She explained that even when the schools were shut due to COVID, parents still were paying for busing; only a \$35 credit was received for those months. The taxpayers are being asked to pay more money in, but when the schools closed, they did not receive any money back. She stated concern with increasing the school budget over \$67 million when there are many issues in the schools that are not being addressed. ■Chair Mercer pointed out that Ms. Callaway-Tripp should bring her concerns about bullying to the School Committee. ■Ms. Susan Dewsnap, 10 Garden Street, commented that changing over to the aggregate wealth model, if the State were to wipe the slate clean and give Franklin their fair share, there is \$11 million less coming from the State. She stated that realistically, they cannot count on the State. ■Ms. Denise Spencer, 59 Milliken Avenue and School Committee Vice Chair, stated that for over one-year schools have faced challenges and high costs to service students during the pandemic; she noted that federal aid money will not last forever. She stated that people are moving to Franklin for the stellar school system. She stated that Franklin is losing school staff to other towns because of Franklin's inability to compete salary-wise. The

school system and students suffer when that happens. Franklin needs to be competitive. She stated they need to seriously begin investing in the schools.

► **MOTION to Close the public hearing by Dellorco. SECOND by Kelly. No Discussion. ► VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

LICENSE TRANSACTIONS: ► *La Cantina Winery - Farmer-Winery, Farmer's Market License.* ► Mr. Jones read the license transaction. ► **MOTION to Approve La Cantina Winery - Farmer-Winery, Farmer's Market License to Robert Vozzella, La Cantina Winery Company, by Dellorco. SECOND by Kelly.**
Discussion: ► Mr. Hellen stated that this is required by State statute on an annual basis. He stated that this is Mr. Vozzella's fourth or fifth year. ► Mr. Vozzella stated his appreciation for approval of his being at the Town Common; it is his sixth year. ► Councilor Hamblen stated that the first Farmers' Market will be on June 4, 2021. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

LEGISLATION FOR ACTION:

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

- a. **Resolution 21-28: Adoption of the FY22 Budget (Motion to Approve Resolution 21-28 - Majority Vote).** ► Mr. Jones read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 21-28: Adoption of the FY22 Budget with a total appropriation of \$138,564,865 by Dellorco. SECOND by Kelly. No Discussion. ► VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- b. **Resolution 21-29: Departmental FY22 Expenditure Limits, Town Code Chapter 73, MGL Chapter 44, Section 53E1/2 (Motion to Approve Resolution 21-29 - Majority Vote).** ► Mr. Jones read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 21-29: Departmental FY22 Expenditure Limits, Town Code Chapter 73, MGL Chapter 44, Section 53E1/2 by Dellorco. SECOND by Kelly. Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen stated that this is a routine item that has to be done annually. He stated that the limits have not been increased for the last couple of years. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**
- c. **Resolution 21-19: FY22 CPA Budget Reservations (Motion to Approve Resolution 21-19 - Majority Vote).** ► Mr. Jones read the resolution. ► **MOTION to Approve Resolution 21-19: FY22 CPA Budget Reservations by Dellorco. SECOND by Kelly. Discussion:** ► Mr. Hellen reviewed that the Community Preservation Committee voted unanimously to recommend \$1,329,402 to appropriate or reserve from the Community Preservation Fund. The Finance Committee also voted unanimously to support this budget. This is needed as a part of required reserve accounts and administrative expenses in FY22. ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR'S REPORT: ► Mr. Hellen reviewed that by State law the Town has to have someone on staff or contract out to a service to manage infectious disease control; it must be an RN. He discussed that they received a \$900,000 State grant with the towns of Wrentham and Norfolk to share some public health services including nursing; therefore, to go full time is free for three years. He stated that the Town Hall is open. On June 15, 2021 forward, board/committee meetings will be available for in-person attendance for the public.

COUNCIL COMMENTS: ► Councilor Frongillo thanked Franklin High School seniors for getting 37 more bricks on the Town Common for the fallen veterans. ► Councilor Bissanti thanked some of the unsung heroes at the Franklin Crossing fire. He stated that there is a fund at Rockland Bank if anyone would like to make donations. He discussed that the education system in Franklin may need to be reviewed and possibly they should capitalize on the Horace Mann aspect. ► Councilor Kelly thanked Town staff and departments for their hard work on the budget. He stated that the Town Council members ask the tough questions during the budget hearings to get the answers for the citizens. He reviewed the difficult Franklin Crossing fire. ► Councilor Chandler stated that maybe there needs to be more conversations with the School Department.

He thanked the citizens who spoke tonight. He wished everyone a good long weekend. ► Councilor Hamblen thanked the Town employees, committees, and schools for all the work done for the budget. She thanked all the volunteers who planted the flowers on the bridge and triangle area in downtown. ► Councilor Pellegrini noted the passing of Mr. Robert Dean and gave condolences to his family. She thanked the CPC for the work they have put in. She thanked all those who worked on the budget. She thanked Ms. Eileen Mason for decorating the Town. She noted the Memorial Day celebration on Monday at 12 noon at the Town Common. ► Councilor Jones stated that it is a privilege to be a Town Council member. He thanked everyone for their hard work on the budget. He stated that he was going to lobby the federal and state regarding the unfunded mandates. ► Councilor Dellorco thanked everyone for their work on the budget. He discussed the illness of 14-year-old resident Nick Gaspar; a GoFundMe page has been set up to help the family. ► Chair Mercer thanked everyone for all the hard work and extra effort put in during the last year.

ADJOURN: ► MOTION to Adjourn by Dellorco. SECOND by Kelly. No Discussion. ► VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0. Meeting adjourned at 8:43 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary