

**FRANKLIN TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING
May 24, 2023**

A meeting of the Town Council was held on Wednesday, May 24, 2023, 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, Thomas Mercer, Deborah Pellegrini, Patrick Sheridan. Councilors absent: None. Administrative personnel in attendance: Jamie Hellen, 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 in memory of Nicholas Gaspar, the Gaspar family, and the entire Franklin community for this incredibly tragic loss. 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 board and committee meetings in person. Meetings are live-streamed by Franklin TV and shown on Comcast Channel 11 and Verizon Channel 29. In an effort to maximize citizen engagement opportunities, citizens will be able to continue to participate remotely via phone or Zoom. He announced that this meeting is being recorded by Franklin TV; this meeting may be recorded by others.

CITIZEN COMMENTS: None.

HEARINGS: 7:00pm. ► ***FY24 Town Council Annual Operating Budget Hearing.*** ► Chair Mercer stated that tonight is the first of two public hearings on the FY24 Town of Franklin budget. He declared the first public hearing on the FY24 Town of Franklin budget open. ► Mr. Hellen stated that it is no secret that the finances of the Franklin Public School District are a major concern. He noted that some of the language he used in his budget narrative was strong; he noted it was not his intention to offend anyone. It was his intention to be transparent to the public and state his concerns about the fiscal condition of the public schools. It is also his job to present the issues and potential risks facing the Town. He explained that the reality is that the escalating school budget must be addressed. He stated that he remains committed to solving the myriad of problems facing the community. He noted his excellent working relationship with those in the School Department. He explained the location of the budget materials available on the Town's website. He narrated a slideshow presentation. He reviewed revenues. He noted this is a \$150 million budget. He stated that the tax levy is essentially the main revenue source which is based on the property taxes in the community. The tax levy is 2.5 percent annually. He reviewed the Proposition 2½ law. He reviewed that new growth is property value increases captured mid-year. He stated that the Town does a 10-year average of new growth. He stated that new growth is expected to decline due to rising interest rates and more risk in the market. He explained debt exclusions which are tax increases that sunset at the conclusion of a debt exclusion project. He stated that while no one will see a tax break, it is taken into consideration that some of the debt exclusions are coming off the books. The second major category of revenue the Town gets is local receipts. He reviewed that greater than half of local receipts are revenues that pay for fee for services such as building permits, ambulance receipts, licensing fees, etc. He noted that the local receipts fluctuate year to year. He noted that the Town of Franklin did not balance their budgets on one-time revenues. He stated that the final revenue source is state aid. State aid is not just Chapter 70 School Aid; it is dozens of state formulas/assessments that amount to a cherry sheet. The cherry sheet is what every municipality uses as a baseline budget for state aid. He reviewed charter school reimbursements. He noted that he expects an increase of \$200,000 to \$250,000 in more aid after the state budget process is done in July. He reviewed the overall summary of expenditures based on budget category. He reminded all that all this information is available on the website. He reviewed that out of the \$73.59 million School Committee approved FY24 budget, 78 percent

is salaries. The biggest driver is salaries and the second biggest driver is employee health and Medicare costs at 9.5 percent of the budget. He reviewed examples of fixed costs which include (but are not limited to) pension assessment and benefits, municipal cost of living adjustment, and inflation such as electricity, gas, propane, supplies, parts, etc. He reviewed the School Committee Approved FY24 Budget Summary slide which shows an increase in \$3 million for school salaries. He reviewed new discretionary spending which includes (but is not limited to) police and fire capital for turnout gear and safety equipment, four additional police officers, senior center van driver and administrative assistant, DPW fleet manager, and Town admin and arts. He reviewed FY24 Sample Summary Points which included inflation, supply and demand, quality of life, debt and interest, and reserves. He explained that the demand far exceeds the supply of money to meet the demand. He reviewed that Town and School should avoid all attempts to use reserves. He noted that the public needs to be conscientious of the impact of cost increases to citizens including higher property taxes, stormwater fee, sewer rate increases, residential municipal aggregation rate, PFAS remediation, and expected debt exclusion for a new Tri-County School. He reviewed the Historical Franklin Public School District \$\$ Annual Increase slide. He reviewed that 2019 and 2020 represent the years all of the Town's \$1.9 million rainy day funds were used to balance the school budget. He noted this is not good for bond ratings and emergency use. He reviewed his recommendations for the increase in the school budget with included (but were not limited to) state aid will increase approximately \$250,000 in July, eliminate \$116,000 in capital gear for police and fire, reduce facilities water expense budget \$100,000 for lawn watering, reduce \$50,000 from snow and ice removal expenses, and tap \$250,000 of the MECC Stabilization account. He recommended approving the Town Administrator's FY24 Budget now and Town Council making adjustments later as needed. He discussed moving forward from summer 2023 and beyond. He stated that we have got to sacrifice as a community and as elected officials other things to fix this issue. He stated that this must be a commitment the Town Council and School Committee charge with us; other priorities need to be dropped. ►Chair Mercer noted that the first part of this Town Council meeting was not on TV; it was taped and will be shown later. He thanked Mr. Hellen for the overview. He stated that everyone who is listening can turn a corner and worked together to solve the challenges Mr. Hellen spoke about. He spoke about how the Town Council is the elected officials for the community. They are often in the difficult positions to be the checks and balances of the town government. He explained how the annual budget process is difficult for the Town Council. He stated that we must all agree that not every request can be fully funded every budget year. He stated that we have to live within our means just like every family in Franklin has to; we need to make difficult, and not always popular, decisions. He noted a lack of communication between the Town part of the government and the School part of the government. He stated that their decisions affected all residents. He stated that he feels they have the right leaders and staff, but what we have lacked is the discipline to sacrifice other priorities and ideas and focus on the most important thing we do every year which is for the Town Council to set the annual budget. He stated that if the community wants to see the cycle of budget of uncertainty end, then we must reduce time spent on other projects and really focus together creating solutions to solve the structural budget deficit. He stated that we need to establish a One Franklin mentality. ►Chair of the School Committee Denise Spencer stated that the education and well-being of our students is the utmost importance to the entire School Committee. Our job is to advocate for the schools and the resources necessary to provide a high-quality education. As an elected official, it is our job to submit an annual budget as well as addressing as many of the priority needs of the Franklin schools as possible. She stated that this will be a challenging year. The future holds serious fiscal concerns. She stated that moving forward they plan to continue their work with the town administrator and Town Council to have healthy productive discussions and to work collaboratively for the benefit of all taxpayers while continuing to address our school priorities. ►Chair Mercer reviewed the budget hearing process for tonight's meeting. He stated that he was putting an automatic hold on the following five departments: Public Buildings and Properties-Facilities, Fire, Police, Schools, and DPW. ►Councilor Jones read each *Town of Franklin Operating Budget FY 2024 Voting Document* line item.

► Hold on Line Item 111: Town Council. ■ Councilor Jones asked about the increase. ■ Mr. Hellen stated that the line item has always been \$4,000; the Mass Municipal dues exceed \$4,000 and a couple thousand for councilors who have been going to MMA seminars and conferences. He stated that it is an increase overall of \$4,000.

► Hold on Line Item 123: Town Administrator. ■ Councilor Chandler thanked Mr. Hellen for the budget book; it is a lot of work. He asked about the vacant job in the TA budget for \$45,000. If they are not going to hire someone, he would like to give the money to music or Chief Lynch could send a local person to the academy. He asked how important that money is to the TA budget. ■ Mr. Hellen stated that the vacancy in his office is for a full-time half-year position titled director of public art and cultural initiatives. They are anticipating based on the compensation and classification study that salary would be somewhere in the range of \$80,000 to \$95,000 based on the market. He reviewed that you could put in for the full year at \$90,000, but then you would have to cut somewhere else. This is a frequent policy decision to put them in for half year. He discussed the importance of this position and the hope of bringing in revenue for the Town. He explained that if this is approved and something that can be sustained, it would be a separate department at some point. ■ Chair Mercer stated that if we cut something, all we can do is give it to the schools; we cannot give it to music or science or math as that is the School Committee's decision and prerogative. The Town Council cannot tell the School Committee how to spend the school money. ■ Councilor Cormier-Leger stated that they have heard overwhelming support for this position. He stated that this summer they will not have the cultural festival because volunteers could not sustain it; the hope is that this position will pick up the baton and bring the festival back for next year. He stated that the festival brings in revenue for the Town; there is an economic impact directly to this position. ■ Councilor Hamblen stated that every dollar spent on arts and culture, you get \$7 back. This is part of the plan on how to bring in revenue to help pay for all the things we want in town.

► Hold on Line Item 135: Comptroller. ■ Councilor Frongillo stated that he was hoping it could be explained more on the comptroller shift. ■ Mr. Hellen stated that for both town and school operations the Treasurer's Office is a municipal department overseen by the finance director. He stated that there are projects that they have not touched yet because there is no time; there are services that should be streamlined. The teams work very well together. At some point we need additional staff there as it is not sustainable. He noted departments that do not have deputies: school finance and town finance, and HR. It is the department head and then the rank-and-file staff. With the work flow, Munis, quality control, the school administration and our team have worked on this; we have made progress. Maybe the two positions will both be \$80,000 or maybe one will be a little more or less. This is to earmark funds to do this. He stated that he hopes by November they could have an organization chart on this; they are in the infancy on this. ■ Councilor Frongillo asked if shorter term contracts could be used for this. ■ Mr. Hellen stated that these are not easy. Munis is extremely difficult; hopefully, some of these funds will go to a Munis administrator. He stated that the budget that is put out now is probably not going to be enough for the community down the line. He stated that more mature communities all have full-time budget analysts in their departments.

► Hold on Line Item 147: Treasurer/Collector. ■ Councilor Frongillo stated that his hold on this item was addressed.

► Hold on Line Item 164: Election & Registration. ■ Chair Mercer stated that we have a Tri-County election and annual election and asked if we are budgeted properly to deal with those two that we are currently aware of. ■ Town Clerk Nancy Danello stated that elections are expensive. She stated that she took the annual election times two. She stated that she will be getting dollar for dollar back from Tri-County, but she has to front those dollars. ■ Councilor Dellorco asked how much does each election cost the town. ■ Ms. Danello stated that it is tough. The Tri-County is only eight hours and a town election is 5 AM through 9 PM to 9:30 PM. She stated that she basically cut the staff in half for the Tri-County

election. She stated that she thinks she budgeted \$9,000 for the Tri-County election. She stated that election workers get paid minimum wage and she wishes she could pay them more. ■Councilor Sheridan asked how a special election works. ■Ms. Danello stated that it is the same as a town election or a state election. ■Councilor Jones asked about the bins. ■Ms. Danello stated that is where she stores the ballots. She stated that she uses nine per day.

►Hold on Line Item 192: Public Property & Buildings. ■Chair Mercer asked for any initiatives that are changing the paradigm in the budget to save money. ■Director of Franklin Public Facilities Michael D'Angelo explained the composting initiatives at the schools. ■Councilor Jones asked about the building and noted the transfer over to LED lights. He asked if there have been any other energy saving initiatives. He asked about solar panels on the high school roof. ■Mr. D'Angelo explained that all town and school buildings are 100 percent LED right now. He stated that over the past year they did over the three school complexes; they put in step down transformers. He stated that they are looking at splits. The jump off point to go all electric has not matured enough to heat big buildings like the Franklin High School. They are hoping more things get invented. He stated that they are adding eight charging stations at the high school. He explained the use of the solar farm and a law regarding solar farms. He reviewed that the high school building was built to have solar panels. ■Mr. Hellen added that we have had solar installers pre-pandemic reach out to the town about solar panels at the high school. ■Councilor Frongillo noted the importance of energy efficiency. ■Councilor Hamblen noted air filters to clear the air during Covid and asked if they can get the supplies now that keep us safe. She thanked everyone for their help with the food composting. ■Mr. D'Angelo stated that bulbs are not really that expensive for the UV lighting, and they are changed about every couple of years. He stated that they are easy to get at this time. ■Councilor Dellorco asked about the condition of all Town buildings. ■Mr. D'Angelo stated that the buildings are getting older; we are keeping up with things. Some of the older buildings are getting outdated and costing more to maintain. Roofing systems are holding up pretty well. The chiller at Remington Jefferson was purchased in 1995 and is not that efficient. He stated that this building got new boilers last fall. We are going have to start putting money into the older buildings. ■Councilor Chandler noted the rise in costs of the electric bills over the past few years. He asked about the telephone line item for \$204,000. ■Mr. D'Angelo discussed the cost of electricity. ■Mr. Hellen explained that there is a lot of debate in the energy market about prices. He noted that the rate is locked in for four years, so we should not see a huge spike in costs. ■Mr. D'Angelo discussed that they are spending less on telephone now than in previous years. He stated that this is for all schools and Town buildings. He discussed that a few years ago they did a change in telephone systems to save money. ■Councilor Cormier-Leger asked about Davis Thayer being a \$100,000 expense to the Town; he stated that the building has not been used for two years. He asked if the \$100,000 expense could come out of operating and go into some sort of a deferred fund or a capital fund or a rainy-day fund until we figure out what to do with the building. ■Mr. Hellen discussed that we could maybe talk off line once the committee nomination appointments are made possibly in June; it would be best for the subcommittee to talk about it. He stated that what the committee may look at is once we get it cleaned out, if there was a temporary use such as leasing out the parking lot or a pickle ball court, the cost could be offset. ■Chair Mercer noted that for the public to use the building it would need to be brought up to ADA standards which would be very expensive.

►Hold on Line Item 210: Police. ■Chair Mercer stated that he saw Chief of Police Thomas Lynch's presentation on why the new officers are needed and asked that for those not watching that presentation, could he explain why the new officers are needed this year. ■Chief of Police Thomas Lynch stated that we have been under staffed for over two decades. He noted his budget memos for the past few years. He noted the number of officers over the years and stated that for the past 23 years there has been no growth in the police department. He discussed the needs of the police department for the number of officers to answer the number of calls based on service volume. He stated that they have exceeded their volunteer overtime capacity; when they go below the minimum, they have to fill shifts with overtime. He discussed that if no one volunteers for an overtime shift, they get ordered to work. He explained what ordered to

work means. He discussed that the newer generation does not want to work all the time; this is throughout all the country. He stated that continuing to fill the need with overtime is not going to continue to work. He stated that he is asking for the four officers to plug the hole. He stated that when we are at the minimum, we do not have enough officers to do traffic enforcement. ■Councilor Cormier-Leger asked that if you bring on the new personnel, is there adequate space for them. ■Chief Lynch stated that they will not need a desk, but it will get tight in the locker area. He stated that they will make do. ■Councilor Chandler stated that he does not like it that people get ordered to work. It is not a good feeling; we need these people. He stated that regarding the education incentive, an educated cop is better than a non-educated cop. ■Chief Lynch reviewed the cost of overtime. ■Councilor Dellorco stated that forced overtime brings down moral which is not good; you definitely need these officers. ■Chief Lynch stated that he agrees. He cannot blame them for wanting to spend more time with their families. He stated that he cannot balance the budget on overtime as much as we used to. ■Councilor Sheridan confirmed that Chief Lynch stated that for a town of this size, the ideal number would be 59 officers. ■Chief Lynch stated yes and reviewed the number of officers in other towns. ■Councilor Frongillo stated that he thanked them all for what they do to keep us safe. He stated that Chief Lynch made a clear case for increased personnel, but four officers at once is a substantial increase. He asked is there a reason for four at once. ■Mr. Hellen explained the shift schedule rotation as to why four are critical at once. ■Chief Lynch reviewed the need based on shift schedules. He stated that the town is not smaller than it was 23 years ago, but they are at the same number of bodies that the town agreed upon 23 years ago to properly police the town. He stated that it is time. He explained that he does not want to lose officers to another town that does not ask them to do so much overtime. ■Councilor Frongillo asked how long does it take to hire and can they work half the year. ■Mr. Hellen explained that the question makes sense, but next year you are going to face the exact same problem. He stated that you do not gain anything on a policy like that on these four officers. In terms of that in the recruitment, you have to be ready to hire the best people you can find. So, if you have to wait for January or February, you could lose the quality of officers that you want. He stated that this is a tough issue. There are fewer people who apply for the exam than use to. He explained that two officers left for various reasons. ■Councilor Hamblen stated that she watched Chief Lynch's presentation at the FinCom. She suggested people watch that presentation. She stated that she wants the community and the police officers to feel safe. She asked about sending a local kid to the academy to get trained and the cost. ■Chief Lynch reviewed that if we hire them, we pay them while they are at the academy, and it is about \$3,000 tuition. However, we cannot realize them on the schedule for about one year. ■Councilor Jones stated how great the police force is. He stated concern that the officers are ordered to work. He stated that he does not want to jeopardize the town's safety. ■Ms. Carol Oneil, 11 Colt Road, stated that she wanted to comment about young people wanting to spend more time with their families. She stated that it is a good thing, and perhaps it might have some influences in that so many kids will not be wandering the streets. She stated that we do not want to look at that negatively.

► Hold on Line Item 220: Fire. ■Chair Mercer asked for an update on the call volume and mutual aid. ■Fire Chief James McLaughlin reviewed that calendar year 2022 was the first year the department went over 5,000 calls; we did 5,120 calls. He stated that mutual aid was roughly 250 calls and they rendered mutual aid out for 150 calls; so, the numbers are steadily going up. He stated that they need to address this which is the plan for two new firefighters in this proposal. ■Chair Mercer asked how the two new paramedics will help the trend. ■Chief McLaughlin explained one would be an EMS captain and reviewed their overall function. He explained the function of the other firefighter in this proposal and reviewed their schedule. He stated that he thinks this is a cost-effective way. ■Chair Mercer asked how often both the town's ambulances are out and we have to call in mutual aid. ■Chief McLaughlin explained that of the 250 calls for mutual aid, the majority are EMS calls. ■Councilor Sheridan asked how is their manpower compared to other towns of the same size. ■Chief McLaughlin noted other towns of similar size and stated that some of those towns are in the seventies and we do more call volume than some of those towns. He stated that the number we are at will properly staff the two stations we have right now. He stated that we are in the middle of the pack regarding pay for the communities around us.

■ Councilor Frongillo stated Chief McLaughlin has made a clear case for why they are understaffed. ■ Councilor Dellorco asked about the two paramedics and if they are having a hard time finding paramedics. ■ Chief McLaughlin stated that they have applicants right now and some of them are in process of becoming a paramedic. ■ Councilor Chandler stated that he can guarantee that similar towns have more than one civilian working for them. He stated that everyone gets a paramedic stipend and an education stipend and asked Chief McLaughlin to expand on that. ■ Chief McLaughlin stated that the one civilian does a great job. He explained the education stipends.

► Hold on Line Item 240: Inspection Department. ■ Councilor Hamblen stated that she wanted to make sure everyone knew that Building Commissioner Gus Brown has new duties of weights and measures that the state has given to the town, and she asked has this added to his budget and how much time it takes. ■ Building Commissioner Gus Brown stated that this year they have a line item for about \$34,000 to pay for a part-time sealer. He stated that we are waiting for the county commissioner to answer back if we are going to get someone from them to help us. He stated that we are trying to do a regionalization thing. He stated that in the meantime, it has added a little to his workload, although the state has come in an assisted him a little as well. ■ Councilor Hamblen asked how the fee schedule works. ■ Mr. Brown explained that there use to be a little profit in the past. However, the rates will probably have to be raised a little to eventually pay for the new position.

► Hold on Line Item 300: Franklin Public Schools. ■ Chair Mercer asked Town Council members for their questions. ■ Councilor Sheridan asked about how their budget compares to other towns our size, school fees, and class size. ■ Superintendent of Schools Lucas Giguere stated that the role he has is to advocate for schools, students, and staff for what we need here. He stated that anything we have asked for schools is not meant to be a situation where it is taken from another department in this town. He stated that it is his feeling that if other departments have needs that have to be funded, then that is something that needs to be part of the conversation. He stated that there is a narrative around schools that they are a burden to a community. He stated that a second narrative is that they are operating in a bubble. He stated that the third narrative is around visioning and he is eager to answer the question. He stated that to get to the number they have landed on, they have done 24 non-renewals and 10 involuntary transfers. He stated that he is open to the conversation about becoming one town. He explained that the non-renewals will have impacts at all the schools. He reviewed classroom teacher cuts and classroom size and discussed quality of teachers they are able to recruit and maintain. He reviewed comparable statistics by showing a bar chart provided in his material packet. He noted net school spending on slide 17 regarding comparable statistics. He stated that regarding our 13 percent over, while we are over, other districts in our community contribute more. He confirmed that people are leaving the teaching industry as a profession and we do see it here as do other communities. He stated that fees are on the table. ■ Ms. Miriam Goodman, School Business Administrator, stated that they are in the midst of discussing fee increases for school athletics and extra-curricular activities. She stated that she thinks that in some cases our fees are a little higher than other communities and some communities have no fees. ■ Mr. Giguere discussed that they have tried to keep class size within the ranges. ■ Councilor Frongillo stated that he hopes it has become clear that we simply do not have enough money to fund this quality of services that we all want to enjoy. The pot is just not big enough. He discussed inflation and noted that the town is only allowed to increase revenue by 2.5 percent. That alone means we are millions of dollars in the hole. If we want to keep level services, we as a community need to have a conversation about increasing the pot beyond 2.5 percent. He stated that we can do that through an override. He stated that we need to grow responsibility, and it is a key part of enjoying the services we enjoy. He stated do not lose sight that the pot is not big enough to afford the services that we enjoy. He stated that he wants to equally express his disappointment regarding the exact wording of the budget narrative. He stated that he is hoping to translate or underline what he thinks is a very real message trying to be expressed by Mr. Hellen. He stated three main fears of the school budget which is that we have increased the school budget annually 3 percent over the past three years; again, we are only allowed to bring in annually 2.5 percent. He stated that the second fear is that this year we now

chose to increase the personnel line item 4 percent, which is a needed and deserved increase, but it is more that we get in. He stated that the third fear is that there are more opportunities for innovative use of money. He stated that he wants to recognize that these are reasonable fears. He stated that he appreciates the vision. He stated that this year we cannot fund fully what they ask for. He stated that as a community we feel that the one place we want to increase more than anything else is schools. He discussed that in the general fund 11 percent was given to police and 9 percent given to fire and 4 percent to DPW and 13 percent to general government and 1.5 percent increase to schools. He asked Mr. Hellen what brought us to giving them less than all other departments. ■Mr. Hellen stated that he has written about this for five years and Mr. Nutting wrote about it also. The biggest drivers for the school district are simply so far away from what we can afford; it is challenging. He stated to think of the slideshow he presented earlier; there are a lot of other expenses on the other side. He stated that for 13 years, no one from the school community has come forward asking the Town Council for an override. It is uncomfortable and unpopular, but it is not just about raising revenue and giving more money, it is also analyzing the decisions that are getting made about how they spend the money. He stated that he has written about it for years about the consistent options before the school district to change their paradigm shift in what is going on to be able to come back to us and say that we have looked at everything and done everything we can, He stated that he does not believe that has happened. He stated that he has to look at the fiscal constraints this year, but everyone out there for the departments has to have a slice of the pie. He stated that there is no way to fund it all. He stated that he has to look at others and ask are you doing everything. He stated that he has written about it, and he does not think that has happened. He stated that they have to have the courage as a community and start talking about some difficult things. He stated that we have to have some sobering conversations about the future. ■Councilor Frongillo reiterated his thoughts about the pot is not big enough. He stated that he wants to incrementally increase the funding for the schools. ■Councilor Hamblen stated that she agrees the pot is not big enough, and we need to have these conversations. She stated that she does not think that the schools are a burden. She stated that we need to accept the fact that we need good schools, but the pot is not big enough. She stated that we need to fully fund the out-of-district and people need to speak to their legislators about funding. She stated that we have to work together as a team. She congratulated Ms. Goodman on her retirement. ■Councilor Jones said we have one of the best school systems in Massachusetts; we have done well with our investment. He stated that there is one underlying fact which is our ability to raise additional funding. He explained Proposition 2½. He stated that our budget cannot be where we want it to be because we do not have the mechanism to do that. He stated that only the Town Council can say they need to do an override. He explained override requests and how they were approached in the past. He explained that an override becomes a permanent tax increase. He stated that we are in a recession even if no one wants to bring it up. He stated that we need the money, and the only way to get the money is through an override. He stated that the Town Council needs a number and what that number will go toward. ■Mr. Giguere stated that they will provide the information that is in their purview to provide. ■Councilor Jones stated to put a request together and put a number together and it needs to be the citizens that are ultimately going to support this. The citizens need a guarantee of where it is going. ■Chair Mercer stated that the difference is that a debt exclusion goes away and an override does not. ■Councilor Dellorco stated that there is no problem putting an override on the ballot. He stated that the problem is right now we are hitting the residents with stormwater and inflation is bad. He stated that they have to figure it out; whatever it takes they have to do. ■Councilor Pellegrini stated that these are very hard times. We only have X amount of dollars. We want to be able to give everyone something that is going to be able to help them. She stated that she remembers last year that they decided on the salary increase of 2.5 percent that was agreed upon and then all of a sudden it was 4 percent for schools and 2.5 percent for municipal. She stated that she found that disheartening. She stated that was \$800,000 that had to be budgeted by schools so it had to be taken out of somewhere in the school budget. She stated that money was taken away from the students. She asked what departments did it come out of to get that money. She stated that it bothered her terribly. She discussed how are they are going to budget the money this year with the salary increases. She stated that will be more money taken away from the students. She stated that she wishes that they could meet all

their requests for money. She stated that there are almost 1,100 students less than they had 10 years ago, and we have one school that is closed which is Davis Thayer. She asked how do we explain to people that we need so much more money and have fewer students and one less school. She asked how many new positions do they have budgeted this year. ■Mr. Giguere reviewed that the budget included 7 FTEs. He stated that he had a list of what was not being asked for; however, the School Committee approved a budget that included some of those asks that we had in there. He stated that they had to look at the 7 FTE positions and it came down to 2.5 FTEs. ■Councilor Pellegri stated that she thought there was money being allocated for redistricting. ■Mr. Giguere stated that there was a decision to not move forward with the redistricting. ■Ms. Goodman said there was no money budgeted for redistricting in FY24. ■Councilor Pellegri stated that she is 100 percent for the School Department, but she still needs to ask questions. ■Mr. Giguere stated that 80 percent of communities spend more; he reviewed other statistics. He stated that the services are great here. ■Councilor Chandler stated that he was going to piggyback on what Councilor Pellegri said. He stated that he has three questions. He asked if the School Committee charged you with looking for a better bus deal so it does not have to go up. ■Ms. Goodman stated that they go out to bid for a contract every five years; historically, we usually get one bid. ■Councilor Chandler stated that all the children get free lunch. ■Ms. Goodman stated that lunch is funded by the state. She calculated the approximate savings for a family with students getting free lunch. ■Councilor Chandler suggested that with this savings for each family, maybe some other fee could be raised. He discussed social/emotional needs. He stated that only freshman football is a non-cut sport, and this sport has been threatened to be cut. He stated that when we see 18 of the 24 teachers out on the street, if we did not do the extra raise of \$800,000, they would still be here. ■Mr. Giguere stated that he would not want to make any cuts, but these are tough decisions. He stated that they have phenomenal teachers. He explained that they thought about recruitment and retention. He noted that they did analysis of teacher salaries. ■Councilor Cormier-Leger stated that he appreciates everyone who is here; we need your advocacy all year round. He stated that teachers should get paid more everywhere in the United States. He stated that educators do an amazing job with what they are given, and he is sad some are leaving the profession. He stated that we are a very lucky and strong community; our kids should be our priority. He talked about all the priorities that need to be funded and asked where is that money supposed to come from. He stated that we have to come together as a community. He stated that the police and fire departments have chipped away at their problems over the years; let us put that same energy and resources to the schools. ■Chair Mercer stated that he would hold his questions as other people in the audience have statements they would like to make. He noted that it is after 11:00 PM. He stated that after comments from the audience, they will continue this first public hearing tomorrow night and then proceed with the second public hearing. ■Ms. Bowser and Ms. Murphy, students at Annie Sullivan Middle School, read their statements to the Town Council. They spoke about the importance of arts and clubs at the middle school level. They noted the activities that they participate in and explained some of the benefits of the programs. They stressed the importance of music, drama, and arts at the middle school level. ■A student addressed the Town Council and stated she was a graduating senior at FHS. She reviewed that she will be attending college in the fall. She stated that she was part of the choir for the past four years. She discussed the need for consistency and proper support in the chorus. She reviewed how there has not been consistency in the chorus. She discussed that music makes better students based on scientific studies. She stated that music and arts are just as important as any academic class. She asked the Town Council to take this into consideration. ■Chair Mercer reminded everyone that the Town Council does not have the authority to say what gets cut and what does not get cut in the schools; that is 100 percent a School Committee decision. He stated that the Town Council votes the bottom line number, but how that is spent has nothing to do with the Town Council. ■Ms. Julia Richardson, 102 Louise Drive, stated that she has heard some staff positions and activities in the music programs are going to be eliminated to close the budget gap, and she is here to ask that to be reconsidered. She explained the importance of the music programs and how grateful she is for the opportunities that her children have had in the music program. She stated that we should be supporting music to return to pre-Covid levels, not cutting. She stated another reason to support music is because students have found their community through music; in these rooms they feel safe. ■Ms. Selena Cousin,

114 Beech Street, asked what kind of public education do we want for the students of Franklin. She stated that we live in one of the wealthiest communities, but we make do with one of the absolute lowest per student expenditures around; this is simply unacceptable. She discussed that the budgetary limitations are depriving the students of the education they deserve. She stated that Franklin students deserve lower teacher-student ratios. She stated that teachers should have stipends to run clubs. She stated that it is insulting to expect teachers to volunteer their time for after-school activities. Franklin students deserve counselors with reasonable caseloads. She explained the other items that Franklin students deserve and need. She stated that the time is way overdue for us to stand up for our Franklin public schools; the kids in the community should be given the education they deserve. ■Ms. Deborah Ryan, 4 Symmes Road, discussed the Apollo spacecraft on the way to the moon and stated that we need to devote more time to course corrections as we steer the Franklin ship. She stated that we are drifting without expending additional fuel. She stated that she attended the finance meetings. She stated that she wanted to encourage town leadership to continue to have these course correction conversations. She stated that it takes courage to be visionary. ■Ms. Donna Grady, 500 Lincoln Street, President of the Franklin Education Association and educator, stated that she represents almost 600 members in Town. She stated that she is used to difficult conversations. She stated that the answer is in front of us; we are one Franklin. She stated that the paradigm does not need to shift. She stated that the miracle is the children. She stated that we owe them the future we want for them. She stated that the future is coming together. She stated that we are one community for the children. She stated that she is asking everyone to come together as one for the kids. She stated that the kids today are not even the kids we had at the beginning of the year. She stated that yes, we are 1,100 kids less and one school less, but the kids today need so much more. She stated that technology is a wonderful thing expect when it comes to kids. She stated that kids now need coping skills; they do not know how to play or talk to each other. She discussed that the year she came to Franklin as a teacher they hired 75 teachers and Franklin was the envy of the district of Massachusetts. Franklin is not the envy anymore. She stated that these children belong to all of us; we need to make it better for them. ■Ms. Ruthann O'Sullivan, 175 Oak Street, stated that she senses the burden of the superintendent feeling like he is the burden. She stated that the Town councilors should go back and watch this meeting on Zoom and see what it is like when all the other departments are up there and were joking around and what do you need and explain why you need that and supporting you and thank you and then this guy gets up there and it is like he is on the hot seat. She stated that it has been 16 years since Franklin passed an override. Franklin is in the top 13 percent of wealthiest towns in Massachusetts; we pay in the bottom 20 percent. She discussed educator salaries which is decided in collective bargaining. She discussed Franklin teacher salaries compared to other towns. She stated that schools are the number one reason that people move here. ■Ms. Sue Cass, 146 Longhill Road, stated that we do not have enough money and that is for the whole town. She suggested everyone in the room get others to help pass a real override. She stated that we do not have a choice, and we need to face that now before it gets any worse; we cannot keep expecting all the departments to keep cutting. ■Student Becka Jones explained personal involvement and siblings's involvement in music programs at Franklin schools. It was disheartening to hear there are so many problems with the budget and stuff within chorus. The music and arts programs have been beneficial. ■Person who did not identify themselves stated that every year music is targeted. She stated that now she hears that they are digging into football; maybe we can get an override. ■Fabiana (via Zoom) stated that it is obvious everyone is passionate about our town. When you talk about education, emotions are high. We do not have the money. It is an opportunity for the community to come together to find new solutions. ■Chair Mercer asked what is the projected status of the revolving fund surplus at the end of FY23. ■Ms. Goodman stated that they will have close to \$8.4 million. ■Chair Mercer stated that under the Town Administrator's budget with his plan B which is the 2.5 percent, what is the projected surplus in the revolving fund at the end of FY24. He stated that his concern is for the strategic planning that needs to be done to put a proper override question to the community which takes time and effort to put it together. He stated that the time and effort that is needed to put that plan together is daunting. He stated that his concern is that looking at the salary increase in the School Department for FY23, how do we make it sustainable. He stated that he is not saying that they did not deserve the 4 percent for FY23 and the next

two years, but they have to put together a strategic override plan. Then, it is up to the community to sell it. It takes a grassroots organization to do the work. He stated that it is going to take a lot of hard work. He noted that they are already dipping into taxpayers' pockets four times this fall. He stated that there is not enough money right now; the pot is just not big enough. If we do it right, it will give us the best opportunity to increase the dollars we have.

► Chair Mercer explained that the remaining held line items would be addressed at tomorrow night's meeting:

- Hold on Line Item 422: DPW-Highway.
- Hold on Line Item 514: Council on Aging.
- Hold on Line Item 610: Library.
- Hold on Line Item 630: Recreation.
- Hold on Line Item 695: Cultural Council.

► Chair Mercer stated that they will continue the first public hearing tomorrow night and immediately go into the second public hearing. ► **MOTION to Continue** the first public hearing to tomorrow night at 7 PM by Jones. **SECOND** by Dellorco. **No Discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0.**

ADJOURN: ► MOTION to Adjourn by Dellorco. **SECOND** by Jones. **No Discussion.** ► **VOTE: Yes-9, No-0, Absent-0. Meeting adjourned at 11:55 PM.**
Respectfully submitted,

Judith Lizardi
Recording Secretary