

Fort Fairfield Town Council Monthly Meeting Minutes
Council Chambers
Wednesday, June 12, 2024
6:00 PM

I. Roll Call – 6:00 PM

COUNCIL: James Ouellette, Keith E. Thibeau II, Patricia Canavan, Kevin Pelletier, Shane McGillan

STAFF: Timmothy Goff, Neadra Dubois, Doug Sharpe, Lynn Cote, Darren Hanson, Cheryl Boulier, Fire Chief Jalbert, Tony Levesque, Police Chief Cummings, Cody Fenderson

BUDGET ADVISORY COMMITTEE: Billie Jo Sharpe, Dan Foster, Stev Rogeski

CITIZENS: Eleven (11)

II. Prayer

Tony Levesque provided prayer for the Council Meeting.

III. Pledge to the Flag

All in attendance pledged their allegiance to the flag.

IV. Public Comment Period

No public comments.

V. Correspondence and Reports

A. Licenses and Permits

Town Manager Goff reports that there was a Public Hearing held for prior license holders and states that there is an item later in the meeting for Council to approve the licenses. There is also one other license, for approval, a Catering Permit for the Maple Pig Bar and Grill. It will be voted on later in the meeting.

B. Financial Report

Town Manager Goff gives the Financial Report for the month of May. Financially, the Town has come out of the month of May fairly strong. Revenues continue to be close to target. He expects the Town to hit most of the targets for the major revenue drivers. Utilities continue to be a major cost driver. Ultimately, the Town

is in much better financial shape than a year ago, with plans to improve their financial position and make some necessary investments in their facilities.

C. Aroostook Waste Solutions Report

Stev Rogeski gives the AWS report. The last AWS meeting was held on May 24th. Their income was 10% above and expenses were 14% below the projected amounts. Mr. Rogeski discussed the Igloo truck repair and the staffing pay scale and benefits. He states that the DEP inspection went well.

D. June Election Results

Town Manager Goff discusses the June State Primary Election results.

E. Elks Award

Town Manager Goff invites Attorney Alan Harding to step up and talk about the award. The Maine Elks Association Drug Awareness members presented the Elks Awards to Police Chief Cummings. Alan Harding was also presented with the Elks Director of the Year Award.

F. Revitalization Committee Update

Councilor Canavan gives an update on the Revitalization Committee. The Community Market will be held on Saturdays after holding the first one with a great turnout. The Revitalization Committee will join the Arbor Committee with planting flowers on Main Street and cleaning up the gardens to make the Town of Fort Fairfield look nice again.

G. Town Seal

Town Manager Goff talks about a new Town Seal that has been offered by a local artist, Amy Schwartz. He publicly thanks Mrs. Schwartz for her generosity and support of the community. Mr. Levesque explains the process of adopting a new Town Seal. Mr. Goff states that he will be using the new seal as a secondary and asks Council to think about adopting the seal as the new Town Seal.

H. Town Office Closure – End of Fiscal Year

Town Manager Goff reports that the Town Office will be closed on Friday, June 28th for the end of the fiscal year closure of financial records.

I. MPBF Report

Cheryl Boulier gives the report on the Maine Potato Blossom Festival. She states that the planning for this year's Festival is going well. Mrs. Boulier also talks about volunteers, sponsors, changing to a non-profit status, and budgeting for the Festival. She also states that the Festival and Fort Fairfield has been chosen by the Maine Office of Tourism to be the dedicated topic on an episode of the TV show, Maine Life.

J. Property Violations

Town Manager Goff gives an update on the property violations issue. 59 violation letters were sent to property owners that were in violation with their property or properties. To date, there have been 39 property owners that have reached out to the Town to ask why they got the letter, or, to tell their plans to remediate the issue. The property issues will be revisited in late July and again before winter.

K. Trio Web Transition

On May 14th, the Town Office moved to Trio Web and the staff had been doing a very good job of adjusting to the new program until they hit a snag on Friday, May 31st. That evening, the Town's receipts were on, but they didn't match the information in the system. The decision was made to seek out tech support on Monday morning before closing out the day as it could cause significant errors in the system and negatively impact folks who had registered their vehicles that week. On Monday, June 3rd, staff waited for a response from Trio and were informed on Tuesday, June 4th, that the issue was not related to the system-wide issue and that Trio staff were researching a fix. On Wednesday, June 5th, the Town Office was able to get back up and running. The underlying issue was a glitch with the system, which impacted the services provided by the Town Office to the citizens. On June 6th, staff were able to complete all of the end of month reporting and open the Office to the public to resume business.

L. Pool Pump Update

Town Manager Goff gives an update on the Pool Pumps that broke this spring during a flood at the Town Pool. The Town was faced with a potential cost of \$10,000 to replace the pumps, but before replacing them, some research was done and saved the expense of replacing the pumps. The pumps were rebuilt and replaced at a significant savings to the Town. The cost incurred by the Town for this work was \$1,377.23.

M. EPA Watershed Grant - Notice of Award

The Friends of Monson Pond group has conducted an extensive survey of the watershed and investigated the depths of the pond searching for invasive aquatic species to gain a clearer understanding of the water quality issues impacting Monson Pond. With the Council's approval and support, the group applied for an EPA Watershed Planning Grant. The Town of Fort Fairfield, as the sponsor applicant for this grant, was informed that they were selected to move forward with the development of a management plan and they will be working with The Friends of Monson Pond group and EPA to negotiate a contract to start this project.

VI. Old Business

A. Approve FY 24/25 Budget

Motion: Councilor Ouellette makes a motion that the fiscal year 24/25 budget proposal be amended to reinstate the 1 Mil property tax reduction.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: Councilor Ouellette discussed his reasoning for his motion and opinion on the budget. Councilor Pelletier states that it would be fair to give back to the taxpayers. Councilor Canavan discusses her stand on the budget and states that the Council should approve the budget. Council Chair Thibeau asks the Town Manager about the "yo-yo effect of Revenue Sharing". Town Manager Goff explains how that works – by drastically adjusting the mil rate one way and the next year, having to drastically adjust it in the opposite direction. This year there will be a change in the mil rate regardless because the Town will be indexing. The Town has to do indexing or they won't receive State reimbursements at 100%. That means that all properties in Fort Fairfield will receive a 10% increase in property value. That in itself will reduce the mil rate. Councilor Canavan states that she understands the process and mentions that even if the Town lowers the mil rate significantly, the property taxes bills could still go up. Councilor Pelletier asks if one mil will really make that much of a difference. Town Manager Goff explains the specifics around it not making that much difference in the taxpayers pocket or the municipal budget. Councilor Pelletier expresses his concerns about this and states that Town Manager Goff has a good plan in place. Mr. Levesque goes up to the podium and tells Council that it is their duty to adopt a budget, with changes or without changes, at this meeting. He explained that the mil rate is not a discussion worth having right now because the valuations with the State has not been done yet.

Vote: 3/2 vote – draw

Councilor Pelletier – yes

Councilor Canavan – no

Councilor McGillan – no

Councilor Ouellette – yes

Council Chair – no

Motion: Councilor Pelletier motions to accept the 24/25 budget presented.

Second: Councilor Canavan seconded.

Discussion: Councilor Ouellette stated that he cannot support the increase in the Municipal budget spending by 11%. He believes that some of the department cost increases in this budget total are too high. This includes increases in the cost of operation by 12% and the cost of employees by 22%. He also states that everything that department heads ask for can't just be rubber stamped. Councilors have not trimmed even one dime from this budget. Councilor Canavan expresses her concerns about having eight budget meetings, including workshops, two public hearings, tours of facilities, had workshops, and met with department heads and met with the Town Manager. There was plenty of opportunities to ask these questions, and nothing was discussed until now, when it's time to vote. If there were any questions or concerns, they should have asked and brought up all along. She states that she is happy with this budget and doesn't think it's overextending. Councilor Pelletier and Canavan banter back and forth disagreeing on the budget. Councilor Pelletier thinks it's too high and Councilor Canavan thinks it's appropriate.

Vote: 4/1 – passed

Councilor Pelletier – yes

Councilor Canavan – yes

Councilor Ouellette – no

Councilor McGillan – yes

Council Chair Thibeau – yes

VII. New Business

A. Maple Pig License Renewal

Town Manager Goff requests that Council approve the license renewal for Maple Pig.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to approve the Town Manager's request.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. Proclamation – Ella Leighton

Town Manager Goff presents and reads a Proclamation in honor of Ella Leighton, who is retiring from the Town Office after her more than 23 years of dedicated service to residents of the Town of Fort Fairfield. Ms. Leighton speaks at the podium, thanking everyone. Town Manager Goff also presents Ms. Leighton with a fishing cap with the Town logo on it and calls her the new CFO – Chief Fishing Officer.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to accept the Proclamation.
Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.
Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

C. Approval of Award Tax Anticipation Note

Town Manager Goff recommends that Council award the Tax Anticipation Note (TAN) with Katahdin Trust Company for the million dollars at the 5.35 fixed rate on the traditional tan. It is a reduction, not a significant reduction, in fixed rates.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to accept the Town Managers recommendation.

Second: Councilor Canavan seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

D. Approval of Payment of Special 6-Month County Tax

Town Manager Goff discusses the Special 6-Month County Tax and his conversation with the County Administrator. It seems right to pay it off to get it off the books versus drawing it out over the next three years. The Town Manager requests that Council approve that the Town pay the Special 6-Month County Tax in full by October 31st.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to approve the Town Manager's request.

Second: Councilor McGillan seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

E. Approve Letter of Engagement with Felch & Co. for Annual Audit

Town Manager Goff tells Council that he has not received the Letter of Engagement yet, however, Felch & Co. does plan on doing the Town's annual audit. Town Manager Goff requests that Council approve Felch & Co. as the auditors. Should their expenses be too high, that bridge can be crossed in July. Town Manager Goff states that it will be a struggle to find a new auditor, and they do a good job.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to approve the Town Manager's request.

Second: Councilor McGillan seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

F. Approve Insurance Carrier for FY 24/25

Town Manager Goff discusses the renewal for the Town's insurance carrier. The rate increase is modest at 2.35 percent. The concern the Town Manager has is the removal of cyber coverage from the policy. That means that the Town will have to explore options for that coverage in the event that the Town is victimized in a cyber attack of some sort. Town Manager Goff requests that Council approve renewing this insurance policy and once he gets quotes for the cyber coverage he will go back to Council with those quotes.

Motion: Councilor McGillan motioned to approve the Town Manager's request.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

G. Appointments to Arbor Committee

Town Manager Goff speaks about the Arbor Committee and states that there are only two active members. He states that he and Pat Troicke had a conversation about the Arbor Committee and she is asking if the Council could help by appointing and nominating members for this Committee. Town Manager Goff states that the Town spread the word and has received no nominations, the Town Manager has received no nominations and he has received no nominations from Council. He spoke with Pat Troicke again and she stated that she met with other people in Town and the Committee is no longer planting trees in Town or doing things that they used to do. The Committee has transitioned in to being more of a Beautification Committee, decorating the barrels, mulching and flower beds. The Arbor Committee and citizens that Mrs. Troicke spoke with, would rather not have formal meetings, but instead just make the Town look pretty. Town Manager Goff asks Council if the Town should continue to run a committee that doesn't have any members or should it be disbanded and allow them to work with Quality of Place and other folks to do the barrels and other beautifications for the Town. The members are stating that they do not want to function as the label of the Arbor Committee and are looking to disband and potentially reorganize as a different volunteer based non-profit. Mr. Levesque comments, stating that he recommends that Council table this item until the Committee is formally disbanded.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to table this item.

Second: Councilor McGillan seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

H. Appointment to Fort Fairfield Housing Authority Board

Stacey Michaud, the Housing Authority Director, is asking Council to approve the appointment of Sheri Whitley as a Resident Commissioner to fill the term of David Donovan that ends June 30, 2026.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to approve that nomination.

Second: Councilor Canavan seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

I. Fort Fairfield Volunteer Fire Association Donation

Town Manager Goff reads a letter from Fire/EMS Chief, Michael Jalbert, who is seeking approval from Council for the donation of an aluminum flatbed truck body. The Fort Fairfield Volunteer Fire Association has done some fundraising and has donated the flatbed truck body to the Fire Department. This flatbed truck will significantly enhance the Fire Department's capabilities, particularly in the response to wildfires.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to approve the donation.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

VIII. Minutes of the May 15th, 2024 Council Meeting & May 15th 2nd Public Hearing on the FY 24-25 Municipal Budget

Motion: Councilor Canavan motioned to approve the minutes.

Second: Councilor McGillan seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

IX. Warrants: #21 – \$392,926.91 #22 – \$ 128,346.72

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to approve the warrants.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

X. Other

A. ATV Signage

Councilor Ouellette states that he was approached by a citizen and discussed putting signage on the ATV crossing area where there was an accident last week. He spoke with Police Chief Cummings and he will be applying through the State

to sign it. Since it is a State road, they have to sign it. Police Chief Cummings states that it is something that has to be discussed with the State to see if that is something that they do, as he is not sure if signing those crossings is something that they do. Mr. Hanson states that it is usually it's up to the ATV Club to sign anything, but it has to be approved by the State DOT. Police Chief Cummings states that a formal request could be sent to the State requesting signage.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to seek approval from the State for the signage.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. Office Closure on July 5th

Town Manager Goff states that the Governor has moved to close all State Offices on July 5th because the 4th of July falls on a Thursday. He has talked with other Town Managers and they are also closing their Offices on July 5th with the stipulation that the employees use personal time off. The only downside of being open on the 5th is that all State Offices will be closed and there would be no one to answer questions if staff run into issues with transactions. Staff that he spoke with said they would gladly take personal time to have the day off. Council Chair Thibeau states that he will leave the decision to close the office up to Town Manager Goff. Town Manager Goff states that he will move to close the office on the 5th.

XI. Public Comment Period

Mr. Rogeski thanks the Council, the Town Manager and the Department Heads on all the hard work they have done on the budget.

XII. Adjournment

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to adjourn.

Second: Councilor Canavan seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

Council adjourned at 7:23 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Neadra E. Dubois, Council Secretary