

Fort Fairfield Town Council Monthly Meeting
Council Chambers
Wednesday, April 19, 2023
6:00 P.M.

I. Roll Call

Staff: Dan Foster, Neadra Dubois, Tony Levesque, Chief Jalbert, Chief Cummings

Council: Present – Pat Canavan, Robert Kilcollins, Keith Thibeau II, James Ouellette

Excused Absence – Kevin Pelletier

Media: Fort Fairfield Journal

Citizens: 14 present

II. Prayer

Tony Levesque provided the prayer.

III. Pledge to the Flag

All attendees pledged their allegiance to the American Flag.

IV. Public Comment Period

Gary McNeal talks about Ken Stratton's passing and how much he loved ATVs and loved this Town. Mr. McNeal also states that the ATV Club has appointed him to be the ATV Club's president since Mr. Stratton's passing and he will do the best he can with the Club to be law abiding and if there are any problems he will go to the Council and if Council has any problems they can go to the Club.

Tony Levesque wants to publicly thank Ken for his many hours of community service, undying discipline for what he believed in and publicly thank him for his service. He also wishes Mr. Stratton and his family the very best.

Tom Towle echoes what Mr. McNeal and Mr. Levesque said. He talks about how a couple of years ago, the Town was in dyer straits as far as ATV trail system and the State of Maine was going to discontinue the trails in Fort Fairfield because of poor management and the direction the Club was going. Mr. Towle stated that Ken Stratton took it upon himself, "literally grabbed the bull by the horns" and was very dedicated to that cause, and because of that, Fort Fairfield has one of the best ATV trail systems in The County.

Kevin Bouchard and several Townspeople have been working on a report that they would like to present to the Council. Earlier in the week Mr. Bouchard had asked to be placed on the agenda for this month's Council meeting and he asks if he should talk now or if there is another, more appropriate time for this information to be discussed.

Councilor Kilcollins suggests that he bring this information to the Budget Public Hearing on May 3rd at the VFW. Councilor Kilcollins also suggests that Mr. Bouchard bring this information to the Budget Advisory Committee to look at.

Mr. Leveque redirects point of order for the meeting. Mr. Levesque reminds Council that they are in Public Comment Period and there should not be any exchange, no questions responded to and that is outlined in the policy.

Chair Thibeau tells Mr. Bouchard that he has the floor for up to three minutes.

Mr. Bouchard talks about the report that he and the others he worked on. Mr. Bouchard focuses on one paragraph from the report. That paragraph represents what they are trying to address, why they are trying to offer what they believe to be constructive information. Mr. Bouchard states that he has more information that he will give to the Council and if they want more information, he would be more than happy to provide it.

V. Correspondence and Reports

A. Licenses and Permits

There was one application for an On-Premise Liquor License for the new owners of River's Edge Variety LLC.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to approve the On-Premise Liquor License.

Second: Councilor Kilcollins seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. Financial Report

Mr. Foster reports on the Town's March financial status. He states that there's not a lot to report different than the Town is moving in the right direction, the Departments are showing savings towards the final goal. Mr. Foster is concerned about the amount of cash that is needed to pay down the Katahdin loan by \$500,000. If the Town can do this then the Mil Rate can be dropped, if not, the Mil Rate will have to stay where it is. The goal is to pay off the \$1,275,000 and the Town is working towards that. Mr. Foster states that the Town's financial status will be a lot clearer at the end of May.

C. Aroostook Waste Solutions – Stev Rogeski

Mr. Foster reports that AWS did not have a meeting last month and he was provided a monthly update from Mark Draper. Stev Rogeski adds a reminder to Council that they need to keep in mind that AWS needs to get their pipeline up to par to keep up with the horrendous spring melts.

D. Fire/EMS Department Report

Chief Jalbert gives the report on the Fire/EMS Department. Chief Jalbert reports they've been on 57 EMS calls and 14 Fire calls. He expects that to go up a bit as grass fire season hits and as everything dries out and they are prepared for that. Chief Jalbert mentions the ice out and states that it went well. A few roads were closed due to flooding, nothing out of the ordinary. Water levels are still high, but it will go down in

the next few days. Chief Jalbert reports that they've been pretty busy with transfers to bring in more revenue. One way they have been to start that process is because of the new hires. Within the last week, Chief Jalbert has three EMS new hires. Chief Jalbert now has 13 EMTs and 11 volunteer firemen.

E. Budget Advisory Committee

Mr. Foster reports that the Budget Advisory Committee met on the 12th and thought it was very productive. The Budget Advisory Committee will be at the Budget Public Hearing on May 3rd and will be meeting again on May 10th. The Budget Advisory Committee will be drafting some suggestions or recommendations for Council to consider, not just for this budget, but for the process of things that could be looked at for the next year. The Budget Advisory Committee determined their terms for the remaining 5 members. Billie Jo, Jason and Danielle will have one year, expiring June 30, 2024. Chuck and Ann will be on for 2 years, expiring June 30, 2025.

F. Fort Fairfield Community Empowerment Project

Mr. Foster discusses the report generated by Catherine Ingraham regarding the interviews that were completed. Catherine will be meeting with the group of interviewees on May 9th in the Council Chambers at 5:30 to discuss the recommendations found in the summary report. Those items discussed will then be presented to the community as a whole and all of this information will be provided online for the public to see. After all of that, there will be a final report that will be brought to Council for consideration. Mr. Foster hopes this will all be done at the end of May or beginning of June and then the start of the process to look for a new Town Manager.

G. FY 23/24 Budget

Mr. Foster has presented a Budget Summary Update to Council. Mr. Foster reports that when he agreed to take on the Town Manager role, one major concern of his was finding the next Town Manager. He states that the Town has to find someone that has qualities they are looking for and the financial issue and contentious environment needs to be resolved. The whole budget process is about so much more than the Mill Rate. Mr. Foster says what the tax payers have been asked to do is highly inappropriate and offensive, and he understands the frustration and anger that goes along with it. Mr. Foster states that there is a lot more on the line than just that. Mr. Foster also states that the Town has to build up their credibility with the banks, get debt paid, and need to be on solid financial footing. Mr. Foster discusses what he told Council about his plans for the current fiscal year – reduce the budget by \$400,000. That money was needed to pay off debts. Also, for next year's budget – reduce it by \$1 million. Where it stands right now and the direction the Town is going, the savings of the current fiscal year budget will be closer to \$800,000. There have been three Department Heads leave because of this and people are upset because not enough has been cut and people are upset because the cuts are too much. Not everyone can be pleased but Mr. Foster's goal is to get the debt paid. That has to be done before anything else can be done. Mr. Foster says that Chief Jalbert has done an outstanding job by reducing the long term debt by over \$600,000 and the Town will be reducing the short term debt by February of \$1,275,000.

Some services have been cut to be able to do this, it's not perfect, but it's getting done. The Town Government is still in tact and the Department Heads are working very hard and making it work.

H. Disposition of Old Line of Credit & New TAN

Mr. Foster reports on working with the bank and meeting with Craig Staples about the goal of paying \$500,000 on the loan by the end of June and the other \$500,000 by the end of February. Mr. Foster also talked to Mr. Staples about the Town needing a \$1 million line of credit Tax Anticipation Note(TAN), from July until February. Mr. Staples is taking that information to the board and has said that he is in support of the requests made by Mr. Foster. Mr. Foster feels confident that, based upon what the Town says they can do, they are going to get the bank to supply the line of credit that is needed. Mr. Foster also mentions that the line of credit will be on a tax exempt status, which means the interest that the Town will have to pay will be significantly less than otherwise.

I. 2023 Communities Leading on Climate Conference

Mr. Foster reports on a grant that the Town received. Andrea Powers started the grant with Washburn and Caribou and they call it a Resiliency Grant, which has been initiated by the Governor's Office. Because of what they have been able to do with this, they actually sent up a camera crew to film and interview Darren and Mike on the pump station and how the Town handles the Ice-Out. Mr. Foster and Mr. Levesque met with Jay from NMDC and the Town has been invited to the second round of grants, because of what was able to be done with the first round. This Conference that is going on may be a precursor to the second round of grants, so Mr. Foster thinks that either he or Mr. Levesque needs to go to represent the Town.

J. Quality of Place Council Meeting

Mr. Foster reports on the Quality of Place Council Meeting in the Council Chambers on April 10th. They put on three new members – Matt Cummings, Elizabeth Reed and Brianne Bubar. Mr. Foster states that he and Mr. Levesque will be working with and supporting Quality of Place. Mr. Foster also states that it is important for the Town Government to be engaged with the volunteer organizations. These organizations exist for the sole purpose of benefitting for the Town of Fort Fairfield and the Town needs to be providing the support when they can.

K. FA Peabody

Mr. Foster says that after a meeting he had with Chuck he met with EJ Dorsey and got him all the information he needs to provide the Town with a quote. Mr. Foster met with Stacey from FA Peabody and they went over the insurance that the Town has with them. EJ had mentioned to Mr. Foster that Ms. Powers did ask him to do this a couple of years ago, but the underwriter would not quote the Town of Fort Fairfield because of outstanding claims. Mr. Foster was able to provide EJ with a five-year loss report and is waiting to see if EJ can provide a quote.

L. Solar Farm

Mr. Foster reports on a Solar Farm that the Town has. Mr. Foster says that Ms. Powers had budgeted that the Town would be getting a payment this year and Mr. Foster took that out of the anticipated income. Mr. Foster and Mr. Levesque have read and talked about the contract, that runs from January to December (calendar year), and as soon as they are connected to the grid and sending out electricity to the grid, the Town can collect. Right now they are in the development stage, and it's a two-year period, which started April 20, 2021, so that period is up now. They have the option in the contract to extend the contract for another two-years, in order to do so they need to request it in writing and Mr. Foster has yet to receive anything for that. Versant had the contractor who ran the lines to the site, Mr. Foster went up there and they are not connected yet. Mr. Foster says that he and Darren are keeping an eye on that. As soon as that is connected and a switch is flipped, they should be sending electricity, and once they do, Mr. Foster plans on sending them a bill.

M. Pines Lease Renewal

Back in June of 2013, Mr. Foster signed a ten-year lease with Pines Health Services and now it's time for a renewal. Mr. Foster has sent a copy of the lease to Chris Doody and is expecting to get a renewal signed for another ten-years. The Town owns the building with Pines – the Town owns 75% and Pines owns 25% of the building.

VI. Old Business

A. Appoint New Member to Budget Advisory Committee

Mr. Foster asks the Council to appoint Stev Rogeski to the Budget Advisory Committee to fill one of the open slots. Mr. Rogeski has been to the two meetings they have held, the Budget Workshop and the Chair, Jason Barnes, thinks he would be a great addition to the group. Mr. Rogeski is up to speed with all of the issues, so Mr. Foster thinks it's appropriate for Council to give him fair consideration.

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to appoint Stev Rogeski to the Budget Advisory Committee.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. Approve Sale of Used Police Cruiser

Mr. Foster asks Council to approve the sale of the 2017 surplus Ford Explorer for \$5,000. Of that money, \$3,000 was used to purchase a cruiser that the Police Chief has now and the other \$2,000 was used for installation and transfer of the equipment from the old one to the new one.

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to approve the sale.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

VII. New Business

A. Approve Proclamation 23-01 for Municipal Clerk Week

Mr. Levesque reads Proclamation 23-01 for the recognition of Municipal Clerks Week.

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to approve Proclamation 23-01.

Second: Councilor Canavan seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. Approve Accepting Piano Donation

Mr. Foster states that Barb Alexander, one of the Library employees, and her husband have generously offered to donate a piano to put in the recently redone community room in the Library. Mr. Foster is being cautious about having the piano moved, as to not create more Worker's Comp claims, and is working with Darren Hanson to get it moved as safely as possible. Mr. Foster thinks the piano would be great to have and knows that it would get used down at the Library. Mr. Foster asks Council to approve that, recognizing that he and Mr. Hanson will be working hard at it to make sure that they will be doing it in a safe, appropriate way.

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to approve the piano donation.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmed.

C. Approve Frontier ATV Club Use of Trails on Municipal Property

Mr. Foster reports on Frontier ATV Club requesting permission to utilize property owned by the Town of Fort Fairfield for their trails. Every year the Town is asked to approve this. Mr. Foster asks Council to approve the ATV Club to use the Town's property for the trails.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to approve the ATV Club use of trails on municipal property.

Second: Councilors Kilcollins and Canavan Seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmed.

D. Approve Sale of Tax Acquired Property

Mr. Foster reports on a property at 152 Fort Hill Street that was tax acquired and it went out to bid. The minimum bid was \$5,000, because of what was owed against it for taxes, interest, and liens. Two bids were received – one for \$7,500 and another for \$10,101. Mr. Foster asks Council to approve awarding the sale of the property and providing a quit claim deed for \$10,101.

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to approve the sale.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmed.

E. Introduce Ordinance #23-05 – Utilities Right of Way at Riverside Park

Mr. Foster describes the Ordinance for the Utilities Right of Way at Riverside Park. A new water line is needed and the Utilities District wants to relocate it from where it currently is. Mr. Foster asks the Council for one of them to introduce the Ordinance.

Councilor Ouellette introduces Ordinance #23-05.

F. Introduce Ordinance #23-04 – Deed Land to Utilities District

Mr. Foster describes Ordinance #23-04 to deed land to the Utilities District. The Utilities District has a pumping station next to Patti Brook and it is in a flood zone. The Town owns the land surrounding the building. In order for the Utilities District to relocate a new pumping station building out of the flood plain, they would need to use or have some of the land that the Town owns. Mr. Foster asks for a Councilor to introduce that Ordinance.

Councilor Ouellette introduces Ordinance #23-04.

G. Introduce Ordinance #23-02 – to convey land to Jon & Christine Helstrom

Mr. Foster describes Ordinance #23-02 to convey land to Jon and Christine Helstrom. The building on the land is currently owned by Gary Sirois, and Jon and Christine Helstrom are buying the building and they want to buy the land under and around the building as well. Mr. Levesque has given an assessed value of the land at \$8,600 and they have agreed to pay the assessed value for the land. Mr. Foster asks for a Councilor to introduce the Ordinance.

Councilor Kilcollins introduces Ordinance #23-02.

H. Introduce Ordinance #23-03 – to convey land to Gary Sirois

Mr. Foster describes Ordinance #23-03 to convey land to Gary Sirois. The land is the pad where the old redemption center used to be, next to Mr. Sirois building. The assessed value on that land is \$16,830. Mr. Foster asks Council to introduce that Ordinance.

Councilor Ouellette introduces Ordinance #23-03.

Mr. Foster states that Mr. Levesque will be scheduling a Public Hearing to include all four Ordinances at that time. Mr. Levesque states that the Public Hearing has been tentatively scheduled for May 16, 2023 at 12 PM (noon).

VIII. Minutes of the March 15th Regular Council Meeting

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to accept.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

IX. Warrants: #19; \$817,982.44 #20; \$185,201.85 #21; \$398,470.34

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to accept.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

X. Other

Mr. Foster states that there is nothing to report under Other.

XI. Adjournment

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to adjourn.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmed.

Council adjourned at 6:49 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Neadra E. Dubois, Council Secretary