

Fort Fairfield Town Council Meeting Minutes  
Council Chambers  
Wednesday, February 15, 12023  
6:00 PM

I. Roll Call

Council Present: Keith Thibeau II, Pat Canavan, Jim Ouellette, Bob Kilcollins  
Absent: Kevin Pelletier (excused absence)

Staff: Dan Foster, Neadra Dubois, Tony Levesque, Steve Turner, Chief  
Cummings, Darren Hanson

Citizens: Seven citizens present.

Media: Fort Fairfield Journal, Star Herald

II. Prayer

Tony provided prayer for the meeting.

III. Pledge to the Flag

All attendees pledged their allegiance to the flag.

IV. Public Comment Period

No public comments.

V. Correspondence and Reports

A. Licenses and Permits

Mr. Foster reports on two renewal liquor licenses. One is for the Lions Club, who is going to cater the Snowmobile Super Draw in the Armory. The other is for River's Edge Variety. Mr. Foster recommends that Council vote on River's Edge Variety's license because it has been expired since January 21, 2022.

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins makes the motion to have the liquor license signed for River's Edge Variety.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconds.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmed.

## B. Financial Report

Mr. Foster reports on the Town's finances. Mr. Foster says that the Town had a pretty good January and paid bills. Mr. Foster's expectation is that the Town would take in about a million dollars, and they took in \$1.4 million. The AWS loan and the County has been paid and the school was paid on time. There is money in the bank. Mr. Foster called and checked, there is still a balance on the Ambulance. The Town makes one payment a year and out of seven payments, there are four left. The Town sent them \$150,000, the payment is \$57,000 and the balance is \$65,000. Mr. Foster doesn't want to wait until June 1<sup>st</sup> to make that payment, he wants to pay it off. If he pays it off now, it will save the interest for the next three and a half months. The Town has the money to pay it, so he wants it paid off. Mr. Foster talks about the \$400,000 that needs to be saved from this year's budget that was approved, so that loans (not included in the budget) can be paid and not accrue more interest. Mr. Foster has been working on the budget and states that the Town will clearly have more than \$400,000. Mr. Foster talks about the work that the Department Heads have been doing to help save the \$400,000 and says that they are doing a great job. Mr. Foster states that he is having a hard time understanding the electric costs, particularly with the Rec Center. It appears that some of last year's bills are lumped in with some of this year's. The Town was charged a disproportionate amount at the beginning of this year and put the Town behind, and have been behind right along. Mr. Foster thinks that is the bulk of the problem that amounts to \$3,000 to \$4,000. Mr. Foster is going to continue to look at that. Mr. Foster praises the Department Heads for the jobs they've done handling their expenses and overtime and everybody is pulling their weight.

Councilor Kilcollins says that he would like to take a minute to thank all the Department Heads for the great job they've provided.

## C. AWS Report

Steve Rogeski reports on AWS. Their last meeting was on January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Their income is 4.9 percent ahead. They are about ten percent ahead of schedule for the year so far. AWS has put out, mostly to Presque Isle customers, a Frequently Asked Questions, for people to review answers to questions that have been asked about the shutdown of the Presque Isle landfill. Mr. Rogeski talks about the tree harvesting they have been doing and they have received about \$8,000 in January from the tree harvesting that goes into Capitol Reserves for extra money.

#### D. Fire & EMS Report

Mr. Foster reports on Fire & EMS for Chief Jalbert. Chief Jalbert has been busy filling in on calls and taking a Basic Training Class. Chief Jalbert has also finished up and submitted a Fire Act Grant for \$600,000 or \$700,000. That money will be used to get a new pumper. Chief Jalbert has been working hard on his budget. In January, they did 66 EMS calls and 9 fire calls. The Volunteer force is at 19 or 21 volunteers now. The people that came to look at the Ladder Truck have decided to opt out. Mr. Foster has asked that Chief Jalbert drop the price on the truck and so Chief Jalbert has dropped the asking price from \$600,000 to \$495,000. Mr. Foster states that he has a lot of respect for the work Chief Jalbert is doing.

#### E. Public Works Report

Darren Hanson reports on Public Works and what their experience has been so far with this winter. Mr. Hanson discusses the reliability of their aging fleet and the experience of the crew members. Mr. Hanson has tried a new 7 day a week shift this winter and reports that although it has helped with time off, they still have not been able to attract enough qualified people to fill all positions. Mr. Hanson also mentions the one area where he has been unsuccessful – convincing the Town Council of the need for major investment in the future of Public Works. The path they are on is unsustainable and they need major investment in equipment paving and longevity of personnel. Mr. Hanson reports that people have been asking a lot of questions about the wreaths downtown. Mr. Hanson states that he would have liked to have them picked up a month and a half ago but between preparing for storms and cleaning up after storms, then fixing equipment, Public Works just has too much to do between and during the storms.

Mr. Foster discusses Public Works' budget and how much budgets have changed between 2013 and 2023. Mr. Foster tells Council that something has to be done with the Public Works budget and says he echoes Mr. Hanson's concerns.

#### F. County Broadband Report

Tony Levesque gives an update on the County Broadband project. The project is being funded by several federal agencies and is passing through to some regional agencies in the State of Maine, Efficiency Maine is one of them. There are ways to capture some of that money, but it's specific for underserved communities or areas. A report that has been put out discusses how to be successful in the processes and it appears that the best way to capture funds is to partner with another community. Mr. Levesque states that Limestone is an identified partner for Fort Fairfield on this project. Mr.

Levesque discusses how Tim Goff has been involved in this project in the past and now in the present.

Mr. Foster adds that the Town has involved Tim Goff so to reengage Quality of Place Council with the Town. Mr. Foster states that Mr. Goff and Mr. Levesque work well together and this will be ongoing and they will continue to give updates to the Council.

#### G. Resilience Grant Report

Tony Levesque reports on Community Resiliency, a phased project. The Town initially received funds to be used for the highest priority project the Town had at the time – the Sutron, a gauge housed within the pump station on Main Street. The Sutron technology is 25 years old and it doesn't function the way it used to anymore. Mr. Hanson has identified a replacement for it, proposed a purchase and later installation of it. They have the funds to buy it and it is planned to be installed after winter. That is the first step to the Community Resiliency Plan. Tony discusses how this all started in 2021 with phase one. Tony states that to be resilient you have to maintain what you have in a better way.

Mr. Foster adds that this program is being administered by the Governor's Office and they were really pleased with the way Fort Fairfield has handled the first phase, so there's going to be a second phase coming out. There is going to be funding, it has not been identified, yet, as to how much funding will be given. The Town is in a very good place to receive funding for the second phase, since the first phase has gone so well.

Mr. Levesque adds that in the first phase, the Town had two other partners; Washburn and Caribou, and were able to identify solutions for the partners. Going forward, Fort Fairfield has spent their share and when the Town knows how much money and the priority for the Governor's Office to have the money spent, that is the path that Mr. Levesque suggests that the Town goes down.

#### H. Library Grant Report

Mr. Levesque states that finally the Town is in good stead with the company that handles the funds for this foundation. The funds that the Library are going to be able to use is \$19,200 and of that money, within seven days of getting into the funds, Mr. Levesque was able to draw back all the expended to date, \$14,300. Mr. Levesque reports there is money left over and that money will be used for the Drew Room, which is for historical documentation to help maintain it. Mr. Levesque states that the money has to be spent by March 31<sup>st</sup>.

I. Job Search – Phase One

Mr. Foster reports that the Fort Fairfield Community Empowerment Project is underway. The proposal given to the Town by Catherine has been put on the Town's website for anyone to view. Mr. Foster states that Neadra Dubois has been working with the Town's webmaster to redesign the Town's website so it is more usable. For people to view the document mentioned, they will have to go to the Town's website and click on the box that says "For Immediate Attention". With the current way the website is set up, there is no way to change the wording on that box. Mr. Foster states that the dates for the interviews have been set and this will be a good first step for the Town to look at where they've been and how they want to move forward and also the game plan for preparing the Town to start the job search for a new Town Manager. Mr. Foster is feeling very confident and thinks that Catherine is very well qualified to facilitate this process and says that she has a great plan. Mr. Foster has hopes that this will establish some new norms that will help the Town be more vigilant and not end up in the same situation that the Town ended up in. Mr. Foster states that it's a community thing, that involves the Council, Town Manager, Department Heads and the community. Mr. Foster says he will be reporting on this every month going forward.

J. NIMS Training

Mr. Foster reports on the NIMS Training, which stands for National Incident Management System. Mr. Foster states that for part of the grants that Chief Cummings and Chief Jalbert are applying for, require them and elected officials to participate in a 2-hour webinar. Chief Jalbert is asking that at least 2 of the Councilors participate. Councilor Ouellette has agreed to do that with Chief Jalbert and Councilor Canavan has volunteered to do it as well.

K. MDOT Work Plan

Mr. Levesque gives the background and discusses the MDOT Work Plan that involves Fort Fairfield. Mr. Levesque reports that Fort Fairfield has been identified as one of the three worst traveled places/roads in the State of Maine for at least the five years. Mr. Levesque has been trying to get on MDOT's list of projects to do. There is work proposed for 2024 and 2025 for Maine Street and Presque Isle Street, and it will be a reconstructed project. There is other work that has to be done before MDOT can start their work. Smaller projects like bridge repairs and ditching will be happening in 2023.

VI. New Business

A. Budget Advisory Committee

Mr. Foster reports to the Council that there are two vacancies on the Committee. One meeting has been presented and the vacancies have not been publicized. Once Mr. Foster gets a list of names for the Council to consider they can make appointments next month.

The other thing that Mr. Foster would like Council to vote on is a schedule for the Budget Meetings and Workshops for Town Council, Town Manager, Department Heads and Budget Advisory Committee. Mr. Foster briefs the schedule that he would like Council to vote on. Mr. Foster asks Council to approve that schedule and approve the Budget Advisory Committee to be able to fully participate in the Budget Meetings and Workshops.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motions to approve both of those items.

Second: Councilor Kilcollins seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. NMDC Board Member Appointment

Mr. Foster reports that Mitch Butler was the appointed NMDC Board Member while he was on the Council. Since Mr. Butler resigned there needs to be a new member appointed. Normally the member is a Councilor, but it doesn't have to be. Since there have not been any interest with emails that Mr. Foster has sent out to Councilors, Mr. Foster is recommending to Council that Kevin Bouchard be appointed.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motions to appoint Kevin Bouchard.

Second: Councilor Kilcollins seconded.

Discussion: Chairman Thibeau asks Mr. Foster if Kevin is okay with doing this. Mr. Foster says he would not be presenting it to the Council if he wasn't.

Vote: All Affirmative.

VII. Minutes

A. Council Meeting January 25, 2023

B. Special Council Meeting February 9, 2023

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to accept the Minutes, even though there is a minor spelling error.

Second: Councilor Kilcollins seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

VIII. Warrants: #16 - \$904,747.66

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motions to accept Warrant #16 as presented.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

IX. Other

Councilor Ouellette asks Mr. Rogeski to speak on behalf of a question he asked about the cost of running the street lights and the wreath lights.

Mr. Rogeski explained his investigation and findings on this. What he calculated for taking half of the street lights off the bill is that the Town would only save roughly \$3.06 a day. Those lights in question are really efficient and don't use much electricity at all. Overall, the savings per year would be a little over \$1,000 to have every other light off.

Mr. Foster asks if the lights are wired so it would be easy to do that.

Mr. Rogeski says that at one time they were, but are not now. It wouldn't be too bad, just a matter of disconnecting and reconnecting relays for each string of lights.

X. Adjournment

Motion: Councilor Kilcollins motioned to adjourn.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmed.

Council Adjourned at 6:47 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Neadra E. Dubois, Council Secretary