

Fort Fairfield Town Council Monthly Meeting
Council Chambers
Wednesday, September 16, 2020
6:00 P.M.

I. Roll Call

Councilors: All Councilors are present.

Staff: Ms. Powers, Billie Jo Sharpe, Tony Levesque, Darren Hanson, Chief Newell, Jennifer Gaenzle, Kevin Senal, Ella Leighton, Randall Bowen, Darryl Doughty, Neadra Dubois, Sergeant Eagles, Officer Fenderson.

Citizens: 7

II. Prayer

III. Pledge to the Flag

IV. Public Comment Period

Linda Shaw – Resident of Fort Fairfield spoke to Council regarding an on-going issue with a neighbor on Hunt Street. The yard is junkyard and filthy. Trash blows all over other yards, the lawn is not mowed, there are multiple vehicles in and out of the property at all hours of the night and day. Ms. Shaw read a letter from another neighbor, Carl Cheviot regarding the same issue and also included an issue with the growing of pot behind the house.

Ms. Shaw says the neighbors are not happy nor do they feel safe and want something done.

Perry Higgins – Resident of Fort Fairfield and a neighbor on the same street also spoke of the same issues along with the issue of youngsters being unruly and rude/vulgar as they drive past.

V. Correspondence and Reports

A. Licenses and Permits

We received an application for an On-Premises Liquor license renewal for Boondocks Grille/SVA, LLC on September 16, 2020.

B. Financial Report

We received August Revenue Sharing in the amount of \$31,241.85 on 8/20/2020. This is down \$8,156 from monthly budget and down \$1,398 for the first two months of this year.

We received the 1st payment for homestead exemption reimbursement today in the amount of \$297,191.00. This amount combined with the 2nd payment from last year gives us a total of \$354,786.00 vs our budget of \$354,400.

Our 2nd payment will not be paid until July or August 2021.

Checking account balance as of 08/31/2020 is \$877,296.03; Machias Savings balance \$5,000.00.

Total expenses at the end of August were at 15.90% vs 16.67% budgeted.

Total excise tax collected in August was \$59,795; State revenue sharing \$31,242; Real Estate & Personal Property taxes collected \$140,488. We also received \$297,191 homestead exemption reimbursement. This combined with the 2nd 2019 reimbursement brings us up to \$386 over the amount in our budget.

Loan balances as of 08/31/2020:

Jones Fuel - \$1,780.63
Langley #5275 - \$18,816.63
Langley #5277 - \$6,799.37

C. AWS Report – Mr. Rogeski

Mr. Rogeski was not present to give a report.

Mr. Butler commented that Council has not received a report of AWS for three months and asked if there was a way to get the minutes from the meetings or have someone other than Mr. Rogeski on the AWS Board that would be able to give monthly reports.

Ms. Powers commented that she has left Mr. Rogeski messages with no replies.

VI. Old Business

A. Fort Fairfield Fire Rescue Report -Ms. Powers

Deputy Chief Timothy R. Browning has been promoted to Fire Chief of the Fort Fairfield Fire Rescue Department. Chief Browning will be sworn in by Chief Shawn D. Newell, Dedimus Justice.

In the short amount of time of four months, Mr. Browning has brought the Fort Fairfield Fire Rescue Department full circle. As our Deputy Fire Chief, he has shown himself to be a great leader. Earning the respect of the people he manages and supervises while establishing and maintaining discipline and efficiency throughout the department.

Our paid-on-call has grown to 25 volunteers and our career staff has established itself early on as a respectful and professional department. I am proud of the work they have achieved and look forward to watching this department grow with Fire Chief Browning.

Chief Shawn Newell administered the Oath of Office to Mr. Browning.

Chief Browning gave the following update to Council:

Since January 1st of 2020 The Fort Fairfield Fire and Rescue Department has responded to 147 calls for service, with 104 of them being fire based calls for service and 43 of them being medical calls. Over 12 of these were structure fires to homes, businesses, and agriculture land. With the help of all of our mutual aid partners we have been able to quickly and effectively extinguish these fires even with the odds of mother nature against us for some of these. Our staff and all of our mutual aid neighbors have worked together to accomplish one common goal. To help the community of Fort Fairfield.

Having full-time staff here since March, our response times to calls has significantly improved, helping save structures and lives. Our annual average for fire-based calls has been 70 calls per year.

On August 15, 2020 our ambulance service became operational. Our response time to the first call was within minutes of receiving the page. We were on scene with not only an ambulance but an engine and command vehicle as well. We are averaging 1.5 ambulance calls for service each day.

All of these calls and many more have come in and we have responded with full time staff.

Our new Aerial Truck is here and ready for you to review the apparatus. I would like to welcome you to do so after the Council Meeting tonight.

I would like to thank the Council for their confidence in our Department and myself to do our jobs. We are always working to be a better department than we were the day before and we look forward to servicing the Town of Fort Fairfield for many years to come.

B. Fort Fairfield Solar, LLC

The Fort Fairfield Solar, LLC, in order to provide more acreage for our Industrial Park /is proposing changing the language for the site agreement to 15 acres instead of 20 and \$1,500.00 per acre per year.

Recommendation: That Council votes to approve the new language of the Fort Fairfield Solar, LLC project to include the new acreage of 15 acres and per acre payment of \$1,500.00 per acre yearly.

Motion: Mr. Butler made a motion to approve the new language of the Fort Fairfield Solar, LLC project to include the new acreage of 15 acres and per acre payment of \$1,500.00 per acre yearly.

Mr. Smith seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

C. Fort Fairfield ATV Club Trail Extension Request

During the August Council meeting, Chief Newell presented to Council his findings of the proposed ATV access route survey on Riverside Ave East. The majority of residents polled stated they were in favor of the route. "I explained to Council I would support this access route."

"I do not, however, support an access Route 1A bridge crossing the Aroostook River." This is a very narrow bridge and it poses a high safety risk to motorists and ATV riders. It is the State of Maine who will ultimately decide if that route is granted access.

There is 2,600 feet on the Strickland Road that the Fort Fairfield ATV Club is requesting to become an access route. It is the only connection between the Riverside Avenue West and the ATV trail just beyond the Strickland Road. "I support this access route."

Recommendation: That Council approves the 2,600 feet on the Strickland Road connecting the Riverside West access route to the Strickland Road access route to the ATV Trail.

Mr. Kilcollins made a motion to approve the 2,600 feet on the Strickland Road connecting the Riverside West access route to the Strickland Road access route to the ATV Trail.

Mr. Butler seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

D. Town Revaluation Discussion

Our total Town Revaluation eliminated the disparities that arose when the fair market values changed over time. Our last total Town Revaluation was 1997. Our ratio before the total Town revaluation process was 76%. After the total Town revaluation, we are now at 100%.

The revaluation project was undertaken by our municipality to appraise all real property and personal property within the taxing district according to its full and fair value. Full and fair value is the price at which the assessor, Garnett Robinson Company, a certified assessor in the State of Maine, to be certain a property would sell at a fair and bona fide sale by a private contract on October 1 of the pre-tax year.

The revaluation project sought to spread the tax burden equitably within our municipality. Real property must be assessed at the same standard of value to ensure that every property owner is paying his or her fair share of the property tax. Inequitable assessments can result from changes in characteristics in areas or neighborhoods within the municipality and within individual properties, fluctuations in the economy (inflation, recession), changes in style and custom (desirability of architecture, size of house), and changes in zoning which can either enhance or adversely affect value.

Both the interior and exterior of each property were physically inspected, and building dimensions were noted during the revaluation process. In addition, recent sales of properties were studied and adjusted to estimate the value of property that has not been sold. All information believed to have an influence on value were gathered, reviewed and analyzed in order to make a proper determination of each property's full and fair value.

Although revaluation did result in an increase of nearly each individual assessment, there were some that lost value, it does not mean that all property taxes will increase. This is just one of many projects we have successfully completed in less than two years to help Fort Fairfield continue to grow and move forward. We are thankful for the cooperation of our citizens and businesses, for whom we would have never been able to finish this project.

Ms. Powers – Citizens still have time to contact Garnet with any questions they may have.

VII. New Business

A. GA Maximums ORD 20-06

Enclosed please find the new maximums for the 2020-2021 General Assistance Ordinance, Appendices A-D. These maximums are updated annually and are effective from October 1, 2020 through September 30, 2021.

The law requires that the municipal officers adopt the Ordinance and/or Appendices after notice and public hearing.

Recommendation: A Councilor needs to introduce the attached ordinance during the September Council meeting and direct staff to hold a public hearing on September 30, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. on the Ordinance.

Mr. Butler introduced ORD 20-06. A public hearing will be held on September 30, 2020 at 12:00 p.m. in Council Chambers.

B. Mil Rate Town Order 20-07

Town Council approves the budget in June for a July 1st implementation. The mil rate is not set until the taxes are committed on October 1st.

A 20.5 mil rate will support the FY 20/21 budget the Town Council approved on June 17, 2020.

<u>Mil Rate</u>	<u>\$50,000 value</u>	<u>decrease below current rate</u>	<u>\$100,000 value</u>	<u>decrease below current rate</u>
25.02*	\$1,251.00	\$0.00	\$2,502.00	\$0.00
20.5**	\$1,025.00	\$226.00	\$2,050.00	\$452.00

*current mil rate
**suggested mil rate
one mil is one-tenth of a cent (\$0.001).

Recommendation: Town Council approves Town Order 20-07, and adopts a 20.5 mil rate to support the FY 20/21 budget; due date of February 1, 2021, interest rate of 8.00%, and interest penalty date of March 1, 2020 for FY 20/21 real estate and personal property taxes.

Discussion:

Mr. Kilcollins made a motion to table this so that they may educate themselves more and receive more feedback.

Ms. Powers – We cannot table the Mil Rate because we commit taxes on October 1st. We have to set a Mil Rate.

Ms. Powers there is a State formulation that helps determine a maximum and minimum Tax Rate. The Maximum was 21.1 and the minimum is 20.1. A 20.5 Mil Rate will provide an overlay of \$98,761.19. This year there are so many factors as we have seen that can come into play that if we do not plan properly for an overlay, we find ourselves in a position that we do not want to be in. We have done so well even through COVID-19 without having to even reach into our TAN.

Mr. Babin – Before any discussion we need to have motion based on the recommendation of Ms. Powers.

Motion: Mr. Smith made a motion that Town Council approves Town Order 20-07, and adopts a 20.5 mil rate to support the FY 20/21 budget; due date of February 1, 2021, interest rate of 7.00%, and interest penalty date of March 1, 2020 for FY 20/21 real estate and personal property taxes.

Mrs. Libby seconded.

Discussion:

Ms. Powers used a tax card to give an example of the change in a person's tax bill with and without the updated homestead exemption of \$25,000.

Mr. Levesque explained the formula used when preparing the Town Budget and determining the mil rate legally bringing the Town to 100 percent valuation.

Mr. Kilcollins had questions about valuation and appraisal and the inability to get a loan based on location comparing Portland and Bangor to Fort Fairfield.

Mr. Levesque – They took land and building sales in Fort Fairfield and created a pricing schedule just for Fort Fairfield.

Mr. Butler – where does the rate 20.5 come from?

Ms. Powers – it comes from the State. It is my recommendation for an overlay that I feel safe with and these are the only numbers I have to work with; is the maximum and the minimum tax rate.

I think it would irresponsible for us to ask for the maximum tax rate.

Mr. Babin – We need to educate ourselves in order help others understand and we are all still learning.

Vote: Mrs. Libby – Aye
Mr. Kilcollins - Nay
Mr. Smith – Aye
Mr. Butler – Aye
Mr. Babin - Aye

Motion Passed 4-1.

VIII. Minutes of the August 19, 2020 Regular Council Meeting

Mr. Butler made a motion to approve the Minutes of the August 19, 2020 Regular Council Meeting as written.

Mr. Smith seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

IX. Warrants #5: \$108,310.52 #06: \$395,123.00

Warrant #5 in the amount of \$108,310.52 was completed on 08/26/2020

Warrant #06 in the amount of \$395,123.10 was completed on 09/11/2020.

Checking account balance as of 09/11/2020 is \$570,577.21; Machias Savings balance \$5,000.00.

On September 08, 2020, Mrs. Leighton had 93 Liens recorded for the 2019 Real Estate Taxes and sent out 194 thirty-day lien notices on 8/6/2020.

Mr. Butler made a motion to approve Warrant #5 and Warrant #6 as presented.

Mr. Smith seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

X. Other

XI. Executive Session

M.R.S.A. §405 (6)(A) Personnel Matter

Mr. Butler made a motion for Council to enter into Executive session regarding M.R.S.A. §405 (6)(A) Personnel Matter

Mr. Smith seconded.

Council entered in to Executive Session at 6:49 pm.

Mr. Butler made a motion that Council come out of Executive Session.

Mr. Kilcollins seconded.

Council came out of Executive Session at 7:24 pm.

XII. Adjournment

Mr. Butler made a motion to adjourn.

Mr. Kilcollins seconded.

Council adjourned at 7:26 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Billie Jo Sharpe,
Council Secretary