

Fort Fairfield Town Council Monthly Meeting Minutes
Council Chambers
Thursday, November 17, 2022
6:00 PM

I. Roll Call

6:00 PM

Council: All Councilors present.

Staff: Dan Foster, Neadra Dubois, Tony Levesque, Darren Hanson, Fire Chief Jalbert, Jennifer Gaenzle, Shannon St. Pierre, Police Chief Cummings.

Citizens: 14 citizens present.

Media: Star Herald, Fort Fairfield Journal.

II. Prayer

Tony Levesque said the prayer.

III. Pledge to the Flag

All attendees pledged their allegiance to the flag.

IV. Public Comment Period

Council Chair Kilcollins congratulates Pat Canavan and Keith Thibeau for getting elected into Town Council.

Councilor Ouellette congratulates Matt Cummings for getting awarded the Presidential Valor Award.

Gary Sirois discusses the Audit Report and points out a few things that he finds alarming, which includes the change in the net position, deficit, ARPA Funds, excessive expenses, and benefits for employees. Mr. Sirois states that he hopes that the Council will get this back in line.

Diane Mulherin speaks on behalf of the Librarian and talks about how important and special the Library is to the community. Ms. Mulherin talks about how passionate the Librarian is about the Library and maintaining the history involved. Ms. Mulherin talks about the Joan of Arc statue and how important it is. Ms. Mulherin expresses how she feels about how important the Library is and how dedicated the Librarian is.

V. Correspondence and Reports

A. Licenses and Permits

Mr. Foster reports that there is one renewal license and permit for the Knights of Columbus #1753.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. Financial Report

Mr. Foster discusses the Town's finances for October. The Town continues to run very tight on cashflow. Taxes collected in October of last year were \$179,000.00. This year, taxes collected in October were \$452,000.00. Mr. Foster states that the Town is looking at saving \$400,000.00 on expenses this year. Expenses are pretty much in line this year. On the income side, Revenue Sharing has gone up from around \$70,000.00 last year to \$110,000.00 this year. Revenue from Fire/EMS is coming in more regularly, now that the billing is doing better. Planning for the next fiscal year, Fire/EMS should be bringing in around \$400,000.00, with a very busy ambulance service.

C. AWS Report

Stev Rogeski reports that the last meeting was October 28th and the next meeting will be November 18th. In September, they met their monthly budget expectations by five percent. AWS's Safety Officer has written a grant to get a sander to go on the back of a pickup truck to sand up to the doorways to prevent slips and falls in the winter. Plans for closing Presque Isle are well under way, ahead of budget and on track.

D. Fire & EMS Department Report

Fire Chief Michael Jalbert gives his report on the Fire/EMS Department. Chief Jalbert reports that they ran on 62 EMS calls and 6 Fire calls. Chief Jalbert talks about having new Volunteer Fire Fighters and attendance being good. As of November 8th, the expense side is about \$115,000.00 underspent. On the revenue side, they are just under \$79,000.00 collected of where they should be this time of year. Chief Jalbert reports that revenue from billing is coming in good. Chief Jalbert discusses the possibility of selling the Ladder Truck, two SUVs and an

Ambulance through a direct sale negotiation. The Ladder Truck's fair market value is \$600,000.00. Chief Jalbert talks about a possible deal with NMCC for EMS students to get their clinical time with our EMS Department. Chief Jalbert also discusses the AFG Grant Program, going to workshops to learn more about writing grants to save the Town more money. Chief Jalbert reports the Ambulance Service is licensed for another year.

E. Community Resilience Partnership Grant

Mr. Foster reports on the Community Resilience Partnership Grant, which is collaboration between Fort Fairfield, Caribou and Washburn. It has to do with the money that came from the Governor's Office for climate change issues, i.e., planting trees to cut down the snowdrifts on roadways. Turns out, the cost was too great for the money that was available. The Town is now looking at a new monitoring system for the Dike to remotely monitor the water levels of the river. Mike Greenlaw gave a bid on that for \$11,250.00. Mr. Foster has submitted this information to the Governor's Office and is waiting to hear back. This is not something that will happen right away, but something to look forward to in the future.

F. Elected Officials Webinar

Mr. Foster reports that Pat Canavan and Keith Thibeau participated in the Elected Officials Webinar on November 16, and were given their Municipal Officers Manual.

G. Solar Farm Developments

Mr. Foster reports on three Solar Farms that are in the planning stages. One of them is being developed close to residential homes and there has been some concerns about this. Council plays a big role in this process.

Mr. Levesque discusses the roles that the Planning Board and Council has on this topic. Mr. Levesque also discusses the Zoning Ordinance and the process of opposing or amending the Ordinance.

H. County of Aroostook Proposed 2023 Budget

Mr. Foster reports on the County of Aroostook proposed 2023 budget, which has gone up 8.24 percent. They had a Public Hearing on November 15th. The Town's payment, for next year, will go up by \$22,842.00 to make it \$300,000.00.

I. Aroostook Municipal Association Quarterly Meeting

Mr. Foster reports that he attended the Aroostook Municipal Association Quarterly Meeting for the first time in ten years.

VI. New Business

A. Approve Extension of Promissory Note to AWS

Mr. Foster reports that AWS has agreed to extend the Promissory Note from November 30th to January 31st and they are asking the Council to approve Mr. Foster to sign the extension.

Motion: Councilor Butler motioned.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. Approve Audited Financial Statement for FY 21/22

Mr. Foster reports that there is not much to say about the Audited Financial Statement, except that the Town has some financial issues that have to be straightened out. It's not going to be easy or fun and it's not going to happen without losing some employees. Mr. Foster asks the Council to approve the Audited Financial Statement presented by Felch & Company.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned.

Second: Councilor Libby seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

C. Approve Exception to Town's Policy on Nepotism

Mr. Foster talks about the Fire/EMS Department needing to utilize more part-time and on-call people. Mr. Foster reports that the Town is better off having the EMS service in Fort Fairfield, the Town just can't afford what they have. Mr. Foster says that it's not going to be easy, but the Town needs to find better ways to provide the service without always depending on full-time employees. Mr. Foster reports that Chief Jalbert's wife, Peggy, is a very experienced EMT and would like to be used as an on-call, however the Town has a Nepotism Policy that states, "No person shall be hired and no employee shall be promoted while a relative

exercises supervisory authority over that person.” Mr. Foster asks the Council to allow Peggy Jalbert to be hired and work in the EMS Department as on-call because of the situation the Town is in.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned.

Second: Councilor Butler seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

D. Approve Process for K-PEL Land Transaction

Mr. Foster reports on the Land Transaction with K-PEL. It has already been approved; however, Mr. Foster wants to be able to introduce an Ordinance for this. Mr. Foster also talks about the fair market value and leasing the land, with option to buy, to K-PEL. Mr. Foster asks the Council to allow him move forward with this scenario.

Councilor Butler states that he would like Mr. Foster to introduce an Ordinance for K-PEL.

Mr. Foster describes the process to take place after getting permission to introduce the Ordinance.

E. Approve Selling Leased Property to Lessees

Mr. Foster states that the Town should explore selling some Town land, specifically three land leases on Cheney Grove. Mr. Foster asks the Council to agree to allow him to approach the three land owners to see if they would be willing to purchase the property under the buildings for the assessed value of the property, and then use those funds to clean up in that area.

Motion: Councilor Pelletier motioned.

Second: Councilor Ouellette seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

F. Approve Contract with NMCC

Mr. Foster talks about an agreement with NMCC to have their students come to Fort Fairfield and work with the EMS Department to get their clinical hours. Mr. Foster asks the Council to approve Chief Jalbert to sign the Contract with NMCC.

Motion: Councilor Butler motioned.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

G. Surplus Cruiser

The Police Department has two surplus SUVs that the Chief Cummings would like to be able to market, rather than put them out to bid. The Town's policy allows for Departments to market vehicles without having them go to bid. The vehicles to be sold are emergency vehicles and will probably be sold with the emergency equipment. Chief Cummings believes that he will be able to get a better price for the vehicles if he marketed them, rather than letting them go to bid.

Motion: Councilor Libby motioned.

Second: Councilor Butler seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

H. Eliminating the Library Department Head

Mr. Foster discusses how he is going to make changes, including cutting employees. Mr. Foster states that he was hired to do a job, and cannot do that without creating some pain and discomfort. These changes that Mr. Foster wants to make are part of the process to getting back on financial footing. Mr. Foster states that it is not an easy thing to do, but is willing to and can do, if allowed to. Mr. Foster discusses a memo he sent to Council, back in October, about reducing the Library down to three days a week and utilizing two part-time employees and volunteers. Mr. Foster states that if Council is able to move forward with this, the Town will save almost \$60,000.00 this year and will be able to get close to saving between \$85,000.00 and \$90,000.00 next year. Mr. Foster asks the Council for approval for the Library to go to three days a week, to be able to terminate the Library Department Head position, and to maintain the two part-time employees, so that the financial goal can be achieved.

Diane Mulherin interrupts and asks if this is the only Town that has done that. She finds it unusual to have the Library targeted.

Councilor Libby states that the Library Board of Trustees has made an offer that they are willing to contribute \$6,350 of Board funds to supplement the budget, keeping the Librarian on. She asks if that would be the same thing as keeping the Librarian on and it not cost the Town anymore.

Mr. Foster disagrees and explains that cutting the Library down to three days and having two part-time employees is better for the Town.

Councilor Libby states that the Librarian is willing to go along with the reduced hours, eliminating her benefits and her retirement. Councilor Libby asks if it would be better to have her, with all of her experience and knowledge, and one part-time.

Mr. Foster states that the two part-timers have plenty of experience and knowledge.

Councilor Libby states that she disagrees.

Councilor Butler states that he can't grasp the concept of firing the Librarian and keeping two part-timers. Councilor Butler thinks that reducing the hours is fine, but the person that has been there the longest, should be the one staying and the person who has not been there the longest, should be the first one out.

Mr. Foster states that in his judgement, that is not what he thinks should be done.

Mrs. Gaenzle approaches the podium and states that she would like to address this.

Chair Kilcollins states that at this time, he would like to keep the conversation amongst the table.

Mrs. Gaenzle interrupts and states that she has a letter from the Maine Library Commission that states that without a Librarian, the Town will lose the Library Designation.

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motions.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconds.

Discussion: None.

Vote: 3/2 Motion Passed.

Ayes: Councilor Ouellette, Councilor Pelletier & Chair Kilcollins

Nays: Councilor Libby & Councilor Butler

VII. Minutes

A. Regular Town Council Meeting Minutes October 19, 2022

Motion: Councilor Pelletier motioned to accept the minutes.

Second: Councilor Libby seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

B. Special Town Council Meeting Minutes November 14, 2022

Motion: Councilor Libby motioned to approve the minutes from the Special
Town Council Meeting on November 14, 2022.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

VIII. Warrants: #9 - \$366,434.78; #10 - \$261,315.62

Motion: Councilor Ouellette motioned to accept both warrants.

Second: Councilor Pelletier seconded.

Discussion: None.

Vote: All Affirmative.

IX. Other

Nothing to report in "Other."

X. Adjournment

Chair Kilcollins Adjourned the meeting at 7:01 PM.