

FARMINGTON SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, January 9, 2024

The conduct of the meeting included remote access by telephone, video, and electronic means. The public could attend in person or by viewing the live stream at <http://mtbluetv.org/program-live-streamfarmington-selectmen.html> or Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/MBTV11/> or calling 578-7395.

Chairman Matthew Smith called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. with the following members present: Stephen Bunker; Joshua Bell; Byron Staples; and Dennis O'Neil. Erica LaCroix, Town Manager; Police Chief Kenneth Charles; Deputy Police Chief Shane Cote; Director of Parks & Recreation Matt Foster; Leah Giusti, Executive Assistant; MBTV Camera Operator; and members of the press and members of the public were also present. Members of the press and public participated remotely as authorized by PL 209, c.617.

ITEM 1: Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

Chairman Matthew Smith led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

ITEM 2: To allow FY2023 Police Department Personnel Budget Carryover to purchase and install security and interview room camera upgrades in the amount of \$35,444.46

Chief Ken Charles addressed the Board. He stated that there are two sides to the budget, operations and personnel. With the ongoing vacancies this year, the personnel budget is under budget by about \$150,000. They have been aware of problems with their security cameras for some time. The cameras were inherited from Wal-Mart 12 years ago. They have had some important investigations lately, and when going back to get the footage, it wasn't there. They are functioning at 2/3 capacity, cameras are no longer functioning properly. Particularly, there are problems with the interview room cameras which can undermine credibility when they cannot produce footage.

The preferred vendor is offering a 30% discount on this year's cameras as they are being discontinued making it a \$15,000 savings. They come with a 10-year warranty. Timing is of the essence.

Town Manager Erica LaCroix addressed the Board. She stated that, in general, it is not advisable to transfer personnel budget funds to operations. However, so long as the budget isn't increased, the Board is allowed to do so. In this case, she believes that this purchase would be in the best interest of personnel safety and security.

Selectman Bell brought up the Purchasing Policy, which states that any purchase over \$10,000 must go out to bid. Ms. LaCroix stated that while she understands the Purchasing Policy in place, it is not always possible to write an RFP for everything. In this particular instance, she did request that PD get three quotes, which they did. Not having reliable video is a large liability,

and one lawsuit could trump any expense. This is the preferred product. It is cloud-based and has AWS government-level encryption. She requested that the board entertain this option as it comes at significant savings and is in the best interest of the taxpayers.

Selectman Bunker stated that he appreciates the comments that have been made. He noted that Selectman Bell raised a good point, and the Purchasing Policy should be reviewed at a later meeting. He is most concerned about interview room recording as an immediate pressing issue and does not care to defer that off at this point. It is in the town's best interest and there is a time/savings issue to be taking advantage of.

Selectman Bunker made a motion to approve the FY2023 Police Department Personnel Budget Carryover to purchase and install security and interview room camera upgrades in the amount of \$35,444.46 and to review the Purchasing Policy at a later meeting; Selectman O'Neil seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 3: To request approval of the transfer of \$1,800.00 from the 2023 Parks and Recreation line item 50-7620 into the Hippach Field Reserve Account SX-7954

ITEM 4: To request approval of the transfer of \$2,000.00 from the 2023 Parks and Recreation line item 50-7680 into the Parks and Recreation Vehicles and Equipment SX-7994

Director of Parks & Recreation, Matt Foster, approached the board. He stated that he had been unable to use the funds which he is requesting to be transferred. He held onto more money after the May event. Selectman Staples enquired as to the legality of transferring the funds. Ms. LaCroix stated that there is no issue with transferring money from general operating to capital. The only real difference here is that capital monies are generally used for larger expense items that you save for over time. Mr. Foster also stated that the notes section does state that the remainder is to go into a reserve account.

Selectman Smith noted that he would like a legal opinion from the Town Attorney or MMA.

Selectman Bell made a motion to approve the transfer of \$1,800.00 from the 2023 Parks and Recreation line item 50-7620 into the Hippach Field Reserve Account SX-7954 and the transfer of \$2,000.00 from the 2023 Parks and Recreation line item 50-7680 into the Parks and Recreation Vehicles and Equipment SX-7994; Selectman Staples seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 5: To accept donation of \$100.00 from Debra Miller for the 2024 Parks and Recreation Program Supplies Account 50-7407

Selectman O’Neil made a motion to accept the donation of \$100.00 from Debra Miller for the 2024 Parks and Recreation Program Supplies Account 50-7407; Selectman Bell seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 6: To discuss a Town Tree Ordinance with the Conservation Committee

William Haslam and Patty Cormier, members of the Conservation Committee, approached the Board. Mr. Haslam stated that the town has been put on notice by the Arbor Association. They are looking for a more general tree ordinance regarding the planting of trees on public property, public ways, parks, etc. They have many examples from other towns that were circulated via email. Ms. Cormier stated that what is needed is already in town ordinances, but needs to be in one designated document. Farmington has been a Tree City for 48 years. In the past two years, the National Arbor Day Foundation reviewed all ordinances, and Farmington’s was deemed unacceptable. Just needs to be pulled together in simple clear language.

The Conservation Commission will draft an ordinance and send it to the Zoning Board. It would be ideal to have done before Town Meeting on March 25, 2024.

ITEM 7: To hear from Marc Edwards, Regional Outreach Coordinator, Natural Resources of Maine regarding the Maine Trails Bond Initiative

Marc Edwards approached the Board. He is seeking the Select Board’s support for the Maine Trails Bond Initiative, LD4489. He is requesting that the Select Board vote to allow the Town Manager to sign a letter which will be sent to legislators in a show of support. To date, 460 towns, organizations, and businesses have signed on to the letter, including quite a few in Franklin County. The Trails Bond Initiative would provide \$30 million over four years for trail development, design, maintenance, and building throughout the state. Of the funds, 50% will be designated for multiuse trails with the remaining funds be split equally between motorized and non-motorized use trails. Originally, they were asking for a 20% match, but there were concerns that this would put funding out of reach for smaller communities. It has been dropped down to a 10% match and the match can come from anywhere.

The program would be administered by the Bureau of Public Lands, which would receive applications and distribute funds. The initiative would benefit many snowmobile and ATV clubs that are struggling with membership and capacity after the floods. The funds would also go toward trailhead improvements and access to trails. The initiative will bring in a lot of spending to Maine. The initiative will go before the ACF Committee. Senator Russell Black is a co-sponsor and has had a lot of bipartisan support. The next step is to get approved by the legislature. It would then go to voters.

Matt Foster also wanted to encourage the Select Board to sign on to the initiative. There has been a great increase in outdoor activities since Covid. This initiative opens up funding for

maintenance, which has been difficult here in Maine. Adding trailheads, parking lots, and restrooms is also a necessity. A lot of places have little to no signage, rough lots, etc.

Selectman O’Neil made a motion to support the request letter for the Maine Trails Bond Initiative; Selectman Bell seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 8: To review Application to Register Beano/Bingo for Farmington Emblem Club #460

The Select Board reviewed the application.

Selectman O’Neil made a motion to approve the application; Selectman Bell seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

Selectman Smith made a motion to sign the letter granting Blanket Approval to the Farmington Elks Lodge #2340 for Games of Chance and Beano/Bingo for 1/1/24 – 12/31/24; Selectman O’Neil seconded.

The Select Board reviewed the letter.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 9: To approve minutes of 11/14/23 and 12/12/23

Selectman Smith made a motion to approve the minutes; Selectman Staples seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 10: To Discuss Other Business

Selectman Bunker addressed the Select Board and the public to state that he would resign effective following the March 25, 2024, Town Meeting. After a lot of thought, he has decided that it is time to step down. It is a good time for him to step away now that things are in good order.

The Select Board and Ms. LaCroix thanked Mr. Bunker for his many years of service. Selectman O’Neil stated that the Board would lose a lot of institutional memory and knowledge. Chairman Smith states that the Town of Farmington is better off because of him.

Ms. LaCroix addressed the Selectboard regarding the recent storm. She conducted an after-action meeting with department heads and did a SWOT analysis. She stated that overall the Town’s response was good. A lot had been learned from the May storm and that recent prior knowledge helped this most recent response. The main weakness was in the ability to get

notifications to the public. At present, there is no easy method. She does want to look at a notification system, there are a lot of options. Social media is also a possibility, however, there would need to be a strong policy in place before implantation. Additionally, communications with other towns and the DOT were difficult. Better coordination with NorthStar and Franklin Memorial is needed. There is also a need for more detour signs. There will be a review with the county and they are working with FEMA.

Wastewater was the hardest hit in this storm. A lot of equipment was list, including trucks. Parks and Recreation was next hardest hit with Hippach Field sustaining a lot of damage, including approximately \$150,000 for lighting alone. Overall looking at upwards of half a million dollars in damage.

Ms. LaCroix stated that she is working every day late into the night to get the budget done. She is not comfortable with what had been done in past couple of years. Department heads are to have their budgets to her by the end of the week. The budget will be presented to the Select Board at the next meeting on January 23rd and to the Budget Committee on January 25th. The budge will look different than in the last few years, but will look similar to budgets done by Dick Davis. The biggest complication this transferring back to Trio from QuickBooks. Salaries will look a little high due to vacancies being filled. There was a 4.5% increase on health insurance premiums, 1.5% increase for water, and the county is estimating a 6% increase.

Ms. LaCroix advised the board that Counter Clerk Dena Rackliffe has given her notice. She is going back to work for the school department at a new special ed program they are instituting. The job ad is out and the exit interview is coming up.

Staples – requesting quarterly expense reports.

Selectman O’Neil wanted to make note of several unresolved issues that had been brought up at prior Select Board Meetings which are as follows: Assessor candidate; start of revaluation; bidding for banking services; HR issues; 4 day work week; rec center roof; energy audit; downtown parking; TIF info; downtown outhouse; Volunteer Maine program; fees for solar farm; and going to fiscal year budget.

Selectman Bell made a motion to enter executive session at 8:37 p.m.; Selectman Bunker seconded.

ITEM 11: To hold an executive session pursuant to 1 MRSA § 405 (6)(A) to discuss a personnel matter

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

Minutes respectfully submitted by Leah Giusti.

Byron Staples - Secretary