

FARMINGTON SELECT BOARD
Tuesday, March 12, 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.

Selectman Matthew Smith called the meeting to order at 6:30 P.M. with the following members present: Joshua Bell; Byron Staples; and Dennis O’Neil. Stephan Bunker appeared via Zoom. Erica LaCroix, Town Manager; 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 Smith led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

ITEM 2: To review amended Warrant Article 14

The Select Board reviewed the Warrant article. Ms. LaCroix noted that Article 14 has to do with capital reserves. This was a simple clerical error and did not change anything in the budget. \$9,000 was the amount of the increase over last year, the total appropriation was supposed to read \$14,000 and was misprinted in the warrant

Selectman Staples made a motion to amend Warrant Article 14 to read \$14,000; Selectman Bell seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 3: To review and sign Quitclaim Deed for 130 Wilton Road

The Select Board reviewed the Quitclaim Deed.

Selectman Bell made a motion to accept and sign the Quitclaim Deed for 130 Wilton Road; Selectman Staples seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 4: To approve minutes of 1/30/24 and 2/7/24

The Select Board reviewed the minutes

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

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 5: To discuss Other Business

Ms. LaCroix addressed the Select Board.

Brandy Paradis has started working as the Assessing/Counter Clerk. She was previously with KVCOG as well as a Selectperson in Benton. She is familiar with Trio and municipal work and has jumped right in. Assessing will come easy to her. She is fitting in great.

Ms. LaCroix received a letter from Senator Collins advising that the Maine DOT request for \$13M road work on Route 27 from Farmington to Eustis has been approved by the Appropriations Committee. The budget still needs to pass, but this was the bigger hurdle.

In regard to Trio, they have reached out to Harris for help transitioning the financial system. The treasurer has been sick but as of Thursday, they have not heard back. Hoping they can come on board.

Ms. LaCroix received an email from the school department. They have to move the town meeting from the gym to the auditorium. Selectman O'Neil asked why it is necessary to go to the school rather than the community center. Selectman Smith stated that the PA system is an issue at the community center. LaCroix noted that the Warrant has been published with the location already and suggests staying at the school this year and going back to the community center next year if the Board prefers it.

Ms. LaCroix got an update from Phil Hutchin regarding the downtown street lights. The town owns the poles, but lighting is managed by CMP. Requests have been sent to CMP to get the lights fixed. Taken care of hopefully in the very near future. Bell – own them? LaCroix probably own them, but they maintain them. No charge from CMP. Bell – number of lights – LaCroix – 5 that need repairs. Bell – if bulb is blown – LaCroix as far as she knows they maintain them all. LaCroix opportunity to get in front of them coming up – municipal day in April. Good for networking with CMP folks.

Ms. LaCroix wrote a lengthy email back to a resident who emailed regarding flood management. He has requested a sit-down meeting with the town manager and fire chief, which has been scheduled for next week.

There was a discussion about taxes and interest rates. The Warrant talks about the interest rate charged on past-due taxes. We charge the maximum, as do most municipalities. The interest rate we pay to them if we refund it is 4%, the minimum set by the state. At this point, the Warrant has been approved and posted. They can discuss it again next year.

Selectman Bunker addressed the previously discussed issue of the LOSAP (Length of Service Award Program). It was his error for not raising the issue again before the Warrant was voted on, but he does not want to lose the opportunity to address it. He had a brief conversation with Ms. LaCroix on what the options were and if an amount might be suggested as to a reasonable annual contribution to get the program started.

Ms. LaCroix apologized if there was a miscommunication. She thought he was going to propose an amendment to the Warrant and when he did not, assumed they were going to let it ride this year. Ms. LaCroix stated that Stephanie Fecteau answered all of their questions. The group as a whole was excited, only one person did not sign up. The program is run by the state and the town can withdraw at any time. The town is also not under any obligation to contribute. The complicated part will be the bookkeeping.

Selectman Smith noted that he wants to see a policy first. They can always go back and retroactively reward the people that need to be rewarded. He is hesitant to put a number on it right now.

Selectman Bell stated that at this point he is struggling to see why the town would contribute. Why not just increase their wages instead of committing to a liability? He is not in favor of a local contribution at this time and would be more in favor of having them compensated more. Getting into retirement is getting in line with the full-time employees we're already trying to retain. Ms. LaCroix noted that if you increase the hourly rate, it could potentially end up being more because we will pay payroll taxes on it.

Selectman O'Neil would like to see more information, particularly on the financial side. He understands that we are not locked into any funding, and it could be revisited regularly. He can see the bookkeeping piece of this being somewhat complicated.

Ms. LaCroix reiterated that there is no continued obligation. It is not a traditional retirement plan, there is no ability for employee contribution. State contribution is mandated. Some towns choose to use whatever is left from part-time funds to distribute. We could wait until year-end and if, for example, \$5,000 is leftover they could use that or not, within the appropriation already approved. There would be no need for a special meeting. She would also argue that it is not a long-term liability. The program is completely run by the state and the town can withdraw at any time with no obligation.

Selectman Staples stated that he appreciates all the hard work going into making it happen. He is interested to see how the point system works out. Selectman Bell noted that it is hard to take something away once you say yes. Ms. LaCroix argued that depends on how you say it.

Selectman Bunker stated that he understands the sentiment of the board and accepts responsibility for not adequately explaining the program to his colleagues. There are answers to their questions, and he will wait to see how this will work out. He notes that the state has lost almost 50% of part-time and per diem firefighters over the past 10 years. He does not think it would make a great difference in retention with an hourly increase. Will not belabor the point now.

Selectman Bunker hopes to be back on his feet for the town meeting.

Selectman Staples made a motion to enter executive session pursuant to 1 MRSA § 405 (6)(C); Selectman Bell seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 6: To hold an executive session pursuant to 1 MRSA § 405 (6)(C)

Exited executive session at 7:59 p.m.

Selectman Bell made a motion to reject Avesta Housing's request for a Credit Enhancement Agreement based on insufficient information provided, lack of financial clarity, and lack of benefit to town since we already capture the full TIF amount; Selectman Smith seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 4 MOTION CARRIED

Minutes respectfully submitted by Leah Giusti.

Byron Staples - Secretary