

FARMINGTON SELECT BOARD

Tuesday, September 12, 2023

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://mtbluetelevision.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. Police Chief Kenneth Charles, Fire Chief Tim Hardy, Stephen Eldridge, Interim 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 Matthew Smith led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

ITEM 2: To request approval of the 2022 FEMA Assistance to Firefighters Grant

Chief Hardy addressed the board. Earlier this year, the fire department applied for grant to upgrade their air compressor. They have received the grant in the amount of \$75,000. FEMA to pay \$71,458.78 with the remaining 5% to be paid by the town. The current air compressor was purchased in 2004 and has had a lot of maintenance issues. Chief Hardy is requesting approval to use the equipment reserve account to designate the \$3,541.22 to cover the 5% match requirement.

Selectman Bell made a motion to approve the designation of account funds; Selectman O’Neil seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 3: To hear Proposition to create four 10-hour work days at the Farmington Town Office

Interim Town Manager Stephen Eldridge addressed the board. The office staff discussed a schedule but did not get feedback from the code enforcement office. He recommended waiting for a new manager to arrive. Selectman Smith agreed that the discussion should wait for a new manager. Selectman Bunker likes that the plan creates extended office hours for the public.

Selectman Bell made a motion to table the discussion until new manager comes onboard; Selectman Smith seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 4: To hear from Wendell Olmsted of Remy's on Broadway re: downtown parking

Wendell Olmsted approached the board. Olmsted is a manager at Remy's. The parking has been challenging for the work crew as well as customers. Olmsted is looking for any options to improve parking for workers and customers. The parking on Broadway and Main is limited to 2-hour parking, and most parking lots nearby are always full. Some employees cannot walk far. Olmsted is looking for any and all options to improve parking. Some options might include all-day parking except for Broadway and Main, setting up a parking permit system, with a paid fee, parking for extended hours in 2-hour parking areas, and permits for employees so they can park reasonably close. Wants to see if the situation can be improved for both workers and customers.

Selectman Bell stated that a good starting point would be to send the issue off to the parking committee to review. Deals have previously been worked out with Church Street and Anson Street. When school is in session, students from UMF will be parking all day. The tag idea has been thrown out in the past, but details will need to be figured out.

Selectman O'Neil inquired as to the amount of employees; Remy's alone has 17 employees.

Selectman Smith stated that they will get the parking committee together and cc the downtown business association.

Chief Charles noted that there has been a bigger demand for parking since Origin came in, as they are a substantial employment group. He also believes the parking situation is worth revisiting.

Selectman Bell made a motion to send the issue to the parking committee; Selectman Bunker seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 5: To authorize the expenditure of \$6,956.00 from the Police Drug Reserve Account to purchase one Tactiscan Portable Narcotics Screening Device

Chief Kenneth Charles approached the board. When drugs or narcotics are seized, they are identified via admissions by a defender and/or a chemical test. Does not want to expose officers or anyone to dangerous materials. Seems expensive but much less expensive than the alternative. With the Tactiscan, you put the materials into the machine right in the bag. It is essentially a spectrometer that identifies substances without exposure.

Selectman Bell inquired about the annual fee, does it involve calibration? Chief Charles stated that this would be used as a presumptive test, essentially a field test. If the case goes to court, the materials would be sent to the state lab.

Selectman Staples asked if the device would be kept in the Police Station. Chief Charles stated that it would, but could also be taken on the road.

Selectman O’Neil inquired as to how long the device has been on the market. Chief Charles stated that the technology has been on the market for at least 10 years. This particular device is made by a European company expanding into the U.S. He is waiting to see more testing of the device, but would like to get approved for expenditure beforehand. Waterville, Norway, and 5-10 other departments have used it. Auburn PD has opened evidence to test and verify.

The money would come from the drug reserve account. While Chief Charles does not have immediate access to the numbers, the account contains tens of thousands of dollars.

Selectman Bell made a motion to approve the expenditure of \$6,956.00 from the Police Drug Reserve Account to purchase a Tactiscan Portable Narcotics Screening Device; Selectman O’Neil seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 6: To hear proposal from Ryan Morgan to Supplement Police Department staffing levels

Ryan Morgan approached the board. Mr. Morgan has come back to the board to propose the addition of 2 positions in the Farmington Police Department, including a full-time narcotics detective. He is also proposing an increased baseline salary. He realizes a contract was just signed, but stated that something has to be done. Farmington has not had a full force in a long time. Mr. Morgan stated that there are a tremendous amount of drugs in the community. He stated that we must proactively try to tackle the epidemic in Franklin County. Chief Charles has presented numbers to the board. This would create a budget increase of 27.7%.

Selectman Bell stated that while he appreciates putting the numbers together, he is looking for evidence to support the need. While he agrees there is a problem, they need to see numbers before spending half a million dollars. He would like to know what the DA doing in terms of sentencing. He stated that an option to pursue would be adding another school resource officer. If a substantial increase in pay is made, it just makes other towns do the same. The battle has been going on for decades.

Chief Charles stated that these are tough questions to answer and it is hard to put a number on something that didn’t happen. In the near term, we do not have a detective, the seizures are coming from day-to-day operations. A big piece of it is community engagement in solving the problem. Chief Charles stated that Mr. Morgan is right, the problem has changed so much locally. The stuff we are seeing now was unfathomable 5 or 10 years ago. Pills traded up to heroin. He could go on and on about the evolution of the drug problem in the community. It is more dangerous than they have ever seen.

The detective position has been open for 2.5 years. The position requires that internal candidate have at least 3 years of experience, for an external candidate, 5 years of experience. He has had no interested candidates who meet the criteria.

Selectman Bell asked Chief Charles how often they meet with state police. Chief Charles states that they meet at least monthly. They also communicate with Maine Drug on more than a weekly basis. Relationships among agencies are very good.

Selectman Bunker stated that Mr. Morgan needs to strengthen his proposal. They need to see statistics on drug arrests for sales, use, etc. Would like better information comparing/contrasting to salaries in other communities and information on how to attract/retrain. Need a stronger message to take to a special town meeting/vote.

Selectman Smith asks Chief Charles if he would be able to reach out to the DA, DEA and other police chiefs to see what information and/or tactics they could share that would be useful for our community. Chief Charles stated that he would do so.

ITEM 7: To review County Tax and Budget

Interim Town Manager Steve Eldridge addressed the Select Board. The county tax bill is for the fiscal year, which makes it difficult as we work on a calendar year. \$150,000 short to pay county tax bill based on the budget. Mr. Eldridge recommends getting onto a fiscal year budget. It is not an easy task, as to get there as either a 6 month budget or 18 month budget would have to be done beforehand. He would be happy to start the budget process in October/November for a new person coming in.

Selectman Bunker stated that there had been previous discussions of fiscal year, twice a year billing. Twice a year billing would help cash flow and could be easier on tax payer as well.

Selectman O'Neil asked why our budget number was so short. The tax bills are based on actual numbers, not budget numbers.

ITEM 8: To review, complete, and sign General Assistance Ordinance for 10/1/23 – 9/30/24

This is an annual renewal, and the numbers are on the recommendation of the state. The Town is reimbursed 70% from the state.

Selectman Bell made a motion to approve the General Assistance Ordinance for 10/1/23 – 9/30/24; Selectman Bunker seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 9: To review and sign Resolution Letter adopting Franklin County Hazard Mitigation Plan

Select Board reviews the resolution. Update to current plans town by town.

Selectman Smith made a motion to sign the Resolution Letter; Selectman Bunker seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 10: To Approve the Minutes of 8/22/23

Selectman Bell made a motion to approve the minutes of 8/22/23; Selectman Smith seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

ITEM 11: To Discuss Other Business

Interim Town Manager Steve Eldridge addressed the Select Board. The Walton's Mill Park dedication is coming up. Director of Parks and Recreation, Matt Foster, has asked that Mr. Bunker speak at the dedication. Mr. Bunker agreed.

A delegate for MMA convention is needed to vote and represent the community. Selectmen Bunker and O'Neil will be attending.

The Farmington Chapter of the Daughter's of the American Revolution have requested that the sign a Proclamation naming Constitution Week, beginning September 17.

Selectman Smith made a motion to sign proclamation; Selectman Bell seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE 5 MOTION CARRIED

Regarding the funding from Industry for fire coverage, believes there needs to be a special town meeting to authorize the moving of money from one account to another. Mr. Eldridge recommends an article on the annual warrant that allows transfer of funds going forward. Will speak to the Town Clerk.

Selectman Bell inquired about Phil Hutchins giving an update on roadside mowing schedule. Mr. Eldridge stated that he would get an update from Phil.

Selectman Bell also inquired about the Ramsdell Road – does the town own all way to 27 or is a portion in New Vineyard?

Aileen Doyle asked the board if the town had a policy on nepotism. She stated that two new hires in the public works department are the Assistant Director's father and uncle. The Selectboard will look into this. Ms. Doyle also asked about the tax bills. Mr. Eldridge stated that the information has gone out, he will send a message to Dirigo to see where they are at.

Mr. Eldridge brought up human resources and general assistance. He stated that the Town Manager is usually the head of personnel with assistance from the town secretary.

ITEM 12: To hold an executive session pursuant to 1 MRSA § 405 (6)(E) for a consultation with legal counsel

Selectman O'Neil made a motion to enter executive session pursuant to 1 MRSA § 405 (6)(A) to discuss a personnel matter, Review Town Manager Applications at 8:11 p.m.; Selectman Bell seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE MOTION CARRIED

Return to regular session at XXXX p.m.

ITEM 13: To hold an executive session pursuant to 1 MRSA § 405 (6)(A) to discuss a personnel matter, Proposals for Legal Services.

Selectman Smith made a motion to adjourn; Selectman Staples seconded.

VOTE AFFIRMATIVE MOTION CARRIED

Minutes respectfully submitted by Leah Giusti.

Byron Staples - Secretary