

Town Council Virtual Meeting Minutes March 23, 2020

Chair Kuhn began the meeting at 7:00 pm.

Roll Call

All Councilors were present and answering roll call.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chair Kuhn led those present in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Item 1 Discussion about the state of the Town amid the COVID-19 situation.

Chair Kuhn commented on what a challenging week it had been for everyone. She said that Town staff and the Council are still working to keep Town services running. She described the Town's Emergency Management Agency. She said that leadership from the Town and the Council are in regular communication. She described the three priorities guiding the Town's actions. She said that she understands that the closures have been disappointing and frustrating, and that the Town will continue evaluating them but that it is important to follow CDC guidance. She described the Town's communications methods for providing updates. She said if there is a service that is essential for people that they cannot access to email the Town Manager or Town Council.

Nathan Poore, Town Manager, said that the Town spent the last week trying to stabilize operations. He felt that "the new normal" has been established. Staff begin discussing phase two over the weekend. This includes taking inventory of all the Falmouth entities that provide services to residents as well as whether the Town can add and/or enhance Town's services. He listed examples such as the General Assistance Program, business assistance, and collaborating with the Food pantry. He said that the Town provided an update this afternoon on the status of the food pantry. The physical food pantry space will be closed for two weeks but the mission remains operational. The Town will also be looking into how it can provide physical and mental wellness and asking the public what more can the Town do.

Chair Kuhn reviewed best practices for preventing the spread of the coronavirus as well as for how to support neighbors, the food pantry, and local businesses. She encouraged people in need of food or financial assistance to reach out to the Town Manager.

Item 2 Order to cancel the previously scheduled public hearing on the FY21 Municipal and School Department Budgets, such meeting scheduled for April 1, 2020.

Chair Kuhn said that considering the current economic circumstances both the Town and the School Department plan to revisit their budgets so the budgets will not be ready for public comment on April 1. She said the emergency legislation passed last week provides a lot of leeway for moving forward.

Councilor De Lima acknowledged the concerns that residents have expressed regarding the current economic situation. She said that while the Finance Committee was far along in its work on the FY21 budget, the Council will need to reevaluate the budget as soon as possible. She appreciated Town staff's work so far on the budget. She said that when the Council can reevaluate the budget, the focus will continue to be on the safety of residents. She thanked town staff for managing under these difficult circumstances.

Chair Kuhn asked for a motion to waive the public comment opportunity. She said that normally public comment would accompany an order but there is no choice but to cancel the meeting as there is not a budget to discuss.

Councilor Cahan motioned; Councilor Johnson seconded.

The motion carried unanimously.

Councilor Hemphill moved the order to cancel the public hearing; Councilor Trickett seconded.

Councilor Trickett agreed with the rationale for canceling the public hearing. He expressed concern about canceling the hearing without having a plan for resuming work on the new budget.

Chair Kuhn said that staff will work on an initial reevaluation of the budget and will bring it forward to the Finance Committee who will meet virtually.

Mr. Poore said that it is currently hard to determine what the economic situation will be like. He felt that the first step would be for the Finance Committee to meet virtually to reevaluate the budget. The next steps in the process could be developed after that. He and Pete McHugh, Finance Director, have been meeting regularly. He added that Town staff are paying attention to the current budget. Last Friday, he initiated a hiring freeze on any open positions and a spending freeze on any non-essential items.

Councilor De Lima felt that time would be needed to see how things play out with the economy and at the federal level. She felt that property tax increases would be very difficult for residents. At this time, she did not want to put together a budget when things were still in flux.

Councilor Trickett expressed concern that the Finance Committee and the Council could not just wait to see what happened. He felt that things could be in flux for a long time and that, at a minimum, the Finance Committee should resume regular meetings. He felt that the budget should be an agenda item on future Council meetings. He felt that the Town should be monitoring and developing a plan for moving forward.

Chair Kuhn said that under the new law if a new budget is not passed by the end of the fiscal year the current budget carries through. She suggested that the Finance Committee schedule a meeting sometime in the next few weeks. She asked the Finance Committee to explore options surrounding the spring tax bills and taking pressure off residents. Councilor De Lima said those were great suggestions and the Finance Committee would work with Town staff to get a meeting scheduled. Mr. Poore said that the tax bills are scheduled to go out late this week. In order to change the schedule, an emergency Council meeting would need to be held. He said that there could be some flexibility around the interest rate.

The motion carried unanimously.

Item 3 Public hearing and order relative to the renewal of permanent food service establishment licenses for Madden's and Subway.

Councilor Asherman motioned; Councilor De Lima seconded.

Chair Kuhn opened the public comment period; there was no public comment.

The motion carried unanimously.

Item 4 Public Hearing and Order to approve a new liquor license for Madden's.

Councilor Asherman motioned; Councilor De Lima seconded.

Chair Kuhn opened the public comment period; there was no public comment.

The motion carried unanimously.

Item 5 Public Comment Period.

Chair Kuhn opened the public comment period.

John Winslow of 253 Gray Road expressed concern that people were shooting firearms near his residence. He said that he alerted the Police Department and did not hear back. He also expressed concern regarding the budget process and potential budget increases regarding the current economic situation.

Bonny Rodden appreciated that the Town had developed a solution to holding public meetings. She asked about the number of positive COVID-19 cases in Falmouth; how many were at OceanView and how many were elsewhere. She also asked about the number of people who had received negative test results. Additionally, she asked about how Town funds are invested and protected. Mr. Poore said that the CDC is not releasing town by town information on testing just by county except for OceanView because it is considered a community spread. There are currently 6 confirmed cases at OceanView. Mr. McHugh said that the town invests in government securities and CDs. The Town buys no more than \$250,000 from each bank so they are FDIC insured. All the Town's money is insured. He said that some of the CDs have been called and the Town is replacing them as it gets the calls.

Josh Hurley of 56 Woodlands Drive asked if Falmouth Schools had put in the waiver request for the 175-day rule. He said that some schools will not count remote learning towards their state mandates. He said that Maine passed a rule, but the school departments must put waiver requests in for that. He also asked when the Town planned to reopen the transfer station. Chair Kuhn said that the question about the School Department would be best directed towards the School Board. Mr. Poore said that staff and Councilors had received several questions about the transfer station. He appreciated that people have offered suggestions regarding a partial reopening. He said that he would start working with staff on a partial reopening of the transfer station and that the town will send an announcement soon.

Chair Kuhn closed the public comment period.

Adjourn

Councilor Johnson motioned to adjourn; Councilor De Lima seconded.

The motioned carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:53 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Marguerite Fleming
Recording Secretary