



Town Council Meeting Minutes



Thursday, March 11, 2021, at 7:00 PM, in the Matthew Thornton Room

Call to Order

Chairman Koenig called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm. Present at the meeting were Chairman Koenig, Vice Chair Boyd, Councilor Harrington, Councilor Rothhaus, Councilor Albert, Councilor Healey, Councilor Woods, and Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul T. Micali. Town Manager Eileen Cabanel was excused.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Koenig led the Pledge of Allegiance

Announcements

Chairman Koenig made the following announcements: Upcoming Town Council meeting schedule Thursday, March 25, 2021, 7:00 PM Regular meeting, Thursday, April 8, 2021, 7:00 PM Regular meeting, Election Day is April 13th 7:00 AM to 7:00 PM at all three polling locations and Thursday, April 22, 2021, 7:00 PM Regular meeting.

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul T. Micali made the following announcements:

- The Assessing Department is accepting applications for the Elderly and Disabled property tax exemptions. The filing deadline is April 15th. More information about each program is available on the Assessing page of the Town's website or by calling the Assessing Department at 424-5136.
- 2021 Dog Licenses are now available. Per NH State law, all owners of dogs four months and older are required to license their dog by May 1st. Owners must present a valid rabies certificate and a neutering or spaying certificate, if applicable. Licenses are available at the Town Clerk's office during our normal business hours of 9:00 AM to 4:30 PM. License renewals can also be completed by using the on-line payment services at www.merrimacknh.gov, by mail or by using the drop box. See Dog Licensing in the Town Clerk's section of the website for more information.
- Home Easter Egg Hunt Kits With COVID-19 restrictions still in place, the Parks & Recreation Department is unable to hold its traditional Easter Egg Hunt this year. Instead, we are offering free Easter Egg Hunt Kits to Merrimack families. On Saturday, March 27th, registered families will come and pick up their Easter Egg Hunt Kits at Merrimack Town Hall between 10:00 am - 12:00 pm. This is a free event but advanced registration is required. Please register on the Parks & Recreation website at www.merrimackparksandrec.org or call 603-882-1046.

Comments from the Press and Public

None

Recognitions, Resignations and Retirements

None

Appointments

1. 2021 Town-wide Reevaluation Update

Submitted by Avitar Associates President / Town Assessor Loren Martin

The Town Council received information related to the 2021 Town-wide reevaluation as required by law under RSA 21-J:11. Loren Martin informed the Town Council that she and the Assessing staff participated in a zoom meeting with the Department of Revenue Administration (DRA) to discuss the town wide reevaluation update. She advised the Town Council that the DRA will be in to audit all the assessing records such as property exemptions, veteran tax credits and current use files.

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Loren Martin spoke about the requirement to value properties at market value. She stated that staff have been out verifying sales which will help her to develop a new model. She advised the Town Council that income and expense questionnaires have been sent to the commercial and industrial properties that rent out their real estate. Loren Martin indicated that field review will begin in May. She explained that the field review is a final check that the property records are in good shape. They will not be seeking inspections or taking measurements. She spoke about the Assessing Department's frequently asked questions section on the Town's web page. She informed the Town Council that she and Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali will be filming a segment that will air on Merrimack TV that will inform the residents of Merrimack about the upcoming revaluation. She stressed that the Assessing Department is being proactive and get as much information out to the residents.

Loren Martin advised the Town Council that in order to bring property values up to market value as is required by law Merrimack will see a significant increase in property values. She stressed that does not necessarily mean property taxes will go up significantly. She explained that often when reassessments are done she will see that a certain types of property will see a bigger increase than others. She stated that she has run preliminary analysis and found that across the board of different property types there are not big shifts, properties are selling similarly. Loren Martin advised the Town Council that Merrimack's sales ratio for 2020 is 78.4% and her preliminary analysis shows values as of April 1, 2021 are at 72% of market value. She stated that as the Town's value increases by 30% the tax rate should come down proportionally as long as there is not a significant change in spending.

Loren Martin stated that notices of preliminary values will be sent to property owners in June and informal hearings will be held in July. She stated that it is her hope to have the reval complete by August and that will allow a timely filing of the MS-1 by September 1st for the tax rate setting. She assured the town council that she and the assessing staff will continue to work proactively. She recapped the DRA's monitoring of the assessment update. She explained that the DRA will follow up with a sampling of the sale reviewed and the new construction properties. She explained that the DRA is not conducting interior inspections due to Covid-19 and the DRA is not going into communities with more than 10 active cases of Covid-19. Loren Martin explained how her staff has been addressing the need for interior inspections by use of virtual tours, video calls and pictures. She advised that Town Council that a final decision has not been made regarding hearings. She stated that due to Covid-19 her staff has been holding hearings by phone. She stated that as the process proceeds, she will re-evaluate and determine if phone hearings are still the best choice. She stressed that safety is her highest priority.

Councilor Albert asked if Merrimack could decline to update values. Loren Martin advised the Town Council that it is required by state law to revalue properties every 5 years. She explained that this process ensures a fair disbursement of state education funds. Councilor Rothhaus asked if the commercial and industrial sector will increase the percentage. Loren Martin confirmed commercial and industrial will see a similar value increase. Vice Chair Boyd asked if this trend is state-wide. Loren Martin stated that the south and southeastern part of the state are trending in this manner. She informed the Town Council that Merrimack has been trending upward since the last update in 2016. She spoke about the seller's market with an average of 10 days on the market and the bidding wars occurring. Vice Chair Boyd asked Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali if the Town would be utilizing Nixle, Facebook and electronic signs thorough out town to inform the residents. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali stated that he will. Councilor Harrington asked Loren Martin to emphasize that the value increase does not mean taxes will increase by the same. She

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urged Loren Martin to reiterate that point in the public service video. Councilor Harrington would like a direct link to the public service video. Councilor Albert stated that he has been asked by residents why should a resident allow an inspection if it increases their taxes. Loren Martin explained that if an inspection has not been done in several years they will estimate. She stressed that the worst thing that will happen if they are allowed in a home is that the data will be accurate. She stated that no one should be paying more or paying less than their fair share. She assured the Town Council that taxpayers will have the ability to meet with her, discuss their value and correct data as needed.

Public Hearing

1. Public Hearing – Abbie Griffin Memorial Funds (Merrimack Fire & Police Departments)

Submitted by Fire Chief Matthew Duke and Police Chief Brian Levesque

The Town Council held a public hearing to authorize the acceptance and expenditure of funds from the Abbie Griffin Memorial Fund in the amount of but not to exceed \$ 17,808 for the purchase of replacement cardio fitness equipment for the fire stations (treadmills, stair machine, etc.) for the Fire Department and for body armor plates and gym equipment for the Police Department. In addition, the Police Department will also be purchasing tools for the Special Response Team, pursuant to RSA 31:95-b and Charter Article 8-15.

Police Chief Levesque discussed the body armor plates that would give the Police Department another safety tool. He advised the Town Council that the body armor plates will stop a rifle round. Chief Levesque outlined the exercise equipment that is requested. Councilor Albert asked if the healthcare provider offers reimbursement or incentive to the police officers. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali will ask the healthcare provider. Chairman Koenig explained that the Abbie Griffin Memorial Fund is not taxpayer money. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali confirmed that the AGMF is a fund established by Abbie Griffin prior to her death to help the first responders, welfare department and medical fund to assist those with medical problems. Chief Levesque recapped the items requested by the special response team such as a compact battering ram, pry bar and a steal quick cut blade. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali advised the Town Council that the Police Department is requesting \$8,904.

Fire Chief Duke explained that the Fire Department is looking to upgrade their fitness equipment such as a stair master and various other equipment and weights. Chief Duke stated the Fire Department is requesting \$8,896. Councilor Albert asked if there is a specific work out program that the fire fighters are asked to follow. Chief Duke explained there is not a specific program but a member of the Fire Department has experience and education in the fitness field and that individual works with staff to design a program that is tailored to a person's individual needs.

Chairman Koenig opened the public hearing at 8:06 pm

No public input was given.

Chairman Koenig closed the public hearing at 8:07 pm

MOTION made by Vice Chair Boyd and seconded by Councilor Albert to authorize the expenditure of funds from the Abbie Griffin Memorial Fund in the amount of but not to exceed \$ 17,808 for the purchase of replacement cardio fitness equipment for the fire stations as outlined in Assistant Chief Brechtel's memo dated March 5th and for body armor plates and gym equipment for the Police Department as outlined in Police Chief Levesque's memo dated February 25th. In addition, the Police Department will also be purchasing tools for the Special Response Team, pursuant to RSA 31:95-b and Charter Article 8-15. Furthermore, the Town

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Manager or her proxy be authorized to sign the necessary paperwork to accept and expend.

MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

2. Public Hearing – Milfoil Control Efforts

Submitted by Planning and Zoning Administrator Robert Price

The Town Council held a public hearing to consider the acceptance and authorization of the expenditure of up to \$16,350 for the milfoil treatment program at Horseshoe Pond and Naticook Lake, of which \$6,540 is from a grant from NHDES for milfoil control, and the Town's matching share is \$9,810, to be funded from the Milfoil Expendable Capital Reserve Fund, and to authorize the Town Manager or her designee to execute any and all documents which may be necessary. This request represents funding to allow for treatment of milfoil in Horseshoe Pond & Naticook Lake in 2021. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali explained that this is something that is done every year. He stated that the grant is a 40/60 match. The Town is responsible for 60%. He stated that milfoil is a state-wide problem. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali explained that Naticook Lake association members are trained to mark the milfoil for treatment and harvesting.

Councilor Woods asked about the mesh treatment used in the past and he suggested establishing a fishing perimeter to protect the mesh. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali informed the Town Council that this year the mesh is not being used.

Chairman Koenig opened the public hearing for public input at 8:13 pm

No public input was given.

Chairman Koenig closed the public hearing at 8:14 pm

MOTION made by Councilor Albert and seconded by Councilor Healey to accept and authorize the expenditure of up to \$16,350 for the milfoil treatment program at Horseshoe Pond and Naticook Lake, of which \$6,540 is from a grant from NHDES for milfoil control, and the Town's matching share is \$9,810 to be funded from the Milfoil Expendable Capital Reserve Fund, and furthermore, the Town Council authorizes the Town Manager or her designee to execute any and all documents which may be necessary. MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

Vice Chair Boyd thanked the residents of Naticook Lake and Horse Shoe Pond for their continued diligence. Chairman Koenig thanked Amy Smagula from the DES for her continued efforts.

Legislative Updates from State Representatives

None

Town Manager's Report

Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali reported the following: The Transfer Station and Recycling Center will begin summer operating hours on Thursday, April 8 and continue through Thursday, September 30. During that time, the operating hours on Thursdays at the facility will be from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM. The facility will continue with normal 8:00 AM to 4:00 PM hours on Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday

Chairman Koenig stated that at last night's deliberative session there was a special tribute for Town Manager Eileen Cabanel who is retiring at the end of April 2021. Chairman Koenig announced that

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Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali will be stepping in as Town Manager. He congratulated them both.

Consent Agenda

None

Old Business

1. Merrimack 275th Anniversary Planning Committee Project Proposal

Submitted by Merrimack 275th Anniversary Planning Committee Member Chuck Mower

The Town Council considered the Merrimack 275th Anniversary Planning Committee's proposed fundraising project to build a covered bridge at Twin Bridge Park over Baboosic Brook. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali informed the Town Council that a group of people wanted to give a gift to the Town for its 275th anniversary. The 21 covered bridge was presented to the anniversary committee. He explained that the anniversary committee asked that the covered bridge idea be presented to the Town Center committee. He stated that the Town Center Committee was in favor of the idea of a covered bridge at Twin Bridge Park.

Mr. Chuck Mower stated the design concept is a replica of the Flume bridge in Franconia Notch. He explained the location that has been selected for the bridge. Mr. Mower stated that the covered bridge will provide a cultural improvement to the park. He stressed that the bridge will provide access to a multi-recreational use of the park and it will provide a revenue producing destination venue for events. Mr. Mower stated that the bridge proposal is consistent with the Town's master plan and town center master plan. Mr. Mower spoke about the historical significance of the area. He stressed the importance of providing and preserving resources in Merrimack for future generations.

Mr. Mower explained the proposed covered bridge would be a truss (lattice) configuration. He stated the bridge would have camber to avoid future sagging and improved weight disbursement. He informed the Town Council that the 275th anniversary committee received an estimate from Arnold Graton in the amount of \$450,000. Mr. Mower reiterated the benefits that the covered bridge would bring to Merrimack such as an improved bridge and access, shelter, preservation of the first road, preservation of an important piece of history and it will be a revenue producing destination. He stated that the covered bridge model on display is to scale. He reviewed the materials that will be used to construct the covered bridge. He stated that power will be brought to bridge and security features. Mr. Mower explained that this project is not anticipated to be done quickly. He stated that it take a year or more to fundraise and construct.

Mr. John Lastowka spoke about and outlined the history of the various dams and sawmills that were in Merrimack along the Souhegan River. He stressed the importance of remembering the historical value of the various dams and sawmills. Rosemarie Rung stated that she believes this project will spring board the cultural and economic development of the town center. She recognized the cost is significant but believes it is important to do something bold that ties Merrimack's history to the future. She stressed that she believes this project can be done without a penny of tax dollars. She stated that she is committed to fund raising.

Councilor Rothhaus acknowledged the price is concerning but realizes that the project does not have to be done quickly. He informed the Town Council that he fully supports the proposal. Chairman Koenig asked if the Mr. Mower could address the need to widen the bridge in attempts to reduce the choke that narrowing a water way has on flood waters. Mr. Mower explain that the permitting process for the covered bridge is the same standards as all other construction. He stated that flow engineering

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will have to be undertaken to determine the best way to proceed. He informed the Town Council that the covered bridge will be elevated 2 feet over the existing bridge. He stated that Graton Associates has assured him that they will follow all the permitting standards. Mr. Mower spoke about flow data available from other bridge reconstructions and the flow data from the Mother's day flood providing additional information. He stated that the flow engineering will provide valuable information to address and reduce flow choke.

Councilor Healey clarified that the estimate from Graton Associates does not include any work or engineering to address the flow. She asked who would oversee the bridge after it is completed. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali stated it would fall under Parks and Recreation. Councilor Harrington inquired about the what cost and what the cost covered. Mr. Mower stated that there are still some unknowns. He stated that the estimate from Graton Associates is the construction of the bridge. Mr. Mower stated that other items such as land work and electricity would be the Town's responsibility. He stressed that the committee hopes that the fundraising goals will be realized through the community's generosity. He stated that there are other funding avenues that could be applied for. Councilor Harrington encouraged the committee to be more realistic about the cost. She believes it will be more than the estimated cost. Councilor Albert would like staff to explore any possible covenants or restrictions on the parcel. There was a discussion regarding the Town's role and responsibility in the process. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali explained that Town staff would be involved to make sure the Town's interests are protected. Laurie Rothhaus explained how the bandstand came to fruition 25 years ago. She stated the residents raised the money and built the bandstand not corporate America. She appreciates the passion from the committee and looks forward to the project's completion.

MOTION was made by Vice Chair Boyd and seconded by Councilor Harrington to encourage the 275th Anniversary Planning Committee to start a fundraising project to build a covered bridge at Twin Bridge Park, to set up an account with the Town's finance department to hold those funds. MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

Councilor Rothhaus stated that he and his wife Laurie Rothhaus donate \$1,000. Rosemarie Rung also stated that she would be donating \$1,000.

New Business

1. Acceptance of a Donation for Bise Athletic Field

Submitted by Finance Director Paul T. Micali

The Town Council considered the acceptance and expenditure of a donation in the amount of \$7,500 from Haywards Ice Cream to be used for the purchase of a scoreboard to be installed at Bise Field located at 487 DW Highway as well as update outfield fence wrap and signage, pursuant to RSA 31:95-b and Charter Article 8-15. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali explained that this would amend the current MYA contract with the Town. He stated that Haywards Ice Cream is giving back to the community. Mr. John Calabro advised the Town Council that the baseball scoreboard is broken and in need of replacement. He appreciates the donation from Haywards Ice Cream. He informed the Town Council that the baseball program would like to update the outfield fence and will be paid for by the baseball program. Examples of both the scoreboard and fence wrap were shown. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali questioned the white color of the fence wrap and how that could affect the batter. Mr. Jason Lancaster assured the Town Council that they will give that consideration and make modifications if necessary.

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Mr. Calabro advised the Town Council that all but two current sponsors are coming back. He advised the Town Council that there are several new sponsors.

MOTION was made by Councilor Harrington and seconded by Vice Chair Boyd to accept and expend a donation in the amount of \$7,500 from Haywards Ice Cream to be used for the purchase of a scoreboard to be installed at Bise Field located at 487 DW Highway as well as update outfield fence wrap and signage, pursuant to RSA 31:95-b and Charter Article 8-15. Furthermore, approve the modifications made to the contract. MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

Discussion on the motion

Chairman Koenig raised the question regarding sponsorship asking if the Town Council is comfortable with the list of new sponsors relating to the youth sports. Vice Chair Boyd appreciates the sponsorships from the local businesses. No objections were raised. The Town Council agreed to amend the MYA contract to include the new sponsors.

Councilor Woods left the meeting at 10:00 pm

2. Ambulance Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) Account Withdrawal Request

Submitted by Fire Chief Matthew Duke

The Town Council considered Merrimack Fire Rescue's request to withdrawal and expend up to \$157,000 from the Ambulance CRF to replace and upgrade all three of the ambulance stretcher systems which are used to decrease injuries and provide a safer transition for the patient into the ambulance. Assistant Fire Chief Harris explained that the replacement stretcher is an automatic lift. He stated that the automatic lift system is safer for the employees and the patients. Assistant Chief Harris advised the Town Council that in the past there was an injury suffered by an employee that cost the Town approximately \$200,000. A video was shown to the Town Council illustrating the new equipment. He advised the Town Council that there is a warranty of 7 years. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali stated that the lift systems are transferrable to new ambulances.

MOTION was made by Councilor Harrington and seconded by Councilor Healey to approve withdrawal and expend up to \$157,000 from the Ambulance CRF to replace and upgrade all three of the ambulance stretcher systems which are used to decrease injuries and provide a safer transition for the patient into the ambulance. MOTION CARRIES 6-0-0

3. Fire Equipment Capital Reserve Fund (CRF) Withdrawal Request for Gas Monitoring Equipment for the Merrimack Fire Department

Submitted by Fire Chief Matthew Duke

The Town Council considered Merrimack Fire Rescue's request to withdrawal and expend \$24,000 from the Fire Equipment Capital Reserve Fund for the purchase of new and/or replacement gas monitoring equipment. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali advised the Town Council that this item was included in the budget but because the Department of Revenue has instructed the Town to keep capital reserve withdrawals separate Captain Bickford is requesting to expend \$24,000 for this equipment.

Lieutenant Bickford stated that it behooves the Town to upgrade the new engines that are coming in with the gas monitoring equipment. He outlined the gas monitoring changes and upgrades that will be included on the new engines. Lieutenant Bickford stated that there will be additional education/training for the department on the gas monitors. Councilor Rothhaus asked for clarification on the difference in money between the \$24,000 and the \$16,000 in the back up materials. Lieutenant

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Bickford stated that the information/costs in the agenda is the nuts and bolts of the request and he will come back for the remainder. Councilor Albert supports the request.

MOTION made by Vice Chair Boyd and seconded by Councilor Healey to withdrawal and expend \$16,087 from the Fire Equipment Capital Reserve Fund for the purchase of new and/or replacement gas monitoring equipment outlined in the March 4, 2021 memorandum from Fire Chief Matt Duke. Furthermore, that the Town Manager or her proxy be authorized to sign the necessary documents. MOTION CARRIES 6-0-0

4. Withdrawal Request from the Reevaluation Capital Reserve Fund (CRF)

Submitted by Finance Director Paul T. Micali

The Town Council authorized the expenditure of \$96,700 for the 2021 Town-wide reevaluation of which \$21,700 to come from the 2020-2021 Operating Budget and the remaining amount of \$75,000 to be withdrawn from the Reevaluation Capital Reserve Fund. Assistant Town Manager/Finance Director Paul Micali explained that \$21,700 will come from the current budget and the remaining \$75,000 will be withdrawn from the CRF.

MOTION made by Vice Chair Boyd and seconded by Councilor Albert to authorize the expenditure of \$96,700 for the 2021 Town-wide reevaluation of which \$21,700 to come from the 2020-2021 Operating Budget and the remaining amount of \$75,000 to be withdrawn from the Reevaluation Capital Reserve Fund. MOTION CARRIES 6-0-0

Minutes

Approve the minutes from the following Town Council meetings: ♦ January 28, 2021 ♦ February 11, 2021

♦ February 18, 2021

MOTION made by Vice Chair Boyd and seconded by Councilor Harrington to table the Town Council meeting minutes from January 28, 2021, February 11, 2021 and February 18, 2021 until the March 25, 2021 Town Council meeting. MOTION CARRIES 6-0-0

Comments from the Press

None

Comments from the Public

None

Comments from the Council

None

Adjourn

MOTION made by Councilor Harrington and seconded by Vice Chair Boyd to adjourn the meeting. MOTION CARRIES 6-0-0

The meeting adjourned at 10:45 pm

Respectfully submitted by Tracy Doherty