



Town Council Meeting Minutes



Thursday, November 18, 2021, at 7:00 PM, in the Matthew Thornton Room

Chairman Koenig called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm. Present at the meeting were Chairman Koenig, Vice Chair Rothhaus, Councilor Harrington, Councilor Healey, Councilor Hunter, Councilor Murphy, Councilor Woods, and Town Manager Paul Micali.

Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Koenig led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Announcements

The Town Offices will be closed on Thursday, November 25 & Friday, November 26 in observance of Thanksgiving.

The Merrimack Transfer Station will also be closed on Thanksgiving Day.

Upcoming Town Council Meetings:

- Thursday, December 2, 2021, 7:00 PM Regular meeting
- Thursday, December 16, 2021, 7:00 PM Regular meeting

The tax rate has been set to \$17.17

Property tax bills will be mailed on November 30th and are due by December 30th. Tax bill amounts are posted online on the Tax Collector's kiosk for property owners who wish to see their bill amount prior to receiving it. In addition, the Tax Collector's office is currently accepting payments.

Comments from the Press and Public

None.

Recognitions, Resignations and Retirements

None.

Appointments

None.

Public Hearing

None.

Legislative Updates from State Representatives

None.

Town Manager's Report

Woodbury Street Sidewalk Construction Update:

- They have finished up the steep slopes, by hydro-seeding and installing the matting. The stone check dams were installed to better control the water flow. The stone riprap swales were completed along the south side of the road. The old curbing was removed on both sides of the road. The road was repaired as needed and the base pavement was installed.

- They were able to complete a few items last week that were originally scheduled for this week. The subcontractor was able to come in a week early to install the guardrail along the school parking. The manhole and catch basin structures were replaced as needed and raised in preparation for the final pavement was also completed. Please use caution when going through the area, they can be difficult to see especially with all of the falling leaves even though they are painted.
- Last week they have begun installing the base gravels for the sidewalk and have installed the base coat of paving for the sidewalk. They installed the new curbing on both sides of the road and have been working on the ditch line on the north side of the road. Once all of the work is complete they will be able to install the final layer of pavement. The end of this project is quickly approaching. Thank you for your time and patience during this project.
- You can continue to expect that the road will be closed and/or alternating traffic to local traffic only.

Consent Agenda

1. Proposal to Increase Athletic Field Rental Rates [Tabled at the November 4, 2021 Town Council meeting]

Submitted by Parks and Recreation Director Matthew Casparius

The Town Council to review current fee charges to rent athletic fields in Merrimack and consider a proposal to increase those fees to bring them up to market rate.

MOTION made by Vice Chair Rothhaus and seconded by Councilor Harrington to pull this Consent Agenda item off the Consent Agenda.

MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

Town Manager Paul Micali shared that he and Mr. Casparius talked after the last meeting and decided to break the fees up into four hour blocks, with residents paying \$50 and non-residents paying \$75. For an 8 hour rental, residents will pay \$75 and non-residents will pay \$100, and a rental up to 12 hours will cost residents \$100 and non-residents \$150. They also agreed on a surcharge for using the lights on the field of \$25 an hour.

MOTION made by Councilor Harrington and seconded by Councilor Healey to accept the proposed current fee charges as presented to rent athletic fields in Merrimack.

MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

Old Business

1. Flying Eagles Field Enhancement Project Request [Tabled at the November 4, 2021 Town Council meeting]

Submitted by Robert Fregault

The Town Council to consider The Flying Eagles' request to restore the field to its original open boundaries by removing a select number of trees located on the Town owned property on Caron / Griffin Street, known as the Sklar Waterfront Park.

MOTION made by Councilor Harrington and seconded by Councilor Murphy to take this agenda item off the table for discussion.

MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

Councilor Hunter shared that The Flying Eagles came before the Conservation Commission at their meeting last week and it was found out that one of the areas that The Flying Eagles proposed cutting a notch in the trees (the southern area of the map presented at the previous meeting) had already been cleared out, which was on conservation land. The Commission is now trying to figure out who cleared these trees out as they were marked, but some subcommittee members were in the area clearing out other marked trees so they are unsure if there was confusion over which trees to keep vs cut.

MOTION made by Councilor Woods and seconded by Councilor Healey to move to remove this item until The Flying Eagles resubmits and repropose a plan to remove the trees from the property.

MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

New Business

1. Computer CRF Withdrawal Request – DocStar Renewal

Submitted by IT Coordinator Jonathan Dias

The Town Council to consider Information Technology's request to withdrawal \$12,558 from the Computer Capital Reserve Fund for the Docstar Renewal. The Docstar system is utilized by Town personnel as a scanning workflow platform to archive all of the paper records for personnel and Town records for all of the departments.

Town Manager Paul Micali wanted to share that Docstar has been in place for over 17 years, and every few years it needs to be upgraded. He further stated that this is a very reliable scanner system, and to move away from Docstar would cost almost twice as much as getting a new system in place. He then shared that Docstar currently holds all of the tax collector's permanent records, as well as the human resource department's files. IT Coordinator Jonathan Dias then stated that Docstar has been having issues with scanned files not being searchable, and one of the enhancements of this upgrade is that it does OCR, which takes characters and search strings out of the document when it scans, making it easier to search in documents.

Vice Chair Rothhaus stated that they have not had an opportunity to use the enhancements over the past number of years and wanted to clarify that they are paying for this upgrade despite not using a majority of the features. Mr. Dias shared that yes, unfortunately that is the way the upgrade works. He also shared that Docstar wanted to charge the town full price for the upgrade, but he was able to get a slightly better deal. He said that Docstar wants people to pay every year as they put a lot of time and effort into building the software. Councilor Hunter asked what the difference in cost is if they were to purchase the latest software and not do the back year payments, in which Mr. Dias shared that it would be about \$25,000 to buy it at retail value.

Councilor Murphy asked to clarify that the town will have to pay for 5 years of services that they did not have in order to access the software for the next year, in which Mr. Dias stated that the current server that is running Docstar is running an out-of-date operating system that's no longer supported by Microsoft, which is driving them into the new version of the software. In order to get the new Docstar version, the town will have to backpay the maintenance since they didn't pay it yearly, as well as pay for the current year so they can upgrade the server platform and the user experience. Councilor Murphy then asked if anyone knew why the town didn't do this yearly, in which Mr. Micali stated that there was a financial concern by the old IT Coordinator, but now that they are unable to operate the software without upgrading the operating system on the server, they have to move forward with this now.

Chairman Koenig wanted to highlight for the public that Mr. Dias was able to negotiate a 50% discount on the annual renewal fee, and that it would have been around \$17,940 plus \$35.88 annual fee for the upcoming year if Mr. Dias was not able to secure this discount for the town. Mr. Dias also wanted to share that there are different platforms for the renewal, so once the town is current with their payments, they can do software only upgrades, or software plus support.

MOTION made by Vice Chair Rothhaus and seconded by Councilor Healey to approve the Information Technology's request to withdraw \$12,558 from the Computer Capital Reserve Fund for the Docstar Renewal. The Docstar system is utilized by Town personnel as a scanning workflow platform to archive all of the paper records for personnel and Town records for all of the departments.

MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

2. Credit Card Implementation Discussion

Submitted by Finance Director Thomas Boland

The Town Council to discuss and consider a proposal to equip the Finance, Code Enforcement, Solid Waste and Wastewater departments with the hardware and software required to start accepting credit card payments for transactions such as ambulance fees, permits, inspections, applications, dump fees, compost fees, etc.

Town Manager Paul Micali began by stating that Town Clerk/Tax Collector Diane Trippett from the Tax Collector's office has been accepting credit card payments for a number of years now, and when this first happened there were some residents that asked if other departments could start accepting credit card payments. At the time, Mr. Micali was leery about this as he wanted to see how it worked first and how secure it was. He then stated that Town Hall does not store any credit card numbers, but rather they are all stored at the OCR processing sites, so these transactions are very secure. He then shared that cash has been used significantly less lately, especially with Covid, so it is a challenge for residents to pay cash or check for the various town fees. Finance Director Thomas Boland then shared how this will work, stating that they have been looking into this for a while. He stated that they would be looking to implement the same process and utilize the same company that Ms. Trippett uses that includes a virtual terminal and similar fee structure as the tax collector's office. He then shared that there is a 2.79% convenience fee for this, with a minimum of \$1.50 per transaction. Additionally, the card swipe terminals are \$575 each, so it would cost around \$2,300 for four terminals, and there is a \$60 maintenance fee, which is optional, but he suggests investing in this as it can be used any time something breaks or needs an upgrade.

MOTION made by Councilor Harrington and seconded by Councilor Healey to approve accepting credit card payments in the Finance, Code Enforcement, Solid Waste and Wastewater departments.

Before voting, Councilor Healey asked if this platform is PCI DSS compliant, in which Mr. Dias stated that it is, and it is an external terminal, similar to what you'd see at a grocery store. Further, it is an android-based device that runs a custom application that hooks on to their website, so it is only connected at the time of transmit.

Councilor Woods asked if all major credit cards are accepted by this system, in which Mr. Dias stated that there is not a restriction on the card type, but there could randomly be a specialized card that does not read on it, in which if that is the case it may have to be manually entered.

MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

2. 1st Quarter Financial Review

Submitted by Finance Director Thomas Boland

Finance Director Thomas Boland will review the key financial information of the quarter ending September 30, 2021.

Finance Director Thomas Boland began his presentation by stating that overall, the town is in good shape so far in terms of expenses and trends. The first area he highlighted was health insurance costs, which show that the rates from Health Trust have gone down a bit since last year. Next, he discussed the New Hampshire Retirement System, which shows an increase from last year, which he stated he knew was going to happen as the rates were increasing significantly beginning this year. Mr. Boland then shared overtime costs, stating that as usual the fire and police departments dominated this area as they need to be able to provide services for the community. He also shared that the overtime rates for the first quarter of the year were mostly due to backfilling vacant positions and employees out on worker's comp or disability, and impacted other departments such as Communications and Solid Waste. He then stated that the Highway Department is only at 3% of budget, but this is expected to change as winter is fast approaching and most of the overtime comes from plowing.

Mr. Boland then presented a slide that showcased the departmental summary, which compares the first quarter expenditures to the full year budget. The first four columns, which include the annual budget, first quarter expenditures, remaining balance (first quarter subtracted from the annual budget), and encumbrances, are the main columns to pay attention to as this shows how the departments are doing in terms of staying on track with their budget.

Next, Mr. Boland shared the revenue comparison, stating that the town is also in pretty good shape for this as well. He stated that building permits are up significantly from where they have been at through the first quarter of the last few years, being at almost 45% of the budgeted figures. Mr. Micali stated this was due to large projects coming through and complexes developing, and he does not anticipate this trend continuing each quarter going forward. Mr. Boland then shared that auto registrations have dipped slightly from where they were a year ago, being around 26.7% of the budget, which he stated was expected.

Minutes

Approve the minutes from the following Town Council meeting:

♦ October 28, 2021

MOTION made by Councilor Healey and seconded by Councilor Harrington to approve the minutes of October 28, 2021, as written.

MOTION CARRIES 6-0-1 with Councilor Harrington Abstaining

Amendments:

Mr. Disco incorrectly said that the bridge was given to the city from the state, when it was actually purchased from Portsmouth so the Council agreed to just strike that comment from the minutes.

Comments from the Press

None.

Comments from the Public

None.

Comments from the Council

Councilor Harrington wanted to wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving on behalf of the Council. Councilor Murphy wanted to thank the residents that contributed to Wreaths Across America. She shared that they have received a sponsorship of over 550 wreaths, so each veteran buried at Last Rest Cemetery will receive a wreath on December 18th at noon. The public is invited to this event.

Councilor Healey wanted to remind people that the 5k Turkey Trot is on Thanksgiving Day and starts at 7:30am at the Middle School and should be done by 11:00am. Additionally, she shared that Christmas trees will be arriving and available for sale on Saturday, November 27th at Watson Park. More information can be found on the Merrimack Rotary's website and Facebook page.

Adjourn

MOTION made by Councilor Woods and seconded by Councilor Healey to adjourn the meeting.

MOTION CARRIES 7-0-0

The meeting adjourned at 8:13pm.

Respectfully submitted by Jennifer Steagald