**MINUTES**

**FREEPORT TOWN COUNCIL MEETING #12-23**

**TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 30 MAIN STREET, FREEPORT**

**TUESDAY, JUNE 6, 2023**

**6:00 PM**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 6 pm.

PRESENT ABSENT EXCUSED

Councilor Chair Daniel Piltch, 25 Quarry Lane X

Council Vice Chair, John Egan, 38 Curtis Road X

Councilor Matthew Pillsbury, 36 Todd Brook Rd X-arrive at 6:30

Councilor Chip Lawrence, 93 Hunter Road X

Councilor Darrel Fournier, 3 Fournier Drive X

Councilor Jake Daniele, 264 Pownal Road X

Councilor Edward Bradley, 242 Flying Point Road X

**FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS**: Pledge of Allegiance

Everyone stood for the Pledge of Allegiance.

**SECOND ORDER OF BUSINESS**: To waive the reading of the minutes of Meeting #10-23 held on

May 16, 2023 and the Special Meeting #11-23 held on May 23, 2023 and to accept the minutes as printed.

**MOVED AND SECONDED:** To waive the reading of the minutes of Meeting # 10-23 held on May 16, 2023 and the Special Meeting #11-23 held on May 23, 2023 to accept the minutes as written. **VOTE:** (Lawrence & Egan )(5 -Ayes)(0-Nays)(1-Abstain Fournier)(1-Excused Pillsbury)

**THIRD ORDER OF BUSINESS**: Announcements (15 minutes)

* The new and renewal application for the Senior Citizens Tax Stabilization Program should be available sometime in August 2023 from the State. No further information is available at this time. Residents can go to the Freeport Assessor’s Page: <https://www.freeportmaine.com/assessor> to sign up with their email addresses to get updates from the assessing department as soon as they are made available by the State. When the new application is available, the assessing office will send a copy by email to everyone who signed up.
* The Town’s Climate Action Planning process is underway and there are many opportunities for residents and businesses to get involved and shape the Plan! If you missed the first Community Workshop for this project in May, you can view the event materials and participate in virtual versions of the workshop activities on our website: <https://www.freeportclimateaction.org/pages/community-workshop> We invite you to share your ideas, priorities, and concerns with us by taking our survey, visiting the interactive display in the Library lobby, or reaching out to Meddy Smith, our Sustainability Coordinator at msmith@freeportmaine.com.
* Our popular Summer Reading programs for kids and adults begins on June 12. We have lots of great prizes and challenges in store! Please visit freeportlibrary.com for more information.
* Election Day is next Tuesday, June 13, 2023. Polls will be open 7 am to 8 pm at the Freeport High School gymnasium. This is a RSU5 Budget Validation Election only.
* **Please be advised that Nathan Nye Street (from Main Street approximately 420 feet westerly) will be closed on June 24 & 25 for the Maine Oyster Festival.**
* **The Town of Freeport will 2023 Commercial Shellfish Licenses available by Lottery for:** Resident Commercial Adult License & 4-Resident Commercial Student Licenses. **Applications for the lottery can only be accepted until Thursday, June 15th at 6 pm.**

**FOURTH ORDER OF BUSINESS**: Information Exchange (15 minutes)

**Councilor Daniele: The Start Summit is going to be June 23, 2023. We’ve had good buy in from the community. There are 30 participants who have signed up. This is an entrepreneurship competition involving coming up with an idea to solve an issue. The winner gets $2,000 with no cost to the participants.**

**Councilor Bradley: The Transportation Committee that was created under the Downtown Visioning Process has met and convened a significant number of people in the community interested in it. They are meeting to discuss hiring a consultant to help design a transportation system or at least identify the issues with trying to create a system for the Town of Freeport.**

**FIFTH ORDER OF BUSINESS:** Town Manager’s Report (10 minutes)

Today, we updated the Letter of Intent with Revision. We sent it over for review hoping we can execute that tomorrow for the Level 3 Chargers for exclusivity for 6 months for them to explore installing them at the Train Station.

GPCOG wanted to apply for a grant that would be used for planning regarding current access points to the water in Freeport and the impact for climate hazard. It’s taking and mapping access points for the shellfish harvesters where they are going into the water and explore and see if there is a way to fit a deep-water ramp. It was a grant application that would require an in-kind match of the Harbormaster’s time. He did agree with this so the manager wrote a letter of support.

This is the last day of Clean Up Days at the Transfer Station. They will be accepting items for 50 more minutes. Again, this year, we did a two-day event on the days the Transfer Station is not normally open. The community loves this event but it’s a big lift for our staff. It’s extra hours and long days. We struggle to get staff to work it. Next year, it’s something we need to look and make sure we can adequately staff.

4 of July: Last year we didn’t have fireworks. Some people wanted them back. We had a group of people including L.L.Bean, Tawni Whitney from the Chamber of Commerce, the Town Manager and a few other stakeholders tried to meet and find an alternative location. That was unsuccessful. We looked at a lot of areas. We need a good amount of land with public access for viewing. There is debris, so we don’t want to have them near houses. L.L.Bean just released their Summer in the Park schedule. They have events going on. Michele Barker will be organizing the Parade again this year.

Councilor Bradley: Curious why we aren’t having them this year. He understands there was a stakeholder group that decided there was no location. Fireworks are important to this town. Is there still time for a town group to talk to the stakeholder group and hear what the problems were and find a solution? Was money a factor? No, the problem was finding somebody who will allow us to shoot them off on their land and have them be visible to the public. There was a lot of work in looki9ng at different locations. One was on lower Main Street at the L.L.Bean parking lot. They did a trial run, but they weren’t that visible. We used to have them on the school property, but the problem was debris that fell on the new track and roofs. There was pressure from the Fireworks company as they had other requests coming in. Finding the person who’s willing to host the Fireworks and meet all safety requirements is really what it came down to. It’s not impossible, it’s really late. They will have a discussion with the Town Manager this week. Councilor Fournier suggested Pine Tree Academy as it’s been used in the past. They did actually shoot the fireworks from there. The Manager had suggested that to L.L.Bean last week.

Public Works recently installed a fence at the Porter Cemetery on South Street. They want to thank Joyce Veilleux who brought the idea forward and got donations to cover the expense.

Public Works need to do maintenance on the Burnett Road bridge. The work will consist of replacing the wood deck boards. This will require that we close the bridge to traffic for one day on June 22nd tentatively. If supplies don’t arrive we will need to push that out. Once we know the date we will post on the town website, on social media and cable tv. Could we put Wolf Neck and Thomas Mean’s membership on the notification mailing list. Councilor Bradley wants us to mail to those people. Otherwise, people have got to figure out from us when we’re going to do it. Councilor Bradley will be the contact for both of them.

We’ve had ongoing issues at Hunter Rd Fields in the restrooms. They have been going on for a while. We had an overflow this weekend. We had to have some work be done. There are two septic tanks. We had one done today, one was done in the fall. It seems that there might be an issue with the float on the pump. We have someone looking at that tomorrow and doing repairs if necessary. We have to fix a water heater. If the pumping of the tanks doesn’t resolve the toilet flushing issue, we’ll have to have a pump installed for flushing. We had to overspend that budget line. The bathrooms will be open and operational except for one stall.

She wants to recognize the passing of Gail Moody from our Finance Department who passed over Memorial weekend. She was recently promoted to Accounting Assistant. Gail took at step back from the counter with that role. Gail was super-fast at the counter and there was never a line. She was a team player and scanned more documents than anyone and never complained. She loved her Jeep and her animals. She was the proud mother of one and two grandchildren. This was hard on our staff. Thank you to everyone who has come in and asked about her. The staff is doing their own collection for the family. The family did start a Go Fund Me if you want to make a donation.

**SIXTH ORDER OF BUSINESS**: Public Comment Period – (30 Minutes)

(Non-Agenda Items Only)

Jacob Crone: Introduced his son Devon Crone who won the Shellfish Lottery last year. He paid for the first half of his license to renew it. His parents were supposed to be in charge of it. The Town Clerk called Devon when he was in school on the last day for him to pay it, but he didn’t answer or return the call. He’s only 14 years old and doesn’t know how to use his voicemail. He did not make the payment on time. By rules, they wanted to take his license away for not paying on time. To him, it’s a license he can keep for his whole life and make a living on it. He doesn’t want to see him losing it because it was the fault of the adults. As his father, it was his fault for not making sure the town had his and Devon’s mother’s information on the application as well as Devon’s. A kid this age should not just have his cell phone on the application but an email also. It’s important to them for Devon to keep his license and they are asking the Council if that’s something they can do. He took the summer of from camp to shellfish and save money. Let him pay what is owed and keep his license. He thinks it should be mandatory that someone under 16 have their parents information on the form as well as the child, just for secondary contact. His was not a student license, it’s the full adult commercial shellfish license. Devon didn’t lose the license, the adults did.

The Chair summarized the situation. Per the rules, the Town Clerk is not allowed to renew the license. We had a similar situation a few years ago. The only way the clerk can issue the license is if the Town Council agrees to “bend the rules to allow it to happen”.

Councilor Bradley: There are two payments to be paid, but he didn’t make the second payment? Did he do the conservation work for the first year he held it? No, they are not doing the conservation work this year. How much digging did you do last year? He replied six or seven times, but he went to football camp last year and he doesn’t have his driver’s license yet so he has to rely on adults for transportation. How did he know to pay for the first half, but not the second. Devon’s grandparents told him it was due, so he went out digging to pay for the license renewal. The grandparents thought the deadline was June 26th, not May 26th.

Councilor Fournier: Sometimes kids do boneheaded things.

**MOTION:** That an exception be allowed for Devon Crone to renew the Commercial Shellfish License in the event the deadline was missed and the Commercial Shellfish License be allowed to be applied for renewal and the advertising of the position not be put out for lottery. (Fournier & Lawrence)(7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Andy Arsenault: Wants to know if the Level 3 EV Chargers will be on the agenda tonight. What’s going on? The Chair explained that at the last meeting we voted to allow Caroline to sign the Letter of Intent with a few changes so they’re in the process of making the changes. Mr. Arsenault wanted to know if the changes will be reviewed before the Council votes. No, we said “these are the changes we want to see” and as long as the changes are made, we authorize the Letter of Intent. He asked if the public would see it before the Manager signs it. The Chair explained that we saw the letter and we voted to make the three changes and as long as they’re made, the Manager can sign. There should be no surprises. You can stop by the Manager’s Office tomorrow and see it.

Councilor Bradley: He agrees with Andy. We did say in substance the changes we want, but we didn’t see the language that executed those changes. We should be careful. Is it holding something up?

Town Manager: The grant application is due the 20th. You took action on the Letter of Intent as presented at the last meeting. You requested that the timing change from 2 years to 6 months, that they have one of the spaces be ADA compliant, that it be clarified that it only applies to the Train Station lot and any municipal property with it within 500 feet and it would be subject to any FOAA requirements for Freedom of Information. Councilor Bradley doesn’t think he needs to see it again if the language states the changes.

There is a six-month exclusivity for Revision to file. He’s got 6 months instead of 2 years to get it done.

Councilor Lawrence clarified that it wasn’t to give him the leases, it was just a Letter of Intent saying yes we do intend to do that and we’re not going to let someone else within 500 foot radius. A lease hasn’t been signed. It’s just for the DC fast chargers. It will come back to Council when they do the lease arrangement on those parking spaces.

Andy Arsenault: that’s when I’d like to see how long it’s going to be. Why aren’t we getting some money for these parking spaces? We haven’t had a discussion about whether he’s going to pay money for those parking spaces or not. Andy thinks we should have that discussion. He’s opposed to it.

Amy Sheehan: She is here to encourage opening a conversation about the transition from a student license to a resident license. Her son has had the pleasure of having a student license for the last 3 years. She displayed a large stack of her son’s landings. He takes this seriously. He’s treating this as a business. He’s about to phase out of being able to hold a student license here. She has seen him shine with pride at being able to harvest here in Freeport. He has had the opportunity to educate the public while he’s harvesting. This has allowed him to stay here, pay rent and make his living. She wants to start a conversation about how a student license could transition over to a permanent resident license. She thinks as part of that they should have to prove their landings. We want our kids to thrive and grow and live on their own. He’s passionate about this.

Councilor Bradley: He thinks the place to start is the Shellfish Commission and let them work through, if they’re willing, a change to the ordinance. She thought this was a good place to start. She knows there are other towns that do the transition from student to adult. She understands competition. If you have the privilege of having a license, use it and prove it, otherwise just get a peck license.

Councilor Fournier: is this something we can direct the Shellfish Commission to look at and have them come back in 3 months with recommendations. There was a consensus on the Council.

Vincent Migliaccio: He want to open a dialogue on this. He has gone to Coastal Waters Commission and this issue hasn’t gotten any traction. He is here to shed light on a discrepancy in the fee schedule. As a resident, he pays $96 per year for the right to have a mooring in the harbor. The wait list is 8-10 years right now. He then pays an additional $2.25 per foot for again the right to have his boat in the harbor that he lives in. He’s not complaining. He knows those fees go to Harbor Master, to pay for wharfing out, it goes into the General Fund in Freeport, etc. What he discovered is that the marinas in Freeport pay a set $22 fee for a slip. That is a set fee. If you believe the fee for the mooring is for the right to have the mooring, that’s one thing. The boat yards add an additional 350 vessels to the harbor which doubles our Harbors capacity for vessels. Each boat has yards of toxic bottom paint and gallons of bilge water that gets dumped into the harbor each day. The question is that it seems unfair as a resident that he has the right to pay $200 for a mooring that he maintains, but the boat yards only pay a set $22 fee for the right to have their boats in the harbor. In a perfect world he would like to see the fees disbursed evenly through the boat yard and through the mooring field. He would love to have that money set aside for the betterment of waterfront to pay for the expenses in the harbor.

Councilor Bradley: The council doesn’t usually deal with the substance of these issues in the first instance. We have committees that we rely on to work through these issues. Is there a problem going to the Coastal Waters?

Mr. Migliaccio: I’ve gone to them twice. It appeared to me that both times, more than half of the people there had boats in the marina that I was looking to increase the revenue for. He’s sure they were unbiased in their judgement, but it fizzled out. They argued that this might cause Brewer’s to charge us more for our parking and it might increase the slip fees to the people on the slips. None of those things seemed like a concern in the grand scheme of things to the people on the wharf and the people on moorings. We may be leaving $50,000 to $100,000 on the table for some unknown reason. That money cold be used. A lot of people are using our harbor for work and play. People aren’t going to come. No one wants to be here. The slip owners don’t pay to the Town of Freeport, they pay to the marinas. The large vessel at the harbor probably pays $100,000 to $200,000 in annual fees to the marina, but the town of Freeport receives a $22 fee for 120 feet of slip space. Whether you agree with the fee structure for moorings or slips, it seems a moot point. If we are paying it on the moorings, why aren’t we paying it on the slips. Slips pay no per foot fee to the town but pay $130 per foot to the marina. In order to get a slip, you must agree to winter storage, winterization and commissioning with them.

The Council has it on the list to review all the town fees. It’s probably been many years since we’ve updated either of those fees.

Councilor Pillsbury would like an accounting of where the fees are directed. It goes to the General Fund, but in terms of the offset to what expense? That will help inform us as to what an appropriate fee is. If the intent is for this fee to go to pay for this group of services or personnel, we need to align that. It’s one thing to look at the fee schedule and identify what looks low or high but that’s more of a comprehensive look. That’s something we’re going to have to coordinate with Jessica on.

Mr. Migliaccio couldn’t find slip fee information for other neighboring towns.

Greg Michaud and Liz McDonald from the Complete Streets Committee: Last year they held a workshop on this bike pedestrian Vision plan that we have called The Loop. It would connect us to the East Coast Greenway which goes from Florida all the way to Maine.

Liz McDonald: wants to update the Council on the progress they’ve made towards an off-road multi-use path from Cousins River Bridge to downtown. This is going to be the future route of the East Coast Greenway form Key West to Calais. Senator King has officially requested that the project be funded by the Senate Transportation, Housing and Development subcommittee on Appropriations. The net request was for $1,525,000 to cover the following:

* Construction funding for the Cousins River Bridge multi-use path to the YMCA for $100,000
* Design and right-of-way funding for the multi-use path from the YMCA to Pine Street for $275,000.
* Design construction funding for a multi-use path including the concord Brook Trail from Pine Street to Main Street for $1,100,000.

Connect Freeport is serious about finding funding to help these paths get developed and plan to apply for a land and water conservation grant with a deadline of June 30th, 2024. They have met with the owners of Good Fire Brewery and Main Beer. Both are excited about the off-road multi-use path that will become the East Coast Greenway route. They want to get involved in the following ways:

* They are willing to participate in discussions with property owners about the easements needed for the desired route
* They are willing to work with the community to assist in private fundraising.

They would like to put in a plug for a grant writer for the town. A lot of time they forego applying for some of the bigger grants because the volunteers don’t have the ability to do it.

Councilor Fournier: It’s going to be tough to hire a full time grant writer. If we contracted specific projects with a grant writer, we would get a bigger bang for our buck. There were other committees that have requested grant support. They are still in the same boat. They’re really not experienced in doing this type of work and we’re talking about millions of dollars of grant potential. They stand a better chance of that happening if we can get a bit more professional help.

Chair Piltch: We’ve had discussions up here and the spirit of it was that if there are opportunities where it makes sense to contract a part time grant writer for a particular opportunity, we were in favor of that.

The Sewer Committee faced exactly the same issue and put that into the budget this year and there is some money for a consultant to help the Sewer District and the Town to work out grant applications that are to the benefit of both. The precedent has been set. The Council won’t know what the grants are or what your needs are. To have some focus on that helps when you get to the budget process.

Greg Michaud: Wants to put in a plug for just what Complete Streets is responsible for. We have accountability for parking in the town, street lights, sidewalks, crosswalks, all of those items. As visioning comes to light, steer those people towards them.

Gary Crone: The stairs and mortar joints are getting really bad on the Bartol Library building on Main Street. He’s done masonry for years. He would like to get the opportunity if there are programs for working on town owned property. Back years ago, Dale Olmstead would allow it. He’s interested in working on the building and using it towards his taxes. He’s looking for locations to do his mortar work such as the Bartol building.

The Chair pointed out that they are aware the building needs to have work done. You can follow up with the Town Manager. Caroline has been looking at work that needs to be done to the building in general so that’s why he’s pointing Mr. Crone in that direction.

Some towns have programs in place where you can work and have it go towards your taxes. If that’s something of interest we can look at it once we get through the budget.

**SEVENTH ORDER OF BUSINESS**: To take action on the following items of business as read by the Council Chairperson:

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ITEM # 109-23 To consider action relative to adopting the June 6, 2023 Consent Agenda.

The Chair reviewed the items on the Consent Agenda for the public.

**BE IT ORDERED**: That the June 6, 2023 Consent Agenda be adopted. **VOTE:** (Pillsbury & Fournier)(6 -Ayes)(0-Nays)

(Council Chair Piltch) (5 minutes)

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ITEM # 110-23 To consider action relative to a new Liquor License for the Harraseeket Inn. PUBLIC HEARING

**MOTION**: To open the Public Hearing (Fournier & Lawrence)(7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

**MOTION:** To close the Public Hearing (Fournier & Lawrence)(7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

**BE IT ORDERED**: That a new liquor license for the Harraseeket Inn be approved. **VOTE:** (Fournier & Lawrence)(7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Councilor Bradley: It looks to him that the group that acquired it is a professional hotel and restaurant management group that manages properties all over New England. They are well respected. We should invite them in for a conversation about how they intend to run the Harraseeket Inn and if there will be any changes. We can let them know how we feel about the place.

(Town Clerk, Christine Wolfe)( 5 minutes)

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ITEM # 111-23 To consider action relative to a new Special Amusement Permit for the Harraseeket Inn. PUBLIC HEARING

**MOTION**: To open the Public Hearing (Lawrence & Daniele)(7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Janice Flynn: What is a special amusement permit and what does it cover?

Any time an establishment has a liquor license and they are going to have any music, indoor or outdoor, they need to have a special amusement permit.

She thinks it seems unusual that a property like that would sell to a large development group and chain without anybody being curious what they intend to do with the property. It is a private sale but to the point of amusement, what can they do on the property. Can they do live shows or use the back parking lot? Is it just music or do they come back over and over again.

They will renew their license each year. On the application they listed live musicians, DJs and magicians. They have the location listed as the Casco Bay Room, the Dining Room and the Merrymeeting room. As an FYI, the Harraseeket has always had a special amusement permit under the prior ownership.

Councilor Lawrence asked why we have a special amusement permit. It is State Statute that any establishment with a liquor license and entertainment must have a special amusement permit. It also does trigger an inspection of the establishment. It would separate the alcohol from the activities inside and if you have a year to look at the what they’re doing inside in terms of amusement and you think it’s excess, then you have a way to limit their inside entertainment opportunities without taking away their entire business by cutting off their liquor license. That is what Councilor Bradley thinks. It does trigger Codes and Fire Department inspections. We repealed the Victualer License, so this does provide an opportunity for when people are inside gathering. It seems redundant and an expense. The Manager can see it coming into play in places that have like a big club scene at night where they’re not falling in a different category.

**MOTION:** To close the Public Hearing (Lawrence & Daniele)(7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

**BE IT ORDERED**: That a new Special Amusement Permit for the Harraseeket Inn be approved. **VOTE:** (Lawrence & Daniele)( 7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

(Town Clerk, Christine Wolfe)( 5 minutes)

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ITEM # 112-23 To consider action relative the FY24 Operating, Capital and TIF Budgets. PUBLIC HEARING

We are not intending on voting on the budget tonight, that’s going to happen on our next meeting in two weeks on June 20th.

If there are changes to the budget, this would be a good time to make them, so the public is aware of them. Tonight’s public hearing applies to all three budgets tonight, the Operating Budget, the Capital Budget and the TIF Budget.

Ms. Maloy provided a memo on the proposed changes that have been discussed. Before the Council is a proposal to remove two items from the Operating Budget and fund them with ARPA funds including $40,000 for Visioning Project and the Marine Conservation Corp labor request for $18,000. She is also requesting we pull the $25,000 increase for paving out of the budget but is not proposing funding it through another source at this time. That would reduce it back to last year’s value. This changes the tax rate impact from the initial 17.05% levy increase down to a 15.59% levy increase. We essentially went from .45¢ on a municipal tax to .41¢ increase. On a $300,000 home that would be a $12 decrease if these changes move forward.

ARPA Funding: She has four items before you to propose funding out of ARPA. The two listed above as well as a Downtown Visioning Project Engineer Contractor for $30,000 and funding for the Tri-Town Little League for $26,750. That would be a total of $114,750 coming out of ARPA if those go through. To clarify, the $26,750 for dugout improvements at the municipally owned Hunter Road Fields baseball fields. It’s not an allocation to Tri-Town Little League. They are going to provide all the labor and the town is going to provide the materials for the dugouts for all the baseball fields. The way the request came in was from Tri-Town. It was to make capital improvements to a town owned facility.

The Chair clarified, when we talk about the tax levy increase, we’re not increasing everyone’s tax rate by 17% this year. The total tax rate people should expect to see is changing from 6.7% to 6.4%. That’s the tax increase people will see at the existing valuations. If everything stays equal, that’s the increase. Nothing else is going to stay equal, so there will be a different change than that. That’s largely due to the school budget being relatively small this year at 3% or so. We are just over $100,000 more than them. Part of it is from Cumberland County.

Councilor Bradley asked if it was correct to think that valuation in town will increase so there will be a greater contribution to the taxes from new properties that weren’t since last year so that we could expect that rate to go down? Ms. Maloy believes we can expect housing values to increase in town both for new buildings and existing buildings based on the housing market.

The 6.40% increase does include the schools, county, transit and the town.

Councilor Pillsbury asked about the $25,000 being removed from paving. Is that because we don’t anticipate a certain number of projects or have we controlled costs in another way or is it just a way to help reduce the tax burden. Ms. Maloy agreed it was to reduce the tax burden. Paving used to be at $350,000 eight years ago and remained at that amount until we reduced it to $250,000 two or three years ago. It was changed at the time based on staffing levels and the ability to get the work materials in. With COVID everything was blown out, so we just used it at that time to help focus the existing money on other ventures that needed to happen without impacting taxes. Since then, she has tried to increase paving back up because material costs have gone up as well as we’re fully staffed. She has yet to leave that in there as an increase for various reasons. Last year it was pulled out and funded with ARPA. That was with the caveat that at some point the operating budget would have to go back up. The $25,000 was her attempt to build it back up over four years. With all the Downtown Visioning stuff and other things going on, it’s unlikely they will get all the paving done and $25,000 is a safe amount to pull from the budget.

Councilor Fournier: His concern is the more we let our roads deteriorate, not only does the costs of paving go up, but the base of the road goes away. We have to bring in gravel. We have to consistently add more than we think. He asked the Public Works director for his opinion. He asked what impact is this going to have on our infrastructure of our town? He knows we have a plan that identified roads and would this have a negative effect on that. Mr. Gibson replied that any time you push a road off and you lose the base your going to spend more to fix it. The double edge is the cost went up. We’re somewhere in the $80 range where we were at the $60 range. He has had discussions with Finance about understanding what the budget was. With increases in the budget, they were going to try to do this. He thinks they will pay for it on the backside. We’re going to spend more to fix the same road if we had the money to do it. If we save this amount now chances, are we are going to spend more later. That’s not wise. Our roads are one of our more important infrastructures we maintain here. We have challenges. He hopes the council will find other areas to replace the funding. Mr. Gibson remembers when the paving line was $425,000. Lower Flying Point and Pleasant Hill roads are coming up and it’s going to take some money to fix them. If you leave the $25,000 in the budget, you would be adding 1.0115 cents. It would go from 6.4 to 6.49 as a total tax levy.

**MOTION**: To open the Public Hearing (Daniele & Lawrence)(7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Stephanie Paine-Representative of the Freeport High School Scholarship Foundation: They are requesting a grant for $100,000 to support the FHS graduates with large multi-year scholarships for both two and four year post- secondary experiences and mentorship programs. Education is the key to unlocking the potential of our youth. Unfortunately, financial barriers often limit student opportunities to pursue higher education and support their dreams. That’s where these scholarships come in. The foundation was created in 2021 in response to this need and the lack of substantial scholarship support programs for graduation Freeport students. It was designed for deserving students who display academic excellence, leadership potential, a commitment to their community and significant financial need. The funding they are seeking today will go towards their goal of raising an additional $1,000,000 to allow them to offer substantial multiyear scholarships to a larger group of students. This will help cover a portion of their tuition fees and related expenses throughout their entire post-secondary journey. Their commitment extends beyond financial aid. Scholarships alone are not sufficient to ensure success, therefore the foundation places emphasis on mentorship programs as a vital component of our support system. They match each scholarship recipient with a dedicated Mentor who provides guidance, advice and support throughout their academic journey. They realize requesting $100,000 is a significant investment for the town. There are long term benefits to the program. By supporting the Foundation, the Town would be investing in the future of the community allowing students to reach their full potential.

Fred Palmer: This year there were 32 applications for scholarships. The scholarships are $5,000 a year for four years for college students and $4,000 a year for two years for people who going to another form of education. They funded 3% of the applications that were sent to them by awarding two scholarships this year from the 32 applications. With the funds raised they feel they can continue to fund those students two students every year for four years. They are interested in expanding the program to address the need. They have to raise another million dollars. They are funding six students right now. The scholarships are awarded on potential, not just academic excellence and financial need.

Mason Morfit on behalf of Freeport CAN Farmer’s Market. This year it will be held at Memorial Park. He hopes the Council will consider their request for $1,500 as a high priority. They initiated the market at the request of the town which apparently perceived it as contributing to the Downtown Revitalization. Visit Freeport has included the market in the media advertising. They operate with a bare bones budget of $6,600 for such expenses as marketing, website design, banners, insurance and cooking demonstrations, etc. The $1,500 request from the town represents about ¼ of their budget. They operate on a volunteer basis. They estimate they receive 20 volunteer hours per week for 15 weeks for a total of 320 hours. If volunteer hours are worth $30/hr that’s $3,600. Of season preparations of arranging the venue, recruiting the vendors, developing marketing, etc., the total approaches $4,000 (three times what they are asking the town to contribute). The market provides a sense of community as represented in the Downtown Visioning Plan. He provided a budget for the Town Council.

Suzanne Watson, Executive Director of Meetinghouse Arts, a local Arts Agency: They have requested a town contribution to support our work in the coming year. It’s important as it relates our ongoing partnership with the town. In the past year, Meetinghouse has hosted the Bates Film Festival at Nordica, produced the Freeport Community production of Our Town, partnered with Freeport Speech to bring national level speakers to Freeport, helped local artists earn nearly $40,000 in gallery sales and hosted Regional and National level art exhibitions local student art shows. They hosted 36 local and regional musical artists including free concerts in Memorial Park, brought hundreds of visitors to downtown by way of their gallery and stage. They provided a stage for Freeport middle and high school students a place to rehearse and perform. They provided low and free to low cost space for local organizations to host discussions. They participated in the town Revisioning as lead on the Arts and Cultural goals and recommendations. The request before you clearly lay out what they have achieved today on behalf of the Town of Freeport. They are putting artwork in empty store front windows. They have organized free concerts in Memorial and Winslow Parks. They are adding value to the Oyster Festival and Visit Freeport’s work by bringing Schooner Fair for a Discovery Park concert and presenting a working waterfront exhibition of local artists in the Gallery.

They just received a match funding from the National Endowment for the Arts to embark on a year and a half project to document Freeport’s unique moment in time with the project named Our Town, A Community Self Portrait. It’s an effort in partnership with the Freeport Historical Society and other Freeport organizations. Some 100 citizens of Freeport will take photos, add their narratives and it will be showcased in various town locations in 2024. It will then be housed with Freeport Historical as a time capsule. It’s a big deal for an Arts organization to get this. A statewide U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that the Arts and Cultural sector contributed 1.6 billion to Maine’s economy in 2020 representing a 2.3% of the State’s GDP. They will continue to apply for grants to secure State and Federal funding and local support as they already have. They need the Council’s support to make their work on behalf of the Town of Freeport possible. They take that role seriously. Their request is $20,000. The grant from the National Endowment was $25,000 which is purely project based. They have to match that grant dollar for dollar, they cannot spend outside of the project itself.

This request is not for air conditioning. They will have to address that. This year they will not have any performances in July and August at their location. They have 5 different proposals in to look at the best option. They don’t want to just throw in heat pumps that had a $50,000 quote from Royal River. That’s not the solution when you have a full-scale ventilation system that’s operating almost separately as well as a heating system. They don’t want to throw air conditioning on top of that without looking at the system holistically. That’s what they will bring back to the Council at a later time.

Councilor Fournier: Meetinghouse Arts is located in an active church. He’s had people come to him and ask about the separation of church and state. Ms. Sullivan would love to have a conversation with the Council about this. It’s an interesting point from a constitutional law point of view.

The Chair clarified that with her that the town has appropriated $25,000 in this fiscal year for Capital Improvements. She submitted a letter to the National Endowment that stated the $25,000 was for Operational purposes for 2023, so she argues she is in the budget for 2023. Ms. Maloy clarified that they were awarded $25,000 in this current FY23 budget out of the Capital Program for their operational expenses. The intent of the $20,000 request now is for operational expenses to keep the building intact. They have regular repairs, the back of the building has siding issues, there were ice dam problems, there are salaries to cover. They are trying to reduce those costs on a regular basis. Out of a $223,000 annual budget, $20,000 is a small, but huge for them. She also looks at this as a chance for the town to make a statement to them. They are doing the work of revisioning that is the town responsibilities that they are taking on. They are doing work for the town and not being paid for it.

Councilor Lawrence: One problem he has is that the town has given $120,000 to get you started and then you came back for $70,000. We funded $25,000 last year. That’s $215,000 total and this year we have a lot going on.

Meetinghouse Arts has put half a million dollars into the building. So, the town paid for half of the capital improvements, that was not our operating money. That was only for the restoration of that building which is hugely beneficial to the town. They raised the difference to make the building more viable. The marriage between the church and the theater is working. We as a town are demonstrating a partnership between a church that was on a decline and a theater that was looking for a home.

Kathleen Sullivan: On behalf of FCAN: speaking in support of the Arts Association. The arts are an important way to communicate what’s happening to our planet. We are switching from an economy that’s based solely on a consumer-based economy to an economy that supports things other than buying more materials. It supports a sense of community.

David Webster: On board of Meetinghouse Arts: They have a 6.5 day a week lease agreement to use the upper level of the building. Lease costs are $20-$25 a square foot. Meetinghouse Arts didn’t have that and the church wanted a relationship that would help with the building. They created a relationship where they took care of the maintenance and they still assume the responsibility of the building itself and major issues in lieu of paying the per foot rental. It is a lease agreement between the lessee and the lessor and they fulfill the contractual obligations. It’s a legal direct relationship, it’s not a non-profit that is part of a church. They didn’t know the ceiling was going to be coming down, but they fixed it. If the ceiling had come down the building wouldn’t be used. None of us want that. They did not know they needed to put in a fire barrier. When they told the council what they were going to do to the building at first it wasn’t based on what really happened. There is concern about them coming back for more funding, but the Board never said they wouldn’t come back. They are doing their best to maintain a historic building and create a tremendous asset that the town asked them to do, which is revitalize downtown.

He would be happy to provide the reports they receive from the executive director that show what she does. You would see how many hours she spends on the issues that Freeport and Meetinghouse Arts agreed are important for downtown. She’s spending an incredible amount of time on revitalization, art in public spaces, Memorial and Winslow Park. They are all great investments and they are also time investments by staff people that otherwise could be used to raise money. You’re getting your dollars’ worth for the value.

Robert Stevens: FCAN representative: The board is pushing to put together a grant application to Efficiency Maine to take advantage of the money that would be available for level 2 chargers. We know electric cars are the future. What is in the budget now is $30,000 that would be used for the up-front payment for the chargers. After that, the rebate would be received from Efficiency Maine, but that’s how the procedure has to work. He hopes we can get the chargers here for the benefit of the town.

John Albright: He supports fervently the request by Meetinghouse Arts for $20,000 for all the reasons stated. Cultural richness is important. A rich cultural soup can bolster the local economies and even improve the mental health and wellbeing of a town’s residents. Let the music and theater continue and grow.

Amanda Kent: supports Meetinghouse Arts. Meetinghouse Arts is supporting the new retail movements of Freeport. It makes a big difference when you have people who are concerned with the cultural heritage and the cultural arts of a town and are willing to document that and continue in the preservation of that. Not only are they preserving the building, they are preserving what the town is all about. Working with the Historical Society is a great tie in together. It’s hard for a nonprofit to work with and get the support of the town. Its critically important to support them financially in even this minor way. The $20,000 they are asking for is less than 1/6 of 1% of the budget.

Joyce Veilleux: Put in a word for the Farmer’s Market. That was one of the things we talked about during the revisioning process with Principle Group and they’ve made it happen with your direction. We need to continue to make it happen. It supports our local farmers and craft people. Is there any ARPA money left that could be used to fund that?

**MOTION:** To close the Public Hearing (Fournier & Lawrence)(7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Councilor Bradley: Transportation Committee has been working on a plan for transportation to downtown both along Main Street and among and between the assets. They want to hire a consultant. They had money in the 2023 budget to do that but because of the time it has taken, they didn’t get to the point where they could spend that money. That money is not going to be spent in 2023 but they will need it in 2024. He thinks it is appropriate to make another $10,000 appropriation which is not currently in the 2024 budget.

Secondly, this one is harder. It has to do with the Mallet Drive proposal. There is a significant budget for Mallet Drive which includes tax revenue and expected grants in the Capital budget for 2024. He would like to remove the portion of Mallet Drive funding that presumes we will get grants to fund it. The reason is we might not get those grants. If we put the full amount including the grant amounts we’re expecting in the budget, then a future council will say “ we didn’t get the grants, but we did approve the million plus for Mallet Drive”. He supports Mallet Drive if we get the grants but he doesn’t want to put in a Capital Budget which includes the assumed amount of grants that we ay not get because I don’t want to create a pressure now or in the future to spend taxpayer money on what is more the aggressive Mallet Drive that includes the boulevard and other pieces of it that are not in the bridge, roadway or right of way. Most of those we should pay for. To summarize, there is grant money for some speculative things that will go on in the future that he would like removed from the budget. He thinks it’s $400,000 to $500,000.

Adam Bliss, Town Engineer: There are several layers to Mallet Drive. The $450,000 Councilor Bradley is referencing is for paving of Mallet Drive, which is badly needed, is scheduled for 2025. We go for every grant that we can, and we stand a good chance to get a grant. In fact, it’s penciled in through PACTS but we don’t celebrate until we have it in hand. The request is for the full amount but is expected to be offset by the grant of about half the amount needed. Money is fluid from the Federal to MDOT to PACTS to towns. That’s the first layer, the paving of Mallet Drive in 2025. The other layer is within the 2024 budget including $50,000 for a boulevard study. You can think of that as a long-range high-level planning study. Paving is short-term tangible asset going into the roadway. Another layer is the Complete Street improvement work in 2025 that takes into account shared use path, striping landscaping, but not the full boulevard concept. Councilor Bradley was focused on the long-term boulevard study ($50,000) and the paving amount that we feel relatively confident that we will get grants for. If we don’t get those grants, Mr. Bliss is saying we should pay for the paving. It’s high up on our paving plan. Public Works paving plan is more just overlay of roads. This is capital where we look at the whole road system including gravel depths and so forth. Mr. Bradley does not think we should put it in the budget until we get the grant. Is there harm in taking it out? They want to have the money appropriated in 2024 so that we are ready to sign agreements with the DOT and PACTS by 2025. They want a signed three-party agreement whether we get the grants or not.

Councilor Fournier: If we reduce the paving to $300,000 would that give us what we need to move forward with a possible grant and to sign agreements to get it done. Mallet Drive is a heavily traveled road and we need to maintain it. We may have a better figure once we get closer to 2025 in next year’s budget. Well know whether we need to up that. That would give us wiggle room without completely cutting it. He’s not in favor of eliminating all of that, but maybe a portion could come out to ease this budget.

Councilor Bradley is more looking at the principle of not committing us t do something on the assumption that we are going to get grants, when we might not. This isn’t grant related, its something we are going to do. We are just hoping we’ll get grants to help us. We are going to pave this road, this is what needs to be done and it’s going to cost us $450,000 in today’s dollars. Mr. Bliss does not think it’s wise to cut it down. Mr. Bradley retracted his request to cut it down.

Mr Bliss: if we were at the top of the list vying for the grant money, he would work to trim that number down but we are at the bottom. If we don’t get that money, we have to wait until 2028. That is five years away and that road is going to fall below or into the reconstruction phase, then the number goes through the roof.

Councilor Fournier: The $50,000 that is there for the future planning of Mallet Drive, what would it hurt to put that off a year?

The Chair responded. During the visioning process they showed sketches of Mallet Drive sort of boulevard like with trees down the middle. That was one of the things people really got behind. That would allow us to expand what is now a single linear downtown of a few blocks and would allow it to expand a little in that direction. To change that from a four-lane connector to the highway road into a pedestrian road, changing the zoning and sidewalks, storefronts closer to the road with sidewalks. Changing the whole character of the road is a huge opportunity. Principle Group agreed it would be a missed opportunity to not capitalize on the momentum from the project. There is a huge opportunity on Mallet Drive whether we do the $50,000 now or later. Last time we were debating how many projects on the Downtown Vision do they want to start versus postpone to actually get momentum and action behind what we want to do. He thinks this is an easy one to say, let’s start planning so the next time it comes up from paving, we have a design ready to go rather than say wait, let’s not pay yet, we have to figure out what we want it to look like. Mallet Drive is a Capital Budget expense so it doesn’t impact the operating budget, so it doesn’t impact the taxes, but its still money we need to replenish. If we don’t do this, no one is going to fund raise for us.

We have a lot of requests coming to the Council because we don’t know how to say no. We cannot fund everything we are asked for.

Does the $50,000 change what we do in 2025 as far as paving? Does this study lead to when we pave in 2025 or 2026? If we do the study and then we pave, we’ll have something to pave to as opposed to pave and then do the study and we have to dig up the road. The study will certainly inform how we design and phase Mallet Drive construction. It will inform the sequencing. There’s a paving element, there is a paving element. We need to get the survey done so we can do Mallet Drive the way we need to do it.

Councilor Bradley: is the $50,000 the leading edge to a $50,000,000 investment in a boulevard. He doesn’t want to spend the $50,000, but he’ll never spend $50,000,000 on a boulevard idea. The project is not on any piece of paper before them now, it’s prospective. There are too many other priorities in the downtown. He would kick it down the road until we figure out what our other priorities are in the downtown visioning are and what they will cost and where we thought we’d get the money.

There was discussion about what the CPI costs are. There was a New England group that put out what the cost would be for us. Jessica looks at CPI for what to propose for wage increases. She doesn’t have that number. The CPI is 6, last year it was closer to 11. That helps him get perspective. He’d like to see the $25,000 put back in for paving. He thinks we are cutting ourselves short and we’re going to spend more money down the road if we don’t maintain what we have. We had to take a big hit to get our wages up, which is important to retain staff. That’s money well spent. He doesn’t see that big cost coming next year. If we were to just add the items back in that came before the council tonight, you would be looking at 6.93% from the 6.4%.

Councilor Fournier thinks the scholarship grant is a big ask. The Fire Company puts out 4 scholarships. Maybe it’s time to put all the scholarship groups together. All the scholarships that were previously retained at the town have been transferred over to the school. In some fashion it might have contributed to that one million.

Freeport CAN: Heat pump program: It is a town program that is being administered by the town. That money will be spent for low income people in town. Can the Council authorize some of that for the Farmer’s Market because Freeport CAN was here and asked for 1,500 for the market. That is for the Farmer’s Market that FCAN is holding at the request of the town. The ARPA program is not, that’s a town activity. FCAN doesn’t host the money, our Finance Department has the money. Could we authorize $1,500 from the $40,000 but that would be us saying we said we would do this, but now we are doing that.

Councilor Pillsbury: He’s impressed with how fiscally responsible the town is, especially this council. We evaluate decisions based on what is best for the town with an eye towards the impacts on the tax payers. We need to step back and see that we are doing very well. The cost of goods and services does go up every year and that’s just an expectation of how we live. We are not just mindlessly spending taxpayer money. It’s an important thing to consider because the things coming before us are not one-ofs. They are for the betterment of the town as part of visioning and part of the mandates we put out there for the things that we want to do to grow and improve the town. WE are not inundated with requests. We’re inundated with or we’re receiving requests that are targeted and for purposes we have said are important. What we’re discussing are things that are valuable and will help preserve the town as we know it in the future. We are mindful of the impact to the taxpayers. That can sometimes get lost.

Chair Piltch: on the front page of the memo that Jessica gave us is a list of proposed ARPA funding. Some of these are coming out of the budget so it would have a negative impact on taxes. Others are just kind of reallocating monies. There are four items listed here including $40,000 for grant matches, $30,000 for engineering, $26,750 for Hunter Rd Fields dugouts and $18,000 for Maine Conservation Corp labor. We haven’t heard a lot of the council speak out against these. We’ll need a formal vote on this next time because it’s ARPA money. Is there consensus on that $114,750 worth of ARPA money to be put on our agenda next time.

Why are the dugouts not in the Capital Program? That would free up ARPA money because he thinks that is legitimate. We can spend capital or ARPA money on it. Why do you care if its from one bucket or the other? He was always told that if it had a 5-year life expectancy it should be put in the capital. The dugouts will have a 5, 10, 15-year life expectancy. That allows a little freedom for us to apply those funds to something else. It’s 6 of one half a dozen of the other. Councilor Egan: we’ve already heard from Jessica on the sequence of how it got through and that’s largely where it’s sitting right here. He takes responsibility because he is the liaison for the committee. We’ve approved the Capital Program already, but we haven’t approved the capital budget for this year. Can we put this in so going forward we have something going towards it so in ten years when we have to build it again.

Chair Piltch will modify his request that we have three of those four items which comes to $88,000 to be paid for out of ARPA. Councilor Egan would like to add $21,500 to the ARPA list if we are going to move the dugouts at the Hunter Rd Fields. Within the $21,500 would be the Meetinghouse Arts and the Farmer’s Market money. The request that came in on the request form was for $2,000 for the Farmer’s Market not $1,500. The Chair explained that they changed their mind and didn’t need that much.

Councilor Pillsbury: In regard to Farmer’s Market, he appreciates the layout of costs versus revenue and expense. It makes sense as an investment toward what we’re getting. He doesn’t understand the trajectory of Meetinghouse Arts and where they are in their iteration and how much support they are going to need as they grow over the next couple of years. It would help him be a supporter of the organization because he believes what they do is fantastic and such a value to the town but there’s part of him that doesn’t understand their funding stream and what their expenses are and what they’re projected to be. To him that’s a risk. He would like to see a multi-year plan as to what the town’s going to need to do to support to continue the efforts that they’re doing. They have offered that in the past. He doesn’t want to sit here in a years’ time and have the same discussion. He’d like clarity as to the path that we’re on. We have consensus on the Farmer’s Market. Councilor Fournier suggested supporting them with half the amount. He wants to support them but has a problem with the $20,000. The rationale for Councilor Egan’s suggestion was to take the burden off the operating budget and put it into ARPA which is one time. It’s an opportunity to fund one of the most vital activities we have on our Main Street with a source of funds that has more flexibility and does not add to the tax bill. If that failed, his second suggestion was to move it into the Destination TIF part of the Capital budget which also has substantial reserves and is actually even more aligned with what Meetinghouse Arts is doing. He is trying to support the momentum that is building for an opportunity to get behind an institution that is changing our Main Street. If we made them matching funds would that make everyone happy? We would match the money they raise up to $20,000 so we know there is substantial community buy in and we’re leveraging our dollars to get twice the amount we would have. Why are we nickel and diming Meetinghouse Arts? We don’t ask any other organization that makes one of these requests to show their value. Either they have it or they don’t. they made a strong case that they have it and $20,000 isn’t a lot of money. They like the idea of a budget projection. Right now, this isn’t going to effect the taxpayer and it’s needed for the operations of an organization that’s putting it’s heart and soul plus all it’s resources behind our downtown. Why put them through it? Councilor Fournier supports moving this out of the operating budget and putting it in the Comprehensive Plan in the Destination TIF. That’s what TIF money is for, to promote the town. The first suggestion was out of the ARPA budget, he likes the Destination TIF.

Ms. Maloy on the Destination TIF: The available fund balance for the TIF after what’s in there for FY24 appropriations, we are technically negative $138,000 in that fund balance. We are going to have more property taxes raised for FY24 to the tune of $250,000 but it will significantly cut your ability to fund FEDC and any sidewalk work or any other Destination TIF projects in the next five years. Usually you don’t appropriate more than property taxes being raised and we have done so and are projecting so for the next five years. We typically have not run negative in the fund balance. There is a period where in theory FY24 is going to bring in another $250,000 so that puts you to the positive $70,000. Then FY25 expenses are almost $200,000 so then your negative $130,000. There are only two things projected to be paid for out of the TIF, one is FEDC and the other is sidewalks. The Chair again suggested taking Meetinghouse Arts out of ARPA rather than the TIF. There was agreement amongst the Council.

Councilor Fournier would like to add the $25,000 for paving back in. Is $25,000 enough? We might not be able to do it all but the additional dollars that we put in then go to the General Fund (or put in a pot) then we typically move it to Reserves which have been flat or declining. This is a hard year. Is that extra little bit, that’s setting precedent going forward, we are going to have more paving costs. Is this a bad expectation to be sending? We are just trying to get back to where we were pre COVID. We’re down from $400,000 to $250,000. Councilor Daniele is suggesting that instead of putting back in just the $25,000 that we increase it to $50,000. If you were to change it from $25,000 to $50,000. The $25,000 adds .0115 cents onto the mil rate and $50,000 would add 0.23 cents. On a current proposed mil rate for the municipal side of 0.4088 if you added $50,000 you would be making that 0.4318. We need to get back to where we are.

Why is paving in the Operating Budget? This is just for maintenance of the roads. It’s an overlay. What’s in the Capital is reconstructions or rebuilds. Is there an issue in our budgeting process if we were to move all the paving into the Capital Reserves (Comprehensive Town Facilities)? At the end of the year when our audit is done, if there is unspent paving money you could ask to transfer that over. We are spending a little over three million dollars in our Capital Budget this year, that does not have an impact on the tax levy because we have reserved and planned for these activities so well. We’re haggling over $1,500 here and $25,000 there and yet we’ve got a program that runs largely by a robot because we’ve done so well managing the Reserve and how we spend it. We are counting on staff department heads to work within those budget allowances that Jessica outlines for them during the budget season and we go through those activities and we all benefit from that. The town is not borrowing money to do things like road paving and buying ambulances, we are using the Reserve account to do that. Many other towns have to bond for that activity and bonding means interest costs which goes right to your annual operating budget. We’re way ahead and if we’re struggling with how to balance out a very difficult budget increase maybe we should look at the $50,000 for the paving totally in the Capital Budget. Take it out of the operating budget all together. That’s a suggestion. Ms. Maloy looks at paving as a maintenance item which would not normally get put into the Capital Plan in that capacity. Her other concern is the ability to continue to fund the Capital Program when she hears more being put in and the fact that we’re putting in more whether it be the Downtown Visioning Projects or whether it be the addition of the paving, etc. What she’s not hearing is how we are going to increase our funding of those plans. The balances in there now may start to grow with the rates turning over as they are. The CDs are coming due and are turning over at a higher interest rate. It’s not going to be enough to sustain a 20-year plan, or even a 10 year Plan. Until she determines adequate funding mechanisms of the Capital Reserves, she would be hesitant to add new Capital items in there to be maintained. The Reserves that you have existing right now were built for existing assets and infrastructure that we have in place to maintain and replace them.

She proposed that if next year there is an excess of Fund Balance, we take that and create a Growth Capital Reserve so that there’s money set aside for these visioning projects that come forth or these other projects that benefit the town in some capacity but aren’t necessarily directly tied to a town asset or infrastructure. The way she views existing Capital dollars is to retain existing Capital assets or infrastructure whether that be through rebuilding, reconstruction or replacing them. With town vehicles, one comes out and one goes in, it’s a cycle of replacements. Councilor Egan remarked that he sees pavement as lasting at least five years so it fits that category of Capital Expenditure. He understands that historically paving as a maintenance item has been part of a Public Works Operating Budget. She’s not opposed in theory to it going in there, she would like to know that we have a means of funding it. We are moving 1.9 million dollars that we put into Reserves. That number was based on what was currently being requested in Capital Reserves including those visioning projects and the Mallet Drive work, you know the road work. Jessica was proposing removing $25,000. We’re proposing putting the $50,000 back in.

The Capital Budget is Councilor Fournier’s pet peeve. We’ve got a 1.4-million-dollar ladder truck coming down the road shortly. He wants to see $50,000 back in the Operating Budget. They asked Jessica’s recommendation. Now we want to close the gap from where we were when we’re fully funded and realistically how long should that take us? That will determine the amount that we do each year. She initially proposed the $25,000 thinking it would take four years to get to an adequate level that would need to be discussed of where it needed to be. She is not opposed to $50,000 or $25,000. She is in full agreement with Mr. Gibson that you will have long term impacts if that maintains the mentality. Last year paving had $100,000 that she added into it. Council last year pulled it out and funded it out of ARPA. If she had to give a number, an increase of $100,000 is ultimately where she wants Paving to be. How many years should we take to do that? She is saying we needed to immediately get $100,000 back in. Last year, we were at $250,000 and she put back in $100,000 to bring us to $350,000. That was too much of a hit to the budget, so they pulled it out of ARPA because we had that availability knowing that we would have to put it in. She initially had $100,000 to go back in but with what was a 30% increase before we brought it down to 17 for you, that was not feasible. If you are asking her what she would do, she would put $100,000 in today. What about $50,000 this year and $50,000 next year.

Scholarships: Councilor Fournier does not support $100,000 for the scholarship. What is the plan for them to raise the additional million. We don’t know if they are going to aggressively raise a million dollars in the next two years or if it’s a ten-year plan. That makes a big difference in the ask. The ask may have been that they have $100,000 from the town and they can leverage that to other donors? Where do we fit in the puzzle? He’d like to see a plan of how we fit in and what we can realistically do. Councilor Pillsbury can’t support $100,000 right now. The Chair would support a smaller amount more in line with what we give to other nonprofits. He supports the concept but doesn’t think we should put $100,000 of town money into it. Other towns support scholarships funds to a greater degree than we support this one. We’ve heard creative ideas tonight. Usually scholarships are one time, which is what makes this scholarship different. It’s a four-year scholarship. Maybe if they work out a memo of understanding with the various one-time groups, they could get a nice jump. He likes the idea that it be part of a fund-raising program that’s going to raise the million dollars instead of a one-of. We asked the question about the other communities, which we didn’t ask about tonight. Those communities should be part of the discussion. We have a chance to support them without saying what the number is or anything at this point without making a commitment to this year’s budget. We want to provide the support that would allow you to get to the million dollars with our help. Councilor Bradley would agree to put in a smaller number to show good faith. We can help them get to the million-dollar goal.

Councilor Daniele: This isn’t time sensitive. We could choose to use ARPA funds during the middle of the year, for instance, if we really wanted to. We could have this conversation and kind of bring them along the way to next year’s operating budget. What are we going to do long term moving forward? He doesn’t think this has to come in tonight. If we want to do a number tonight, he thinks $20,000 might be a little heavy. He would be a proponent of pushing it off and having a conversation with them. Let’s figure out what we want to do versus what the school wants to do versus what individual donors are going to do but be a part of the conversation. The Chair summarized that we say “yes” we want to help, but we’re not ready to put a number on it yet, but let’s keep talking. Especially since it’s an operating budget request.

The Grange Hall is asking for $13,000.

Port Teen Center is asking for $8,600.

We could choose to fund these things out of ARPA which means we don’t have to decide tonight. We haven’t heard from them as much. We have a one-page document explaining what they might have needed. A conversation would really go a long way as to what’s going on. If we fund it out of ARPA or the Operating Budget they going to be here next year asking for the same amount so we’re setting ourselves up for more expenditures. They see that we are supporting other things. It was for grounds and/or building was the primary amount of the request. They have pine trees that are a hazard that they have to take down. The request application states: $10,000 grant for one-time assistance for grounds including tree and brush removal and $3,000 for the top sponsor level support for programming. Their total budget is $13,750 last year. Does anyone want to add in Grange or Port Teen Center. Ms. Pelletier suggested next year having a workshop with the outside agencies before we get to the public hearing.

Transportation: We have the money in the budget and it can’t be used by the end of the fiscal year. They are currently looking for the consultant. They want to know they have the $10,000 to spend on it before they negotiate with that person. Councilor Bradley said he would present the transfer idea to the council knowing they hadn’t spent money that they had already been allocated. Do we have money in the budget in this year’s budget? No, it was mentioned that $10,000 could be given out of FY23, but there is no current appropriation or budget for transportation funds. It was more can we find it somewhere. We would rather see it come out of FY23 and be basically an over expenditure of something. Jessica had not delved into where it would actually come from because she didn’t have the request before her.

The Chair explained he had conversations with Russ from Principle Group and Greg Jordan from the Metro and we asked them both “what do you think, should we do this”? They both said they looked at it and they didn’t think there was a need as a public transit service. It was better served by doing point-to-point van RTP stuff if we want to do it. It’s often going to require lots of public subsidy. If you want to have a transportation service that is ongoing it tends to run in the hundreds of thousands of dollars of money that needs to be contributed to it beyond what you collect in fares. What he’s learned is that in order to be successful, it’s probably not going to be just a bus but rather an experience that is tied to “Come to Freeport and have this unique experience by traveling to unique places in a unique way. It sounds more like a private enterprise type of thing. It’s tough for the Chair to get behind this. If he’s not behind the end goal, he would have a tough time supporting a consultant to study something that he doesn’t think he would vote to fund in the end.

There is a group of local residents who disagree with the Chairs stance and think that without knowing exactly what it should be that the town would benefit from a municipal transportation system that connected the train to the hotels which connected to things along Main Street for older and disabled people. It would give Freeport a reputation for caring and concerning about moving people along and then beyond that the circle of assets that exist around town including the Desert of Maine, the Farm, Winslow Park, the marinas, etc. Everyone in that circle, including the beer companies, said that they would benefit. They would also participate in the development if the ultimate project seemed to benefit them. Nobody knows exactly what it should be. They are asking for $10,000 which they had last year without knowing exactly what bucket it was in. They had the commitment and if we didn’t then Mr. Bradley has misrepresented the town’s position to them for over a year. You could always say to them at the end of the $10,000 that you don’t like the idea and you’re not going to fund anymore. Please give them the request.

Councilor Daniele: He remembers the discussion from last year regarding the $10,000. It’s an interesting idea and he’s a proponent of trying to figure it out.

Does it have to be a specific line item or is this one of the things that comes up periodically throughout the year? Let’s say in September they want to hire a consultant to be funded out of either Reserves or operating budget or something else. The prior Manager’s intent was for it to come out of contingency. Ms. Maloy explained that the contingency is for the unexpected happenings that may come up. You are aware of this, it’s a potential expected expense. ARPA would be an appropriate use of this fund. It’s a one time thing and it will lead to a yes or a no. They agreed on taking the $10,000 from ARPA.

Councilor Fournier: Asked if the money to hire a Grant Writer is in the budget. Have we addressed that and is it appropriate? He is talking about any grant that may come up. He wants to make sure we have an adequate pool of money to hire people to write grants for us. Ms. Maloy stated there is no position in the budget solely for grant writing.

Level 2 Chargers: Right now, there is a $100,000 Capital item for level two chargers that we’re going to pay for and probably put in at Town Hall. We don’t think we’re going to spend $100,000 of town money. We think it’s going to be grant funded. Because we are going to spend it, we have to put it in and then get reimbursed for the grants later. We initially had three sites proposed but have since learned that two of those will be challenging but Town Hall is easier. When Mr. Bliss put out the RFP out, we only got one response from a firm in Texas that has since gone dark after we reached back out to them. He has cobbled together a way to get this done using some contractors and some town staff which will require some money that we might get grant money for. Total cost of the project was closer to $20,000 for one site at Town Hall. If that’s the case, we don’t need $100,000 in the Capital budget, we can reduce it to $20,000 to $30,000. It doesn’t affect the tax levy or operating budget.

Councilor Egan did some research on the Efficiency Maine grant and there is no prohibition or requirement in the grant documents, that these a likely to be funded with, that the municipality has to pay for the electricity which was a key component of his support. The only way he will support it is if there is a point of sale opportunity at the charger and the town is not providing free electricity. Do we know what that would add to the cost because we have not accommodated for that? Councilor Egan did a quick scan and had found four devices less that $2,500 each that allow for networked charging and you can add a point of sale component to that charging device.

Town Engineer: The grant requires cost proposals to accompany the grant. He sent out RFPs to all the qualified contractor within a 25-mile radius of 04032 listed on the Efficiency Maine website. We also posted it to social media, on the town website and emailed it out. That was for a level two charger (refurbish, own & operate) and we got zero responses. There is a very finite number of grants available to be distributed. There are 25 grants between Cumberland and York Counties. We don’t have those cost proposals to go with the grant application and it’s not for a lack of trying. His other strategy was to get a grant for the electrical work. We’ll figure out how to do the site work, either internally or what have you. Phone calls and emails to electrical contractors within a 25-mile radius, he got all non- responsive or no responses. The $20,000 to $30,000 number could come in a little lower. We’ll deal with that when we find out where the power is coming from which we hope is coming from the utility pole right off Main Street. The chargers themselves aren’t that expensive. What you are saying is that there could be additional charges for the point of sale. Would we need someone to oversee that for the town? We assume that whoever operates it will take their percentage. We can either assume that and take the revenue and overset the cost of the electricity with the revenue or we can hire a vendor to do that. When the Council has talked about this you have always think that we’re going to get grants. Mr. Bliss is now saying that isn’t likely. Is the Council still supportive? Councilor Lawrence thinks we’ve already got a lot going on and this isn’t the right time to do this. Councilor Fournier was sold on going for a grant with no cost to charging it. Now he thinks it needs to be postponed. Do we think other municipalities are having the same lack of response so maybe the grant money doesn’t get spent. Yes, he knows the schedules are unrealistic. The RFP was put out in March and are due June 30. They have to be installed by December 31st. That doesn’t work. He is thinking they may extend those deadlines. Councilor Egan’s support was that we were leveraging 90% Efficiency Maine grant money for the chargers. The grant is actually for up to $8,000 per charger, not 90% of $20,000 or $30,000. That was per site, with Town Hall would be one site. Phase one is the lawn in front, the ramps and the entryways. Phase two is the parking lot and is not scheduled for this summer. Should we take it out? If this might get extended, we might need the money come summer of next year to get the grant. Maybe we don’t pursue the project, but we let that money sit there because it’s going to sit in a Capital budget anyway. We leave it there in case the grant opportunity comes back. Councilor Fournier would support a lesser amount. What if we leave $25,000 in there. Agreed upon.

Mallet Drive: is there anyone who supports taking $50,000 for Mallet Drive study out of the budget? There was no support for that.

Grant Writer: He don’t have enough for a full-time person, but we have some support for a part-time grant writer. We removed $75,000 for the chargers. Is there any way to move that over to an account that we can hire people from. When Mr. Michaud was here today, and we said to them we’ll consider a grant writer and we have precedent for funding a grant writer if you need one piece by piece. Do we need to put money in now or can we wait for those proposals to come forward and then make the judgement? We have some flexibility without putting it in the Operating Budget and kicking up the tax rate? We only have $100,000 left in ARPA by Councilor Daniele’s calculations. We do have a $40,000 fund for downtown related projects we could use as well. We have $60,000 in the Sewer money that isn’t sewer designated, it’s qualified project designated. The Manager is a little concerned about just saying we have funding to do grants because there are so many grants available for everything and who is going to pick and choose what the priority is. We could use a grant writer to go and find grants that match our projects.

Groups could come to us and say we would like $10,000 to hire a consultant to help them write a grant and then they would bring that to the Council. Then the Council can say yes and designate the fund. We didn’t want everyone to run out and apply for grants and then get the grant and say there is a million-dollar match. We want them to come to us before they go out for the grant, so they know there is some support to match the grant. That is what Complete Streets is doing.

3 Additional Items:

1. Library is looking for an additional staff person for $16,000. The Library Director indicated a direct service impact of not having that position.

2. $60,000 requested for the cleaning service at the Library to assist the Buildings and Grounds to assist them with their true work focus.

3. Fire Rescue position for $95,000.

We had the list of ten and we picked tow or three to add in. We didn’t act on the others because there was not support for them. Those three are not being added those things. Ms. Maloy summarized that we have no inclusion of the medic position, the Library cleaning service, part-time staff for the Library, the Grange Hall support or the Port Teen Center. She has Meetinghouse Arts, the Farmer’s Market and Transportation Study coming out of ARPA. She has a no on the Scholarship amount that came forward tonight. The Scholarship is a “no” into this budget, but is pending future discussion. There is a reduction from $100,000 to $25,000 for EV Chargers, $26,750 for the dugouts into the Capital and paving for $50,000.

**BE IT ORDERED**: That Item # 112-23 be tabled until June 20, 2023. **VOTE:** (Egan & Bradley)(7 -Ayes)(0-Nays)

(Finance Director, Jessica Maloy)(45 minutes)

*Note: Action on the Budget is scheduled for June 20, 2023*

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ITEM # 113-23 To consider action relative to the acceptance of Asset Forfeiture Funds.

Every so often, the Police Department gets some money from Cumberland County. These are funds from criminal court cases that originated from Freeport. When there are undesignated seized funds, they give them back to the municipality. We have a fund that we have historically put these in and then the Police use it for training or purchasing equipment following the purchasing policy we have in place. Sometimes we get State funds and we incorporate those into the budget. These are specifically from the County so it’s separate.

If these are funds coming out of cases that originated in Freeport, it could be perceived as creating this odd dynamic where we are pursuing a case and if we win the case we’re going to get the money back and we can spend on Police stuff. It seems odd. We couldn’t see that we accepted these for the last 10 years, so the Manager is not going to lose sleep over it. We have a Police Forfeiture Fund where we’ve always placed the funds. If we want it put in a separate fund, we can do that as well. We can later on have discussions about what to do with it. That can happen subsequently, this is just accepting the funds.

**BE IT ORDERED:** That $12,742.00 in Asset Forfeiture Funds be accepted. **VOTE:** (Pillsbury & Lawrence)(7 -Ayes)(0-Nays)

(Town Manager, Caroline Pelletier)(10 minutes)

**OTHER BUSINESS:**

**END OF AGENDA (Estimated time of adjournment 8:20 PM)**

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|  | **OUTSTANDING OR UPCOMING**  **ACTION ITEMS** | **INITIATED ON** | **PROPOSED BY** | **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION** |
| **#1** | **Review of Town fee schedule this**  **year** | **1/4/2022** | **Councilor**  **Pillsbury** | **Tasked for April 2023** |
| **#2** | **Explore new fire rescue substation in District 2** |  | **Councilors Fournier &**  **Bradley** |  |