

MINUTES
FREEPORT TOWN COUNCIL MEETING #24-22
TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 30 MAIN STREET, FREEPORT
TUESDAY, DECEMBER 20, 2022
5:30 PM Executive Session
(Regular Council Meeting to start at 6 pm.)

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Chair Piltch called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm.

ITEM # 220-22 To consider action relative to an Executive Session pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. § 405(6)(E) pertaining to a legal matter.

MOTION: That the Town Council enter Executive Session. (Piltch & Daniele)

VOTE: (5-Ayes)(0-Nays)(2-Absent Lawrence & Fournier)

MOTION: That the Town Council exit Executive Session. (Egan & Piltch)

VOTE: (5-Ayes)(0-Nays)(2-Absent Lawrence & Fournier)

(15 minutes)

ZOOM:

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

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FROM: Peter E. Joseph, Town Manager

TO: Councilor Chair Daniel Piltch, 25 Quarry Lane
Council Vice Chair, John Egan, 38 Curtis Road
Councilor Matthew Pillsbury, 36 Todd Brook Rd
Councilor Chip Lawrence, 93 Hunter Road
Councilor Darrel Fournier, 3 Fournier Drive
Councilor Jake Daniele, 264 Pownal Road
Councilor Edward Bradley, 242 Flying Point Road

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The Hilton sends an email to the Clerk and it's added to the calendar and Building and Grounds is notified of the reservation. Events are booked on a first come/first serve basis. Could the Hilton reserve the park for Saturdays, the whole summer, just to reserve them? They would pay the \$200 fee and they have never done this. If an event is free and open to the public there has not been a fee assessed to other groups that reserved the park. If someone however gates off the park for a private event, the council may look at that differently. Most weddings are booked for Saturday afternoons for a 4 hour window. Councilor Egan wondered if we should have a cap on the number of events we allow the Hilton to reserve the park for. The average number of reserved events preCovid was 7-8 per summer and since Covid it has only been 1 or 2 per summer so we probably don't need a cap now. We'll keep an eye to next year.

BE IT ORDERED: That the 2023 Bow Street Park Usage Agreement for with the Hilton Garden Inn be approved. **VOTE:** (Egan & Daniele)(4-Ayes)(1-Nays Bradley)(2-Absent Lawrence & Fournier)

(Town Manager, Peter Joseph)(5 minutes)

ITEM # 224-22 To consider action relative to Town Council Committee Assignments to Ordinance Review, Municipal Facilities and Special Projects.

BE IT ORDERED: That the Committee Assignments as listed below be approved. **VOTE:** (Bradley & Daniele)(5-Ayes)(0-Nays)(2-Absent Lawrence & Fournier)

MUNICIPAL FACILITIES: Councilors Fournier, Egan and Pillsbury
APPOINTMENTS: Councilors Egan, Bradley and Lawrence
SPECIAL PROJECTS: Councilors Bradley, Lawrence and Daniele
ORDINANCE: Councilors Piltch, Bradley and Pillsbury

(Council Chair Piltch)(5 minutes)

OTHER BUSINESS:

1. Discussion of participation in project HOME with Freeport Community Services and Quality Housing Coalition (Town Manager, Peter Joseph)(30 minutes)

On Zoom: Victoria Morales, executive director of Quality Housing Coalition (QHC) and they do Project Home which is what we're discussing here. The QHC had submitted a grant application to Cumberland County under the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. They had invited Freeport and Westbrook to participate due to some of the rehousing and settlement issues that we're going through. Project Home is a project where their organization works directly with landlords to prequalify/identify housing areas (apartments and landlords) for people who generally fall into the category of people who are in our general assistance program including new Mainers and people coming off the ERA program that don't have housing. They work with landlords ahead of time to identify families and they're able to place them. They do the housing navigation and the housing coordination feature. That is one of the things that FCS doesn't have the capacity to do. This is one of the missing links in what we do for GA, what we do

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for housing and the landlord general market and how we make those connections. They negotiate the landlord needs and put people in those places. The council was previously provided with a memo detailing Project Home.

Victoria Morales: She talked about the member make up of QHC. In 2018, during the housing shortage crisis, these for profit and non-profit landlords came together to say what are we going to do to open up housing units, recognizing they have many barriers to getting into housing. That's how the project began. They started out with 20 units in just the Portland area and now they have 200 units they are overseeing, with 32 landlords in 5 counties. They work to bring landlords on board, to remove some of their barriers to apply for housing, to support them with financial guarantees and payments of damages if necessary if they agree to work with people with subsidies. They work with every subsidy here in Maine including Section 8. They provide to every tenant housing navigation and housing stabilization throughout the entire tenancy. Through this 99% of tenants are successful because they are there to navigate the system they are working in and make sure there is a strong tenant / landlord relationship.

Part of this conversation started with discussion of the grant preapplication that we did that goes along with the actual application that happens in January. We said yes to Westbrook that we want to glom onto your work so we can participate in that. We started having conversations about our immediate housing needs. We know there are families, whether that's 10 or 80, that are going to be homeless not by choice, possibly evicted from the emergency rental places where they're staying which is mostly hotels. There are also a few apartments and house rentals that also face the risk of eviction as the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) winds down. We discussed the timing between if this grant application is successful and we're able to establish these services semi permanently including Freeport, that would be great but we have an immediate need. People started talking about the short term and pitched an idea to the Manager and Sarah Lundin suggesting this is a group that could help us in the immediate short term. We have Amy Cartmell on the phone and Representative Sachs who have helped put them all together and recognizing that there is a group that could serve that intermediate need in Freeport. This is all great but there is a funding component attached to this. The Manager is fairly confident that \$20,000 for the housing navigator position that Victoria put forward which would be a roughly 20 hour per week for 6 months. That's the number put forward to us to have someone working directly on Freeport finding housing for that interim period until 6 months or if the grant application is successful which would be funding for one year. The other half is the kind of funding they use for gap funding including first and last month rent, security deposits. Some of it is gap but not all of it is gap funding. The difference between subsidy programs and the landlord incentives, whatever it would take to get somebody to agree to have that family stay there permanently. Also to address concerns that the landlords might not take a rental tenant in because they don't have the means to pay all kinds of costs. That amount they estimate is \$2,000-\$4,000 per family. He suggested \$20,000. It would be 5-10 families at \$2,000. You can do the math to double that. We probably have 10-40 families depending on how this shakes out that Victoria's organization could be helpful with. If the council wishes to participate, that is what you're looking at. There is really not a right number for the second half. What he and Sarah have suggested is to move forward with this with an immediate amount in a smaller amount to start the program. They feel like they could start finding housing for people quickly, like this or next week. Understanding that the number may increase if they're successful and committing to if there is a long-term success we may consider more long term funding.

Councilor Egan: Clarified that it was \$80,000 that was held back for FCS for future funding. He would be inclined to consider more giving how critical and acutely sharp the issue is. We are not taking a lot of risk because QHC has a proven track record for how successful this program is. It's a wheel that's already turning. The network they have built with landlords is a critical piece to this because that builds trust and confidence with those landlords talking to each other about the successes. We don't have enough money to buy that, it's already happening. We have an opportunity to amplify the request. If the request is \$20,000

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he is in favor of that for the staffing request. The remainder would be some chunk of money that would be earmarked by the town for people that QHC finds for housing, \$20,000 to \$40,000 to \$60,000. Councilor Egan wants to make sure we provide the program with a ramp to success.

Councilor Bradley: His understanding is that FCS has not identified anything for the \$80,000 that was set aside from ARPA money that we would revisit if they identified a need. Here's the need, let's do it with that number and we use our judgements about the gap. It would be \$20,000 for this then some other amount from the rest of the money to do the gap funding. The landlords are not just in Freeport. We have people who are in the hotels that want to maintain their connection with Freeport, some with kids in school. Is there any effort to place them in units in Freeport? Yes, they hope to be able to find Freeport landlords that want to work with the program. They are in 5 counties and they use their extensive network. They will be looking for Freeport people to meet the needs of Freeport renters.

Councilor Daniele: Can we fund the housing navigator for 3 months instead of 6 to see how it's going. He assumes the amounts we need will be greater in the beginning and then it'll trail off as people get placed. Councilor Pillsbury also inquired as to how many families the coordinator would be realistically able to set up with housing. What is your success rate? When would this coordinator be ready to go, two or three weeks?

Victoria Morales: They will be devoting probably four team members to this and have a plan to come to Freeport Friday if all works out in order to work fast. The funding for hotels will continue until the end of January. This gives the team who is working hard to house folks in these situations a little more time. The Legislature is taking up a bill tomorrow. They house between 3 and 8 households per month. Their team is multi lingual. The good news is that the folks at the hotel are also very connected to their partners at Hope Acts because they are all seeking their work permits. She works closely with Hope Acts on those initiatives because being able to work and have sustainable housing creates housing stability. We know the timing is tricky.

Representative Sachs: She highly recommends funding the navigator for six months. This is not only a short-term solution it is also potentially long term. We know this housing crisis is not going to be 6 months long. She hopes the council funds this positions so that if the CDBG application comes through, the funding won't be available until July, even if it's approved in March. So hopefully this position will go from January to July and then start July 1 and continue. That navigator position can help continue to build the network of landlords which so many community members are working on right now. You asked for short term solutions and long-term stabilization. This is what you asked for and you asked for a housing navigator. This is the missing link you asked for. She talked about ways to participate in the public hearings tomorrow around the original package that has small changes. Within that there is substantial housing relief money (22 million dollars) along with lots of heating assistance. The ERA money has been extended through January. There's no amount of money that will fix this problem, but let's put it to its best and most targeted use.

Amy Cartmell: Agrees that a six-month term for the housing navigator is essential. There is such an extreme shortage of rental housing right now, it will take that long or longer to find housing for as many folks as possible. All 183 housing units that Freeport Housing Trust has are full.

We were previously told that there are 80 families in temporary shelters of some sort in Freeport. How many of those families have been rehoused and how many will be affected by the end of the ERA in January? FCS has been able to house a few families at the Best Western. They were looking at about 80 families that were affected by the ERA ending, not all of them are in hotels. There are some in apartments.

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A few of the families have been housed. There are about 25 at Best Western and about the same looking at the other hotels combined in the community. She wanted to touch on this resource as well for the families at the Casco Bay Inn. Although we think of them as safe because they are receiving general assistance from the city of Portland, they worry when the rug will be pulled out from underneath us also. Portland has exceed any State regulations as to how long they need to support these families. These efforts can be directed towards that. Beyond the hotels and urgent need now, this is going to be a long-term incredible resource for the community.

Chair Piltch: He supports this but also has a concern that if Freeport and a few surrounding towns do this, will it create a magnet effect. Might people come to Freeport to solve housing issues because we have ponied up and had these programs in place? It would be better to have a regional approach to a regional problem.

Representative Sachs: These 80 families are here now that need assistance. It's a very specific, we are not building an emergency shelter here in Freeport. It can't happen. We are working with the Housing Committee you set up to think about long term because long term what will help is more housing. Thoughtfully have that develop and plan full in a way that you'd like is fantastic. This is a specific program for an interim. There is specialty housing for lots of different folks. This is one solution that we can hopefully do.

Victoria Morales: We do need more regional coordination. It shouldn't be on every town to figure out housing insecurity and homelessness out. Their first attempt to be more regional was to go after that multi-community CDBG opportunity. She names other communities and organizations that fund housing navigators.

Manager Joseph: Should we earmark some of this funding that we may set aside for people who are here right now that are ERA and facing homelessness because of the end of ERA. At the same time, what if all those families are housed and we've got money and a housing navigator left over, we would hate to turn someone away that was homeless for another reason. He thinks we either set a condition that the money we're talking about now is targeted and focused on the immediate crises (i.e. the families that will be homeless at the end of January). At the same time do you want to make that formal to the extent that it would exclude other people. This is money well spent. There are enough families in town that have a need currently. He doesn't want to be the only town trying to solve this program.

If ERA or some substitute happens and is extended for 6 months or a year, will there be a push to bring in more people to house over the winter. FCS has that concern. They don't want to be doing wave number 2 or 3. Shelter by hotel is the emergency option. We don't want it to become the defacto answer to homelessness. It's great to keep people from freezing over the winter but it's not the answer to homelessness. Will this put a dent in the public safety issue that we have with the population of some of the folks in hotels on Route One that have seen an increase in public safety services. The Manager thinks a lot of the issues we are having are caused by long term population that Victoria's group may not be able to find housing for. Their group focuses on all types of people. This isn't a refugee asylum seeker targeted program. The homeless by choice population, people with long term mental health problems or problems of the sort, aren't people who are able to get into a stable housing program. That's why they're in a shelter to begin with. This is not generally a group you can set up with long term success even in Victoria's organization.

Chair Piltch recapped that the ask is for \$20,000 for Quality Housing and then another \$20,000 - \$60,000 for FCS to fulfill the Gap funding at FCS's discretion working with QHC. We think \$20,000 is the immediate need but the long-term need will be more than that. We shouldn't think it will be just \$20,000. We need to see some results in what the individual cost per family unit are before we know what the long-

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term need is. If it's held by the town you can act quickly to change that as long as there's recognition by the council. Sarah Lundin would not object to this money coming out of the pot that of \$80,000 that was set aside for FCS.

MOTION: that we approve \$20,000 for the program as defined by Quality Housing Coalition and that we release half of the \$80,000 that we had held back for future needs at FCS (\$20,000 for QHC and \$40,000 for the Gap needs)VOTE: (Egan & Bradley)(5-Ayes)(2-Absent- Lawrence & Fournier)

EXECUTIVE SESSIONS

ITEM # 225-22 To consider action relative to an Executive Session pursuant to 1 M.R.S.A. § 405(6)(C) pertaining to a Real Estate matter and 1 M.R.S.A. § 405(6)(D) pertaining to discussion of labor contracts between the Town of Freeport and the Freeport Police Benevolent Association.

MOTION: That the Town Council enter Executive Session.

MOTION: That the Town Council exit Executive Session.

(60 minutes)

END OF AGENDA (Estimated time of adjournment 9:05 PM)