

MINUTES
FREEPORT TOWN COUNCIL MEETING #21-22
TOWN COUNCIL CHAMBERS, 30 MAIN STREET, FREEPORT
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2022
6:00 PM

Chair Piltch called the meeting to order at 6:00 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	Via Zoom	
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: That the Town Clerk report on the returns of the November 8, 2022 Election.

Deputy Clerk Carrie Weeman presented the following Election Report.

TOWN CANDIDATE BALLOT: Elected

Town Councilor-At Large: John Egan

Town Councilor-District 1: Daniel Piltch

RSU Board of Directors (2) 3 year terms: Maura Pillsbury and Kelly Sink

RSU Board of Directors 2 year term: Kara Kaikini

Sewer District Trustees: Thomas Hudak and Katherine Wallingford

Water District Trustee: Write in winner/accepted-Clyde Young 5 votes (Tied with Thomas Hudak with 5 votes-declined position)

TOTAL NUMBER OF REGISTERED VOTERS: opening- 7,693

OF REGISTRATION CARDS HANDLED BY THE REGISTRAR ON ELECTION DAY (NEW VOTERS & CHANGE OF ADDRESS, NAME, OR PARTY) – 198

TOTAL NUMBER OF BALLOTS CAST – 5,288 (based on State ballots casts)

PERCENTAGE OF VOTERS WHO CAST BALLOTS – .68%

OF ABSENTEE BALLOTS REQUESTED – 2,370

RETURNED AND ACCEPTED – 2,288

PERCENT OF VOTES CAST BY ABSENTEE - .43%

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We are happy to report that election day went very smoothly. We never could have expected the number of registrations handled (198 registrations) to be at the Presidential levels (2020=148 registrations) especially with Automatic Voter Registration at DMV.

We had very few issues at the polls. Our office would like to inform the general public that Candidates are allowed to be present at the polls on Election Day and may state their name and/or thank you for voting. Candidates are always made aware of the rules and regulations surrounding their attendance on Election Day. While it may seem like electioneering, we always ensure that candidates do not step outside the limitations of the law.

With the volume of absentee ballots, we did utilize our option to process these ballots early. We convened on three separate days the week prior to election day to process 2,075 ballots into the tabulators. The early process memory sticks were then sealed until Election night. On Election night, after the Election Day total tapes were run, we then loaded the early processing sticks and ran the total tapes. The Warden then added Election Day totals to Early Processing totals and we arrived at our total reported on the Return of Votes Cast that is submitted to the Secretary of State's Office.

Our election staff made up of volunteers is pivotal to the entire election process. These dedicated volunteers work diligently to provide an election with the upmost integrity. All the training we provide cannot cover all the situations that may occur on the floor Election Day. We staff our team with an Election Warden who oversees all aspects of the election. We were so pleased to have Councilor Lawrence working with us and learning the A-Zs of elections. While there are always fires that need to be managed during the day, at least we were not the Clerk in Thomaston who had an election clerk show up at the close of polls with two sleeping roosters on her car who proceeded to investigate the polling area until an ACO arrived to capture the birds.

MOTION: That the Town Clerk's report be accepted. **Moved and Seconded** (Lawrence & Bradley)**VOTE:** (7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

(Deputy Town Clerk, Carrie Weeman)(5 minutes)

SWEARING IN OF NEW COUNCILORS:

Daniel Piltch (District 1) and John Egan (At-Large) were sworn in as the newly elected Town Councilors.

ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS: All Present

Daniel Piltch, 25 Quarry Lane
John Egan, 38 Curtis Road
Lawrence, Henry 93 Hunter Road
Jake Daniele, 264 Pownal Road
Edward Bradley, 242 Flying Point Road
Fournier, Darrel, 3 Fournier Drive
Pillsbury, Matthew, 36 Todd Brook Road

Councilor Lawrence was thanked for participating in the process as an Election Official. Councilor Egan spoke about how he observed the closing process at the polls as seamless. The Manager also thanked the Clerk's office for a well run election. Ms. Weeman gave an update on the State's Ranked Choice runoff for Congressional District 2.

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

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ITEM # 201-22 To consider action relative to the electing of a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson for the Town Council.

MOTION: That the nominations for the position of Council Chairperson be opened. (Fournier & Lawrence) **VOTE:** (7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

John Egan nominated Daniel Piltch for Council Chair. Darryl Fournier nominated Henry Lawrence for Council Chair.

MOTION: That the nominations for the position of Council Chairperson be closed. (Fournier & Daniele) **VOTE:** (7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Councilor Fournier spoke in support of Councilor Lawrence for Chair. He would like a mixture of different ideas. He thinks there should be a reward for people who have put in a lot of time over the years.

Councilor Piltch: He feels that there are ongoing items that he would like to see through including the Downtown Vision. It took a while to get used to the roll and he wants to keep the momentum. If he gets the nomination, he would like to work on being more inclusive so it's less often that the Chair/Vice Chair and Manager are doing things alone. He'd also like to do a better job of setting goals for the year.

Councilor Lawrence: He has tried to stay neutral with the Downtown Revisioning. Our job as the Council is to be the neutral and deciding body instead of having a vested interest. He wants to be neutral and inclusive without an agenda.

Note: If more than one nominee, a showing of hands will determine the name for the following order.

BE IT ORDERED: That _____ be elected Chairperson of the Town Council.

Moved and Seconded: That Daniel Piltch be elected as Chairperson of the Town Council. (Daniele & Bradley) **VOTE:** (4-Ayes)(2-Nays Lawrence & Fournier)(1-Abstain Piltch)

MOTION: That the nominations for the position of Council Vice-Chairperson be opened. (Lawrence & Daniele) **VOTE:** (7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Councilor Piltch nominated John Egan for Vice Chair. Councilor Fournier nominated Henry Lawrence for Vice Chair.

MOTION: That the nominations for the position of Council Vice-Chairperson be closed. (Lawrence & Daniele) **VOTE:** (7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Councilor Bradley spoke that anyone would do a good job but is in favor of John Egan for Vice Chair to keep the continuity of the path we are on.

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Note: If more than one nominee, a showing of hands will determine the name for the following order.

BE IT ORDERED: That _____ be elected Vice-Chairperson of the Town Council.

Moved and Seconded: That John Egan be elected as Vice Chairperson of the Town Council. (Bradley & Daniele) **VOTE:** (7-Ayes)(0-Nays)

Councilor Bradley: Believes in the Councilors just elected to Chair and Vice Chair. He talked about having better communication between the Councilors. He doesn't want one person's voice to be more special over another's. The Chair will work at keeping other Councilors in the loop and he invites feedback. His opinion is one of seven and all meetings are open to the public. Anyone who wants to get involved can. Councilor Bradley stated we have a unique responsibility to represent our Districts and town. He wants to ensure that everyone has an equal input.

(Town Council) (15 minutes)

ITEM # 202-22 To consider action relative to amending the Town Council Schedule.

Our next scheduled meeting isn't until December 6, 2022. We should add an additional meeting. The goal is with the volume of items occurring that we have more frequent meetings of shorter length.

To get items on the agenda, the Chair and Manager sit down early in the prior week to set the agenda. To get a specific item on the agenda list, emailing the Manager, Chair, Vice Chair or Town Clerk will work. Any Councilor can add an item by majority vote of the Council. The Chair does have the authority to set the agenda, but a majority vote could add any item to the agenda.

BE IT ORDERED: That the Town Council Schedule be amended to add Tuesday, November 29, 2022 at 6 pm as a Town Council meeting. **VOTE:** (Daniele & Egan)(7-Ayes)

OTHER BUSINESS:

1. Turkey Bingo

The Fire Company holds a Turkey Bingo annually. They are a separate non-profit composed of former and current members of the Fire department. They were contacted by the State Gaming Commission that our letter of approval was expired. All beano games require the consent of the governing body of the Town and the consent for Turkey Bingo is over five years old. The Gaming Commission is requiring a new letter of approval. Councilor Fournier suggested having the letter allow this activity to carry on until further rescinded. They discussed how long the letter could be valid for. The letter is stale by the Gaming Commission after 5 years.

MOTION: that the governing body of the Town consents to turkey bingo being held by the Fire Company at the Fire Station on the Monday before Thanksgiving each year until further notice. **VOTE:** (Lawrence & Fournier)(7-Ayes)

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2. Sewer District:

There have been a series of meetings with stakeholders to develop options. FEDC passed a motion that they would like to see the council explore the sewer options and appoint a committee to do that. It will be on our next agenda with a list of proposed members. The Sewer District is proposing a 13% rate increase to fund operations and new amendments and modifications to the plant. Then a five year increase for the next 10 years. They are a lot of money that they are proposing to raise through connection fees which is what got us started in the beginning because of the impacts on the downtown. It has now expanded into the global benefits the town derives from sewer and whether there's either an opportunity for the town to participate in the costs. We are trying to bring these issues into focus so we can decide what to do. At the next meeting the Council will be asked to adopt the FEDC motion and to appoint the advisory committee.

We do sunset some of our committees. This committee may only be needed for 6 months.

3. Transportation issue:

With Downtown Revisioning we have been talking some about transportation. There is now a group working on transportation. One is along Main Street and then out to the satellite assets (Harbor, Wolfe's Neck, Desert of Maine, The Farm). As of today, we have an extended golf cart we can have in a pop-up way along with a commitment from the DMV to license it for our streets. We have a commitment that MMA will insure if we want to. We'll have a discussion later about whether we want it, how we do it and what it might cost. The idea is that it would satisfy small transportation needs for shoppers. Linda Bean has presented to the LLBean board whether they want to do it the way they do in Acadia moving from one area to another with their equipment. Discussions are being orchestrated. In Maine, there are things that make it difficult such as motor vehicle laws.

4. Housing:

Town Manager: This is in reference to the imminent end of the emergency rental assistance (ERA) program Statewide. That's important to use because there are approximately 80 family units in varying ways using the ERA program. The ERA has funded 30 families of new Mainers that are staying at the Best Western in Freeport, it's funding 30 families that are staying at apartments in Freeport that aren't new Mainers and it's funding about 20 families staying in two separate hotels also not in the new Mainer category. That program ran out of money. The State announced that November 30th that program will be over. Some families on that program have started receiving eviction notices. Some of those 80 will become homeless or are already qualified as homeless because they are living in hotels. We have talked with State officials and some things are being explored to house those families, but nothing concrete. FCS has been trying to pick up the pieces and make connections with volunteer money. Representative Sachs is working with us. It's a situation we have seen coming for a couple months. The State has some plans to address it but there is not anything comprehensive. Different non-profits are trying to step in to find solutions. It will come up in the Legislature that starts in a month, but it will be difficult to have a consensus. There's roughly 8,000 families around the State on the ERA program so we are 1%. We are disproportionately exposed due to our number of hotels/motels. The other acute thing is that once this assistance goes away, most of these people will turn to general assistance. At this point the emergency general assistance for housing is way under what is needed to support someone in a hotel or apartment. The town may raise the amount they provide to a family. However, we then get penalized for exceeding the limits. We contract GA to FCS and they will have families that they can offer something to but it will just be a portion of what they need for housing expenses. It will become acutely sharp in the next 30 days about what to do with new Mainers that are not allowed to get work permit status yet.

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Councilor Bradley reached out to Preble Street about whether we can address the loss of income for rental assistance as a town or whether we're going to try to meet it through some sort of prohibitive regulatory response that keeps these kinds of people from living in our town so we don't have this problem. There is a meeting tomorrow with them, Councilor Egan, the Town Manager and FCS to talk about what the other pieces are outside of rental assistance. What does the town have to do to support these 80 families. We can find a way to get through this winter and then the solutions are global. We can't support immigrant families unlimited any more than Portland. We can put pressure on a global solution and we could bring communities that don't have housing to the table including our neighbors Yarmouth and Falmouth that have money but no housing. That doesn't give them no responsibility.

ARPA monies: FCS has some money to address rent, but we did put some money aside that is discretionary. The town needs to take a leadership role in meeting the needs of its residents as this money goes away and we don't wait for a global solution. Councilor Bradley would like to have some hard dollar and cents numbers.

Councilor Fournier: For a number of years, they were provided for by the State and he thinks we have to make a strong stance on a leadership role in a couple areas. The first area is through our elected officials. We seen this coming and Portland has been dealing with it for many years. It's not going to be solved in the near future. We've got to use our voices through the LPC and MMA. We need a long-term fix. He hopes as a Council we will take that role to put the responsibility back at the State. We've heard the State is in good shape and has fund balances. This is a true emergency. All the communities need assistance. We need to be part of the squeaky wheel.

The dollar issues are up for debate. The bigger picture is that a lot of the shelter by hotels has been a backstop to fill a shelter need that's unmet. There are 20 placements that aren't linked to immigration status that are people who would be homeless otherwise that are on the ERA program. There are other families that are in hotels according to general assistance and according to voucher payments by outside agencies. The hotels preliminary lean is that they will not work with us on general assistance placements due to the experience they have had. There are not differentiating between whether someone is on ERA or not. They are telling FCS that they will not work with the Town of Freeport as an option. We do have a dollar problem and we have an actual housing stock problem because there aren't apartments, hotels or shelters to place people. This could become a homelessness emergency where there is not adequate shelter.

Do we know the numbers that are being paid and to whom? Could we come up with a figure that would maintain the basic cost of rental assistance that's currently in place that we are losing. These are the numbers we need to know so we can quantify it. We would not have access to the information about the 30 families in apartments because those are being paid by private contracts.

Some families have started getting eviction notices, but we do have a few weeks. Do we as a Council want to do an op-ed, pen something and put it in the paper. We can use our platform to yell as a council. Is GPCOG going to play a role in this? They have made several proposals for solution, none of which have gotten traction. They are trying to come up with facilities, with models. They haven't bit on it as an issue. We need to be a squeaky wheel. Stephen Gordon is our County Commissioner who we could reach out to. Councilor Daniele is looking for options, it seems like we are stuck. The legislature has the most tools to deal with it but is the most divided. They are not in session right now. They don't care about our 80 families in particular, it's a global problem that will take months to work through. We have the 80 families that could be on the street in a month.

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Other groups have been assisting to this point and because the State funding has run out they don't want to go in because the State penalizes us. It's Federal funding monies. There are two CAPS that distribute federal and state aid. It's a big pot of federal money approved by the State that was made available to the CAPS in the State. The money for this homelessness problem will be gone by the end of December. We've been talking about this for a year. We knew this was coming. Two weeks ago, the State announced the end of that program.

We need to put this in the paper and do a release and do it weekly. If we get public awareness it might bring solutions. The State has thrown this back in our laps. Maybe we can send a group to Augusta.

This is federal funding that has made these programs possible. Before people were being housed in motels, they had no shelter at all and that is a result of us not having housing stock in our state.

END OF AGENDA (Estimated time of adjournment 6:30 PM)