

**Town of Freedom
Selectmen's Meeting
Monday, February 12, 2024**

Present: Selectmen Chairman Les Babb, Ernest Day, Jr., Melissa Florio, and Stacy Bolduc, Town Administrator, who recorded the minutes. This meeting was held at the Town Office.

Chairman Babb called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

Also, presents were Rob Cunio, Scott Brooks, Anne Cunningham, Darwin Moulton, and Allen Fall.
27 people for the public.

Review of Mail, Sign Manifests, Approval of Minutes

The accounts payable and payroll manifests were reviewed as well as the red folder containing correspondence.

Ernie made a motion to accept the February 5, 2024 meeting minutes and 1/22, non-public, 1/29 non-public & 1/31 workshop minutes as written, Motion was seconded by Melissa; Motion passed unanimously.

Department Head Updates

Police- Jamie updated the board that Clayton made three DWI arrests this past week. He also stated the costs for the new cruiser is higher than anticipated.

Highway- Scott stated we are in a snow drought and the crew has been limbing trees.

Public Comment

Don Johnson updated the board on the school budget hearing he just came from. The school is proposing a budget of \$3,944,808. Freedom's portion of the SAU budget is \$343,332.00. The increase is in the collective bargaining agreement. Funding the reserves will come from fund balance. The school board worked hard to keep the budget flat, the only thing that had to increase was the collective bargaining.

Bond Hearing 7:00 PM

Les opened the bond hearing at 7:00. Melissa read the Bond Articles into the minutes as follows:

Article 7:

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One Million Six- Hundred Dollars (\$1,600,000) (gross budget) for the design, construction, and original equipping of renovations and improvements to the Town Offices at 33 Old Portland Road, with One Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,500,000) of such sum to be raised through the issuance of bonds or notes under and in compliance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act (RSA Chapter 33) and with the remaining One-Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) to be withdrawn from the Municipal Land and Building Capital Reserve Fund; to authorize the Select Board to issue, negotiate, sell and deliver such bonds or notes and determine the rate of interest thereon and the maturity and other terms thereof; to authorize the Select Board to apply for, obtain and accept any federal, state, other aid or private grants for this project and take any other action necessary to carry out this vote, including acquisition and/or conveyance of any necessary utility easements to support the project? 3/5 Ballot Vote required.

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Article 8:

(Selectmen Recommend 0-2-1)

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One Million Six Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$1,600,000) (gross budget) for the design, construction, and original equipping of a new Town Office at 50 Eaton Road, with One Million Five Hundred Dollars (\$1,500,000) of such sum to be raised through the issuance of bonds or notes under and in compliance with the provisions of the Municipal Finance Act (RSA Chapter 33) and with the remaining One-Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$100,000) to be withdrawn from the Municipal Land and Building Capital Reserve Fund; to authorize the Select Board to issue, negotiate, sell and deliver such bonds or notes and to determine the rate of interest thereon and the maturity and other terms thereof; to authorize the Select Board to apply for, obtain and accept any federal, state, other aid or private grants for this project and take any other action necessary to carry out this vote, including acquisition and/or conveyance of any necessary utility easements to support the project. 3/5 Ballot Vote required

Les explained that we do not have bids for the estimates for either project yet. That is why the bond amounts are \$1,600,000. Les asked Anne Cunningham if she would like to speak to the warrant articles. Anne said she would answer questions if there were any. She explained the two cost estimates. She said the estimate for the renovation is to gut the building but keep the staircase. The second option is to build the same square footage building out on 50 Eaton Rd, the Dan Murray property. The difference between the two is approximately 45,000- 50,000 dollars difference between the two.

Kate Chaput questioned what about the costs for moving employees if the bond is just for the renovation or building new. Les confirmed that money is not factored in. Les commented that we are trying to get more accurate numbers and commented on Wolfeboro when they built their new office building which was relocated for approximately three years. Anne responded that Wolfeboro put their relocation costs in a warrant article and used space at Huggins Hospital and she can see it costs them \$125,000 dollars that was put into a warrant article because they did not want to pay interest. Anne further explained they are looking at potential buildings in town and office trailers. She has an estimate for \$70,000 for a 24 x 60 office trailer. Depending on where the trailer is placed depends on additional pricing for hooking up to electric.

Darwin Moulton asked where the office trailers would be situated. Ernie responded possibly 50 Eaton Rd. but right now everything is still up in the air.

Brian Taylor questioned where we acquired the property, if we must look at the market value of the property and reimburse the previous owner for back taxes. Les responded no, the town owns the property free and clear, and the town will have owned the property for ten years this fall. Les added yes, going forward as of 2020 any newly acquired property Brians statement is true.

Brian Chaput stated the way he understands the warrant articles it is either or. He also stated both could fail if a 3/5 vote is not obtained by either. Les responded that is correct.

Robert Libby questioned Anne where the numbers are so close if that was intentional or did the numbers just fall that way accidentally? Anne said they just worked out that way. The committee used two different architectures for the projects. Bergeron Technical Services did the renovation and Turpin did the new construction. Robert also questions about cost overrun, \$1.6 million for a new building seems light. Where do we go if we need more money to complete the building. Les said we would get bids first, if it is more than 1.6 then the board would have to go back to the town people to ask for more money.

Darwin Moulton questioned if we go the route of the old town office, it is his understanding, we are land locked where we are now and because it is an historical building, you can't make any major changes to the building. Therefore, if we need to expand in the future, we are going to be forced to spend additional money elsewhere to build additional office space or a

new building. Anne responded you can add off the back of the building if it has a connector. She also thinks this is conversation for town meeting.

Allen Fall added he may have a different slant. When the Heritage commission was put together one of the first things it wanted to do was put the Town Office on the NH Historical Registry. Allen had a concern that if that happened, the town would be bound and not able to do renovations. He was assured by the State Preservation Alliance that the town could do anything they wanted including tear it down. National registry is different. Bill Carney questioned if the language needed to include utility easements. Melissa and Les both responded it is standard language.

Don Johnson confirmed that we are meeting at the school for the deliberative on March 16th.

Les started to call the bond hearing to a close when Stacy said she needed a vote from the Selectmen for their recommendation for DRA.

Les said let's get a vote from the people. Les asked how many people are in favor of moving the articles to the warrant. The public responded yes unanimously. Les asked Ernie if he was in favor of moving both articles to the warrant he responded yes, Melissa- yes and Les- yes.

Stacy said she needs a vote from each Selectboard member on each article if they recommend it or not just like they do on any other article that has a monetary value.

Les took a roll call vote on Article 7

Ernie- yes

Melissa- yes

Les- yes

Article 8

Stacy clarified this is not a vote to put the articles on the warrant but instead a vote for which one the selectboard recommends. Stacy explained you can abstain from voting, but it will count as a “do not recommend”. Again a roll call vote was taken:

Article 7:

Ernie – yes

Melissa- yes

Les- yes

Article 8

Melissa- No

Les- -abstain.

Ernie- No

Anne confirmed that they could vote on both articles. Don confirmed that they will debate both articles. When the question is moved on Article 7 they will then move to vote on Article 8. When question 8 is moved then people will be able to cast their votes. There will be two ballots and two ballot boxes. Stacy clarified that if people can vote for both. She was advised by bond council that the language should be clear that this is either or not both can pass. Don said it is conceivable that both could achieve 60 %. There were comments from the public that there should be one ballot not two.

Les clarified that the public has to vote on both articles to get an accurate voting. Don again stated the public will have the ability to vote yes or no on both ballots and then they will go into the ballot box and for one hour people will have the chance to vote on Articles 7 and 8. At the end of the one-hour the meeting will recess for the counting of the ballots. Don said what Stacy is saying is important and voters need to know what the intent is to vote on either one or the other. But he

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also said the voter could vote yes or no on both ballots. It's highly unlikely that both could pass but it's not inconceivable. Anne said the last time the town voted they voted on the first article and if it passed the other one was moot and if it failed you took vote on the next article and said that way is very different than voting on them together. Don responded you have to transact any bond articles before you do any other business on the warrant. If we did them one at a time you would have debate on article 7 and bring it to a close and then vote on 7 but you would not know the result of that for one hour later. So, then you cannot do any other business before both bonds are voted on. That is why he thought it would be best to vote on them at the same time because then you have a one-hour voting period vs. two hours voting on them individually.

Les confirmed, you must vote on both articles yes or no. If not, the vote will not be accurate. Don said there is nothing to stop someone from voting yes or no on both.

With no further comments from the public the Bond Hearing was closed at 8:01 PM.

Les opened the budget hearing at 8:01 PM.

Les explained that the town has been growing rapidly in the past few years and this is a reassessment year for Freedom. His goal as a selectman is to not outspend the town's growth. He took from 2020 to 2023 the tax rate fluctuates from 10.67,10.85 10.23 and 10.98 to stay steady with growth.

In the State of NH if someone builds a 1.5 million home and all the houses around it are assessed at 27% -37% or 50%-58% we cannot realize growth of the 1.5-million-dollar home because of the assessed value of the houses around it being lower.

The reassessment will realize the recent growth in the town, especially on the waterfront. After the revaluation this year the town's value should go to \$1,459,794,168 dollars.

Health insurance went up 15% and impacted every department. If you have insurance through your spouse then the town will pay the employee a stipend of \$300.00. Health insurance has increased the budget this year by \$111,045.00. Revenues last year are estimated at \$1.1 million. The amount to be raised to be taxes is 3,292,274.

The budget was reviewed line by line.

Elections- the budget is up because there are four elections this year.

Town office expenses-

The deputy town clerk is increasing her hours.

Health insurance is up.

Commuter support is up \$14,000 due to cyber vulnerabilities. We now have a new server and hired IT company to manage IT.

Assessing is an increase in the contract.

Legal is up because land use continues to be an issue (shorefront violations)

Personnel- FICA, SUTA and Medicare are up due to raises.

Planning Board- Flat

Zoning Board- Flat

Zoning officer- added a hand down car from the fire department. Permits collected in \$64,719.00, reported new construction \$6,621,980.

Government Buildings-

Cemeteries-

Insurance- went up

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Police- Insurance increased the budget.

Fire- Insurance is the increase.

Highway-

Summer - no questions

Winter - no questions

Hwy expenses- no questions

Street lights- changing to LED has helped lower costs.

Sanitation- The town is looking for a manager for the transfer station.

Revenues were reviewed.

Tipping fees are up from \$12,000 in 2022 to \$40,000 for 2023.

Melissa said the health insurance was shopped but the rates were higher than what we currently have.

Bill Carney questioned the library being a warrant article.

Warrant Articles were reviewed next. Points discussed:

Article 11 for 49,532 was monies not expended from 2023 for transfer station improvements.

Article 12 crushing gravel \$96,305 is FEMA money. The last time the town crashed, it cost \$40,000.

When we had washout events this past year, we had the stone available to fix the washouts.

Article 13 no discussion

Article 14 paving for Huckins Rd.

Article 15 no discussion

Article 16 no discussion

Article 17 no discussion

Article 18 no discussion

Article 19 Joyce applauded the police for doing a great job. Rob Libby asked what the turn around rate is for a vehicle. Les said six years and then it gets handed down.

Article 20 no discussion

Article 21 no discussion

Article 22 no discussion

Article 23 Rob Libby questioned if this money was for the assessor to go around and check properties, Les responded this money is for the reassessment.

Article 24 no discussion

Article 25 no discussion

Article 26 no discussion

Article 27 no discussion

Article 28 no discussion

Article 29 no discussion

Article 30 no discussion

Article 31 no discussion

Article 32 no discussion

Article 33 no discussion

Article 34 no discussion

Article 35 no discussion

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Article 36 no discussion

Article 37 no discussion petition warrant article.

Don Johnson commented that 10,000 seems to be a small amount to put into the highway capital reserve fund and questioned why. Les said when they were looking at where to save money on taxes the capital reserve funds is where saved some money.

Les asked if there were any questions. The budget hearing closed at 8:15 PM.

Public meeting resumed.

Stacy let the board know that Jim Stones LEOP grant was approved and she has reached out to Justin Kates to see to let him know we are approved.

Devine Millimet letter was discussed the board wants stronger language for walls of separation. Stacy will let Renelle know the board's decision.

The board went through the warrant articles.

Being no further input, Florio made a motion to adjourn. Day seconded. All in favor, the motion passed. Adjourned at 8:25 pm.

Consent Agenda:

Minutes – Selectmen’s Meeting – 1/29/2024	Approved
Payroll Manifest – week ending – 1/31/2024	Approved
Accounts Payable Manifest – week ending 2/02/2024	Approved

Correspondance :

Homeland Security for LEOP Grant	Reviewed
Abutter Notice for Planning Board	Reviewed
Diane Garrow email dated 2/7/24	Reviewed
Aqualogic Contract	Reviewed
Aqualogic Bill for \$1,650.00	Reviewed
Milfoil Grant Acceptance	Reviewed
Legislative Bulletin #2	Reviewed
Legislative Bulletin #3	Reviewed
Legislative Bulleting #4	Reviewed
NHMBB 15 year	Reviewed
NHMBBB 10 year	Reviewed

Respectfully submitted,
Stacy Bolduc, Town Administrator

Approved by the Board of Selectmen on _____:

Leslie R. Babb

Ernest F. Day, Jr.

Melissa M. Florio