

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING
APRIL 28, 2020
VIRTUAL MEETING VIA ZOOM/FACEBOOK LIVE

Open Town Council Meeting: Councilor Ketch opened the Town Council meeting. Councilors in attendance (virtually) were Councilor Ketch, Councilor Lugdon, Councilor Richard, Councilor Wade and Councilor Clemons. Town Manager Melissa Doane was also present. Also present were Code Enforcement Officer Dean Bennett and Fire Chief Eric Gifford.

Mark Gallagher, Development Manager of EDF Renewables, presented the Council with information on a proposed solar project to be located in Bradley. EDF Renewables has been in business for over seventy years and represents 31.5 million clients. Their focus is on wind and solar power. They manage, operate and maintain projects from start to finish, and remain in the community for the life of the project, which is approximately 30 years. Gallagher explained the benefits of solar, including economic, environmental, and community benefits. EDF is in the process of submitting the project plans to the Maine PUC. Gallagher also indicated that they have begun negotiations with landholders regarding potential property leases. The area of interest is accessible via the Baker Brook Road. CEO Bennett indicated that the project is a permitted use, subject to a site plan review. Planning Board approval is required and includes a public hearing on the project. He indicated that the town is prepared to go through the process. Chief Gifford also indicated that the fire department can offer protection to the area. Gallagher discussed that there are benefits to the town, including tax payments and local contracts for maintenance of the property.

Review of Minutes: Councilor Ketch made a motion to accept the minutes of the April 14, 2020 meeting, seconded by Councilor Wade. Vote 5/0

Citizen's Request: none

Manager's Report: Melissa provided the Council with an updated municipal Election Calendar. The State primary has been scheduled for July 14, 2020. As the State will be pushing for absentee ballot voting, Melissa would like to have the budget public hearing on May 12, then the final ballot public hearing on May 26. This will allow voters the opportunity to have public input before the absentee ballots are available. These meetings will be held virtually through Zoom and Facebook Live.

The Councilors were provided with a sample ballot for July 14th. It includes the general expense and revenue articles, an article authorizing unexpected grant fund expenditures and also asks

the voters to use up to \$70,000.00 of undesignated fund balance to reduce the tax commitment. This request for removal of funds is to assist with the loss of revenue sharing expected to be received from the state due to the COVID-19 pandemic. She remains hopeful that the economy will recover and this \$70,000.00 will be a net zero budget item as next year the revenue sharing is expected to be 3.5% of the State Revenues, as opposed to the 3% for this year. Councilor Wade added that this does not raise taxes on residents.

Discussion was held on possible warrant articles discussed in previous meetings. The Council has decided to table the request for the School Street/Main Street property until next year. Councilor Wade made a motion to place an item on the ballot to expend up to \$20,000.00 for a new electronic sign, due to the ability to keep the public informed, seconded by Councilor Lugdon. Vote 5/0

Melissa also reported that she has notified the Secretary of State that she will be processing absentee ballots early on July 13, 2020. This process has been available for several years, but Bradley has always processed them with the Warden on Election Day. Due to the expected heavy absentee ballot voting, she believes that it is best to do it the day before.

The spring clean up was scheduled for Saturday, May 2nd. Only 25 tickets have been sold to date, versus last year's sale of 166. Due to COVID-19, Electronics End has cancelled the electronic collections scheduled for the same day. Electronics End is available for drop off at their location on Robertson Boulevard in Brewer. They are open Monday-Friday 7:30 to 4:00 and can be reached by phone at 922-2094. They ask that residents call them prior to drop off as there may be a small fee for some items. Councilor Clemons made a motion to cancel the spring clean up and wait and schedule a fall clean up. The motion was seconded by Councilor Richards. Vote 5/0

A discussion was held on reopening the Municipal Office to residents. It was determined that the office will reopen on Tuesday, May 12th, with hours of 8:00 am to 4:00 pm Tuesday through Friday. Melissa will be working on new procedures which will include residents calling to schedule an appointment and allowing only one customer at a time in the building.

Melissa has investigated to see if the Town could apply for the Paycheck Protection Program to cover lost wages and found that municipalities are not eligible for the program. However, if an employee requests emergency paid sick leave due to COVID-19, they are eligible for 80 hours of paid sick time. The Town would then be eligible for reimbursement for those expenses through employment tax credits.

New Business: Councilors continued the discussion of the solar energy presentation. Councilor Clemons has heard that the company is very reputable in the industry. Chief Gifford suggested that it would be a good idea for EDF Renewables representatives meet with Great Works Stream Camp Association to discuss any concerns that might be there. Councilor Wade made a motion to forward the requested letter to EDF to express agreement in principal for the project and to support solar power in general, seconded by Councilor Richards. Vote 5/0

Unfinished Business: As requested by the Council, Melissa requested an update regarding the RSU #34 budget. Mr. Walker did not provide specific details, but noted that the directive from the Governor is that all staff and contracts were to be honored, therefore there is very little savings due to the current closure.

Discussions continued on the 2020-2021 budget. Chief Gifford has provided some information which will be further reviewed with more details to be presented at the budget hearing on May 12. The Maine Municipal Association hosted a COVID-19 budgeting webinar, attended by Melissa and Councilors Wade and Lugdon. The information verified that municipal revenue sharing will be less than what was projected in early March. They also anticipated that excise tax collection will be lower. Melissa feels that since the office will be opening back up soon, the excise tax collection shouldn't be a big issue for the town. She also indicated that automobile manufacturers will be offering special deals to make up for loss sales due to COVID-19, which may stimulate purchases. If the budget exceeds budget constraints, a majority vote of the Council is needed to pass.

Councilor Lugdon presented more information on health plan initiatives for town employees. Councilor Lugdon made a motion to create a line item in the 2020-2021 budget, and to carry forward for each budget thereafter, to provide \$3,850.00 as reimbursement for deductibles to the current health plan. The reimbursement would provide an annual reimbursement of \$750.00 for the Town Manager, and \$1,250.00 for each of the town's two office employees and provide \$600.00 as an administrative fee. Any funds not used will be retained as carry over for the following year. The motion was seconded by Councilor Wade. Vote 5/0 The Council expressed their appreciation to Councilor Lugdon and Town Manager Doane for all of their work on this issue. The line item does not affect the mil rate for the town.

Councilor Wade asked if there was any information regarding the fire truck grant, but no response has been received as of yet.

Municipal Warrants: Councilor Ketch made a motion to accept the following warrants, seconded by Councilor Wade: Vote 5/0

#73 in the amount of 6,271.00

#74 in the amount of \$8,339.04

The next Council Meeting is set for May 12, 2020, to be held virtually via Zoom and Facebook Live.

Citizen Request Follow Up: none

Motion to Adjourn was made by Councilor Ketch, seconded by Councilor Wade. Vote 5/0