

Chair Mary Jo Holmes called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm in the Gymnasium at Ellis School, 432 Main Street in Fremont. Present were Committee Members Mary Jo Holmes, Pat Martel, Select Board Rep Gene Cordes, Steve Bonaccorsi, Jon Benson, School Board Rep Gordon Muench, Josh Yokela, and Emily Phillips; Town Administrator Heidi Carlson; Police Sergeant Michael Buckley; Fire Lieutenant Ryan Dame, SAU 83 Superintendent Ellen Halliday, Business Manager Nathan Castle, Recording Secretary Shawn Perreault and various members of the Town and School's various boards and committees began entering around 6:40 pm.

At the entry table for attendees were copies of all the Town's documents to include the 2023 Town Meeting Warrant, summary expense and revenue spreadsheets for years 2021-2023, a tax impact information page for the budget and each Town Article, and State Forms MS 737 and MS 7D for 2023; and the School District's documents to include the Warrant, budget report and default budget report.

Motion was made by Benson to approve the meeting minutes of January 4, 2023 as presented, seconded by Bonaccorsi. Motion passed with a vote of 8 Yes – 0 No.

Town Administrator Heidi Carlson advised that today at noon the DRA sent out an email about the Veteran's Credit Articles with mandated wording, which has been updated in the Town's Warrant. Additionally, Fremont's Municipal Auditor completed the review this afternoon of the Town's Warrant Articles, changing only the language of the Fire Truck Article which has also been updated.

Carlson also noted that the Town received one Citizen Petition Warrant Article, added as #22 to the Town Warrant, to change the number of seats on the Select Board from the current three to five. Phillips made a motion to recommend this Warrant Article. Yokela seconded. Motion passed with a vote of 5 Yes – 3 No (Bonaccorsi, Benson, Cordes).

**Public Hearing:** Holmes called the Public Hearing to order at 7:00 pm and lead the Pledge of Alliance. In addition to those already listed above, also present were Town Historian Matthew Thomas, Road Agent Leon Holmes Jr, Fire Rescue Deputy Chiefs Joe Nichols and Kevin Zukas, Lieutenant Bryan Bielecki and Firefighter Seth Wood, School Board Member Jane Pellegrini, Select Board Member Roger Barham, Moderator Michael Rydeen, Land Use Assistant Leanne Miner, Planning Board Member Andy Kohlhofer, and Library Director Eric Abney.

Holmes stated the purpose of the Public Hearing and gave out Carlson's email and cell phone number for email or text messaging of questions which can be sent in during the live meeting. The Budget Committee Members introduced themselves.

Holmes started with the School District Warrant Articles. Members took turns reading each Article aloud as it will be presented on the Ballot in March (unless changed at Deliberative Session in February).

Andy Kohlhofer expressed concern regarding the proposed teacher contract (Article 2). He felt teachers were given everything they asked for and currently the school's test scores and standings, in his opinion, do not reflect/warrant these increases. We have very smart kids, but the results do not show this fact. He also wanted to know if the High School contract had been decided. Muench explained that the requests for proposals are pending from the top three schools, Raymond, Pinkerton and Sanborn. They are due in March.

With no further discussion on the School District Articles, the SAU personnel left the meeting. The meeting turned to review of the Town Warrant Articles.

Chair Holmes opened the Town portion of the meeting by reading the dates and information concerning the Deliberative Session. Again, each of the Warrant Articles was read out loud by rotating members of the Budget Committee, as it will be presented on the March ballot unless changed at Deliberative Session.

Leanne Miner explained each of the Planning Board's proposed Zoning Amendments contained in Articles 2 – 4. Article 2 seeks to add a definition for motor vehicle sales which will replace the current category of motor vehicle showroom. Article 3 seeks to remove animal feedlot, currently this is defined as five or more animals. Due to the make-up of our Town, this no longer makes sense. If someone has feed animals, they have more than five. Article 4 seeks to clarify open and elderly spaces based on new State and Federal regulations for work-force housing.

Holmes stated that if the operating budget passes it will raise the tax rate by approximately 20 cents over last year. She reminded everyone this does not include the Warrant Articles. The tax rate impact of each Warrant Article is noted with the narrative description.

Kohlhofer questioned the Select Board about a budget increase of \$10,000 over last year's budget (Executive function), noting the prior year was not spent. Cordes stated the budget reflects a 5% wage increase. In addition, Cordes feels this budget reflects good planning and if something isn't needed or they can find grants, or something comes in at a lower price the money is returned.

In follow-up to Kohlhofer's further questions about the Personnel Administration line, Carlson explained that the line is underspent because one part-time position has not yet been filled, and that in 2022 not all new hires took health insurance. She further explained the hiring process on the two new maintenance positions approved in 2022. For 2023 the budget is only for exactly what the current census is (and the plans they use). She also explained that NH Retirement costs have increased as they are based on wages, which are budgeted for a 5% increase.

Kohlhofer also questioned the increases to the Police Department's budget over the past three years. Carlson explained that the wages are based on a matrix. Sergeant Buckley then came to the mic to explain some of the other increases such as: the cost of ammo, training costs, vehicle fuel, and vehicle maintenance and materials.

Deputy Fire Chief Nichols then spoke on the proposed new Fire Tanker in Warrant Article 6. He discussed the Committee's research into the different options and why the Committee chose this truck. The Committee has worked long and hard on this over the past 2 years. They have seen as much as a 20% increase in the costs of these vehicles and have chosen a non-customized truck that will meet the Town's needs. There was some confusion from a member of the public about where some of the money for this was coming from. Carlson explained that full cost of the new fire truck is \$505,000. The Warrant Article is to raise and appropriate only \$405,000 because the other \$100,000 is coming from ARPA money that has already been accepted by the Town via a separate Public Hearing. Of the \$405,000 in the Warrant Article, \$305,000 would be withdrawn from the existing (previously saved) Fire Capital Reserve Fund and \$100,000 from the Town's 2022 Unassigned Fund Balance (raised by taxes in 2022).

Carlson spoke on the Bridge Capital Reserve Fund Warrant Article 7, stating that the Town is close to having the plans approved for our final red flagged Martin Road bridge. We have about \$200,000 in grant money, plus a current Trust Fund balance of \$228,366. The Town will be reimbursed 80% in NH Bridge Aid as well.

Kohlhofer questioned the timeline of the Martin Road Bridge repair in light of what he knew of for Federal guideline changes. Carlson restated the history of the work on this bridge, which began in 2014

and has been through the most current State and Federal Wetland regulation process. She stated that with the design already in the State's queue for approval, that it meeting current standards should be acceptable. It was noted that the bridge work will be done along with other planned work on Martin Road, as part of the HW budget.

There was no discussion or questions on Article 8 to add \$25,000 to the Highway Equipment Capital Reserve Fund.

Police Sergeant Mike Buckley stepped up to discuss Article 9, the request for an additional police officer. The Police Department is seeking an additional officer to give the Police Department a greater ability to have two officers on duty during some afternoon and night shifts. He noted an increase in requests for mutual aid from surrounding towns and that if Fremont only has one officer on duty, this leaves Fremont uncovered when covering a mutual aid request. In addition, if a Fremont officer needs assistance, help could be several minutes away. This would be reduced when a second officer is on duty. The Town currently has 6 full-time officers, 4 part-time officers and one officer that is currently on military leave.

Yokela questioned how many times the Police Department was going to seek an additional officer. The last time the request was made, it was also to cover shifts and vacation time. Sergeant Buckley explained that there is never an absolute when it comes to personnel. The situations are always fluid, and they do their best, but will always seek what is needed. It was suggested this could happen a couple more times.

Kohlhofer asked where the police logs were being posted suggesting that if residents could see all the calls the officers were going on, it would make the request for another officer easier to justify. Carlson explained the logs are no longer being posted. This was being done by someone that has left the Department and requires a lot of work due to the redactions that must be made before calls can be posted to the public. However, the public can always go into the station to request a copy.

Roger Barham stated that he has compared other towns that are similar to Fremont, and they have more full-time officers than we do. If passed this will allow the Police Department more flexibility.

Eric Abney, Library Director, spoke on Warrant 11, which seeks \$10,000 for the Library Maintenance Expendable Trust Fund. He stated the Library is now 20 years old. The bond has been paid off and the Library recently replaced the heating system. There are other items, such as the carpet, that will need to be replaced and the account needs to be rebuilt.

Matthew Thomas, as a Cemetery Trustee, spoke on Article 12 which seeks to increase the Cemetery Trustee's stipend by \$50 each. He expressed his hope that voters will support this increase. The Trustees attend at least 8 monthly meetings a year as well as researching projects and repairs that need to be done at the cemeteries. This takes a number of hours outside of the meeting. He feels the amount being requested is extremely reasonable.

Holmes wanted the public to understand the reason behind Warrant Article 13, which seeks the wage increase for the Town Clerk/Tax Collector. Due to the position being elected, any increase must be approved by the voters.

Road Agent Leon Holmes Jr spoke on Warrant Article 14, which seeks an increase to the Road Agent's stipend. He explained that these hours are in addition to the regular 40-hour work week. This is for paperwork that needs to be filled out and to be on call 24 hours a day 7 days a week 365 days per year. He stated that when he is not available for an emergency call, he pays someone out of his pocket to cover him. Using the 24/7/365 analysis, the current stipend breaks down to about \$0.68 per hour.

Thomas (as the Town Historian) spoke on Warrant Article 15 which seeks \$15,000 for the Historic Museum Capital Reserve Fund. They are seeking to raise more money towards a future addition (suggesting they are contemplating a 3 bay garage) to the current museum building. He is acquiring new items all the time, as well as vehicles that are not currently on site. The addition would allow new items to be added to the Museum as well as the ability to display the vehicles. He thanked voters for their support of money added to the fund in 2022.

There were no questions on Article 16 for the continuation of the Mosquito Control Program.

Carlson spoke on Warrant Article 17, which seeks \$5,000 to establish a Park and Recreation Expendable Trust. She explained this was brought forward by a resident, and fully supported by the Parks and Recreation Commission. This would allow for future field improvements, including the initial goal of being able to someday fund construction of a pavilion.

Carlson also spoke on Warrant Article 18 which seeks to expand the number of positions on the Parks and Recreation Commission from five to seven. She explained there has been a lot of new interest expressed by different members of the community. The current Commission is seeking to open the programs they offer to a wider range of ages. Although the children's programs are still running, they are also doing more age friendly programs too. Having a wider range of ages represented on the Committee can only add to the ideas and discussion. It was noted that Abney is working on a Transportation Program relative to the 2022 work on a grant for Age Friendly community activities.

Carlson explained that Warrant Article 19 & 20 need to be readopted by the Town, based on new legislation. Without the vote, Veterans that currently receive the \$750 credit will lose it and be dropped to the State minimum \$50 credit. Fremont has traditionally been supportive of its Veterans.

Carlson then presented a map of the parcels of land the Town is seeking to designate as Town Forest in Article 21.

There was a lot of discussion on the citizen's petition (WA 22) to expand the Select Board from 3 to 5 members. Carlson wanted the public to know that one tax impact of this Article is \$3,166 per position which is the current stipend for a Board member. A few members of the public asked if anyone would share their reasons for supporting this Warrant Article. Yokela stated that as a State Representative, he has had the opportunity to see how this has worked for other towns and believes they have had success by expanding. In addition, a number of people have expressed their interest in running but do not want to unseat a current member. Both Cordes and Barham, current Select Board members expressed their concerns with this passing. They both feel that the current number allows for the diversity people may be seeking. In addition, this board needs to be able to work together well and increasing the number creates a higher chance of things not working as well. More people would add to the discussion time and increase the length of meetings. Also, the only time you would not be running against someone would be the first year the positions are opened, after that someone will always be in the seat and could run as an incumbent.

Michael Rydeen stated if someone was really interested in running it shouldn't matter that the position is already filled.

Emily Phillips thought it was interesting that people were questioning this Petition Article more than any other, including the operating budget.

**Fremont Budget Committee  
Meeting and Public Hearing**

**11 January 2023  
Approved 08/23/2023**

With no further discussion on the Warrants and budgets, Holmes noted the final day to register to vote ahead of Candidate Declaration or Deliberative Sessions is Tuesday January 24, 2023. It can be done with the Town Clerk during office hours, and on that final day the Supervisors of the Checklist will meet from 7:00 to 7:30 pm at the Fremont Public Library.

Candidate Declaration runs from Wednesday January 25 to Friday February 3, 2023. See the Town Clerk to sign up for any positions, or the School District Clerk to sign up for School District positions. Both are available on the final day, February 3, 2023 from 3:00 to 5:00 pm at the Town Hall. The list of open School and Town positions are on the homepage of the Town's Website and posted publicly.

Deliberative Sessions will begin at 9:00 am (School meeting following by Town) at Ellis School on Saturday February 4, 2023.

Voting on all Town and School District Warrant Articles will take place on Tuesday March 14, 2023 at Ellis School with polls open from 7:00 am to 8:00 pm.

Motion was made to close the Public Hearing at 8:35 pm. Motion was made by Yokela to adjourn, seconded by Cordes. The meeting adjourned at 8:36 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shawn Perreault  
Recording Secretary