

Town Council Meeting
June 24, 2021

The June 24, 2021, Town Council Meeting was called to order by Denise L. DiFranco, President, via Zoom™ in Foster, RI at 7:00 p.m.

The following members were present:

Denise L. DiFranco, President
Heidi Rogers, Vice President
Chris Stone
David Paolino
Cheryl Hawes

Also present:

Julia Chretien, Solicitor
Kelli Russ, Finance Director

- I. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE** The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.
- II. PUBLIC COMMENT** Ron Cervasio spoke.
Denise L. DiFranco announced that Kelli Russ would be on vacation for a week and asked that her vacation time be respected.
Ron Cervasio asked about in-person meetings. Denise L. DiFranco said that the Governor's Emergency Order expires tomorrow and that beginning Monday, in-person meetings can be held, but citizens can still join on Zoom if they want to.
- III. CONSENT AGENDA** Approval of General Warrants
1. General Warrants #18 - \$57,932.11

Chris Stone moved, Heidi Rogers seconded, to approve the Consent Agenda.
Motion passed 5 - 0.
Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.
- IV. NEW BUSINESS**
1. RIDOT takeover of streetlights
Denise L. DiFranco said there were questions as to whether or not we were part of PRISM.
Gordon Rogers explained that it had been voted on by a previous council to go to LED lights. The State was willing to take over that payment if that happened. Then it stalled. The first step is to see if we purchased the lights from National Grid. Then there is an insurance policy needed. Right now they are trying to get an amount so we were just trying to get the paperwork. We are trying to find out if National Grid will accept the amount from 2016.
Kelli Russ said she worked on it with Bob Lohr. They sent in the check and National Grid did nothing with it; they insisted the town go from a \$3 million to a \$5 million insurance policy, and they would not honor the sale unless we did that. They said they did not receive it. Then they found it, but they couldn't find the proof of insurance, and then they did find it. They didn't want this process to go through, but we are starting it again. Ms. Russ said she recreated the letter and it just needs Ms. DiFranco to sign it.
Julia Chretien said there was a July 10th deadline to send RIDOT a letter.
Cheryl Hawes moved, Chris Stone seconded, to have RIDOT take over the nineteen lights with the provision that everything falls into place.
Motion passed 5 - 0.
Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.
2. NRI 4H Request to use Fairgrounds 7/24 & 25
Denise L. DiFranco said they received a request from the 4-H to use the Foster Fairgrounds for a 4-H Fair. Ms. DiFranco said that she had spoken with Lori Cardillo who informed her that she had spoken to Gordon Brayton about turning on the water and electricity. The animal pens are owned by the 4-H. Chris Stone said that there would also be a horse show. Denise L. DiFranco explained

that for them to qualify for the Big E, they have to have the 4-H Fair.

Chris Stone moved, David Paolino seconded, to have the 4-H Fair on July 24 & 25 at the Foster Fairgrounds.

Discussion: Gordon Rogers asked if there was anything the DPW needed to do for it. He suggested they meet with him.

Denise L. DiFranco said it would be a closed show. Susan Dillon said she need a copy of an insurance policy. Kelli Russ said the Foster has to be listed as an insured party. Motion passed 5 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

3. Employee Pay
Increases

Denise L. DiFranco said that next was the implementation of employee pay increases. In the past, they have said that new employees need to wait to get their pay raise. We have several people coming on new this year, so do we want to wait or do we want to implement them at this time? Cheryl Hawes said didn't they have a six month probation period? So wouldn't you wait until that goes by? Denise L. DiFranco said yes, they have in the past. There are also several people retiring that we are going to have to advertise for and we should offer a carrot.

Cheryl Hawes asked if she meant that the new hires would be under the amount approved in the new budget. Kelli Russ asked so why would you give it to a new employee but not the ones who have been here? Cheryl Hawes said she does not see it as a raise, a new hire comes in with the new rate.

David Paolino said he had heard conversations saying if you come in at a price, then you are not going to get a raise in two months, but Kelli has a point because the people who have been here did not get raises last year. Kelli reviewed the possibilities. Denise L. DiFranco said that if anyone was hired in the past two months, they were hired at the pay at the time. Cheryl Hawes said but after four more months then they could get the new amount. David Paolino asked for clarification.

Patti Moreau said that she was hired after July 1 and was with the new rate and she did not have to wait. Denise L. DiFranco said she had been looking at the other towns and cities, she thought she needed to include the higher rate. Kelli Russ said that in the Charter it says you cannot *exceed* the amount, but you can pay less. David Paolino asked if they were leaning at all to the probation period. Denise L. DiFranco said they still should require a probation period.

Kelli Russ said she was looking for clarification for the people currently employed, when normally you wouldn't have increased the wages on that position, but you did so at my encouragement, but you don't have to pay them what you bumped that up to, but you don't want to limit yourself in case somebody leaves in that position because it's not growing, it's already a year behind; so she just wanted to confirm that you want them to receive the higher amount or that you want them to have them wait. Chris Stone moved, David Paolino seconded, to give the new employees their pay raise when they do their six-month probation.

David Paolino asked if that would still be a matter of review after six months. Denise L. DiFranco said we don't have a performance scale. David Paolino said so you just bump everybody up. Cheryl Hawes said the reason is to see if they are doing a good job. Denise L. DiFranco asked how they would do that?

Cheryl Hawes said then why even bother with the probation if you're not going to do it? You would see if they are doing a good job, following directives, and getting along.

Denise L. DiFranco said that was not on the agenda.

Kelli Russ suggested that if somebody is new, then schedule a time to review.

Ron Cervasio said you went to the taxpayers and asked for an increase for employees, not new, not old. That's the statement of what you're going to pay. Probation is if they are going to continue to work for the town. If not, they're gone.

Heidi Rogers recused herself.

Cheryl Hawes said she said she couldn't remember anyone getting a raise before they had finished probation.

Motion passed 4 – 0 – 1 with one recusal.

Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye, Heidi Rogers recused.

4. Additions &
Abatements

Chris Stone asked why the Additions and Abatements were not included in the Consent Agenda. Susan Dillon said that at first they were not going to have a Consent Agenda but then it was added in. Kelli Russ said she added in warrants at the last minute.

Heidi Rogers moved, Chris Stone seconded, to approve the total abatement of \$3,009.44.

Discussion: Cheryl Hawes asked if we do this for people.

Denise L. DiFranco said she called Nancy Delaere who said yes, but it is very rare. Kelli Russ said it was a very severe case and that this has only happened three times.

Gordon Rogers asked what was listed in the abatement—that is public information—that they were voting on.

Denise L. DiFranco said she could say what it is for but not the name; it says "poverty exemption." Mr. Rogers said, "And you can't say the name?" He thought that they should because if he has an abatement, it would.

Heidi Rogers said she thought it would be public information after. Mr. Rogers said that it is our tax dollars we are giving up but he would defer to the solicitor.

Patti Moreau, Tax Assessor, said this is a very extreme situation, and that before she started there was someone on it for five years. When he came off it, he made a donation to the food bank that he was able to give back.

Julia Chretien said that what is not included in public information are things that are confidential or otherwise considered a genuine invasion of privacy. The reason she thought it fell under that is the poverty issue. She said not to divulge it now and she would look into it. Kelli Russ said most abatements are due to error; this is divulging someone's personal information. Gordon Rogers said that when a town abates somebody else's taxes, it is at the sake of other people having to cover those taxes.

Motion passed 5 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

5. Assignment of Rec
funds

Kelli Russ said that the amount of money that the Recreation Dept. has left, rather than have it revert to fund balance, or be spent in the next few days, we have bigger projects going on with this rec field, and we are not going to have enough money to fully fund it, so if the council assigns it, and it's the lowest level of accounting standards, it would reserve those funds for recreation purposes. She thought it would be a good use for it. Cheryl Hawes asked how much it was. Kelli Russ said it was \$9-10 thousand.

Cheryl Hawes moved, David Paolino seconded, to have the unspent recreation funds be assigned to recreation and not be assigned to the general fund.

Discussion: Denise L. DiFranco said she had a question from Tammy Steinkamp asking if there is a way the Recreation can keep track of the money. Kelli Russ said she would put it in a Recreation fund.

Motion passed 5 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

6. Contract w/ Value Finder

Patti Moreau explained that last year they hired Value Finder to locate properties that have had work done that we did not know about. They did find some properties so we were able to collect quite a bit of money, and we just had to pay them for what last year's tax was on those properties. Ms. Moreau said that she would like to hire them again. They have more resources this year. We only pay for what they find.

Denise L. DiFranco asked if it was free if they don't find anything. Ms. Moreau said yes, and we only pay for what they find in the present year.

Cheryl Hawes moved, David Paolino seconded, to go with Value Finder again this year.

Motion passed 5 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

7. MFE License David Jones

Denise L. DiFranco said there was a Mobile Food Establishment license for David Jones D/B/A for The Patio on 6.

Cheryl Hawes moved, Heidi Rogers seconded, to approve The Patio on 6 for Saturday and Sunday.

Cheryl Hawes said the equipment looks better this year. Ms. Hawes asked police officer Tyler if there were any problems last year. He said there were no issues.

Denise L. DiFranco said they would be there from 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. and wondered if that was kind of late. Officer Tyler said they might not get much business. Cheryl Hawes asked how late they were open last year. Mrs. Jones said it was 5 p.m. but they may try it later; if it doesn't work, they may not. Officer Tyler suggested they might want to close after the sun goes down. Denise L. DiFranco said that was her concern, pulling out on Route Six at night.

Susan Dillon said this is for seven days a week. Denise L. DiFranco thanked her because she thought it was just Saturday and Sunday, not Saturday through Sunday. Mrs. Jones said it was not completely set. Denise L. DiFranco asked if it was for the whole year or just for the summer. Mrs. Jones said it was for the summer. Cheryl Hawes said they could say it would be open until dark as a condition. Denise L. DiFranco asked if they had lighting. Mrs. Jones said they did. David Paolino said it is still light at 8 p.m. Mrs. Jones said okay, until it gets dark.

Motion passed 5 - 0.

Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

Denise L. DiFranco said for Future Agenda Items she had criteria for probation, listed various positions. Chris Stone suggested the second half of the field. Kelli Russ said they did not have the Crossman plans yet. David Paolino suggested George Dumont. Cheryl Hawes said she wanted to know the status of a few places. Denise L. DiFranco said she could not attend July 8 because the emergency extension has ended so she could not attend through Zoom.

**V. EXECUTIVE SESSION
PURSUANT TO RIGL 42-
46-5, (A), (9)
a. International
Brotherhood of Police
Officers, Local 637,
Negotiations**

Heidi Rogers moved to go into Executive Closed Session pursuant to R.I.G. L 42-46-5 for discussion or work sessions regarding collective bargaining, contract negotiations, or litigation according to R.I.G.L 42-46-5 (A)(2), and to reconvene into open session and to further keep the minutes of said meeting closed and the minutes of all executive sessions held previous to this meeting remain closed in accordance with provisions in RIGL 42-46-4 & 5. No discussion.
Motion passed 5-0.

**RETURN TO OPEN
SESSION**

The council reconvened in to Open Session at 7-06 p.m. Denise L. DiFranco announced that there was one vote taken to approve the portion of the contract relating to the Captain as described by Kelli Russ. Motion passed 5 - 0.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

Cheryl Hawes moved, Heidi Rogers seconded, to adjourn. Motion passed 5 - 0.
Heidi Rogers, aye; Chris Stone, aye; David Paolino, aye; Cheryl Hawes, aye; Denise L. DiFranco, aye.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Submitted by,

Susan M. Dillon, Town Clerk