

Councilor Anderson reported that the Veterans Memorial Committee has finalized a design, location and a cost estimate for the memorial. They will come to the Council on February 10 to present their work. FEIC reviewed a survey on the “Shop Falmouth” event; participating businesses reported that it was worthwhile and better than last year. The committee thinks the best way to continue this event is to form an association of area businesses to take it over, rather than have the town continue to organize it, and they will work on forming that association over the next few months. CDC met this morning; they expect bid specs for Route 1 to go out next week with bids coming back in March. They need a formal communications plan to help them communicate about Route 1 with citizens and businesses; that will require a consultant. They also discussed the re-prioritization of the comprehensive plan and will continue those discussions at their next meeting on February 3.

Councilor Farber said the Finance Committee will meet on February 10 at 4:30pm; they will be discussing Clapboard Island and the budget spreadsheets.

Item 4 Report from the Appointments Committee and order relative to filling various vacancies on Boards and Committees.

There was no report from the committee.

Item 5 Presentation and discussion from Casco Bay Hockey Association regarding a proposal to renovate and upgrade the Village Park Hockey Rink.

Chair Pierce disclosed that her husband coaches and her sons play hockey for the Association.

John Veilleux, president of the Casco Bay Hockey Association (CBHA), explained that they are the largest youth hockey organization in the state, with 800-850 skaters every season, and they have been operating for 41 years. 15% of their skaters are Falmouth residents. They are the largest tenant at the three major rinks in the area. Their goal is to grow, but they are limited by the lack of good, quality ice time. With more ice time they think they could grow by 150-200 skaters. There is an outdoor skating rink in Falmouth, at Village Park, which is mostly unused. They are proposing to construct a seasonal, pavilion-style ice rink on that location with heated locker room space. During the off-season the space could be used to host the farmer’s market, indoor soccer, etc. They plan to secure initial commitments to purchase specific blocks of ice time – they can purchase \$100,000 worth of ice, in addition to the time they purchase from local rinks. They want to secure a long-term land lease from the Town for the location. They would own the rink on the Town’s land, and would take on the debt service for its construction. They are talking with Family Ice to take on the management of the outdoor rink. Their goal would be to complete construction of the rink by the beginning of the upcoming season. The paved apron that is there is larger than the rink would be. They would not use the current boards, as they are slightly smaller than they need. He showed photos of the ice rink, which is currently unusable due to the conditions. He showed photos of the type of covered seasonal rink that they envision. It would be open on the sides, with vents in the roof to help with condensation.

Tom Marjerison, a consultant for CBHA, said Falmouth is the best spot for this rink. He presented estimates of how much the rink would cost to construct. A pavilion-style ice rink is the traditional prep school ice rink, and it works. This style also has great off-season use as well, for other sports and the Farmers' Market. This would provide an opportunity for local high schools to have more ice time for their hockey programs as well as CBHA. He presented a sample weekday and weekend schedule; there is no doubt that the ice would be rented. This would be a wonderful opportunity both for the Association and the area towns.

Mr. Veilleux said they have talked about this project for years. They feel it makes a lot of sense, and there is no risk to the Town. They are taking on the risk and are willing to bet on their program that they can make this work.

Councilor Goldberg asked about any revenue stream during the off-season. Mr. Marjerison said they haven't firmed up that; they think there is an opportunity for some revenue but they aren't dependent on it.

Councilor Goldberg said the Freeport YMCA has an outdoor pavilion area but it isn't ice.

Mr. Veilleux said they have talked with the YMCA about that facility; it is exactly the same type of structure they want to build but doesn't have refrigeration. The Y doesn't want to run a hockey rink; they don't have the parking and have other plans for that area.

Councilor Goldberg asked if this would be a full, regulation-size hockey rink; Mr. Veilleux said yes, 85'x200'. It is currently slightly undersized as it is put together, but the paved apron is the size they would need. They could also use the pavilion for hockey-related, off-season uses, stick handling clinics for example.

Councilor Orestis asked if off-season use would go through the same management process as on-season; it wouldn't be exclusive to Falmouth. Mr. Veilleux said yes, but they can negotiate off-season use.

Councilor Orestis asked if there would be a fee. Mr. Marjerison said yes, but they are a non-profit so the fee would be low. They aren't looking to make a profit; their goal would be to break even.

Mr. Veilleux said they would still have costs in the off-season, for debt service and maintenance.

Councilor Orestis asked if they would have to pay for the farmer's market to be there; Mr. Marjerison said no, that would be free. If Community Programs wanted to run programs there, they could negotiate a fee for that to offset the costs.

Mr. Veilleux said they don't have anything built into their financial plan for off-season use, but they don't have anything built in for off-season costs either.

Councilor Orestis asked how they secure the facility when it is not being used. Mr. Marjerison said there would be a fence of some type around the rink, something similar to what is around a tennis court. Mr. Veilleux said the current rink has a surrounding, 10 foot high chain-link fence.

Chair Pierce thought there would be a person on site when it is open. Mr. Marjerison said that was correct.

Councilor Orestis asked about open hours, lighting, noise, and the impact on neighbors. 5:30 am is early in the morning. Mr. Veilleux said 5:30 am is a typical starting time for a rink but they don't have to open that early.

Mr. Marjerison said they wouldn't have horns or anything. It would be during winter when people would have windows closed.

Mr. Veilleux thought the roof would keep noise within it more than a typical outdoor rink, and the lighting would be ambient at best with the fabric around the sides. They were willing to work with the planning board on parking lot lighting.

Councilor Orestis pointed out that they would have noise from the parking lot.

Mr. Veilleux felt they would have less traffic than when the movie theater was letting out at night in that area. He thought most of Councilor Orestis' concerns would be addressed in the Planning Board process.

Councilor King asked about the other structures that would be needed, bathrooms, locker rooms, Zamboni garage and where those would be located.

Willie Audet of Merrill Road has concerns about consolidation. He was concerned that the regional office has not been open very long. He felt it was an experiment at best. He spoke highly of the Town's Assessing office. He was concerned that records would eventually be moved to the County office. The Town hasn't even advertised this job yet; he thought it was a coveted position. He said this is a huge risk and not a good deal for the taxpayers. He didn't think they would get the same level of service from the County.

Jon Berry of Falmouth Road urged caution. He didn't support transferring the assessing office to the county. He has been employed by counties across the state, largely to assess opportunities to regionalize. Over the 15 years that he has been involved he has seen that it hasn't taken root, for many reasons. It is not an efficient form of government. The State has taken regionalized responsibilities away from the counties, including prisons and budgeting authority. He pointed out that the County doesn't even have authority over its own budget, and yet the Town is proposing to turn over its assessing services to them. He felt the Town could provide the service, in the same way they provide dispatch services for other towns, for less money and could even turn a profit. He felt, if there was an opportunity for savings to be made in Town Hall, it could be done. This proposal would require an investment in the County. Moving costs from the Town to the County doesn't mean that there would be cost savings, and it would remove local control.

Stan Given of Hillside Avenue disclosed that his wife works in the assessing office and could lose her job as a result of the consolidation. In his job as an engineer and project manager he looks at large projects and how much labor is involved. He didn't feel that the staffing level proposed in the regional assessing office would be sufficient. He urged them to look closely at the manpower needs. This is the primary revenue generating office in the Town and no matter how good the contract is, moving it to the County will lead them to relinquishing local control of that function.

Bill Lunt of Lunt Road spoke of his long-standing involvement in local government. He spoke of the history of the assessing office prior to the current assessor. Revaluations that were done out of the office were very expensive and people were very angry. Revaluations that have been done in-house have been cheaper and the personal attention given to people with questions has helped. He felt they would lose that personal touch if they regionalize.

Public comment period closed.

Councilor King moved the order; Councilor Farber seconded for purposes of discussion.

Chair Pierce has concerns about turning this over to the county level but they are presented with an opportunity with the current assessor leaving.

Mr. Poore gave a presentation on the recent history of county regionalization efforts. He said it is not uncommon for towns to share a common assessing office: South Portland and Westbrook share an assessing office out of the South Portland office. He spoke about the proposed budget: the projected budget for the assessing office to remain in Falmouth would be \$194,000. An estimate of the costs Falmouth would pay the county office would be \$138,000, a savings of \$56,000. He spoke about how this would be accomplished: the Town would still appoint a Town Assessor out of the regional office. Office hours would be held 1 or 2 days a week, more if necessary. Customers would also have the ability to make appointments and meet with the Assessor at one of the other towns. They don't think there would be any loss of local control with regards to the assessing software. All the towns use the same computer program. Personal property would be assessed and managed similar to current practice. There will be no change to valuations comparisons; they will continue to be based on best practices. If the Town was not satisfied with the service there is a 12 month notice requirement to withdraw. Two towns are already participating and two more communities are considering joining. There are opportunities for reduced costs and economies of scale with this model. This model cannot function without oversight by the towns.

Gary James, director of regional assessing for the county, gave a brief overview of his assessing experience. This is not a consolidation; the assessments for Falmouth would not be in the assessments for Cumberland. He would be operating as an enterprise fund so the goal would be to break even, not turn a profit. The cost of the services would come out of the various contracts. The county would not be subsidizing this, other than the start-up costs. His charge is to be self-sufficient. Either he or another Maine-licensed State assessor would take an oath of office as an officer of the Town, and represent the Town's interests. There are not a lot of assessors in Maine that are available. There is a concern about where to get qualified assessors.

Councilor Anderson has seen proposals to centralize services in his work experience; most of the time when those plans are implemented they fail. Falmouth does assessing very well; he hasn't heard that the regional office can do it better, only that they won't do it worse. Outsourcing in the business world is done with functions that are not at the core of the business. Assessing is a core function of the Town. It is central to what is important to the taxpayers. He wasn't opposed to the staff working on a contract that might address these concerns, but wondered how they draft contractual language to address these concerns. He was concerned about it growing very large, and Falmouth having less attention due to the number of towns participating.

Councilor Goldberg asked how long Cumberland and Yarmouth have been with the county.

Alex Kimball, County Finance Director, said it has been 4 months.

Councilor Goldberg asked how their experience has been; Mr. Poore said their town managers have said it has been going very well. One town manager met with Mr. James with a concern about an abatement and his concerns were resolved. One of the towns has had 3-4 citizens make appointments with Mr. James so far.

Councilor Farber felt they should take the next step but echoed Councilor Anderson's concerns about it growing.

Councilor King thought it would be good to hear what an expansion plan would be. She felt there would be good coverage for people coming into Town Hall.

Chair Pierce was also concerned with adding more towns to this; it wouldn't benefit Falmouth. She would like to see a limit on that. She wanted to see details on the time they would spend on-site.

Anne Gregory, Town Assessor, agreed that Falmouth is unique. She like the concept of regionalization, but was concerned with the track record of the county. Her initial wish was for a joint office to serve Cumberland, Yarmouth and Falmouth. She urged caution.

Councilor Anderson wondered when the contract would come back to them for review. Mr. Poore said his goal was to have something for them to review for the March 10 meeting.

Councilor Farber asked about the cost of this office to the County and whether that cost would be passed on to the towns participating or to all the towns of the county.

Mr. Kimball said there were some minimal costs that are being distributed across the tax base; they used funds from an existing strategic planning fund. The costs were for a couple desks and a laptop.

Councilor Farber said the plan is for this to be self-funded. Mr. Kimball said that was correct.

Motion carried 6-0.

The Council entered executive session at 9:16 pm.

Adjourn

Councilor Farber moved to adjourn; Councilor Goldberg seconded. Motion carried 6-0.

Meeting adjourned 11:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Melissa Tryon
Recording Secretary