**Regular Council Meeting**

**August 22, 2022**

**Chairman Robinson called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM with all councilors present with Councilor Harmon and Councilor Peters present by Zoom.**

**Public Comments**

**Chairman Robinson recognized Zeke Crofton-MacDonald, Tribal Ambassador of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians. He spoke about wanting to have an additional polling place at their location. He stated that it has been effective in other native communities and he would be submitting a proposal on behalf of the Tribe for an upcoming Council Meeting.**

**I. Minutes: It was moved by Councilor Lake, seconded by Councilor Tortello that the Special & Regular Council Meeting Minutes of August 8, 2022 be approved as presented, with all in favor.**

**II. Old Business:**

**A. (S080122-1) Chairman Robinson declared the Public Hearing open on the following: The Town of Houlton ordains the addition of Chapter 10, Article XIV Sidewalk Café Ordinance, to the Houlton Code. (Note: The ordinance in its entirety is available for review during normal business hours.)**

**There being no public comments, the Chairman closed the Public Hearing.**

**Town Manager Anderson noted that a copy of the ordinance with some additions and modifications that had been discussed by the Councilors had been provided for review.**

**Councilor Tortello noted that section 10-1404 item 12 states that there shall be no additional signage for the Sidewalk Café area. She stated that the Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages cites signs stating no alcohol past this point are required to grant an Extension of License Privileges, so these signs would need to be allowed under the Ordinance when applicable.**

**Vote to approve the order was taken as follows: Councilor McLaughlin, yes; Councilor Horvath, yes; Councilor Harmon, yes; Councilor Peters, yes; Councilor Lake, yes; Councilor Tortello, yes.**

**The order passed.**

**B. (S080122-2) Chairman Robinson declared the Public Hearing open on the following: The Town of Houlton ordains the transfer of up to $400,000 from the Undesignated Fund Balance for the purpose of reducing taxes. The Town Manager certifies that this is in the best interest of the Town.**

**There being no public comments, the Chairman closed the Public Hearing.**

**Town Manager Anderson stated that this is done annually and no funds were used last year.**

**Councilor Tortello asked if the tax rate had been set yet. Town Manager Anderson stated that numbers were still being finalized and hoping that there wouldn’t be much of a change from last year.**

**Vote to approve the order was taken as follows: Councilor Tortello, yes; Councilor Lake, yes; Councilor Peters, yes; Councilor Harmon, yes; Councilor Horvath, yes; Councilor McLaughlin, yes.**

**The order passed.**

**III. New Business**

**A. (080222-1) Council accepts the 2021 Annual Audit as presented by RHR Smith & Company.**

**Town Manager Anderson noted that all Councilors had the draft in their packet. She thanked Ron Smith and his team for being patient as the Town had many new staff.**

**Ron Smith from RHR Smith & Company stated that except for one section, the Audit has been finished since May. Ron stated that the delay in completing the final product was the audit of the approximately $3.5 million in Airport funds. Ron stated the Audit didn’t raise any issues to cause alarm. He stated the Town was staying within budget and there were no concerns. He advised the Town to be looking for grant opportunities.**

**Councilor McLaughlin asked Ron to keep the Town in mind if he heard of any big grant opportunities.**

**Vote to approve the order was taken as follows: Councilor McLaughlin, yes; Councilor Horvath, yes; Councilor Harmon, yes; Councilor Peters, yes; Councilor Lake, yes; Councilor Tortello, yes.**

**The order passed.**

**B. (080222-2) Chairman Robinson declared the Public Hearing open on the following: Council accepts the State of Maine Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program funds for a Housing Assistance Grant in the amount of $500,000 on behalf of Shiretown Properties, LLC, pending completion of the Project Development Phase, and accepts any public comments to be submitted as part of this Phase. ( Note: The purpose of the funds for Shiretown Properties, LLC is to renovate the 2nd floor of their building at the corner of Water Street & Market Square in Downtown Houlton converting the space from commercial use to residential use with 10 residential units being created.**

**Nancy Ketch, Community Development Director explained that this was the procedure for the grant process.**

**Councilor McLaughlin noted the need for housing and rentals in Houlton.**

**Nancy stated that Shiretown Properties has already been receiving many phone calls for these apartments and has developed a waiting list.**

**Vote to approve the order was taken as follows: Councilor Tortello, yes; Councilor Lake, yes; Councilor Peters, yes; Councilor Harmon, yes; Councilor Horvath, yes; Councilor McLaughlin, yes.**

**The order passed.**

**C. (080222-3) Council approves execution of the application to the Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages by American Legion Post #47 located at 184 Bangor Street, for Extension of License Privileges to serve liquor outside.**

**Councilor McLaughlin stated her concerns about underage drinking and the potential for pop-up bars. She wants to maintain a family-friendly environment for our community.**

**Councilor Tortello reminded everyone that this application was not for a Sidewalk Café nor was the location in the Downtown. It is on private property behind the American Legion building on Bangor Street. She also noted Post #47 has had a liquor license for many years and to her knowledge has never had a license violation.**

**Representatives from the American Legion shared that they have a plan in place for this event. They will ensure no one leaves the designated area with alcohol and that everyone will be asked for ID. They also shared that this event was in coordination with the Elks Lodge and that the American Legion building can only hold 170 people. They are looking to increase their occupancy level by extending the event outdoors so there will be enough room to accommodate the number of expected participants from both organizations.**

**Vote to approve the order was taken as follows: Councilor Tortello, yes; Councilor Lake, yes; Councilor Peters, yes; Councilor Harmon, yes; Councilor Horvath, yes; Councilor McLaughlin, yes.**

**The order passed.**

**D. (080222-4) Council approves execution of the application to the Bureau of Alcoholic Beverages by Market Pizza, LLC d/b/a Market Pizza located at 23 Market Square, for Extension of License Privileges to serve liquor outside.**

**Councilor Tortello noted the applicant had checked Temporary on the application. Although outdoor service is limited in Market Square to only 6 months of the year, she asked if this extension privilege should be submitted as Permanent if it is the intent of the business to serve liquor during that 6 month window of time on a recurrent basis; not just during the current year.**

**Fred Grant, owner of Market Pizza stated that he would like it to be permanent if that was allowed.**

**Councilor McLaughlin shared her concerns about the sidewalk being two different types of surfaces and making sure that the 5 foot distance had been met.**

**Vote to approve the order was taken as follows: Councilor McLaughlin, yes; Councilor Horvath, yes; Councilor Harmon, yes; Councilor Peters, yes; Councilor Lake, yes; Councilor Tortello, yes.**

**The order passed.**

**E. (080222-5) Council accepts criminal forfeiture funds in the amount of $20,681 in US Currency, from the State of Maine for the Police Department.**

**Vote to approve the order was taken as follows: Councilor Tortello, yes; Councilor Lake, yes; Councilor Peters, yes; Councilor Harmon, yes; Councilor Horvath, yes; Councilor McLaughlin, yes.**

**The order passed.**

**IV. Discussion and Reports**

**A. Charter Commission.**

**Councilor McLaughlin stated she felt the Charter was worth reviewing.**

**Attorney Nelson stated that he had provided the Councilors with information regarding the laws of revising the Charter. He stated that it depended on the type of change made as to which process must be followed to enact the desired revision(s).**

**Councilor Harmon stated that he felt that there were a few articles that need to be updated and would bring forth his ideas.**

**B. Public Works & Airport Capital Plan.**

**Chris Stewart**

**Chris Stewart, Public Works Director stated that Parks & Rec Maintenance is looking to convert the tennis court lights to LED as the bulbs are hard to find. The fencing at the Park also needs replacing. Chris stated the Town received approximately $992,000 in grants for the fuel farm at the Airport. The Airport needs some new windows and siding and the West side of the building needs insulation. Chris stated he is requesting a new Airport mower because the existing one is small and less than optimal to do the job. A larger capacity mower would significantly cut down on mowing time. He is also requesting the purchase of a dirt roller/compactor as the Department is currently renting one for $2,750 a month. He stated Maine Sprinkler Systems of Maine recommended that the sprinkler system at the Public Works building be flushed out every 10 years. The system was installed in 1953 and it’s his understanding it’s never been flushed during all that time. Replacement of the Town’s 1988 backhoe is also on the replacement list as is a single axle plow truck. The latter has electrical problems and often breaks down.**

**Councilor Lake asked Chris if he had looked at getting a used roller, Chris stated that he had looked around at them.**

**Councilor Tortello asked if any of the infrastructure items could be obtained through Federal Infrastructure grant funding.**

**C. Recreation Department Capital Plan.**

**Marie Carmichael**

**Marie Carmichael, Parks & Rec Director reiterated the need for new lighting at the tennis court and for new fencing at the Park. Marie spoke about the much needed repair of the chimney at the Gentle Memorial Building. It has cracks and protruding bricks and has never been repaired in the 70 years since it was built. Marie stated that the fascia around the top of building needs to be painted. At least two more sets of bleachers are needed as the previous ones were removed for insurance reasons. Marie also spoke about the front stairs. They are starting to deteriorate and will need to be repaired in the future. She also advised that in the winter months there is often heaving in the area near the handicap ramp and will need to be addressed in subsequent years.**

**D. Zoom Equipment.**

**Councilor Horvath stated that he has been researching new equipment for Zoom capability as the current system needs to be replaced. He has found many affordable solutions and is recommending having a support contract as the Town does not have a full time IT person. He will bring forth 4-5 options for Council to consider. He also stated that he would be holding workshops to teach public speaking techniques such as voice projection as microphone pick-ups have been flagged as an on-going issue.**

**E. Walkable Houlton Grant Update**

**Nancy Ketch explained that the Town had submitted a second request to expand the sidewalk project and it was not successful. She stated the program was more widely known during this funding cycle than in the past and therefore attracted more applicants. She stated that Senator King and staff were in Houlton today and they are helping the Town identify other sources to pursue for additional sidewalk funding.**

**Councilor McLaughlin stated that she listened to several complaints this past weekend about the condition of the Town’s sidewalks. She stated one of them was not wanting it to be of brick construction due to the tendency of this material to heave. She noted people with walkers or scooters are having a hard time navigating the sidewalks due to the deteriorating condition. She stated that she had been asked when the sidewalk project will commence and if there was a tentative timeline for the construction. Nancy stated that she hoped the project would begin next year but that was not definitive, reminding everyone that we are working within the Government’s timeline and not the Town’s. Nancy spoke about the preliminary design and emphasized all ADA requirements will be met. McLaughlin stated that there used to be programs for safe walking/biking to school.**

**F. Town Manager’s Reports**

**Department Reports**

**Town Manager Anderson commented on all the events offered during Potato Feast Days, summarizing that they “were incredible.” She stated she had included ACAP’s fuel assistance information in the Councilor packets if they were contacted by residents who had questions about the program. She reported that the Ambulance Dept. was at full staff and the Police Dept. and Fire Dept. each had 2 vacancies. She referenced the Public Works Department’s monthly report about repairing a broken cross pipe. She stated that this was a big project as both the catch basin and pipe had to be replaced. She also thanked the Treasurer for all the projects she’s been working on.**

**G. Councilors’ Remarks.**

**Councilor McLaughlin asked about the Tax Collector’s monthly report regarding the personal property collections. She asked if a business closed, did the Town discontinue it’s collection efforts. Town Manager Anderson stated that was not the Town’s practice. The Tax Collector sends delinquent personal property accounts to the collection agency. Sometimes the collection agency may determine the account is not collectible and may stop action. She also stated that Houlton is a vet- friendly, elderly- friendly, and family- friendly community and she wants to ensure it stays that way. She asked about having a Historical Zoning Ordinance for the town.**

**Councilor Tortello referred to the monthly Department Reports. She stated she was pleased to see that the Parks & Rec revenue for both Adult and Children programs came in higher than projected. She added it was great to see people participating in all the various activities offered. She also stated she was glad to see that Haley was pursuing grants for batting cages at the Civic Center. She asked about the septic site PFAS testing that was performed in July and inquired about when the results were expected to become available. Chris Stewart said it often takes a month or two and will share that with Council once it comes back. She also asked about the stolen street signs from Military Street and asked if efforts could be made to enlist the public’s help for information on who was responsible for the theft.**

**As Council Representative on the Planning Board, Councilor Tortello reported on recent complaints the Board has received about color schemes in the Downtown area. She stated that some members of the community felt the paint colors some building owners were using for their facades were not conducive to the historic downtown. The Planning Board is looking for guidance from Council on how to respond to these concerns. She also announced there was a job fair at the Civic Center on August 24 from 10-2 and that school will be back in session the week of August 29 and to be on alert for more traffic and pedestrians on Town roadways. She also wished everyone a happy and safe Labor Day holiday.**

**V. Adjournment: On motion by Councilor Lake, seconded by Councilor Horvath, the meeting adjourned at 7:32 PM, with all in favor.**

**Signed,**

**Khylee Wampler**

**Recording Secretary**

**The minutes of this meeting as presented and/or corrected became part of the official records of the Town of Houlton on 09/26/2022**