



## City Council Meeting Minutes Monday, March 4, 2024 - 6:00 p.m. Franklin Lodge of Elks

**Council in attendance:** Mayor Desiree McLaughlin, Councilor Susan Hallett-Cook, Councilor Leigh Webb, Councilor George Dzujna, Councilor Ted Starkweather, Councilor Ed Prive, Councilor Valerie Blake, Councilor Vince Ribas, Councilor Olivia Zink and Councilor Timothy Johnston

**Absent:** None

**Others in attendance:** City Manager Judie Milner, City Department Heads, and members of the public.

Mayor McLaughlin called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and the Salute to the Flag was led by Councilor Johnston.

Councilor Prive stated that there have not been any lost veterans this month.

### **Proclamation:**

Mayor McLaughlin presented a proclamation in honor of Ezekial McCoy, who now has his name on the Franklin High School gym rafters memorializing his achievements and joining the elite 1,000 career point club for basketball.

### **Legislative Update:**

Representative Jason Gerhard started off by apologizing to Councilor Blake and the rest of the councilors for his disrespect at the previous meeting.

Gerhard gave an update on some house bills that were requested by the council:

HB 1656 that passed the house is currently with the finance committee being heard tomorrow.

HB 1686 was laid on the table and could be pulled off.

HB 1583 passed the house and is currently in finance.

HB 1630 was in expedient to legislate.

HB 1011 was in expedient to legislate on a voice vote.

HB 1466 was an auto pass with an amendment voice vote.

Gerhard proceeded to give a presentation on a house resolution that he put in, in 2023, that did not pass. He stated that it had to do with three questions for the IRS about federal income tax.

Councilor Ribas called a point of order, due to being told about this presentation and letting Mr. Gerhard know that this would not be fitting for this agenda.

Councilor Webb asked for updates on house bills 1652, 1691, 1640, and 1479 when he returns next month.

**Comments from the Public:**

Public comments opened at 6:21 p.m.

Many residents approached the council to read letters that they had written, which can be found at the end of the minutes.

There were some other comments made as well:

- Christine Dzuina, Ward I, let the council know about the annual Mom Prom coming up. This helps women to come together and raise money. The flyer was handed out and is attached to the end of the minutes.
- Dan Darling, Ward III, spoke about the renovations for the Opera House/City Hall and mentioned that it will not be cheap. There will be important decisions to make. He handed out reasons and benefits for arts within the community. The handout can be found at the end of the minutes.
- Mike Lombardo, Ward III, voiced his support for agenda item 3. He also stated that he hopes that the city council does something about the Opera House.
- Bob Lucas, Ward I, stated his support for agenda item 3 and agenda item 4.
- David Bedard, Ward II, thanked the mayor for recognizing Zeke and his team tonight. He mentioned that he is the only math teacher at the high school, as there is a major shortage. He stays in Franklin for his passion for his basketball coaching and theatre. Arts & entertainment bring people from all over and the city needs the Opera House. He asked that the council get the space open again soon.
- Sam Jacobson, Ward II, stated that the public needs to abide by the 3-minute rule when speaking and also need to use the microphone for the people watching on Zoom. He thanked everyone who voted to apply for last weeks CDFA grant for matching funds. Mr. Jacobson let the mayor know that it is unfair to be calling out the Fire Chief or targeting him regarding the Opera House situation. He also stated his support for agenda item 3 and agenda item 4.
- Stephanie Wolff, Partners in Prevention Coordinator, gave the following updates:
  - o Franklin Partners in Prevention held their second Opioid Overdose Kit assembly night and were able to put together another 100 kits and its surrounding communities. Please stay tuned for any future dates. Kits can be found at the Twin Rivers Food Pantry, Healthfirst's MAT program, Archways, or anyone can contact her directly for a kit.
  - o The FPIP annual event is scheduled for March 22<sup>nd</sup> at Mojalaki Country Club starting at 5:30pm. This is a free event to the public, featuring appetizers, desserts, raffles, and a presentation on the coalition impact on the community over the past year. She hopes to see the council there.
  - o FPIP officially started the Youth Leadership through Adventure project block in conjunction with the High School's Climate and Culture Specialist. They have 13 students participating and the program is going very well. Students are currently

- working on service-learning projects including a hygiene drive, social norm campaigns within the school, and student engagement events. She looks forward to keeping the council and public up to date on the progress of these projects.
- April's National Drug Take Back Day is right around the corner. The date is set for April 27<sup>th</sup> from 10am – 2pm at the Franklin CVS.

Letters/emails were read into record by Councilor Webb, Councilor Prive, and Mayor McLaughlin. These are attached to the end of the minutes.

Public comments closed at 7:29 p.m.

### **City Council Acknowledgement:**

Councilor Starkweather gave a shout out to all of the 1<sup>st</sup> responders for the incident at the river involving two children that were drowning. They all did a fantastic job.

### **Mayor's Update:**

“Good evening. Thank you to all for being here, both in person and on Zoom. Just as a quick update, February was a great month. I am learning so much about this great City. I met with many people throughout the month and accepted many invitations to evening events. I still can't believe it but our former councilman Jim Wells and one of our residents Carrie Morse actually got me to hit the dance floor at the VFW one evening. Wow, I haven't danced in years. They served an amazing prime rib dinner and I was so thankful to be invited. What a wonderful experience with great people. I also have my favorite meeting of the week which is the Rotary Club. Such wonderful people doing great things for the community.

In addition to having fun, I attended our various City committee and commission meetings, met regularly with the City Manager and spoke with many residents. It was a busy month but wonderful in the sense that I am beginning to understand why I was elected which is slightly different from why I ran. Funny, a person runs on a campaign of slogans and absorbs those words into their everyday language. Accountability, Transparency, Integrity, listening to our residents. The commitment to the elected position is really what an elected official puts into it. I realized the constituents are the ones who will guide me during my term as Mayor. I also realized that when items come before the Council and have my name attached to it, I am not going to co-sign for something that is not in the best interests of the residents. If there is something that I feel isn't serving the resident, or doesn't look quite right. I am going to say something. I assure you all, that is a difficult thing to do but you know what the positive payout of that is? I sleep like a baby at night.

I am also developing my style. Since I was elected on a pretty intense social media campaign, I foundered for a bit in my first month, trying to eliminate social media from my daily life and interactions. Then I realized that there are many elected officials on social media. What a relief it is to be reconnected with my online constituency. I do think I need to do some tweaking to that

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online equation. I am researching getting a Mayor McLaughlin account. In an age where social media is the new newspaper, it's important to stay in touch with the people we are stewarding a city for. I know a great deal of people in the Franklin city government are not big fans of social media. And that is fine. I love social media. I am comfortable with it and understand that when it's too much, put it down. I believe there needs to be some education to the public also. Just because I am Mayor does not mean my opinions cease to exist or that my political views are no longer able to be voiced. Thank goodness for my 1<sup>st</sup> amendment rights. Our City Solicitor made it very clear in a governance meeting. If a person is elected on a platform, they have the right to continue that platform while in office.

With that said, I am looking forward to another month of being your mayor.

Just a reminder, all Non-Public meeting info needs to remain non-public.”

### **Agenda Item I.**

Approval of Minutes.

Council to consider the minutes of the February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024 City Council meeting, the nonpublic minutes from the February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024 City Council meeting, the February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024 City Council Workshop meeting, and the nonpublic minutes of the February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024 City Council Workshop meeting.

**Motion – Councilor Ribas moved that the Franklin City Council approve the minutes of the February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024 City Council meeting, the nonpublic minutes from the February 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024 City Council meeting, the February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024 City Council Workshop meeting, and the nonpublic minutes of the February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024 City Council Workshop meeting. Seconded by Councilor Webb.**

Mayor McLaughlin asked if there was any discussion.

Councilor Ribas stated that he gave a couple of grammatical revisions to the secretary previously. Councilor Johnston commented on his motion from the February 26, 2024 meeting not being in the correct place, however, he had made the motion during a different agenda item and this was reflected in the minutes.

Mayor McLaughlin stated that the nonpublic minutes from the February 26, 2024 meeting seemed to be missing some of the information that was discussed. This will need a nonpublic to discuss further.

**Motion – Councilor Zink moved to make an amendment to the motion to remove the February 26, 2024 nonpublic minutes so that the Franklin City Council can go into a nonpublic to discuss changes later. Seconded by Councilor Ribas.**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED.**

Mayor McLaughlin called a vote on the original motion to approve the minutes of both meetings as amended.

**8 in favor; 1 abstention. Motion PASSED.**

**Agenda Item II.**

City Manager's Update

- Contingent Grant Line Activity – \$0
- Trust fund for school funding – \$277.22
- Committee Meetings – March:
  - Parks & Rec Committee – 3/21 @ 5pm at the Bessie Rowell
  - Police Committee – TBD
- Council Workshop – March:
  - Monday, 3/11 @ 6pm at the Lodge of Elks – To discuss moving forward as a city
- Upcoming Council Educational Workshops – All @ 6pm, location TBD:
  - Monday, 3/11 – Assessing 101
  - Monday, 3/25 – Budget 101
  - Monday, 4/8 – TIF 101
  - Monday, 4/15 – Economic Development 101
- City SPIRIT Event:
  - April 6<sup>th</sup> from 9am – 3pm at the Bessie Rowell Community Center. Please register on the city website. They are still looking for facilitators for this event.
- Merrimack Community Power is rolling out a community power program with several different options. The community itself can opt to buy power through the community power program. Milner will be adding this to next weeks agenda so that the council can discuss whether or not the community should opt in.
- Shout Out – to Sargeant Forrest Walker of Franklin PD, who took an unexpected swim last Friday saving two children from the water. He is a complete hero.
- Congratulations – Firefighter Sean Breen for receiving his CDL.
- Big Shout Out – Police Chief Goldstein who was recently inducted as a lifetime member in the International Association of Chief's of Police.
- Shout Out – City Clerk Stanyan who is going to be featured in the Concord Monitor in an article that features her valiant efforts of getting people who are behind in taxes and water & sewer bills to use the Covid ARPA money from the State of NH to get caught up on those bills. Because of her efforts the City of Franklin received over \$100,000 in back taxes and back water & sewer fees.
- City Hall Update – Received a final draft of the floor plan for the city hall offices today. They will be having the architects go ahead and update their draft report with the final floor plan. Shortly after that she will be scheduling a workshop with the council.
- Senator Innis – Senate Bill 592 to rename State Rte. 127 in honor of Chief Bradley Haas was put in as a late bill. That passed the committee level, 4-0. It will be coming to the full Senate this Thursday, 3/7 @ 10am.
- Grants-

- Land & Water Conservation grant – This was applied for in December. She received notice that Franklin scored 91.6 points out of 100 from the State of NH review. This is moving on to the federal level at this point.
- USDA grant for the Food Co-op – They were not able to be completed on time. Will go for the next round.
- Tax Credits grant – This was completed and uploaded this morning.
- Myth Buster – Grants are NOT a bad thing for this city. Over the past 5 years, one of the things that they had to do was have a list of grants that the city has been awarded. The city, not including the school district who also receives grants, has received \$24,485,437 in federal grant funding in the last five years. That is one and a half times the municipal budget. This has saved thousands on tax rates and/or water & sewer rates for the City of Franklin users and taxpayers. The city lives on grants.
- The Rotary Club has been meeting weekly and would like to take up the topic of a temporary ice-skating rink/splash park. They would like permission to pursue this by applying for grants. There was no objection from the council.
- City Workplace Violence & De-escalation Training – This has been scheduled and is mandatory for all city employees. She invited the city council to this training as well.
- FY25 Budget Process – Milner wanted to throw out an idea to the council on having one budget meeting on a Saturday so that all of the information is presented at the same time. The school board and the department heads are onboard. She was looking at Saturday, May 18<sup>th</sup>. The council had no objection to this.
- Rabies Clinic – March 30<sup>th</sup>, noon – 2pm at the Bessie Rowell Community Center.
- Milner and the mayor discussed having a meet & greet between the council and Mill City Park. She reached out and the date that was suggested is Tuesday, April 2<sup>nd</sup> at 6pm and she wanted to check to see if the council was ok with that. There was no objection.
- Milner has officially frozen the FY24 budget because the welfare department is over budget as of 1/31 of 2024. The city has stopped spending money in other departments so that the city can make sure that people are taken care of that need help from the welfare department.
- Legislative Updates:
  - HB 1279 – She is unsure where this state money is coming from so she urges to be cautiously optimistic about this bill. It is to restore 7.5% of the NH retirement employer costs for police, fire and teachers.
  - HB 1479 – This is the anti-lobbying bill. This bill would make it so that Milner, for example, cannot go down to the State of NH and testify on any bill on behalf of our city. If she did, she would be criminally liable. This would apply to Chief Goldstein or anyone else from the city. So, this bill is just allowing the state to do whatever they want without any input from municipalities. It is scary as written and is going to be heard on March 6<sup>th</sup> at 10am for the House Executive Committee.
  - HB 1640 – Qualified immunity bill. All municipalities enjoy qualified immunity, which means if someone gets hurt on the playground and it's not faulty equipment that's our fault, they can't sue us. Its to save the city from these kinds of suits that would make it so that we couldn't have any playgrounds. This bill is just as scary as the anti-lobbying bill and is also being heard on March 6<sup>th</sup> at 10am.
  - HB 1002 – House bill on fees for lengthy right to know requests. This looked like it wasn't moving forward, but after the cameras were turned off, they voted to reconsider. It has been sent back to judiciary by the house for further work.

**Agenda Item III.**

City Council to consider approving the Franklin Outing Club to obtain a liquor license for the Veteran's Memorial Ski Area property.

**Motion – Councilor Dzujna moved that the Franklin City Council allows the Franklin Outing Club to file for a Liquor License through the State of NH Liquor Commission for the Veterans Memorial Recreation Area and authorize the City Manager to sign the applicable permit. Seconded by Councilor Blake.**

Mayor McLaughlin asked if there was any discussion.

The council had a lengthy discussion and Milner recommended that an ordinance be made only after the ski club receives an actual alcohol permit from the state. The council also asked questions of the Outing Club President, Tim Morrill.

**Motion – Councilor Ribas moved that the Franklin City Council amend the motion to state that this will be a 1-year trial. Seconded by Councilor Webb.**

**8 in favor; 1 abstention. Motion PASSED**

Mayor McLaughlin called a vote on the original motion as amended.

**8 in favor; 1 opposed. Motion PASSED**

**Agenda Item IV.**

Council to consider waiving vendor fees for the Farmers Market, Winni River Day, and Community Day.

It was mentioned that the waiving of these fees has been done in the past and the fees are \$10/per table.

**Motion – Councilor Dzujna moved that the Franklin City Council waive the vendor fees for the Farmers Market at Marceau Park. Seconded by Councilor Hallett-Cook.**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

**Motion – Councilor Ribas moved that the Franklin City Council waive the vendor fees for the Winni River Day event in Trestle View Park and Mill City Park. Seconded by Councilor Dzujna.**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

**Motion – Councilor Dzujna moved that the Franklin City Council waive the vendor fees for Community Day in Odell Park. Seconded by Councilor Webb.**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

**Agenda Item V.**

Council to consider lease agreement with Brent Fife for the agricultural use of City Land.

**Motion – Councilor Blake moved that the Franklin City Council approves an Agricultural Real Estate Lease with Mr. Brent Fife for 34 acres of City owned property located off River Street, identified as Tax Map 123, Lot 403, and to authorize City Manager Milner to duly execute the lease on behalf of the City. Seconded by Councilor Webb.**

Mayor McLaughlin asked if there was any discussion.

Milner stated that there had been interest in this land being in conservation or as a community garden before. There was some discussion about the fee and time frame on the lease agreement.

**Motion – Councilor Dzujna moved that the Franklin City Council amend the motion to include the \$25/acre fee and the time frame of May through November. Seconded by Councilor Zink.**

Mayor McLaughlin asked if there was any discussion.

Councilor Zink stated that even though that language is in the lease it is good to have it clarified in the motion as well.

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Mayor McLaughlin called a vote on the original motion as amended.

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

**Agenda Item VI.**

Council to consider setting a public hearing on Ordinance #08-24 regarding the Disorderly Patron Behavior policy.

**Motion – Councilor Ribas moved that the Franklin City Council sets a public hearing for Monday, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024 at 6pm regarding Ordinance 08-24 Disorderly Patron Behavior. Seconded by Councilor Zink.**

Mayor McLaughlin asked if there was any discussion.

Milner did mention that there needs to be a language correction on page 91, the bracket should say Chapter 347-5. This will be a final product ready for the public hearing and this has already been approved by the city attorney.

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Mayor McLaughlin read in title only, “AN AMENDMENT TO THE FRANKLIN MUNICIPAL CODE, ORDINANCE 08-24.”.

**Agenda Item VII.**

Council to consider setting a public hearing on Resolution #16-24 appropriating \$245,356.17 to the Franklin Paul A. Smith School and \$295,358.26 to the Franklin Middle School for the fiscal year 2024 budget and subsequent years to the grant ending date of September 30, 2025.

**Motion – Councilor Ribas moved that the Franklin City Council set a public hearing on Monday, April 1, 2024, at 6pm for Resolution 16-24 appropriating \$245,356.17 to the Franklin Paul A. Smith School and \$295,358.26 to the Franklin Middle School for the fiscal year 2024 budget and subsequent years to the grant ending date of September 30, 2025. Seconded by Councilor Blake.**

Mayor McLaughlin asked if there was any discussion.  
A small discussion ensued.

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Mayor McLaughlin read resolution 16-24 into record:

**RESOLUTION # 16-24**

**A Resolution Granting Authority to Appropriate \$245,356.17 for the Paul A. Smith School and \$295,358.26 for the Franklin Middle School from the New Hampshire Education Department (NHED) from the Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) Grant Funding**

**In the year of our Lord, Two Thousand Twenty-Four,**

**WHEREAS**, the City Council of the City of Franklin, New Hampshire recognizes that the school district is allocated \$245,356.17 for the Paul A. Smith School and \$295,358.26 for the Franklin Middle School from the New Hampshire Education Department (NHED) in Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) grant funding totaling \$540,714.43; and,

**WHEREAS**, the City Council of the City of Franklin would like to appropriate the \$245,356.17 for the Paul A. Smith School and \$295,358.26 for the Franklin Middle School from the New Hampshire Education Department (NHED) in Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) grant funding totaling \$540,714.43; **Now,**

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, *that at a regularly scheduled meeting of the City Council on April 1st, 2024, the City Council of Franklin New Hampshire does hereby vote to adopt resolution #16-24 Comprehensive School Improvement (CSI) grant funding totaling \$540,714.43 as follows:*

**An Increase in Revenues:**

Grant Revenue – Five Hundred Forty Thousand, Seven Hundred Fourteen Dollars and Forty-Three Cents (\$540,714.43)

**An Increase in Expenditures:**

Grant Expenditure – Five Hundred Forty Thousand, Seven Hundred Fourteen Dollars and Forty-Three Cents (\$540,714.43)

**Agenda Item VIII.**

Council to consider setting a public hearing on Resolution #17-24 accepting an electronic sign donation valued at \$35,186 to the Franklin School District for the Franklin High School.

**Motion – Councilor Johnston moved that the Franklin City set a public hearing on Monday, April 1, 2024, at 6pm for Resolution 17-24 accepting an electronic sign donation valued at \$35,186 to the Franklin School for the Franklin High School. Seconded by Councilor Ribas.**

Mayor McLaughlin asked if there was any discussion.  
A small discussion ensued.

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Councilor Johnston read resolution 17-24 into record:

**RESOLUTION # 17-24**

**A Resolution Granting Authority to Accept an electronic sign donation valued at \$35,186 for the Franklin School District to erect in front of the Franklin High School**

**In the year of our Lord, Two Thousand Twenty-Four,**

**WHEREAS**, the City Council of the City of Franklin, New Hampshire recognizes that the school district is offered a donation of an electronic sign for the Franklin High School; and,

**WHEREAS**, the City Council of the City of Franklin would like to accept the electronic sign donation to the Franklin School District for the Franklin High School; **Now**,

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED**, *that at a regularly scheduled meeting of the City Council on April 1st, 2024, the City Council of Franklin New Hampshire does hereby vote to adopt resolution #17-24 to formally accept the electronic sign donation for the Franklin School District as follows:*

**An Increase in Revenues:**

Donation – Thirty-Five Thousand, One Hundred Eighty-Six Dollars (\$35,186)

**An Increase in Expenditures:**

Capital Asset – Thirty-Five Thousand, One Hundred Eighty-Six Dollars (\$35,186)

**Agenda Item IX.**

**Other Business:**

**1. Mayor & Council Appointments:**

**Motion - Councilor Zink moved that the Franklin City Council appoint Lisa Duquette to the Capital Improvement Plan Committee, seat CI9, term of service to October 2028. Seconded by Councilor Ribas.**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

**2. Committee Reports:**

Councilor Webb stated that the Legislative Committee's next regularly scheduled meeting will be in May with a few unfinished items and the regularly scheduled meeting in August will be on the city charter with no other items.

Councilor Ribas stated that in the Finance Committee the main topic was the Financial Software. In Joint Finance they discussed rising costs for Special education, new costs for educating students, and a 10-year expense projection strategy.

Councilor Ribas also gave an update on the City Manager's evaluation form. Today he forwarded the previous form to the new councilors and once they have looked at it he will send out this years evaluation out to everyone.

**3. Late Items:**

**Motion - Councilor Zink moved that the Franklin City Council adopt a plan, whereas the Opera House got a grant of \$149,000 in ARPA funds from the Merrimack County, and whereas these funds need to be spent before September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2024, or they need to be given back to the federal government, at the regular scheduled meeting of the City Council on Monday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024, and that the city council and the city manager have an open dialogue with the Opera House and have a plan in place by May 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024 so that the Opera House can expend these funds before the September deadline. Seconded by Councilor Ribas.**

Mayor McLaughlin asked if there was any discussion.  
A small discussion ensued.

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

**4. Nonpublic Session Needed:**

Milner stated that they needed enter into a nonpublic session.

**Motion – Councilor Zink moved that the Franklin City Council enter into nonpublic according to**

**RSA 91-A:3, II (m) Consideration of whether to disclose minutes of a nonpublic session due to a change in circumstances under paragraph III. However, any vote on whether to disclose minutes shall take place in public session. Seconded by Councilor Ribas.**

**By a roll call vote.**

**Roll Call:**

**Councilor Blake     yes     Councilor Hallett-Cook     yes     Councilor Starkweather     yes**

**Councilor Webb     yes     Councilor Dzujna     yes     Councilor Prive     yes**

**Councilor Johnston     yes     Councilor Ribas     yes     Councilor Zink     yes**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Entered into nonpublic at 9:35 p.m.

**Motion – Councilor Ribas moved to leave nonpublic session and return to public session. Seconded by Councilor Johnston.**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Public Session reconvened at 9:41 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**Motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Hallett Cook and seconded by Councilor Ribas. All in favor. Motion PASSED.**

The meeting adjourned at 9:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Lisa A. Jones  
Executive Secretary

→ Rep. The Franklin Opera House Board

Hi. I'm Jeff Perkins, ~~president of the Franklin Opera House~~. The ~~Opera House~~ board feels that there may be some of you who are not completely familiar with the structure and the history of our organization and what we have done during the past 25 years to reestablish the Opera House as a cultural center in Franklin. We began in 1999 as the Franklin Opera House Restoration Committee, and since then we've gradually made progress in restoring the space for performances. We think it's important that you ~~all~~ know about the efforts we've made thus far, because there seems to be a misperception that the Opera House organization is not doing anything but just waiting for the City to renovate the building.

Around 2011 the Opera House applied for a grant from the USDA Community Facilities program and was approved for funding the installation of a sprinkler system for fire suppression, but needed matching funds from the city, which owns the building. But the <sup>former</sup> city manager ~~at the time~~ declined to participate in that effort saying there were other priorities, so that opportunity was lost.

In 2016, in order to comply with the fire department's orders that we reduce the fire load in the building we removed flammable furniture and began making continuous efforts to improve practices for fire safety. In 2017 the Opera House replaced the main stage curtain with a permanently fire-retardant curtain. In 2018 we replaced the black stage curtains with permanently fire-retardant curtains.

Also in 2018 we received the donation of architectural drawings from Cedar Mill Group in Webster for the reconfiguration and renovation of the dressing rooms and offices of the Opera House to improve their usefulness and address safety concerns. We also consulted with a plumbing contractor to get a new estimate for installing a fire sprinkler system in the building. After several years of fundraising for this purpose we were preparing to begin work on dressing room renovation in 2021 when we were asked to meet with the fire department and city officials.

That was when we learned about the fire safety assessment conducted by JS Consulting Engineers. The fire department warned us that any work we did to improve our dressing rooms would likely be torn apart in the near future because of the extensive list of issues that needed to be addressed for fire

code and life safety concerns throughout the building, a list that goes far beyond simply installing a sprinkler system. At that point we began paying for a fire watch for events presented in the Opera House, until the order to cease operations was enforced last year.

So, that is how we got to where we are now. Last year we applied for and received ARPA grant funding for \$149,000 to install a smoke ventilation system above the stage area, as well as other safety improvements, but we are unable to utilize those funds without the cooperation of the city. We have already received an extension of time to use those funds. They need to be encumbered by the end of this year, but we cannot purchase or enter into contracts to use those funds without some kind of approval by the City.

The Opera House organization and the Opera House facility are not the same thing. We don't own the building. We can't just start tearing things apart. Anything we hope to do has to be part of a larger plan with the city.

Soldiers Memorial Hall was constructed in 1892 to house municipal operations, with an opera house for the enjoyment of the community. We want that tradition to continue, but we need the city, and you, the city council, to authorize the funding to do the work that needs to be done. We, as a non-profit arts organization, will do all we can through fundraising, grantwriting, and ticket sales, to help pay down the debt incurred to get the work done. This process will take time and effort. It may take longer than we would like, but if the city will work with us to fulfill our end of the ARPA obligation, we can get the ball rolling that much sooner. We ask you to do what needs to be done to get the process moving so we can begin operating again.

Thank you  
Franklin  
The Opera House Bd of Directors

FEDERAL COMMENTS  
March 4, 2024

**To: Mayor and Council**  
**From: Judith Ackerson, Ward 3**  
**Re: Transparency**

Before I begin my prepared statement, I want to publicly thank Val Blake for representing my Ward 3. When she first ran for her seat, she made every effort to get to know her constituents by holding public forums, acquainted herself with the various department and the issues they faced and continues to do her homework and conduct herself in a professional manner. Thank you Val.

I believe that, even though under our system we have to vote by ward, once you all are elected, I consider every one of you to represent me as your votes affect every citizen in the City of Franklin.

Now to my statement:

Mayor and new councilors, you ran on a platform of transparency. However, that is not what we are seeing. We see vendettas against Mill City Park. We see open comments on Facebook from our mayor refuting and disparaging our city manager. And, Madame Mayor, when the public asks you direct public questions through city council meetings, you don't respond. I posed questions to you on February 5<sup>th</sup> and have yet to hear from you in writing, as requested, or verbally.

You are the ones not being transparent,

Please identify when we will see your responses to your community's inquiries.

It is unfortunate that we even must ask. Perhaps next time step up and publicly debate so we understand the quality of the candidate we are being presented with prior to elections.

*cc: Lisa Jones*

I'm speaking on behalf of the Opera House FACT program, and Franklin Footlight Theatre, and FHS Players, and FMS Players. Last month the Middle School students put on a production of "Willy Wonka Jr." in the Middle School cafeteria, with four sold-out shows. There were people who couldn't see these kids give it their all because they couldn't get tickets. This is what people want in Franklin. This is what parents want. The kids did an amazing job under adverse conditions. Many people volunteered their time and effort to give these kids an experience that approximates a theatrical production. And yet, it falls short.

When it comes to renovating the Opera House, we understand the desire to get as much done as possible. We understand that city offices need to be consolidated into a space that is accessible to all. We understand that the Opera House needs to be used in a way that accommodates the city administrative functions while providing the maximum possible benefit to the community. But we ask that the architects and the planning team consider alternatives to an "all at once" approach, perhaps an approach that makes the Opera House useable in a shorter time frame. Perhaps an approach that makes it the best version of what it is now. Rather than completely reconstructing the building from the inside out, perhaps we could consider an incremental plan that first addresses the critical safety conditions that could allow the fire department to issue an assembly permit. Then, while the building is being used, other desired improvements can be made over time. We know that will require a firm plan, a firm commitment, a firm timeline, and yes, it will probably take more time overall. We ask that the architecture firm currently working on the plan prepare an alternative, incremental plan, for time and cost comparisons, that prioritizes the fire safety and code issues and then phases in desirable functional and aesthetic considerations.

We would all like to see a swanky, glitzy, updated building that everyone – city staff, performers, and residents – can enjoy for years to come. We know you will ultimately approve a plan that is the most feasible, practical, and fiscally responsible. But we ask that you please consider ways to permit use of the building AND improve it at the same time.

My name is Allison Cross and I am here to speak about the importance of the Opera House and the arts to the children of Franklin.

In July of 2022, my son-in-law was deployed to Saudi Arabia for one year. My daughter and their three girls moved in with me.

My granddaughter Emma, who is normally very shy, saw how much I loved being a part of theater and decided that she would like to try it and perform on stage with me. She mustered up the courage, went through auditioning, and got a part in the Footlight production of The North Pole's Got Talent. Her mom and I watched her go from that shy little girl to blossoming out there on stage. She practiced her lines at home and worked with the other kids growing her confidence with each passing rehearsal. By the time of the performance, she had found a new passion. She loved being on stage. We were so proud to see the transformation in her. She went on to perform in the school's district-wide musical The Wizard of Oz. Her sister, Olivia, saw how much fun Emma had had and decided she would like to try out working in the technical part of theater and joined the Wizard of Oz tech team. What a great opportunity it was for them to work and learn from the older high school students.

They hoped to continue with theater when their dad returned and the family relocated to Colorado Springs, Colorado. They found out that there is no community theater there and no theater program in the schools. For the girls to take part in theater they would have to pay. To be a part of a production over the period of January to May, they would need to pay \$92 a month for one class a week along with additional charges for costume and production fees for each girl. The family was not in a position to afford it at that point in time, so the girls were unable to participate. Emma really misses it.

My granddaughter is only one example of the huge positive impact theater has on children. Theater helps them build their confidence, make new friends, and helps them learn to work as a team on top of just providing them with hours of fun being a part of productions.

Franklin is very fortunate to have a community theater program and a theater program in our schools. As you can see not all cities and towns are as fortunate as we are. I know the programs are continuing and the kids are performing, but the middle school stage is just not the same experience nor can it hold as many children as the Opera House stage did. I'm not sure if the district wide musicals can even be held in that space.

The Opera House has been an important part of so many children's lives. I urge the mayor and council to do whatever is necessary to get the Opera House back open so our children can once again have the opportunity to walk out on that big stage and shine. Thank you.

## 10 Reasons to Support the Arts

1. **Arts promote true prosperity.** The arts are fundamental to our humanity. They ennoble and inspire us—fostering creativity, goodness, and beauty. The arts help us express our values, build bridges between cultures, and bring us together regardless of ethnicity, religion, or age. When times are tough, art is salve for the ache.
2. **Arts improve academic performance.** Students with an education rich in the arts have higher GPAs and standardized test scores, and lower drop-out rates—benefits reaped by students regardless of socio-economic status. Students with 4 years of arts or music in high school average 100 points better on their SAT scores than students with just one-half year of arts or music.
3. **Arts strengthen the economy.** The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis reports that the arts and culture sector represents 3.25 percent of the nation's GDP—a larger share of the economy than tourism and agriculture. The nonprofit arts industry alone generates \$135 billion in economic activity annually (spending by organizations and their audiences) that supports 4.1 million jobs and generates \$22.3 billion in government revenue.
4. **Arts are good for local merchants.** Attendees at nonprofit arts events spend \$24.60 per person, per event, beyond the cost of admission on items such as meals, parking, and babysitters. Attendees who live outside the county in which the arts event takes place spend twice as much as their local counterparts (\$39.96 vs. \$17.42)—valuable revenue for local businesses and the community.
5. **Arts drive tourism.** Arts travelers are ideal tourists, staying longer and spending more to seek out authentic cultural experiences. The U.S. Department of Commerce reports that the percentage of international travelers including museum visits on their trip has grown steadily since 2003 (18 to 24 percent). The share attending concerts and theater performances has grown from 14 to 17 percent since 2003.
6. **Arts are an export industry.** U.S. exports of arts goods (e.g., movies, paintings, jewelry) grew to \$72 billion in 2011, while imports were just \$25 billion—a \$47 billion arts trade surplus.
7. **Arts spark creativity and innovation.** The Conference Board reports that creativity is among the top 5 applied skills sought by business leaders—with 72 percent saying creativity is of high importance when hiring. The biggest creativity indicator? A college arts degree. Their *Ready to Innovate* report concludes, “The arts—music, creative writing, drawing, dance—provide skills sought by employers of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium.” Nobel laureates in the sciences are 17 times more likely to be actively engaged in the arts than average scientists.
8. **Arts have social impact.** University of Pennsylvania researchers have demonstrated that a high concentration of the arts in a city leads to higher civic engagement, more social cohesion, higher child welfare, and lower poverty rates. A vibrant arts community ensures that young people are not left to be raised solely in a pop culture and tabloid marketplace.
9. **Arts improve healthcare.** Nearly one-half of the nation's healthcare institutions provide arts programming for patients, families, and even staff. 78 percent deliver these programs because of their healing benefits to patients—shorter hospital stays, better pain management, and less medication.
10. **Arts mean business.** The Creative Industries are arts businesses that range from nonprofit museums, symphonies, and theaters to for-profit film, architecture, and design companies. A 2014 analysis of Dun & Bradstreet data counts 750,453 businesses in the U.S. involved in the creation or distribution of the arts that employ 3.1 million people—representing 4.2 percent of all businesses and 2.2 percent of all employees, respectively. (Download a free Creative Industry report for your local community.)

Could you please read this during public comment and have it added to the minutes as I will be at the School Board Budget Workshop while the City Council is in session?

First and foremost, I want to thank our Council for their work at the February 26 Workshop. We should all view the result positively as this will get the next phase of the whitewater on track with no outlay by the City other than limited administrative costs.

I have a few questions for the Council. I don't so much as need an answer as I think that these are questions that our council should have answered as Franklin moves forward. I would be as gratified to see the answers evident as current and upcoming issues are debated.

Did the Council ever take any action on the MOA with Mill City Park? It was dropped from the Agenda for the December 14<sup>th</sup> meeting and has been MIA ever since.

Why, as a city, are we holding the school board budget workshop on the same evening as a regularly scheduled City Council meeting? Was there any discussion that would shed light on why this conflict has occurred? Will this budget not account for over have the money spent by Franklin this year? Believe me, I'll also ask the School Board as well. However, I would think that the Councilors would have some thought on this situation as there has been no School Board report since the abbreviated report on January 8 when the minutes record two items from that presentation, the posting of the Strategic plan and the date of the class parade in June.

Referring to the February 5<sup>th</sup> City Manager's update, City Hall Update, Has the City Council been provided with the opportunity to review the promised third draft of the architects' drawing?

I've seen conflicting statements as to the composition and purpose of the Economic Development Group (Team?). Who are the members and what is the scope of their responsibilities? I think that the Mayor and every Councilor should feel very confident that they understand what this group's function and purpose is.

Regards,  
Al

Al Warner  
Ward 3  
Franklin

**City Council Meeting  
Monday, March 04, 2024  
Franklin Lodge of Elks**

**Congratulations for the newly elected councilors and our mayor. And thank you for the continued service of our current councilors.**

**I would like to ask a couple of questions and then share a couple of comments and observations.**

**Questions:**

**Who is in charge of the city?**

**What is the number one priority for the city?**

**Comments / Observations:**

**We continue to have many people come to this podium to describe to you and special aspects of the City of Franklin. I hope you are listening fully. Franklin is a special place, but this is not new Franklin has always been a special place and at times a great place to live. We have lived here our entire life, except for a few years in school and invested in the city.**

**Franklin is special and it needs to be treated as such for all the city's residents not a select few.**

**We often hear in these meetings about social media not getting things right. This could be true. I have attended these meetings for the last several years and the information flow from these meetings generally is not very clear, concise, sometimes slanted and never seems to be the entire story. This leaves all of us to make up for the gaps in information.**

**Then we have City Spirit, we have 4 to 10 City Spirit meetings a month, City Council, Planning, Zoning, School Board, and others. This is where city spirit is built.**

**During these meetings we have been called names by a paid member of the city staff. We have been told several times by the director of Mill City Park our taxes will not go up. Recently it was stated that there is an issue with the assessing company hired by the city. This is our City Spirit and this needs to change.**

**This is all accepted and our taxes are continuing to increase to the point you are placing Franklin out of reach of many people. We hear many times this thing called revitalization. Not sure just what this means to you. Concrete barriers in the river? Homes being priced out of the reach of the average Franklin resident?**

**Our schools are challenged, our Fire and Police are challenged, our roads and services are in tough shape. Local families have seen an average monthly cost of nearly \$1000. How are they going to live? And yet we are on our year over year continued tax increase. How can anyone in control of the City of Franklin even talk about homelessness, as we are creating it.**

**The property cost just went through the roof with our assessment, the monthly rents are increasing, our service costs of waste removal, water and sewer are all increasing.**

**The people in the city of Franklin are not against the Mill City Park / White Water Park. It's just not the right priority and should not be funded by any City Money or Resources.**

**I would like the councilors to think about these concepts:**

**What would our schools look like today if all the time, money and resources that has been spent on Mill City Park / White Water park had been spent on our school children and the schools?**

**What would our Fire Department look like today if all the time, money and resources that has been spent on Mill City Park / White Water Park had been spent on our Fire Department?**

**What would our Police Department look like today if all the time, money and resources that has been spent on Mill City Park / White Water Park had been spent on our Police Department?**

**What would the Public Works Department and roads look like today if all the time, money and resources that has been spent on Mill City Park / White Water Park had been spent on our Public Works Department?**

**What would our Soldiers Memorial Hall look like today if all the time, money and resources that has been spent on Mill City Park / White Water Park had been spent on our Soldiers Memorial Hall?**

**We suggest we want people to come to Franklin. We suggest we need to broaden our tax base. How do we expect this to happen with the current condition of the City of Franklin Services and an ever-increasing tax burden?**

**Many of the new businesses in town cannot support these higher assessments and taxes, we will put them out of business.**

**The City of Franklin is a special place and has done very well in the past under some of the prior managements, but today we are challenged, and it appears the focus is not to continue to make Franklin Special.**

LeAnne Fifield Ward 2

I'm sorry I cannot be here in person tonight but I am involved with another meeting.

I truly dislike having to point out negative things, I would much rather be discussing positive changes to this community. But...

Today I witnessed a conversation online regarding water & sewer rates which turned into the Mayor stumping to unseat councilors in the fall to elect new ones that will "fire" Judie Milner. And insinuating "someone" is directing the Welfare Director to not spend enough on residents in need. Really??? This is wrong on so many levels. Is this how you get Franklin to come together and move forward?? Is this your plan to pay for the schools, Soldier's Memorial Hall, Roads Etc?? Spend all your time trying to get someone you don't agree with fired? You should be discussing how to move forward on Soldier's Memorial Hall so we can get it opened back up to the public.

Franklin is better than this! We are tired of being looked at as the victim and would like to see this City move forward in a positive way. Stop trying to divide the community. You were elected to do positive things in this community and so far, all I've seen is you continuing to divide the community with disrespect online.

Tonight, would be a good time to set a social media Policy for ALL elected & appointed officials.

I have attached screen shots of this conversation for proof.