

Fort Fairfield Community Empowerment Project Seeks Public Comment on Draft Recommendations

June 1, 2023

For Immediate Release:

Now more than ever, Fort Fairfield's officials must be empowered to lead the community, be allowed to have a voice in redefining the workplace culture of the Town, and have the time and space to rebuild vital relationships and trust with one another and the community.

Fort Fairfield's leadership has spent the last few months participating in the Community Empowerment Project. During this time the group has discussed how an effective government is indispensable to the implementation of Town plans, and goals, and to protecting taxpayer interests. We have listened to the taxpayers and residents of Fort Fairfield, and heard that people value transparency, open communication, the ability to participate, and Town officials that take time to speak with community members, and businesses and are willing to do outreach.

The working group responsible for these recommendations consists of 23 people, including members of the community, Town Counselors, Department Heads, and Town Staff. Their aim is to prevent the Town from facing financial challenges in the future, provide more opportunities for taxpayers and residents to engage with the civic process, and empower leaders to make decisions that are in the best interests of the people of Fort Fairfield.

At this time the group is seeking community feedback and public comments on the following recommendations. A 30-day open comment period June 1, 2023 - June 30, 2023, and may be accessed at <https://forms.gle/1NKDyqSbv45MVDE1A> Copies of the survey will be available at the Town Office, and the Fort Fairfield Library.

Town Council Meetings

Recommend adding regular standing agenda items at Council meetings for Department Heads to present any department-specific updates, challenges, and successes to the Council. This will not preclude Department Heads from speaking to Council about time-sensitive issues or other matters. The Library presentation will be delivered by a Staff Librarian or a Trustee.

Recommendation for the Town Council to include a public comment period at the end of Council Meetings for a trial period lasting 3 months. The comment period at the end of the meeting will observe the same rules as the one at the beginning of the meeting.

Recommendation for the Town Council, Department Heads, Town Manager, and when appropriate Town Staff to attend and participate in an annual retreat to be possibly facilitated by an independent agency/individual to create a better understanding of the rules and regulations of governance and their respective roles in the process. The date and

details for this retreat are to be decided during the first organizational meeting for the Town Council every year.

Town Manager Contract

Recommend including probationary period and provisions that detail job duties and responsibilities in the contract for the Town Manager. Include in the duties fostering “open and transparent dialogue” and include specific details about information sharing. The contract should include an ability to terminate/resign accountability built into the language. As part of the contract include an annual performance review.

Recommend having an attorney for the Town of Fort Fairfield review the final language before the contract is finalized.

Town Charter

Recommend amending § C-13 (c) Voting

Current Language Town Charter Article II, §C-13 Procedure C. “No action of the Council, except as provided in the preceding sentence shall be binding or valid unless adopted by the affirmative vote of three (3), or more members of the Council.” Shall be amended to include:

“For the annual Town budget, borrowing over \$250,000.00, hiring the Town Manager, and signing the employment contract or contract renewal for the Town Manager an affirmative vote of a supermajority of four (4) Councilors is required for items to pass.”

Budget Advisory Committee

Recommend the Town Council charge the Budget Advisory Committee to work with the Council on adopting a new budget process for the next fiscal year. This could include reviewing the operating procedures for the Aroostook County budget committee, opportunities for earlier discussions about the budget, more working sessions, and opportunities for revisions and recommendations.

Recommended Actions for the Next Town Manager or Town Council:

Research and discuss changes to the Human Resource policies for Town Staff. Consider hiring an independent mediator, or human resource director, or creating an employee assistance program. [EAP Information](#)

Review Fort Fairfield’s vision & value statements through a public process. Work collaboratively with all community stakeholders to create a shared vision for the future of Fort Fairfield.

Actions Occurring

Members of the Budget Advisory Committee will now receive monthly financial statements with a memo from the Town manager sharing any discrepancies between actual figures

and the current budget. This will be the same information that the Town Council receives in their monthly packets.

Budget Advisory Committee members and Town Councilors will have access to training opportunities to learn about reading financial statements, budgeting, and other pertinent matters.

Counselor Training Opportunities and On-Boarding New Members

Prospective Town Counselors will receive a packet with information about “Becoming a Fort Fairfield Town Counselor” at the time they take out nomination papers. This packet will include information about the Town Charter, Job Duties, Job Description, and other resources to inform candidates about their role if they are elected.

Newly elected Town Councilors will receive a packet with information about Robert’s Rules of Order, Operations of Charter Communities, and other documents specific to Fort Fairfield. They will have training opportunities provided by the Maine Municipal Association and other training options that are currently being researched.