

**TOWN OF ORONO
SPECIAL REMOTE COUNCIL MEETING
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2020 at 2:00 P.M.**

**WATCH ONLINE AT
<https://stream.meet.google.com/stream/4df28f64-807a-40c3-b6aa-5c2d57d43f4a>
(LINK AVAILABLE AT WWW.ORONO.ORG)**

**QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS ACCEPTED AT
INFO@ORONO.ORG**

MINUTES

1. Roll Call

Present: Council Chair Cindy Mehnert, Laurie Osher, Meghan Gardner, Sam Kunz, Cheryl Robertson, Terry Greenier, Tom Perry (joined at 2:10pm) and Town Manager Sophie Wilson.

2. Agenda Review - None

3. Town Preparations and Response to Current Public Health Emergency

The following staff members presented general information aimed at summarizing the current public health emergency and departmental operations: Geoff Low (Fire Chief - Public Health & Fire Department operations); Josh Ewing (Police Chief - Police Department operations); Dave Milan (Community Development Director - departmental operations); Rob Yerxa (Public Works Director - departmental operations and services); and Sophie Wilson (Administration and other departmental operations).

Fire Chief Geoff Low reviewed Covid 19 recommendations from the federal and state Center for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). He noted that staff would be working on an outreach program for senior citizens.

Police Chief Josh Ewing stated the Police Department is fully functioning and is available to help and serve the community.

Economic Development Director Dave Milan stated his department is working with businesses and property owners. Staff has created a separate website to aid and promote local businesses at oronoconnects.com with the ability to order online for pickup and delivery. He noted staff is providing for emergency permitting until the Planning Board can reconvene. Mr. Milan urged residents to call the Town Office with any needs.

Public Works Director Rob Yerxa stated his department will be available to deal with road hazards and winter maintenance. Trash pick up will be on schedule. Street sweeping will be suspended and the landfill will be closed until April 11, 2020.

Town Manager Sophie Wilson stated the library is closed. The Wastewater Pollution Control

Facility (WPCF) is in operation with a reduced flow due to the University students being away.

Ms. Wilson stated the Town staff is operating to assist residents by phone, mail or email. Staff is working a combination of regular and modified hours from home. RSU#26 is assisting in providing meals for seniors.

Ms. Wilson noted additional information about Covid 19 can be found at www.cdc.gov, Maine CDC, Maine Emergency Management Agency and the Town of Orono website - www.orono.org.

4. Acknowledgements by Council Members

Meghan Gardner acknowledged how tired and overwhelmed she has been.

Terry Greenier asked how federal delays would affect Orono. Mr. Milan stated the programs will be good in time; the local 0% loan program will help, and unemployment is experiencing delays.

Mr. Greenier acknowledged Town staff doing what they can to address issues and provide assistance. The community people are reaching out and talking to each other.

Laurie Osher acknowledged the Police Department for shutting down student gatherings/parties. She noted that Orono is doing a great job.

Sam Kunz commented the students should be encouraged not to gather. Police Chief Ewing spoke of educating the students about social distancing and seeking compliance.

Mr. Kunz echoed the appreciation of Town staff's efforts and encouraged the community to practice social distancing. He acknowledged the passing of his neighbor, Norman Jolliffe.

Tom Perry acknowledged the quality of the work staff has done to put information on the Town's website and Facebook page. He noted he would be returning to Maine next week.

Cheryl Robertson asked how a home business could get a permit without the Planning Board being able to meet. Mr. Milan stated temporary permits are being issued until the next Planning Board meeting.

Cindy Mehnert thanked the staff for its efforts in coordinating with UMaine and the schools. She asked what will happen with the fluoride vote.

Sophie Wilson explained the vote is planned for June 9th, but the public hearing requirement cannot be met in its usual way. Staff sought out legal counsel who is asking Council to consider not holding the vote at this time.

Councilors agreed that they would like to see a fair debate/process and were in favor of postponing the fluoride vote.

5. New Business

Order 20-33 Order, adopting Personnel Policy governing those employed by the Town of Orono related to Administrative Leave.

Moved by Sam Kunz and seconded by Cheryl Robertson. All voted in favor, 7-0.

Ms. Wilson described the personnel policy related to administrative leave that is unpaid and paid. She noted that prorated benefits will be based on actual time worked. Ms. Wilson stated she would negotiate with employees and provide reasonable accommodations.

Order 20-34 Order, adopting a Personnel Policy governing those employed by the Town of Orono related to Telecommuting (Working Remotely).

Moved by Terry Greenier and seconded by Sam Kunz. All voted in favor, 7-0.

Ms. Wilson described the personnel policy related to telecommuting (working remotely). She noted the Town Manager can direct remote work assignments and all work rules remain in full force and effect. She commented on how the equipment and supplies will be provided and that employees will keep a strict accounting of their work time.

Ms. Mehnert asked how Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) requests would be handled. Ms. Wilson described employees working within a cloud-based format with information available to them.

Order 20-35 Order, adopting a Personnel Policy governing those employed by the Town of Orono related to the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act (Federal).

Moved by Sam Kunz and seconded by Terry Greenier. All voted in favor, 7-0.

Ms. Wilson summarized the newly adopted act which does not need to be recreated in policy as the Town is required to follow the act; however, staff is recommending that the Council avail itself of the exemption for emergency responders provided for in the Act. Staff is in process of reaching out to both labor unions to discuss how elements of this act may be mirrored in emergency clauses to the collective bargaining agreements that would allow for modified leave as departmental operations can accommodate.

Terry Greenier asked if the policy includes employees taking care of family members. Ms. Wilson described the Emergency Paid Sick Leave Act, noting the coverage from 4/2/2020 to 12/31/2020 to help with quarantined situations and providing for two weeks (80 hours) time off allowed.

Order 20-36 Order, adopting a Personnel Policy governing those employed by the Town of Orono related to the Emergency Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act (Federal).

Moved by Sam Kunz and seconded by Terry Greenier. All voted in favor, 7-0.

Ms. Wilson summarized the newly adopted act which does not need to be recreated in policy as the Town is required to follow the act; however, staff is recommending that the Council avail itself of the exemption for emergency responders provided for in the Act. Staff is in process of reaching out to both labor unions to discuss how elements of this act may be mirrored in emergency clauses to the collective bargaining agreements that would allow for modified leave as departmental operations can accommodate.

Order 20-37 Order, authorizing the Town Manager to execute Emergency Clauses, Side Agreements, and Memorandums of Understanding with existing Collective Bargaining Units as necessary to allow for orderly public safety response to continue during the declared Public Health Emergency.

Moved by Tom Perry and seconded by Cheryl Robertson. All voted in favor, 7-0.

Ms. Wilson commented staff has begun the process of working with the labor unions to address personnel and operational needs during this public health emergency. Such clauses would sunset at the end of this emergency, aimed at supporting staff and operations, and be adopted with explicit “non-precedent setting” language. She noted the scope would be the same as non-union employees with the intent to keep employees safe.

Order 20-38 Order, authorizing the Town Manager to make such payments as required by 25 MRSA § 2808 in the event that the Town hires a Patrol Officer with less than five years of experience since completing the Maine Criminal Justice Academy Basic Law Enforcement Training Program.

Moved by Cheryl Robertson and seconded by Sam Kunz. All voted in favor, 7-0.

Police Chief Josh Ewing explained the Police Department is in the process of considering a candidate for the open Patrol Officer position. Since there is a strong possibility that the individual hired has completed the Maine Criminal Justice Academy Basic Law Enforcement Training Program within the last five years, the Town would be required to reimburse the current employing agency. This could be between \$18,000 - \$24,000. As the hiring process is not yet complete, the information about the candidate is confidential by state statute.

Order 20-39 Order, authorizing the Town Manager to execute an agreement for the purchase of Radio Equipment from Radio Communications of Maine of Portland, Maine in the amount of \$10,199.00 with payment of \$5,099.50 from the approved FY20 Fire Department Operating Budget and the remaining from the FY21 Fire Department Operating Budget with funds routinely allocated for this purpose.

Moved by Tom Perry and seconded by Terry Greenier. The vote was in favor, 6-1 (Cindy Mehnert was opposed).

Fire Chief Geoff Low requested purchasing radio equipment in the amount of \$10,199 over two fiscal years. He noted funds for radio equipment were budgeted for FY20. He described reaching out to the sole source vendor for a repeater, 5 portable radios and truck radios. The vendor has agreed to accept half of the payment this fiscal year and the remainder in FY21 (saving over \$500 in labor by being done together). Chief Low noted the high importance of the radio equipment and the funding request.

Ms. Mehnert asked whether the equipment will meet the requirements of the County system. Chief Low confirmed the radio equipment would meet the national and county standards. Chief Low explained the need for radios versus cell phones due to reliability of coverage and dependability of extreme weather conditions.

Ms. Mehnert stated she would be voting against the order because part of the funding is coming from an unseen budget.

6. Brief Town Manager's Update

Ms. Wilson provided a brief update on the following issues:

- Anticipated additional expenses with Covid 19 - submit to FEMA.
- Concern about declining revenues and declining interest rate (\$30,000).
- Council meeting schedule - Council agreed to hold off on regular meetings to ensure equal access to residents, but be flexible to meet for special updates and needs.
- Town staff is working well as a team and serving the needs of the community during this health crisis.

Ms. Mehnert acknowledged the Town employees for their efforts. She also acknowledged the recent Annual Municipal Election results that re-elected Councilors Gardner and Mehnert.

7. Adjournment

At 4:00pm, Sam Kunz moved and Cheryl Robertson seconded to adjourn. All voted in favor, 7-0.

Minutes are not verbatim. A video-recorded version is available on the Town's website at www.orono.org.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy W. Ward
Executive Assistant