



**City Council Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023 - 6:30 p.m.**  
**Franklin Lodge of Elks**

**Council in attendance:** Mayor Jo Brown, Councilor Jay Chandler, Councilor Leigh Webb, Councilor Bob Desrochers, Councilor George Dzujna, Councilor Valerie Blake, Councilor Paul Trudel, Councilor Vince Ribas, Councilor Ted Starkweather and Councilor Olivia Zink

**Absent:** None

**Others in attendance:** City Manager Judie Milner, Police Chief David Goldstein and members of the public.

Mayor Brown called the meeting to order at 6:31 p.m.

Salute to the Flag was led by Councilor Desrochers.

**Item I & Item II were taken off of the agenda.**

Milner stated that before agenda item III, they were in need of a nonpublic session.

**Motion – Councilor Ribas moved that the Franklin City Council enter into nonpublic according to RSA 91-A:3, II(a) The dismissal, promotion, or compensation of any public employee or the disciplining of such employee, or the investigation of any charges against him or her, *unless* the employee affected (1) has a right to a public meeting, and (2) requests that the meeting be open, in which case the request shall be granted.**

Councilor Trudel asked to make another motion before going into nonpublic:

**Motion – Councilor Trudel moved that the Franklin City Council votes to release the draft copy of the engineering study that pertains to the life safety and other structural updates to City Hall by a roll call vote. Seconded by Councilor Desrochers.**

Mayor Brown stated that she is not sure it is in the best interest of the city to release a draft report. She thinks it would be best if the council were able to review the content before releasing to the public.

Councilor Trudel believes that the taxpayers that have paid for this report to be drafted should be able to view it. There have been multiple requests for it and he asked that the council take a roll call vote on releasing now or postponing until they have a final report after the holidays.

Councilor Webb called point of order stating that there was already a motion on the table and that needs to be voted on first. Councilor Trudel stated that he was not withdrawing his motion.

Councilor Desrochers added that sometimes something being legal is not always ethical. He believes that the public deserves to see the draft report and that the council should at least vote on it.

Councilor Webb asked the City Manager to let them know if there is anything in the report that should be kept as nonpublic information at this time. Milner stated that she doesn't think so, but there were assumptions made in the report that should not have been made. This is why the professional staff reviews things in draft and brings them to the council in final form. That is why she held back on releasing this draft, so that she doesn't cause any confusion with the public of what was right or what was wrong on the report, hence draft.

No other discussion ensued.

**By a roll call vote.**

**Roll Call:**

<b>Councilor Blake</b>	<b><u>no</u></b>	<b>Councilor Desrochers</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Starkweather</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>
<b>Councilor Webb</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Dzujna</b>	<b><u>no</u></b>	<b>Councilor Trudel</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>
<b>Councilor Chandler</b>	<b><u>no</u></b>	<b>Councilor Ribas</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Zink</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>

**6 in favor; 3 opposed. Motion PASSED**

Mayor Brown stated that they were going back to the original motion to go into a nonpublic.

**Seconded by Councilor Zink.**

Councilor Trudel requested that any councilor-elected officials and the mayor-elect be able to sit in on the nonpublic session as well.

**By a roll call vote.**

**Roll Call:**

<b>Councilor Blake</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Desrochers</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Starkweather</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>
<b>Councilor Webb</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Dzujna</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Trudel</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>
<b>Councilor Chandler</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Ribas</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>	<b>Councilor Zink</b>	<b><u>yes</u></b>

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Entered into nonpublic at 6:43 p.m.

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

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Public Session reconvened at 7:15 p.m.

**Motion — Councilor Ribas moved to seal the minutes. Seconded by Councilor Trudel.**

**By a roll call vote.**

**Roll Call:**

**Councilor Blake     yes     Councilor Desrochers     yes     Councilor Starkweather     yes**

**Councilor Webb     yes     Councilor Dzujna     yes     Councilor Trudel     yes**

**Councilor Chandler     yes     Councilor Ribas     yes     Councilor Zink     yes**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED**

Councilor Ribas stated that city employees have expressed their concerns about lack of civility in their offices and their safety.

**Motion - Councilor Ribas moved that the Franklin City Council authorize the city manager to purchase and place signage in all city buildings and to present the council with a draft policy about the lack of civility issues at the next city council meeting. Seconded by Councilor Webb.**

**All in favor; motion PASSED.**

Councilor Trudel did want to let the public know where they can get access to the draft report on City Hall, as that had been passed. Milner stated that it is available to view at City Hall.

Councilor Webb added that there are some circulated theories on social media, but he would like to clear one of them up. One of the councilors resigned from a board and announced it at a city public meeting and was challenged. When Councilor Blake made that statement, he did not doubt her and said that he considers her as honorable. It should have never been questioned after the fact.

Councilor Chandler addressed the public on the motion to have the city manager purchase and place signage in all city buildings. This is due to people being extremely rude to city staff when they come up to a window because they are upset. It is never ok to swear or verbally attack a city employee so they approved signage stating that there would be no tolerance for that.

**Agenda Item III.**

Meet & Greet with the Franklin Opera House board.

Mayor Brown invited the Franklin Opera House board to come up and have a seat.

The Opera House board introduced themselves:

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Dan Darling, executive Director  
Jeff Perkins, President  
Chris Seufert, Vice President  
Judith Ackerson, Treasurer  
Jule Finley, Board Member  
Val Perkins, Board Member  
Denise Steadman, Board Member  
Carol Hodgdon, Board Member  
Maureen Aube, Board Member  
Sue Bitetto, Board Member

Jule Finley started off by saying that she didn't know that this meet & greet would be a city council meeting and that was not their intent. The board's intent was to have a casual and honest discussion with the old and new council members.

There was a discussion about how this set up felt like an "us against them" approach. The council assured the board that this wasn't the case. The meet & greet needed to be done in a public meeting due to the nature of city business being discussed with the council. In the interest of transparency, it was decided that this needed to be done as a public meeting as well.

The board wanted to clear up some misconceptions and things floating around social media. Finley could not remember what all of them are, but she does think that not a lot of people are aware of the impact that the Franklin Opera House has had on our kids.

- One misconception is the number of kids that go through the Opera House. There are definitely more than 30 kids that go through the Opera House. It has also been a home and a safe haven for very many kids.
- Another misconception that she has seen is that the taxpayers support the Opera House. This is completely untrue. The Opera House fully supports itself with grants, donations, and ticket sales. The utilities and repairs to the stage and all other improvements have been paid for by the Opera House. Tax payers do not fund the Opera House.

Jeff Perkins went over a handout that he passed out to the council and there was a discussion about the numbers he provided. This is attached to the end of the minutes.

Dan Darling did mention that there are many grants that the Opera House can apply for, however, they need solid info from the architect's report and firm budget numbers before they are able to apply. His next deadline is in April.

The big question from the Opera House is what is the hold up on getting the cost of repairs and to get everything started?

Milner explained the process for repairing the Opera House/City Hall so that they can have an assembly permit again. The council approved the city to use an architectural firm who subbed out the electric, HVAC, engineers, etc. and they came up with an existing conditions report, which is the preliminary report the city now has. This report not only addresses the fire code issues, but also efficient use of space and things like having enough bathrooms for the amount of people in

the building. This draft report from the architects needs some revisions. The engineer has been given direction on what changes to make. The final report will be presented to the council with a few options and then funding will need to be discussed before going ahead with construction. An RFP for a GC will also need to go out as well. These things should be discussed with the Opera House as well, since it affects that piece as well.

Also, Milner stated that she has an economic development team that writes a lot of grants and she will be more than happy to have them assist the Opera House in writing grants. She added that they are the operation in the building that will get the grants, unlike City Hall, which cannot be funded by any grants. The numbers that Jule Finley provided will make for a very strong application. Milner is also looking for a much bigger grant and is going for the half a million-dollar CDBG grant for the Opera House and maybe some preservation stuff as well.

That is where they are at right now. Securing the architect was important since the grantors want to see numbers that are not made up by the Opera House and something legitimate showing what portion is only for the Opera House so the grantors know they are not funding city business. That is also part of the report. Because they will be going for federal grants, they are going to have to go through the federal RFP process to get a contractor in.

Jule Finley did let the council know that they are losing money since being out of the Opera House, since they are not able to accommodate the same size audience at the temporary locations. The Opera House could hold more people; hence they had more revenue in ticket sales. Footlight Theatre is also losing revenue as well. She stated that the downtown businesses are also losing some business during/after shows, since not being able to use the Opera House for shows.

Additional discussion was had and finally concluded, as both the City Council and the Opera House were able to speak about concerns and what the next steps will be. The council voiced their support for everything that the Opera House board does for the community, the kids and the building and agree that they all need to work together to get to the final goal of the building.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**Motion to adjourn was made by Councilor Zink and seconded by Councilor Trudel.**

**All in favor. Motion PASSED.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:19 p.m.

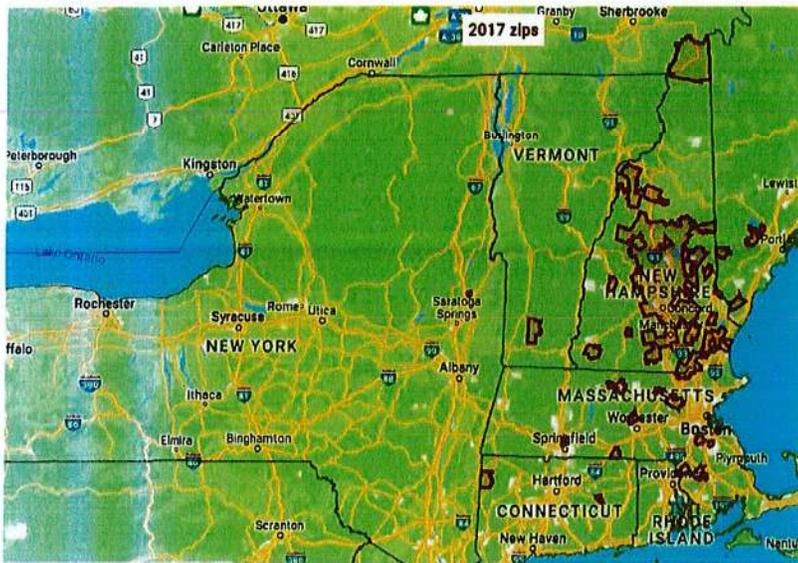
Respectfully submitted,

Lisa A. Jones  
Executive Secretary



## Geographic Reach

In the 2017-2018 season, online ticket buyers came from 97 zip codes.



In the most recent season, online ticket buyers came from 225 zip codes.

That's a  
132% increase  
in audience reach!





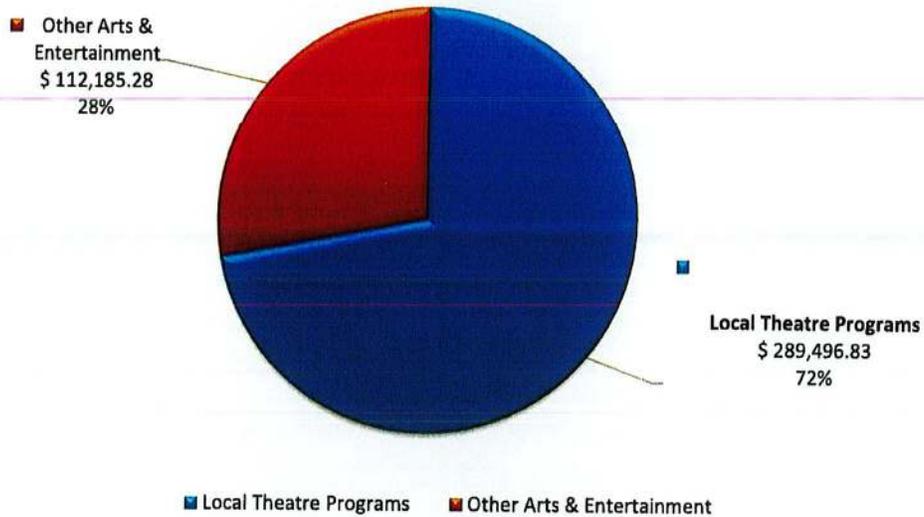
### Opera House usage:

75% Community Theatre and School Drama.

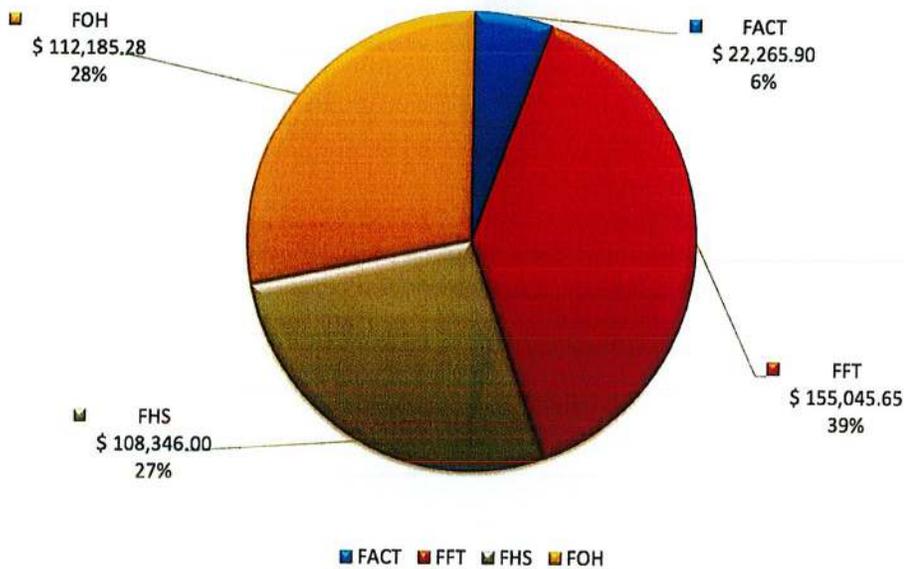
10% Visiting artists hired by Franklin Opera House, Inc.

15% City meetings.

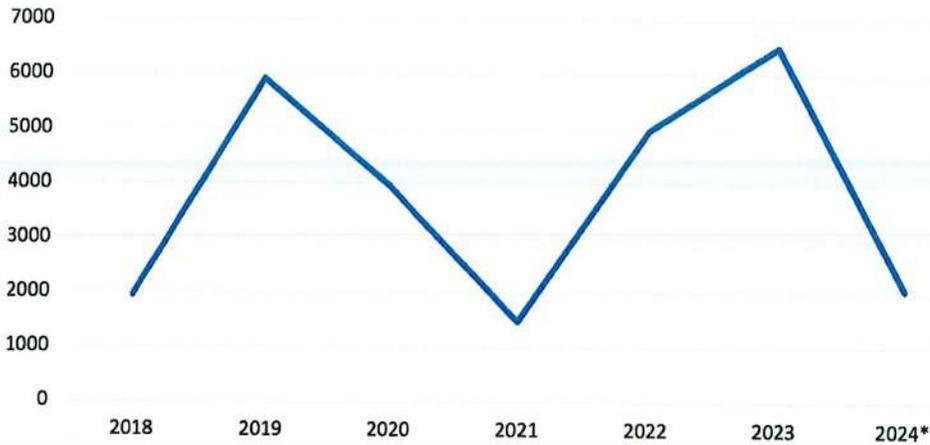
### Community Programs vs Visiting Artists



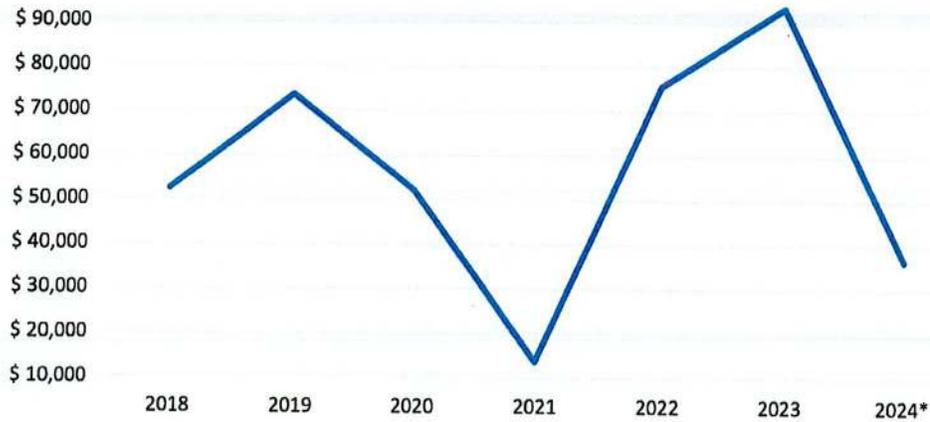
### Total Ticket Sales 2017-2023



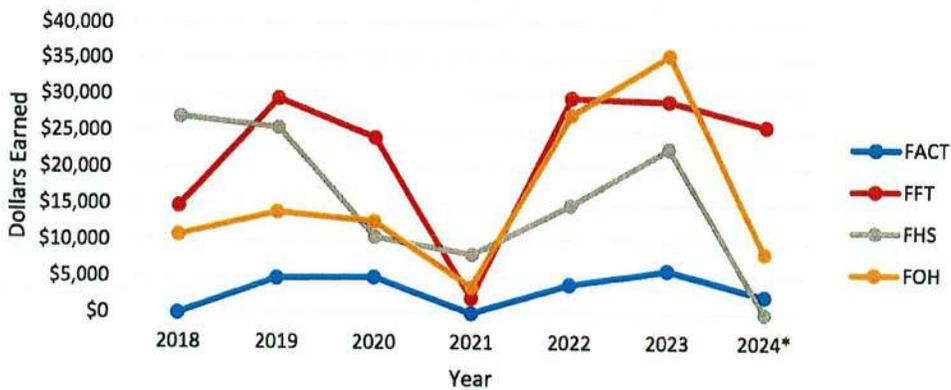
Number of tickets sold each season



Total Ticket Sales Across all Groups 2017-present  
\$370,890.83



Total Ticket Sales per Group  
2017-present





## Effect on Local Business

Some local businesses were asked if they have noticed a difference in patronage since the last show at the Opera House in July. Here's what they had to say.

**Waterhorse Irish Pub:** "Definitely busy before and after *Beauty & the Beast*. Not terribly busy during *Addams Family*, before or after. Not necessarily a decrease but definitely NOT an increase over the summer into fall. People could come to get a drink, then go to the show, like with "*Beauty & the Beast*."  
- Douglas (Host/Waitstaff)-

**Asian Delight:** When there is a show, people would come in before a show to eat. Definitely a slowdown since August. -Jin (Owner)-

**Al's Village Pizza:** "Not seen a decrease" -Al (owner)

**Vulgar Brewing:** "As far as Friday and Saturday Night dinner rushes, all the bartenders and waitstaff have noticed a definite drop in patronage, compared to when a show is running." -Zach (Bartender)

**Kettlehead:** "Yes. Since September, we have seen a drop. During events, people would come in before and after the show." -Anthony (Bartender/Waitstaff)

Has your restaurant seen a drop in Patronage Since the last show at Franklin Opera House?

