

Select Board Meeting
Monday September 16, 2024
6:40 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Chair Niko Papakonstantis, Vice-Chair Molly Cowan, Clerk Julie Gilman, Dan Chartrand, Nancy Belanger, Town Manager Russ Dean, and Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 7 PM.

2. Board Interviews

- a. Michael Drunsic for the Energy Committee
- b. Donald Cloutier for the Budget Recommendations Committee

3. Police Department - Swearing In

- a. Police Chief Stephan Poulin introduced Taylor Sheehan and Town Clerk Andie Kohler swore him in as a Patrol Sergeant.

4. Public Comment

- a. Mr. Papakonstantis thanked town staff and volunteers for their work during the September 10 primary election, as well as the voters who came out.
- b. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Exeter Masonic Lodge had a breakfast honoring the Police and Fire Departments and presented the Chiefs with a Community Builders award.

5. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. Mr. Papakonstantis read the Constitution Week proclamation from the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR):

Whereas it is the privilege and duty of the American people to commemorate the two hundred and thirty-seventh anniversary of the drafting of the Constitution of the United States of America with appropriate ceremonies and activities;

And whereas Public Law 915 guarantees the issuing of a proclamation each year by the President of the United States of America designating September 17 through 23 as Constitution Week;

Now, therefore, I, Niko Papakonstantis, Select Board Chair of the Town of Exeter, do hereby proclaim the week of September 17 through 23, as Constitution Week in the Town of Exeter, and I urge all citizens to study the Constitution and reflect on the privilege of being an American with all the rights and responsibilities which that privilege involves.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the Town of Exeter to be affixed this 16th day of September of the year of our Lord Two Thousand and Twenty-Four.

6. Approval of Minutes

a. Regular Meeting: September 3, 2024

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the Select Board minutes of September 3, 2024 as presented. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

7. Appointments

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Don Cloutier to the Budget Recommendations Committee. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Michael Drunsic to the Energy Committee; this committee has no term. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to accept the resignation of voting member Kyle Welch and alternate member Valorie Fanger from the Conservation Commission, reappointing Kyle Welch to an alternate position with a term to expire on 4/2025 and reappointing Valorie Fanger to a voting member position with a term to expire on 4/2027. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

8. Discussion/Action Items

a. E911 Address Changes – Meeting Place Drive

Deputy Fire Chief Jason Fritz was present to discuss a proposed address change on Meeting Place Drive. He said the numbering there is inconsistent with E911 Standards. We needed to give a number to the new bank and water tower. We decided to renumber the street.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if it would be a risk to defer the renumbering until after the election. Deputy Chief Fritz said he didn't think it would be an issue.

Robin Patria of 6 Meeting Place Drive said the bank faces Epping Road but became 2 Meeting Place. They want to change the bank's number to 3 and our building will be 29. We have a lot of people with medical issues that have medical supplies and prescriptions delivered. They don't use technology. To get these things changed is cumbersome. She doesn't want to miss out on the election. 911 has no problem getting there now. There's more to it than just changing an address at the post office. She said she started a petition, which she presented to the Board.

Sally Ward of 72 Park Street said she understands the concern. The numbers were changed on Park Street and it took at least 2 years for the delivery services to get it straight.

Edward Patria of 6 Meeting Place Drive said medical support and Law Enforcement know where we are. The mail delivery services, FedEx, UPS, etc, have drivers that aren't familiar with the area, and they're going to have trouble

making deliveries to the new addresses. He asked the Board to take a stronger look at the change.

Mr. Papakonstantis suggested deferring this discussion until after the election or after the end of the year to hear additional testimony.

Robin Patria said [Meeting Place owner] Avesta was notified by certified notice, but we were never brought in.

Mr. Chartrand asked if the town has had an address change with this density of population. Deputy Chief Fritz said no. Chief Pizon said Park Street was the largest change to date. In that case, we had numbers mixed in with each other. This would be the largest change. If this change were to take place, Jason [Fritz] will take care of changing almost all addresses, such as voting and mailing address. The personal bills will still be the residents' responsibility. The water tower threw a monkey wrench into it because by law it has to have an address. We have to follow the NH addressing standards.

Jules Stringos of 6 Meeting Place Drive said it's misleading that when she called about this, she was told not to worry because the town would do the notifying, but it's only utilities and things like that. This is the equivalent of moving. There are at least 15 places we have to call to update.

Charles Ryan of 6 Meeting Place Drive said he's been there 5 years. When he moved, he filled out a change of address form, but immediately all the junk mail and some regular mail was sent to apartment 101, which he never lived in.

Mr. Papakonstantis brought the discussion back to the Board.

Mr. Chartrand said given the density of population associated with this change, we have to plan this very carefully. He has tried to find addresses in Meeting Place and it's very difficult because they're not in the right order. It's important to fix that. Residents are used to it but that doesn't mean it's correct.

Ms. Belanger asked about the notification process. Deputy Chief Fritz said we dealt with the property owner, Avesta, and the owner of the bank. It's up to Avesta to reach out to their tenants. Mr. Papakonstantis asked if we could put together a team to walk through and talk to the residents, and Deputy Chief Fritz said he did that this morning.

Ms. Belanger asked if there could be a sign that shows the old numbers as well. Deputy Chief Fritz said if it's approved, they would be required to renumber the buildings per the standard. He added that we've volunteered to make signs like that.

Mr. Papakonstantis suggested bringing this back in January 2025.

Robin Patria asked that the residents be notified directly. Ms. Roy asked if we want this to come back for discussion in January or to make the change effective in January. Mr. Papakonstantis said we should do more due diligence and have additional discussion.

Mr. Papakonstantis suggested a motion to defer accepting the new numbering of the buildings on Meeting Place Drive until further review and setting up a date in January 2025 for the Board

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to defer accepting the new numbering of the buildings on Meeting Place Drive as recommended by the E911 Committee until further study can be done and a review by the Select Board; the implementation would be no sooner than January 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

b. ALS Update – Chief Justin Pizon

Chief Pizon said there was an update from the Hospital that was alarming. On Monday, September 9, he got a call from a medic with some news from the Hospital. The paramedics with Advanced Life Support were told they were going to be dissolved by September 20. He reached out to the person who oversees ALS and found out that they get called to intercept 3,000 times a year. The official notification came the following day. He felt like it was the classic rug-pulling. We don't use ALS much in Exeter, only 9 times since 2023, but they have rapid sequence intubation [RSI] which we don't have. He looked at the contract and there was a 90-day notification clause in the contract. It was pushed forward to the Attorney General's Office, who met with Beth Israel Lahey's attorneys, who decided to honor the 90 days, December 20. There are discussions to suspend this indefinitely. There is \$375M that Beth Israel Lahey said they would invest in community hospital programs, so towns are trying to use some of that money to keep ALS going. Most of the other communities that touch us do not have Paramedics on staff, so what does that mean for the Exeter Fire Department? We're not going to be available for 3,000 callouts a year. Regardless of what happens with ALS, this is a wakeup call for other agencies to come up with a solid plan for the future to rely less on the Hospital.

Ms. Belanger asked for more information about "intercept." Chief Pizon said ALS doesn't have an ambulance. They respond by getting on an ambulance. They drive out and if that's canceled, they have no way to bill.

Ms. Belanger said if they do discontinue this, will we have a better understanding of how it will affect Exeter and the surrounding communities? Chief Pizon said Exeter has a Paramedic working 24/7, 365 days a year. He [the Chief] will have to make decisions on when we say yes and when we say no.

Ms. Gilman said we are part of the mutual aid group with surrounding towns. Did we not do that with Paramedics? Chief Pizon said the State of NH does not recognize EMS as an essential service. Our mutual aid agreements are for Fire services. We do have a mass emergency plan where we might bring in ambulances from other communities.

Mr. Chartrand said we used this ALS service 9 times since the beginning of 2023. The impact on our residents is minimal. It impacts us because we would be in demand if this went away. Our resources would be stretched thinner or we would have to say no more often. This State has traditionally over-relied on not-for-profits to provide services that are provided by the State in other States. New ownership has come in and said this is not sustainable. Chief Pizon said the

communities were willing to help make that more sustainable, whether that means paying a flat fee or half for canceled intercepts.

Ms. Cowan said 9 people are not nothing.

Chief Pizon said we're investigating becoming RSI credentialed.

Ms. Cowan asked if there's anything the Board can do to be helpful.

There are other [Hospital] offices that are closing. Mr. Dean said there's a coalition of Managers working on this to get proper notice with the Attorney General.

c. Tree Committee Update –

Eileen Flockhart and Sally Ward of the Tree Committee gave a presentation on their progress. Ms. Ward said we had a goal to plant 8 trees, but by the end of the year we will have planted 12. DPW does the heavy lifting of planting the trees. The Tree Committee reaches out to our partners. We also have maintenance of trees, such as watering and pruning, and sometimes relocation. This year we'll be doing a tree inventory using an app that Rockingham Planning Commission helped us with. We'll recruit volunteers from town. Our goal is to have an accurate tree inventory for the center of town. We're also identifying sites for future plantings. We're interested in increasing the diversity of trees and planting native trees.

Ms. Belanger asked about the acronyms EOY (End of Year) and ISA (International Society of Arborists) in their presentation.

Kristin Murphy said regarding the tree inventory, \$10,000 was set aside in the budget for tree projects. We got a contract with Rockingham Planning Commission and they built this inventory. This wouldn't be just a document sitting on a shelf. Dakota Bailey created it using Survey123, an ArcGIS Software with a free app. You just walk along a street and answer some questions about the trees. There will be a public dashboard that will allow the DPW to see what trees need to be pruned or find other data. There's a page about participating on the town website.

Ms. Flockhart said we had a tree inventory from 2017 but it didn't give us a lot of overall information. We're looking at our goals for 2025. We'd like to plant 10 - 12 new trees. We'll label tree plantings. We want the trees to be successful.

Ms. Ward said we've continued our work with Tree City USA and have received growth awards for continuing to add to our work each year.

Ms. Belanger asked how you determine the height of a tree. The Tree Committee members said it's not exact, it's more like "under 10 feet," "over 20 feet."

Ms. Belanger asked about maintenance. Mr. Dean said it's up to DPW. We have a \$25,000 line item in that budget for tree maintenance. Ms. Flockhart said sometimes tree maintenance for the DPW is just "take this branch down before it kills somebody." The town might consider hiring a part-time Arborist to consult with them in the future.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked about what Dover is doing. Ms. Murphy said our approach was modeled after Strafford Planning did for Dover. RPC could pull the information and formatting from SRPC and use it. You get “tree stewards” of a street that walk down and enter the information. We talked a lot about the tree canopy and equity. The Tree Committee is excellent at identifying places for future plantings. Once we have a robust data set, it will be obvious where we can expand our canopy.

Ms. Flockhart discussed new plantings going in on Water Street.

d. Public Hearing – Comcast Franchise Amendment – Attorney Kate Miller

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to open the public hearing on the Comcast franchise amendment. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Papakonstantis read the notice of the hearing:

The Exeter Select Board hereby gives notice of a public hearing pursuant to NH RSA 53-C: 3-a, on the proposed amendment to the cable television franchise agreement between the Town of Exeter, NH and Comcast of Maine/New Hampshire, Inc. on Monday, September 16, 2024 at 7:00 p.m., in the Exeter Town Offices, Nowak Room, 10 Front Street, Exeter, New Hampshire. The proposed amendment is available for review at the Town Clerk's Office, Town Office, 10 Front Street, Exeter, NH, during the hours the Town Clerk's Office is open.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked for public comment, but there was none.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to close the public hearing. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Attorney Kate Miller said there's an existing cable franchise in Exeter, to which we negotiated some amendments. The Cable industry is in a time of change, with a lot of subscribers “cutting the cord” with cable. We're at a point where we don't have competition in the cable TV business, but a lot of competition in the streaming services. We would be happy if another cable company came in, but none have decided to do that. We think in 10 years the cable companies will shed the TV part of their business and only host the internet services. We proposed extending the franchise agreement for 10 years, into 2034. The reason is to ensure that Comcast won't walk away earlier. Some folks prefer to get their content in the cable TV format, so requiring the company to provide service in Exeter for 10 years will maintain that. The town is eligible for free cable service in school and municipal buildings. We updated the exhibit list with the locations; if any are going to move in the next few years, the service will move with them. The other high priority is to get one of our local access channels in HD. Right now it does not look as clear and crisp as the other content on TV.

We will not have to lose any of the other channels; there will be an additional channel in HD, which may be a mix of all the programming.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to execute an amendment to the cable TV franchise, which will include obtaining one HD channel for Exeter TV and to carry the current franchise agreement for 10 years, and to further authorize the Town Manager or their designee to sign the agreement. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

e. Finance Quarterly Report

Finance Director Corey Stevens presented the mid-year Finance report. These are the June 30 results for General, Water, and Sewer Funds. This did not include revolving funds, which he will discuss at the end of the year.

The General Fund had a budget of \$22.9M. At June 30 we recognized \$10.3M in revenue and \$10M in expenses. The total operating revenue was 45% of the overall 2024 budget. We collected \$7M in property taxes and \$3M from our other operating revenues. Property taxes were billed at \$31.4M in May. 77% of that is for the schools and county, and 23% or \$7.3M for the town. That was collected 85% as of June 30 and 93% as of July 30. For Operating Income, building permits fees were less than 2023, with a YOY decline of \$214,000 in the first 6 months. Last year was busy for permits, with some high-dollar projects. Income from Departments was \$167,000 less than June 2023. There were one-time reimbursements in 2023 and adjustments made to some lines. Interest income is strong at \$290,000, well ahead of budget expectation.

In General Fund Expenses, we had operating expenses of \$10M, or 44% of budget. The spending rate is similar to 2023. Hiring efforts have continued to improve this year, but wage and benefits spending still lags. The General Government budget was 48% spent. The Town Clerk's office had 2 vacant positions and HR had a vacant PT position. The Finance group was fully staffed in 2024; any variances are due to timing of expenditures. The Planning Group was 46% spent; the Building Department continues to try to hire an Electrical Contractor. In Public Safety, the Police Department was 47% spent, with 1 open position in staff position and 2 in Dispatch. The Fire Department was 47% spent. The new Fire Chief is taking a cautious approach in his first year. The EMS Revolving Fund had a revenue of \$390,000 and expenses of \$233,000.

The DPW had mid-year spending consistent with 2023, at 33% spent. We hired a new DPW Director and GIS Coordinator, but many positions remain open. The DPW General Expense spending lagged behind budget expectations mid-year. The Snow Removal budget was 79% spent, compared to 113% in 2023. In General Maintenance, the \$100,000 budget was 25% spent, but there are plans for that budget.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked how many job openings they had in Public Works. Ms. Roy said 9, but we made 2 offers this week. Steve [Cronin] is working hard to chip away at it.

Mr. Stevens said in Welfare and Human Services, we hired a new Administrator in June, so the wages and benefit lines were unspent. Direct Relief

was up \$7,000 over mid-year 2023. Human Services was 100% spent by mid-year; we made contributions to our service organizations in one-time payments rather than quarterly.

In Parks and Rec, Parks continues to work with a small labor force and relies on Contracted Services, which budget was 60% spent. Mr. Papakonstantis asked if there is saving in Contracted Services with the robots, and Mr. Stevens said it's too early to tell.

The Library budget was 57% spend by mid-year. They requested accelerated payment on the Library Services line, which is 100% paid out.

There was a Debt Service increase of \$572,000 in 2024. There is new debt related to the Westside Drive project and the solar array. There is \$60,000 in retiring debt.

The Water Fund budget was \$4.96M. Revenue was 45% of budget, and expenses were 34% of budget. Water rates increased by 15% this year. The total operating revenue was \$299,000 more than 2023, or a 15% increase. Consumption has dropped 2.6% year over year. Expenses were at 34% of budget, compared to 46% in 2023. Capital Outlay was spent in 2023 by mid-year, this year we've barely eaten into it. Water and Sewer continue to struggle with attracting job candidates. The debt service is largely paid in the 2nd half of the year. The Water Fund had a \$500,000 net surplus.

The Sewer Fund budget was \$7.5M, less than a 1% increase over 2023. Revenue was 47% of budget, and expenses were 19%. The Sewer rates increased 4% this year. Total operating revenue collected was \$110,000 more than 2023, a 3% increase. Sewer Collection dropped 3.2%. The town expects to receive a large grant toward Sewer Debt Service from the State Aid Grant. Operating expenses were 19% of budget, which is in line with historical spending. This area also had open positions. In General Sewer expenses, any differences are due to timing. Each year, Sewer operations runs a surplus. Water/Sewer Receivables were \$1.2M as of June 30.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked what we have left in ARPA funds. Mr. Stevens said we have \$42,000, with \$12,000 committed to design work in Swasey Park. The funds have to be obligated by the end of the year.

9. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

- i. Mr. Dean said there is a form sent in from the NH DRA [Department of Revenue Administration] when they observe our revaluation process. It was in line with their expectations. No action from the Board is necessary.

b. Permits & Approvals

- i. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Exeter Area General Federation of Women's' Clubs requested to place small lawn signs along the roadsides in the Exeter area with a larger sign at Guinea and Hampton Road, to advertise the Yuletide Fair Saturday at Stratham Cooperative Middle School on November 23, 2024. This will be the 45th year for this event.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the Exeter Area General Federation of Women's Clubs request to place small 21x18" signs along the roadsides in the Exeter area as well as a larger sign at Guinea Road and Hampton Road between the dates of November 17 and November 24, 2024, advertising the Women's Clubs Yuletide Fair held at Stratham CMS held on November 23, 2024. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

ii. ADA Compliant Curb Ramps

Mr. Dean said this is part of our ADA compliance program. It will be a project at the Library to install curb cuts and concrete ramps. The request is for \$13,740 from the ADA Capital Reserve fund.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the withdrawal of \$13,740 from the ADA Capital Reserve Fund for the installation of ADA compliant curb ramps at the Exeter Public Library driveway on String Bridge. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

iii. Overnight Parking Permits

Mr. Dean said folks will be allowed to register different vehicles on the same permit, but there will still only be one permit per applicant. Ms. Belanger asked why this would be changed. Mr. Dean said we have had situations where people come in with multiple vehicles and they'd like to be able to switch the permit. This is on Pleasant Street across from the Library. There is a lot of multi-unit housing there. There are 8 spaces, and permits are first-come first-serve. The Police Department has signed off on this. It will be a placard, not a sticker. Mr. Papakonstantis asked that this discussion be brought back on September 30.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. Correspondence includes the funding applications for COAST, TASC, and Rockingham County Meals on Wheels. We don't have a home for evaluating those requests so they're before the Board. He will be bringing funding recommendations forward later.
- ii. Regarding EEE [Eastern Equine Encephalitis], we've begun adulticiding mosquitos. We're paying attention to the threat. Mr. Papakonstantis said Madison Bailey, our Health Officer, has done an excellent job of communicating on this.
- iii. Exeter Public Library had an issue with their wall. The repair cost \$30,000. He met with the Director to talk about funding options. The Library is experiencing budget issues because of the wall and they've asked for assistance. This wasn't an insurable expense; it was deemed regular wear-and-tear by Primex. The Library proposed taking \$15,000 from the Maintenance Projects budget, which he would want to bring to the Board.

Ms. Belanger said she would like to know the consequence of deferring this to their next year's budget. Mr. Dean said if the Library

needs to fund this on their own, they would be overbudget and would have to shut down services at the end of the year. They came to us after the fact. Mr. Chartrand said they should have come to us before the fix. There should be different rules going forward.

Mr. Papakonstantis said we've been requesting an audience with the Trustees for quite some time, but we're now scheduled to meet. They've come to us with the promise that it could affect library services at the end of the year. He'd like to hear the Trustees' side of the story. We can come back on the 30th, after this meeting.

Ms. Belanger said we don't have any say about the budget for the Library. She would like to know if they set aside emergency funds.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- i. Ms. Belanger attended the Planning Board September 12. 50 Linden Street had 3 residential condo units approved. She recused herself on two applications. 165A Kingston Road, a subdivision request, was approved. The Rugg Property came to the Planning Board; she will be recusing herself in case it becomes a Select Board issue. There were no votes or public comment. She attended a Housing Advisory Committee meeting on September 13. They tabled some discussions because Dave Sharples was away. They discussed a project in Dover that used transfer development rights; the developer agreed to come speak at the next HAC meeting. Exeter Senior Council is doing a resource fair October 22nd at 17 Hampton Road.
- ii. Ms. Gilman attended an Energy Committee meeting. They talked about promoting the Exeter Electric Vehicle Car Expo on September 29 and the opt-up electricity competition. The Window Dressers program is going to take place in January. The Heritage Commission Demolition Review Committee is looking at 112 Front Street next Wednesday on-site.
- iii. Ms. Cowan had a Water/Sewer Advisory Committee meeting on September 11. They took up 6 abatement requests. Mr. Chartrand said he wasn't notified of the meeting. He is on the committee now.
- iv. Mr. Chartrand had a Conservation Commission meeting but he worked at the polls instead, so he had no report.
- v. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Tree Committee met Tuesday but it was to prepare the presentation. The next meeting will be a site walk on the Parkway.
- vi. Ms. Belanger said the public should listen to and watch the Exeter Biweekly reports. Friday's report featured Oliva, Bob Glowacky's baby girl.

e. Correspondence

- i. The correspondence discussed in the Town Manager's report
- ii. The NHMA legislative bulletin

10. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are September 30, October 15, October 28, November 12, November 25, December 9, and December 23. The BRC kick-off is October 2nd.

11. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A3II(a). Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0. The meeting entered non-public at 9:27 PM.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to seal the minutes until negotiations are completed. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

12. Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to adjourn. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0. The Select Board adjourned at 10:06 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary