

Select Board Meeting
Monday December 9, 2024
6:30 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, and Town Manager Russ Dean were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:30 PM.

2. Board Interviews

- a. Renay Allen-Hitzrot for the 250th Celebration Committee
- b. Kimberly Barner for the 250th Celebration Committee
- c. Marty Kennedy for the Planning Board
- d. Kelsey Dumville for the Arts & Culture Advisory Committee

The Board reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7 PM.

3. Public Comment

- a. There was no public comment at this time.

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. There were no proclamations or recognitions at this time.

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: November 25, 2024

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the minutes of November 25, 2024 as presented. Mr. Chartrand seconded. Ms. Belanger, Mr. Papakonstantis, and Mr. Chartrand voted aye. Ms. Cowan and Ms. Gilman abstained as they had not been present at the November 25 meeting. The motion passed 3-0-2.

6. Appointments

- a. Suzanne Stone from the Pairpoint Park Committee.

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to accept with regret the resignation of Suzanne Stone from the Pairpoint Park Committee. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Papakonstantis said we're looking for 6 volunteers total for the 250th celebration committee, plus someone from the Heritage Commission.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to appoint the Rev. Doctor Em Heath, Renay Allen-Hitzrot, and Kimberly Barner to the 250th Celebration Committee, with no term limit. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Marty Kennedy as an alternate to the Planning Board, term to expire April 2027. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Kelsey Dumville to the Arts & Culture Advisory Committee as an alternate, term to expire April 2025. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

7. Discussion/Action Items

a. Revaluation Update

Finance Director Corey Stevens was present to discuss the revaluation. Mr. Stevens said he spoke to Tax and Assessing and things have slowed down lately. We've answered a lot of questions through the Select Board meetings and an article in the paper. We put together a quick touchpoint for the website, which is accessible from the homepage. We're seeing a lot of inquiries for abatements, particularly from manufactured homes. Those filing abatements should not defer paying their taxes. They should pay them, and if they go through the abatement process they will be credited or refunded. He added that taxes are due December 19th.

b. FY 25 Budget Recommendations Committee Recap

Budget Recommendations Committee Chair Bob Kelly was present to discuss the BRC process. Mr. Kelly said we received the budget in September and spent the next two months analyzing it and meeting with staff, then met several times as a full committee and in subcommittees. The budget increase was higher than we were used to; usually it's 2 - 3%, but this year it was 4-5%. Healthcare costs were a big part of it. We added a fairly large amount to the IT Department to address the threat of cyberattacks, which are on the rise among municipalities. Exeter is an old community; we try to maintain our buildings and vehicles regularly. The BRC pushed back on some things because we've been short-staffed. In the past, we've budgeted for things and the work wasn't done. We decided to provide more money to do vehicle maintenance rather than replacement. The BRC considered Fire Department coverage to parts of town that are not on the town water system, who were not really paying for it. Last year we approved a \$100,000 transfer from the General Fund to the Water Fund that would allow a payback for the water system. The staff recommendation for this year was to cut that \$100,000 to \$50,000, but the BRC chose to continue with the \$100,000. The BRC added \$275,000 to the preliminary budget. We supported the full-time Human Resources Director and a part-time Recreation Senior Coordinator. Both of these positions have been a long time coming, and people have been doing double jobs to cover these areas. There is a continued assessment of the Public Works Campus. There's a fuel island warrant article. One item that the Public Works Director raised is that there's no security up there. There's \$5M of equipment up there with no gate or fence. We don't have to start from scratch, but need to chip away at improving it. The Water Fund budget went down by 9%, due to retirement of debt and reduced capital outlay. One of

our key operators will be retiring in 2025, and our recent experience is that we haven't been able to hire right away, but it's important to have the funding in there. We also funded a consulting line item in case we need to bring that person back, but the BRC supported it only for a few months. The Sewer Fund was up over last year due to the Treatment Plant we built in 2019 being 5 years old. Our debt has gone down precipitously in the 5 years, but the buildings are aging. In the Capital Improvements program, there was a new fuel island in Public Works. The current fuel island has been there since the 60s and the tanks are 15 - 20 years old. The other big item is the Pickpocket Dam Removal, which the BRC supported. Several bond articles won't be hitting the rolls until 2026. There was strong support for the new groundwater development project. There's a large ask of \$7M, but that's to complete the project. There were new downtown electric vehicle charging stations and a styrofoam processing unit for the Transfer Station, and they were not unanimously but were significantly supported by the committee.

Mr. Kelly recognized the members of the 2024 BRC: Judy Rowan, Christine Soutter, Christopher Zigmont, Elizabeth Canada, Fran Hall, Anthony Zwaan, David Kovar, Enna Grazier, Don Cloutier, Andrew Elliott, and Amanda Kelly.

Mr. Chartrand asked about the groundwater development program. Mr. Kelly said we have enough funds to analyze the data and keep the momentum going. Assuming the State approves the location and data, the warrant will allow us to start with the construction. Mr. Chartrand said this is the most important thing on the warrant in March and hopes the town will support it.

Ms. Belanger encouraged town residents to volunteer for the Budget Recommendations Committee or at least to watch the budget process.

Ms. Cowan said this is a budget we can be proud of. There were important decisions we were forced to make because of decisions at the State and Federal levels.

Mr. Papakonstantis thanked Mr. Kelly for his year-round work, which includes meeting with the Executive Team.

Mr. Dean said right now, we have a 5.58% increase year over year in the General Fund. That is due primarily to health insurance changes. We're going through open enrollment right now which is changing the numbers.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Mr. Dean to put the budget on the agenda for the Select Board meetings of December 23 and January 6. Mr. Kelly said he would only be available on December 23rd.

c. TIF Update

Darren Winham, Economic Development Director said TIF is the tax increment financing district. It has been extremely successful. We have some projects now that could bring lots of jobs and tax dollars. The TIF was voted on in 2015, and since 2016 we've raised \$11,843,000. The current balance is \$8.28M; of this amount, \$1.8M is due to pay the bond, \$1.67M is earmarked for Epping

Road widening and related improvements, and \$2.5M is set aside for phase 2 of the TIF road extension of Ray Farmstead Road. There's some stickiness there now, but it may be solved by next year. We're in the second phase of the widening of the road from Continental to 101. The reason we have to do an amendment to the article voted in 2020 is because Covid hit and the price escalated. Once the voters vote a figure, you can only go 10% over that amount, which is not enough to finish it. We're doing as much as we can this year and are waiting on figures for next year. \$1M was approved. Mr. Chartrand said the money comes out of the TIF fund, so there's no tax impact.

Mr. Winham said TIF money has to be used for public infrastructure. There are a number of improvements we could make, such as around the Police Station Fire Substation and the Water Tower. He's asking the lawyer if we can do that and if the voters can allow the Select Board to spend the money rather than voting on each project. Mr. Dean said Peterborough created expendable trust funds and the voters authorized the Select Board to be the agents of those funds. We'll come back with a slate of recommendations.

Mr. Chartrand said we should be cautious on this. Let's not cut any corners that might impact this tool in the eyes of the voters. They've shown an incredible capacity to understand and support these projects.

Ms. Belanger said the fund has \$8.28M and there's a list of earmarked amounts. Mr. Dean said \$2.5M is left. Mr. Chartrand said the TIF is still operating and growing. It will continue to increase each year. Mr. Dean said the latest figure is \$2.8M a year.

Mr. Winham said the TIF Advisory Board stopped meeting in 2020. It has to have a member of the Select Board, a member of staff, and 3 people who own property or businesses in the TIF zone. Previously, the members were himself, Tom Monahan, Mike Lampert, Dan Chartrand, and John Shafmaster. John Shafmaster resigned in 2020, so Mr. Winham invited Scott Wright and had one meeting including him, but found that the Select Board needs to appoint him. Mr. Papakonstantis said he would have to apply and the Board would have to interview him. Mr. Dean said he can arrange that.

d. DPW Projects Update

Public Works Director Stephen Cronin was present to give an update on DPW projects. Mr. Cronin said we've been working to update our DPW projects page on the website.

The Webster Ave Pump Station construction started in July. We've completed the relocation of the gas mains and installed 400 feet of the new forcemains. This project will pause for the winter months. We should have the new pump station online by the end of 2025 and fully completed in late spring 2026.

The septage receiving equipment arrived on site in November. The mechanical equipment has been installed. We're awaiting delivery of electrical and control panels. We expect this project to be complete in spring 2025.

The intersection improvements at Front/Pine/Linden are ongoing. The design consultant continues to advance the design. We've determined the property impacts and need to secure easements, which should be wrapped up shortly. The sewer and drainage systems are beyond repair and must be replaced. We anticipate construction to begin in 2025. There will be a neighborhood meeting in the coming weeks.

The Linden Street Bridge went to bid in January but came in higher than the appropriation. We added a request for supplemental funding to the 2025 CIP. We would rebid and begin construction in 2025.

The Westside Drive Utility improvements final design has been submitted to DES. We are on track to bid that project this winter and begin construction in spring 2025. We will secure the necessary permits and easements this winter.

Regarding the Groundwater Source Project, the new production well is in. We started the 5-day pumping test on Nov 13, which proceeded nicely. The well monitoring equipment remained in place to look at groundwater recovery. Data will be submitted to DES for review in January. We're optimistic about the results; the yield was consistent with the predictions. There's a warrant item for final design and construction. If approved, we would start construction late next year.

The Surface Water Treatment Plant had a conceptual design RFQ in September. We only had one proposal, which we're reviewing. We will meet with them and make a recommendation to the Board.

Regarding the Epping Road improvements, the road widening began on September 23. Drainage work will continue this week. We will continue with construction as the weather remains favorable. We will need the additional TIF funding to complete the project. We added a signalized crossing, which was not part of the original recommendations.

The Swasey Parkway turnaround construction has been completed. The gates were installed on Friday, and they will hopefully be open this week. We plan to issue a press release and a Facebook update.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if Mr. Cronin could alert the Chair of the Swasey Park Trustees and make sure once the gates are up that he has a key. Mr. Cronin said these are combination padlocks, and we gave him and Public Safety the code today. DPW has a key if there is an issue. We will be monitoring the traffic and activity for any needed changes.

Mr. Cronin said regarding Pickpocket Dam, we directed our consultant to pursue funding opportunities for dam removal. They identified 3 opportunities and they're working on applications. We're looking for a letter of support for that. The Department will host a public information session on December 10 at the Exeter Public Library. We sent notifications to abutters both in Exeter and in Brentwood. At the meeting, we'll talk about the process moving forward. There will be three breakout groups for feedback from residents.

Regarding the School Street area reconstruction, in October the Board approved a contract with CMA, and we've executed that contract. Survey activity starting this week. There's a design kick-off meeting this week.

The Winter Street BMP project was awarded to NE Earth Mechanics who installed new drainage and catch basins. Construction of the new infiltration systems began this week. Most work is outside the layout of the road so will not hinder traffic.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked the Board to consider the Pickpocket Dam letter of approval outside of the permits and approvals agenda item.

Mr. Cronin said VHB submitted a letter of intent on behalf of the town for the Coastal Zone Management Grant and got some positive comments back. DES recommended that we include letters of support from stakeholders in our final grant application. The Town Manager's Office reached out to Brentwood and our Congressional Delegation for letters of support. Kristen Murphy has been working with the Conservation Commission. We drafted a letter for the Select Board's consideration.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if this grant is similar to the grant from last year. Mr. Cronin said that was for fish passage, this is a slightly different program.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve a letter of support for inclusion with the town's application for the NOAA Coastal Zone Management Habitat Protection and Restoration Competition application for the Pickpocket Dam removal project. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

e. Rapid Sequence Intubation Update

Fire Chief Justin Pizon was present to give an update. He's been attending a working group for the 125 Corridor, spearheaded by the Chief of the Plaistow Fire Department. They are discussing how to establish a paramedic intercept service along the 125 Corridor. They've chosen not to go with privatization. March 20 is the end of the Exeter Hospital ALS program, but they could end it sooner depending on how quickly this group works. There's going to be an opt-in cost, which will be a flat fee plus a fee based on population and a transportation fee. That's not something we're interested in opting in on because we employ our own paramedics. There will still be an opportunity for a conversation, because if someone were transported from Exeter, we would be billed.

Chief Pizon discussed Rapid Sequence Intubation or RSI, a mechanism to secure a person's airway. He and Assistant Chief Matheson met with Exeter Hospital representatives. The doctor there has to give us support on this project. We've been using Eric Yeager on our monthly EMS training. Once Dr. Kissel at EHS knew we were working with Eric, he was supportive; he wants Exeter Hospital to become a training partner with the Exeter FD. Chief Pizon was put in touch with their Education Coordinator. They have a simulation lab at the Hospital that may be available for us to use.

RSI needs appropriate initial training, a continuous quality improvement program, and annual ongoing training. RiverWoods donated 2 video laryngoscopes. The most expensive part is a portable ventilator; it's \$12,998 for a

recertified one. It's \$2,200 for the education portion. 16 hours of training is required, but we can take 4 hours out of those costs because it will be added to our regular monthly trainings. Continuing quality improvement is \$1,500 to get us set up for the first year. There will be \$5,200 in overtime expenses: 12 hours x 9 paramedics. The budget has \$1,000 difference from what was proposed in the budget, as he was able to offset it elsewhere. Historically back to 2022, the EMS Revolving Fund has been giving back to the General Fund. In 2023 it gave back \$182,000.

Chief Pizon said he's looking for support to push forward with this RSI program. We'd like to be self-sufficient without paramedics from other communities or an intercept service.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if there would need to be a motion, or just acceptance from the Board. Mr. Dean said concurrence that we can proceed with this program. The costs will be rolled into the EMS Fund. The Board generally agreed to the program as proposed.

f. ARPA Update

Corey Stevens, Finance Director, was present to discuss proposed ARPA funding projects. We're down from \$1.603M to \$27,390 in ARPA funds. The Board has prioritized projects that have a community impact and give back to residents. We're proposing 3 projects, working with DPW and the Media/IT teams. The Swasey Park gates were installed this week at a cost of \$8,700, and we would like to use ARPA funding to cover that. We'd like to upgrade the AV in the Wheelwright Room, which is used by committees but is not set up to video and record the way the Nowak Room is. The plan includes audio and video. The 4 cameras in the Nowak Room are at end of life, but are appropriate in the space downstairs. We could replace the four up here and bring those downstairs. We'd suspend a microphone from the ceiling. They would be able to manage meetings from across the street. This will make the Wheelwright room more useful. The cost is \$13,600. The third project is supplementing the IT budget to make changes to the IT environment as it relates to Public Safety. The actual cost is \$68,000 but we put \$40,000 in the budget. This includes buying hardware and services from the IT vendor. We asked FD, Police, and IT to look at how to pull some of that cost from their current year budgets. What's left is \$5,090 that we could use from ARPA. This is to use up what's left in the ARPA funds. We have to obligate the funds by the end of the year and spend them by the end of 2026.

Ms. Belanger noted that we got to zero in the ARPA funding. Mr. Stevens said we funded 16 projects, including retention bonuses, protective equipment, DPW work, Pickpocket Dam work, the Winter Street BMP, and the Tree Committee. Mr. Dean said we plan to put the list of projects in the town report this year.

Ms. Belanger asked if there could be "quiet, meeting in progress" signs outside the Wheelwright Room. Mr. Dean said we can look into it. Mr. Stevens said Mr. Swanson suggested a plaque that said "paid for by ARPA funds."

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the remaining ARPA funds to be expended as follows: \$8,700 for the Swasey Turnaround Gates; \$13,600 for AV tech upgrades to the Town Offices; and \$5,090 for IT hardware and services; and to further authorize the Town Manager or their designee to sign the appropriate documents. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

8. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 110/2/15 in the amount of \$91.05 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 110/2/14 in the amount of \$160.00 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 110/2/89 in the amount of \$166.04 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 110/2/22 in the amount of \$91.29 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veterans Credit for 47/8/2418 in the amount of \$500 for tax year 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veterans Credit for 64/91 in the amount of \$500 for tax year 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veterans Credit for 80/7/2 in the amount of \$500 for tax year 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Permits & Approvals

- i. There were no permits or approvals considered at this time.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. Collective Bargaining is ongoing. We're having productive meetings with the unions. He'll have an update for the Board on December 23.
- ii. We worked with the FD on the Nowak Room capacity. It is 48 people with chairs or 103 people with standing room only.
- iii. We had a conversation with Keegan Associates about next steps. There is money left in that account. They gave us a proposal that includes Executive Coaching and meeting with Public Works; following up with staff on changes made; and meeting with the Board again.
- iv. We held an in-person Operations meeting on December 6.

- v. He thanked the Christmas Parade organizer Beth Dupell and her team, as well as Parks and Rec and Chamber for the Holiday Block Party. There's a giving tree at Parks and Rec to fund Youth Programming, and he's working to bring it to the Town Offices.
- vi. Town Offices are closed Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, and have a half day on Dec 31 and a full day off on New Years.
- vii. Ms. Gilman asked Mr. Dean to look into whether the town can have its own liquor license for committee-sponsored events.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- i. Ms. Belanger said the Planning Board sitewalk scheduled for RiverWoods December 5th was rescheduled to this Thursday. The RiverWoods application will be heard December 19.
- ii. Ms. Gilman had no report.
- iii. Ms. Cowan had no report.
- iv. Mr. Chartrand attended a Sustainability Advisory Committee meeting, which had a quorum. The Conservation Commission was moved to Wednesday because of the dam removal meeting on Tuesday, so he has a conflict as he would prefer to attend the Water/Sewer meeting.
- v. Mr. Papakonstantis had no report.

e. Correspondence

- i. There was no correspondence.

9. Review Board Calendar

Mr. Papakonstantis said the next meetings are December 23 and January 6. The Budget Hearing is January 21.

10. Other Business

Ms. Gilman asked if the Board thought it was ok for town committees to recommend items to read or watch. Mr. Dean said he will review that.

11. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II(a). Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0. The Board entered non-public session at 8:51 PM. Ms. Belanger moved to exit non-public session. Ms. Gilman seconded the motion. The motion carried all in favor.

12. Adjournment. Ms. Cowan motioned to adjourn. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion carried and the Board stood adjourned at 9:02 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary