

Select Board Meeting
Monday December 23, 2024
6:20 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 6:20 PM.

2. Non-Meeting

- a. The Board went downstairs to the Wheelwright Room for a non-meeting.

3. Board Interviews

- a. Sarah Koff for the Sustainability Advisory Board

The Board reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7:05 PM.

4. Public Comment

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

5. Relief of Property Tax

Mr. Papakonstantis asked the Board to address this issue out of order on the agenda, and the Board agreed. Warren Gardner was present to discuss his tax relief request. Mr. Gardner said his closing date was 3 days after the tax bills were printed, so he never got a tax bill. It was addressed to the old owners. He sent an email to the Assessor's Office on July 5 and didn't get a response. He came into the office and talked to the Assessors and they said he would receive his tax bill in November, but he had missed the last tax bill.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the amount of relief requested was \$309.75.

Ms. Cowan said this situation has happened once before and the Board did abate it.

Mr. Papakonstantis apologized for the issue. Ms. Belanger said it was a timing issue, it wasn't the Assessing or Collections Department's fault.

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to forgive the interest that was charged on the mid-year 2024 tax bill in the amount of \$309.79. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Dean said his office would follow up with Mr. Gardner.

6. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: December 9, 2024

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the minutes of December 9, 2024 as presented. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

7. Appointments

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to appoint Sarah Koff as an alternate to the Sustainability Advisory Committee, term to expire April 2027. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

8. Proclamations/Recognitions

Mr. Papakonstantis said EXTV won two Northeaster Awards. These awards honor outstanding individuals for their contributions to the field of community media. Mr. Papakonstantis presented Gabe Perez of EXTV with a plaque and certificate, and thanked Mr. Perez for his work in Bob Glowacky's absence.

9. Discussion/Action Items

a. Revaluation

Finance Director Corey Stevens was present to give an update. Mr. Stevens said the 19th was tax due day. The office is still busy with administrative work. Last year we were 95% collected on the due day, and this year we're at 95% again.

Mr. Stevens said regarding pre-payments, residents occasionally pay more than they owe with the December bill. We have historically turned that money back and not allowed pre-payments, but if it were allowed it would cut down on the administration of sending the money back. RSA 80:52-a allows it.

Mr. Stevens said the second item is to give more latitude to the Tax Collector, Mr. Dean, on how much interest he can waive. The RSA allows \$25. Mr. Dean said this is a long-standing practice, but we want to reconfirm it.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize property tax pre-payments to be held over to the following year, pursuant to RSA 80:52-a. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Tax Collector to waive up to \$25 in interest pursuant to RSA 76-13. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

b. FY 25 Budget

Finance Director Corey Stevens was present to discuss the budget. Mr. Stevens said a few weeks ago we talked about wages for non-union staff and "27 pay" in 2025. The Board decided on a 2% COLA increase. Since then, we've closed open enrollment for benefits and had other staffing changes, and the budget to date is lower by 0.1% than what the BRC saw. Our staff went back to look at a 3% Step instead of a 2% COLA. This allows employees to move along in their career and has implications for retirement. The 3% Step is a 5.62% increase or \$27,000 more than a 2% COLA.

Mr. Chartrand said it's a \$30,000 difference and he doesn't have a problem with that. Ms. Belanger agreed.

Mr. Stevens said we're trying to make the town competitive with other towns and not fall behind. Mr. Dean said it's imperative that the town remain competitive in its wage structure. The Executive Team came to a group conclusion on this.

Mr. Papakonstantis said this is a good faith effort to retain our employees. He asked if a motion was required, and Mr. Stevens said no, it would be part of the approval of the budget.

c. Town of Exeter Investment Policy –

Finance Director Corey Stevens presented a revised policy was based on recommendations from the Government Finance Offices Association.

Ms. Belanger asked on page 3, where it reads "acceptable to the Board," should that say the Select Board? Mr. Stevens said he would update it.

Mr. Dean said he'd like to recognize Mr. Stevens and his staff on the town's investment income. We're well in the \$600,000 range, as opposed to the past where we made \$50,000 or \$100,000.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to adopt the revised investment policy in the packet as amended for the Town of Exeter, effective December 23, 2024. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

d. Review 2024 Year-End Encumbrance Requests

Finance Director Corey Stevens discussed the encumbrances. Mr. Stevens said these are contracts and obligations we have in place before the end of the year. He included a historical look at what our encumbrances have been over the last 5 years. It averages around \$1M between the three funds.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to encumber \$426,544.91 for the General Fund. Ms. Gillman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to encumber \$49,430.37 for the Water Fund. Ms. Cowan seconded.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to encumber \$503,621.47 for the Sewer Fund. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

e. TIF Update

Town Planner Dave Sharples was present for the discussion of the TIF fund. Mr. Dean said RSA 162-K requires the town to develop a financing plan, which was adopted by the town in March 2015. It was amended twice, first to allow a traffic light at Continental and Epping, and second to allow a widening of Epping Road. Staff is working to prepare a third amendment for phase 2 of the Epping Road widening project. There are not enough dollars to complete the project. We have \$1M, and legal counsel said it's ok to spend up to 10% more, but we need an estimated additional \$800,000 to finish the work. TIF funds are available, so there will be no tax impact. Other projects can be funded with TIF

dollars if they are within the district and are identified in the plan. Projects are considering are paving at \$180,000; enlarging the water and/or sewer lines to support further development; and paying part of the debt service on the Police Station/Fire Substation. We will present a draft financing plan to the Board on January 6th. Legal counsel said we can only use TIF money for projects identified in the program, which have to align with the items listed in RSA 162-K:6:III.

Mr. Sharples said we're working with Darren Winham on the TIF amendment to the financing plan and will be adding the Police Station and Fire Substation.

Mr. Chartrand said he would like to ask questions of legal counsel in non-public. He has no problem with the \$800,000 for the widening, the \$180,000 for the paving, and making the pipes uniform. Beyond that, he'd like to speak with legal counsel.

Mr. Dean said any amendment to the financing plan has to be on the warrant. These are options, they're not hard and fast.

Mr. Papakonstantis said this is being rushed. He asked if legal counsel could be present on January 6, and Mr. Dean said he thinks some resource could be available. Ms. Roy asked if they could have Mr. Chartrand's questions in advance. If they need to do research, they may not be able to answer right away. Mr. Chartrand said he would prefer to present them in conversation with the Board present.

f. Town Manager's Contract – Russ Dean, Town Manager

Mr. Papakonstantis presented the agreement extending Mr. Dean's employment another year. Mr. Dean will have been in this role for 20 years in March.

10. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to accept a Timber Tax for 5/1 in the amount of \$3,737.43 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veterans Credit for 95/64/284 in the amount of \$500 for the tax year 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veterans Credit for 94/3 in the amount of \$500 for the tax year 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 72/58 in the amount of \$9,000 for the tax year 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 104/48 in the amount of \$5,500 for the tax year 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 47/1/2A in the amount of \$1,631.78 for the tax year 2024. 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. He had a meeting on groundwater today. He's working on it with Mr. Kelly, Steve Cronin the Public Works Director, and Finance Director Corey Stevens.
 - ii. The Senior Luncheon last Friday at Town Hall was a big success. Over 75 people registered.
 - iii. He attended the groundbreaking at 10 Hampton Road last Friday. He thanked Mr. Sharples for serving as the Owner's Rep.
 - iv. The septage project should be up and running in the next couple of months. We should be accepting septage in the spring which will generate revenue for the Sewer Fund.
 - v. The report on the School Street project is in.
 - vi. The grant application for Pickpocket Dam is being worked on.
 - vii. The report on the Swasey Parkway turnaround has been generally positive so far.
 - viii. The PEA dining center is finished. Doug Eastman said it looks fantastic.
 - ix. The steel is up on 19 Continental Drive for a new processing facility.
 - x. The Planning Board meeting at the Library went well.
 - xi. The solar array is awaiting two final pieces. They are supposed to arrive in January, but until will not be ready for it to go online until fall of 2025. He's going to see if there's any flexibility in their timeline.
 - xii. There was a meeting last week on Net Zero at the Police Station.
 - xiii. We had the first Tax Exemption and Credit Advisory Committee meeting last week.
 - xiv. The employee Christmas Party was last week.
 - xv. Ms. Cowan said regarding the Tax Advisory Committee, 5:30 is too early for her to attend. Mr. Dean said we can make an adjustment. Ms. Cowan said any time after 6:30 is ok.
 - xvi. Mr. Dean said he and Beth Dupell talked about the Christmas Parade. Ms. Dupell asked him to thank the Dutile Family for their contributions to the parade over the last 7 years.

- d. Select Board Committee Reports
 - i. Ms. Belanger had a Rec Advisory Board meeting. There was a groundbreaking at 10 Hampton Road but she did not attend. The Planet Playground project has some generous donors. Doug Cloutier and Bob Dudra volunteered to paint the pickleball courts. There's a scholarship

giving tree in the Rec Department through Jan 6, and we talked about keeping it all year long. The senior lunches need volunteers to serve once a month. She attended a Planning Board meeting; it was held at the Library because there are 68 chairs there vs a 48 person capacity here. There were two applicants, RiverWoods for 5 White Oak Drive and Green and Co at 76 Portsmouth Ave, both of which cases had lots of public discussion. Both cases will be heard again January 23. There will be a public sitewalk for 76 Portsmouth Ave on January 9.

- ii. Ms. Gilman had no report.
 - iii. Ms. Cowan attended the Water and Sewer Advisory Committee meeting. She said it will be interesting to look at whether there are proactive ways to catch issues before they need abatements. Mr. Chartrand said the abatement policy used to be a hard no. That policy shifted because of the pandemic, and you now get one abatement every 10 years. Ms. Cowan said that's correct, but the issue can't be due to the applicant's negligence.
 - iv. Mr. Chartrand attended the dam removal meeting at the Library. In addition to Paul Vlasich and our consultants, there was a DES Dam Bureau representative who provided some insight into their thought process in removing or repairing dams. He was not able to attend the Conservation Committee meeting but Kristen Murphy sent him a summary. Keith Whitehouse commented on Pairpoint Park. The committee voted to support the Rider Conservation Easement proposal as presented. They approved a letter of support for the Pickpocket Dam grant application. There was a Winter Solstice event 12/21 at Raynes Farm. They will kick off the Hike Challenge in the New Year, and participants will receive a custom sticker. There was a potential wetland violation reported by citizen Brian Griset, which will be followed up on.
 - v. Mr. Papakonstantis thanked DPW Director Steve Cronin and his staff for delaying the Swasey Parkway opening by several days due to inclement weather and getting that message out to folks. The River Advisory Committee had a presentation by Paul Vlasich where he summarized the public meeting and went over the three possible grants the town applied for. Mr. Vlasich told them that the committee probably won't have to meet again until April. At the Pairpoint Park Committee meeting, Mr. Stevens talked about the town's policy for accepting donations. Amanda Kelly gave a presentation on the survey results so far; we've had over 500 responses. He also attended the 10 Hampton Road groundbreaking on Friday.
- e. Correspondence
- i. An email from a resident about the winter parking ban. Mr. Papakonstantis said he has followed up. Mr. Chartrand said the Board took this up after a citizens petition passed back in the teens, but ultimately we chose not to move forward. Mr. Richards has some good

arguments and he [Mr. Chartrand] would like to see the Board get something on the warrant in 2026. Mr. Papakonstantis said the majority of the Board which found the petition non-binding was for reasons of public safety, but it did pass overwhelmingly. We have a new DPW Director, Police Chief, and Fire Chief, so it's worth revisiting.

- ii. An approval of a timber sale.
- iii. A flier from SAU 16 community regarding a survey.

11. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are January 6, the Budget hearing Tuesday January 21, February 3, Tuesday February 18, and March 3. February 1st is Deliberative Session. The Town Election is March 11.

12. Non-Public Session

There was no non-public session at this time.

13. Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to adjourn. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:25 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary