

Select Board Meeting  
Monday March 17, 2025  
7 PM  
Nowak Room, Town Offices  
Draft Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Chair Niko Papakonstantis, Vice-Chair Molly Cowan, Clerk Nancy Belanger, Dan Chartrand, Town Manager Russ Dean, and Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy were present at this meeting.

Julie Gilman was not present.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 7 PM.

2. Swearing in of Elected Officials

- a. Town Clerk Andie Kohler swore in the Elected Officials: Dwane Staples for the Swasey Parkway Trustees; Katherine Miller as Town Moderator; Pat Curtis for the Trustees of the Trust Funds; Cathleen Toomey for the Trustees of the Library; and Christine Soutter, Liz Canada, David Kovar, Bob Kelley, Judy Rowan, and Don Cloutier for the Budget Recommendations Committee.

**MOTION:** Ms. Cowan moved to nominate Niko Papakonstantis for Chair. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger nominated Molly Cowan for Vice-Chair. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Cowan nominated Nancy Belanger for Clerk. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

3. Public Comment

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

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. There were no proclamations or recognitions.

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: March 3, 2025

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve the Select Board minutes of March 3, 2025 as presented. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

6. Appointments

**MOTION:** Ms. Cowan moved to appoint Jamie Sirois to the Robinson Trust, term to end in 2029. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

Mr. Papakonstantis said there was a question about whether the next candidate had a conflict of interest in serving on both the Tenants' Council and the Housing Authority. Mr. Dean said Tony Texiera, the Executive Director of the Housing Authority, said there was no conflict and she could serve.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Patricia Scott Hall to the Exeter Housing Authority, term to expire April 2025. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Kelsey Dumville from an alternate to a voting member of the Arts and Culture Advisory Commission, term to expire April 2025. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to accept the resignation of Kimberley Barnard from the 250th Celebration Commission. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

## 7. Discussion/Action Items

### a. Election Update

Town Moderator Kate Miller said we used the Accuvote ballot counting machines for the last time. Next year at Town Election, we'll be able to use the new vote tabulation machines. There were a few lines to feed the 4-page town ballot into the counting machine, but it wasn't a real problem. The turnout was typical for a town election, about 12%. We'd love to see more voters.

Attorney Miller said the laws have changed on people registering to vote and what documents they need. They can no longer use an affidavit; they have to use documents. We registered 9 voters and did not have to turn anyone away. Mr. Chartrand asked what documents residents need. Attorney Miller said they need to establish identity and domicile in the town of Exeter, citizenship, and age. A NH driver's license does not establish citizenship; a passport or a birth certificate is required. Ms. Cowan said this change is appalling. She knows of three women in NH who were turned away from registration because the name on their birth certificate did not match their current name because they got married and took their husband's name. Attorney Miller said there has been virtually zero voter fraud documented. This is a change that will just create more complications and time.

Attorney Miller said she talked with the school district about other voting facilities. It takes a full day to set up the polling place, a day to vote, and half a day to break it down, so it's a big ask of the public schools. We're looking at all options. One option is to split Exeter into two precincts, but that would require duplicating the Clerk, Moderator, and Supervisor of the Checklist. She's concerned about people with mobility issues having to stand and wait. Ms. Belanger said a woman came to her in tears about a more handicapped

accessible option. Attorney Miller said the four additional poll pads approved by the Board will improve the speed of people coming through.

Ms. Belanger said a resident mentioned that postcard voting reminders used to be sent out to town residents. It wasn't the town itself sending them, but is there any reminder we can do? Attorney Miller said putting out information about the date and time of the election is probably fine. Perhaps there could be more electronic signs or other signage.

b. Election Re-Cap

Mr. Dean said it was a good night at the polls for our initiatives. The Drinkwater Road Groundwater Development passed and we are working with the Academy on the easement for that project. The Pickpocket Dam removal passed; we are waiting for a grant notification from the NH Charitable Foundation, which should come by April 8. The Linden Street Bridge repairs will be bid out shortly. The DPW Fuel Island replacement passed and work will start in spring or summer of this year. The Pine/Front/Linden sewer and drain improvements passed and the roundabout project can commence. The operating budget passed with 65%. This will allow us to hire a full-time HR Director and a Senior Coordinator. The Water and Sewer Budgets passed. The Collective Bargaining agreements passed. In Capital Equipment, the sidewalk tractor and dump truck passed. The ADA accessible van passed. The EV charging facility passed. The Appropriate to Sick Leave Trust Fund and Parks Improvements Capital reserve fund passed. The Styrofoam recycling unit passed, and Kristen Murphy will continue to pursue the grant. Replacing the Fire Utility Truck passed. The Transfer Station improvements article passed, and that will be a summertime project. The ADA Fund passed. The Sestercentennial Fund passed. The Appropriation to Swasey Parkway Trust Fund passed. The TIF amendment passed. The 79E citizens' petition passed, so 79E is repealed for now. The rest of the citizens petition articles all passed; the requirement was for the Board to write 40 letters, and they're out the door.

c. Keegan Report Update

William Keegan of Keegan Associates gave an update on his management report. He said we're entering Phase 2 of the process, wherein we evaluate results of management changes, reinterview departments, evaluate the new processes of the Select Board, and perform coaching and mentoring to support the new management structure. The creation of the E-Team has worked out well, ensuring everyone's in the same place on recommending changes to the Board.

One issue identified in Phase 1 was vacant positions in the Public Works Department. New Director Stephen Cronin has been able to move the department forward. The next level of his organization is pretty thin. He may need help finding Engineers. There's not a big pool of candidates for those positions because they require licenses, so we're going to look at growing those

positions internally. Another issue from Phase 1 was retaining talent, but the town is doing a much better job now with improved contracts and wage positions. Another issue was the lack of ability to grow people from within the organization, but the addition of the HR Director should help provide employees with direction and guidance. All of these issues are being addressed.

Over the last 12 months, the E-Team [Executive Team] was formed and meets almost daily. This has removed the “island effect” for the Town Manager and allows him to get different perspectives. Weekly Operations meetings have helped to form a bond between many of the Town’s operating departments. He heard that staff didn’t have an appreciation of the organization’s needs until they had these conversations. A restructuring of the Departments has led to better internal communications.

Areas that still need work are a further review of Public Works; improved internal communications; and helping to identify the mission and initial priorities of the HR Director. Management coaching and training will occur throughout the summer.

Ms. Belanger asked if he thinks that housing plays into retention, based on his experience in other communities. Mr. Keegan said he works with a community where the average home price is \$1.6M, so public servants can’t afford to live there. There may have to be discussion about creating housing in the community for town employees.

Mr. Chartrand said we should consider recruiting our citizens for town positions, especially for Water and Sewer. Mr. Keegan said he thinks public service is a calling. You have to get them young, in high school or before. In education now, there's no discussion of civics, which leaves the door closed on that as a career. Reaching out to schools and making public appearances will get folks interested at a young age.

Ms. Cowan said housing affordability factors into how we set our pay scales. We have a crisis coming in NH - and everywhere - if there's nowhere people can afford to live. That should be part of how we think about these issues. Ms. Belanger said this is a long-term problem. Even if zoning allows ADU’s, the cost to build them means the monthly rent will be \$2,000 or more.

d. Swasey Parkway Coastal Resilience Project

DPW Director Stephen Cronin and Conservation & Sustainability Planner Kristen Murphy were present to discuss the Coastal Resilience project. Mr. Cronin said we were approved for a grant in July with the NH DES Coastal Program. Since then, we’ve been working to finalize our contract and SOW with DES. Kristen reached out to ensure that the funding was still in place, and she heard that the contracts are in place and have been approved by the Governor and Executive Council, and the Coastal Group has the money in hand, so we’re confident in moving forward. We’ll start with stakeholder engagement training, which is required by the grant. This should include a member of the Select Board, a member of the Trustees, Kristen, himself, and someone from the Town

Manager's Office. The training is scheduled for March 26. Mr. Papakonstantis agreed to be the Board representative and Mr. Chartrand agreed to be the alternate.

The Board discussed the election results with Mr. Cronin and Ms. Murphy. Mr. Cronin said there has been a noticeable morale boost from the new contract.

Ms. Murphy said we worked with Guilford who have been overwhelmed with requests for styrofoam recycling around Earth Day and asked to defer a styrofoam event to April 26. We've lined up one transport vehicle and may be getting another with funding we have. The event will be at the Public Works facility. Ms. Belanger suggested having EXTV doing a promotional piece. Ms. Murphy said that would be great. Information is on the town website. She would like to speak to the Board in the future about pre-approving donations for a truck rental.

e. Use of Water/Sewer Impact Fees – Corey Stevens, Finance

Mr. Stevens said we are requesting to offset the principal payments debt in the Water & Sewer Funds, at \$63,000 and \$65,000 respectively. We'd like to take an amount equal to the fees paid in 2023 and apply it to the 2025 debt service.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to transfer \$57,075, the amount of Water and Sewer Impact Fees collected in 2023, to the General Fund operating account; the breakdown is \$18,007 from the Water Impact Fee and \$39,068 from the Sewer Impact Fee. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

f. SB297 Update

Mr. Dean said SB297, which impacts the Health Trust risk pool negatively, was the subject of a Senate Finance Committee session. The bill would make the town responsible for losses that the Health Trust incurs. We would be mandated to create a reserve to fund those losses at 1% each year until it reaches 4% of contributions, meaning we can't participate until we have this fund approved by the voters. We would also have to pay replenishments as needed. \$130,000 is the 4% mark. It's not an overwhelming dollar figure, but it's an overwhelming process. We'd have to bring it to Town Meeting and explain it. It's problematic on a number of levels. The basis of this was an ongoing discussion about the level of reserves with the Health Trust. The regulator is the Secretary of State, but for years it's been trying to come under the Division of Insurance. Every time that legislation has been proposed, it's been rebuffed, and the State has lobbied against it. Mr. Chartrand said he thinks the Insurance Department would bring a more nuanced understanding to it.

Ms. Cowan said this is happening a lot in Concord these days. The State has zero revenue and the interest on our ARPA funds and Federal dollars are gone. The majority party wants to say we've cut taxes without explaining that this goes onto your local property taxes. Mr. Dean said at one time, the idea of

“unfunded mandates” would have guided decisions, but now issues like this come forward but no one talks about the unfunded mandate portion. Ms. Belanger said this seems like they’re trying to solve a problem that doesn’t exist.

Mr. Dean said he can raise the idea of a sign-on letter at the Board of Directors on Thursday. Ms. Cowan said the Town of Exeter should be leading the way on work that will impact us and other communities.

**MOTION:** Ms. Cowan moved to have the Select Board write a letter supporting the Health Trust’s position on SB297. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if alternatives to the Health Trust are also regulated by the Secretary of State. Mr. Dean said yes, Health Trust, School Care, and the New Hampshire Insurance Trust are all regulated by the Secretary of State.

g. Select Board Committee Appointments

Mr. Papakonstantis said Ms. Gilman was happy to stay with what she has. Mr. Chartrand said for the Conservation Commission, Ms. Belanger is the alternate. For Water/Sewer Advisory, the voters voted to have two full members from the Select Board. Each of the Board members agreed to stay with their current assignments. Ms. Cowan said she has been having trouble making the time of the Tax Exemption and Credit Advisory Commission, but she wants to stay with it. Mr. Chartrand asked if Mr. Papakonstantis could be the alternate rather than Ms. Gilman, since Ms. Gilman is stretched thin. Ms. Belanger said she is willing to step up if needed. Mr. Papakonstantis said we should keep the Tax Exemption and Credit Advisory meeting as-is until the next meeting.

8. Regular Business

a. Permits & Approvals

Parks and Rec Director Greg Bisson was present remotely via Zoom. He said the spring’s arrival marks the final phase of replacing Planet Playground. We released RFPs in early February and there was a great response. During demolition, we will salvage the pickets with past donors on them to keep as a memento, as well as plaques and artwork and the two kiosks at the front. There will be a final send-off on April 12, following the egg hunt. There will be a brick program for families to leave a legacy, which will come before the Board.

Mr. Bisson said there were five bids for demolition. We’re recommending BWP and Sons at \$10,400, which is a great price. The RFP for fencing had 7 responses, and we recommended AAA Fencing of Dover. For paving, accessibility is one of the most important aspects of the playground, and we want to widen the pathway to 5 feet. We had two bids, and MWS of Hampton came in at \$6,250. Regarding landscaping renovations, we feel that Planet Playground is the gateway to the Recreation Park, and we want to clean up the area around it and make it a centerpiece. Since we removed the trees there’s been a lack of grass and it’s dusty. We will plant grass and have irrigation to keep it green in

heavy sun and foot traffic. We want to install garden beds and trees. The plants will deter mosquitoes. We recommend Days Landscaping of Salisbury MA, as the other submission withdrew their bid. These approvals would leave us with \$16,946.50 from LWCF and Warrant Articles.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Parks and Recreation Department to contract with BWP & Sons Excavation for an amount not to exceed \$10,400 for the demolition of the old Planet Playground. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Parks and Recreation Department to contract with AAA Fencing for an amount not to exceed \$18,646.00 for the fencing for the new Planet Playground. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Parks and Recreation Department to contract with MWS Paving for an amount not to exceed \$6,250.00 for the paving of the new Planet Playground. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Parks and Recreation Department to contract with Days Landscaping for an amount not to exceed \$12,350.00 for the landscaping restoration and irrigation of the new Planet Playground. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

b. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an elderly exemption for 87/14/8A, 104/79/955, 104/79/322 in the amount of \$152,251 each for tax year 2025. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an elderly exemption for 103/13/33 in the amount of \$236,251 for tax year 2025. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve a disability exemption for 95/64/47 in the amount of \$125,000 for tax year 2025 Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve a veteran's credit for 99/9 in the amount of \$2,000 for tax year 2025. seconded. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to deny abatements for 32/12/1 and 104/79/209 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an abatement for 47/8/3243 in the amount of \$485.67 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an abatement for 64/24 in the amount of \$71.16 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an abatement for 73/280 in the amount of \$136.98 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an abatement for 79/22 in the amount of \$106.74 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an abatement for 87/3/14 in the amount of \$112.08 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an abatement for 94/22 in the amount of \$305.99 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an abatement for 96/2/7 in the amount of \$247.28 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve an abatement for 97/34 in the amount of \$1,755.87 for tax year 2024. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION (not voted):** Ms. Belanger moved to approve a religious exemption for 69/3/13 in the amount of \$585,200 for tax year 2025. Mr. Chartrand seconded. He asked if it were a new religious exemption and stated that he wanted to review the paperwork. Ms. Belanger withdrew her motion and Mr. Chartrand withdrew his second, and the matter was tabled.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. On Thursday he had a virtual meeting with CRX, the train company, regarding crossing upgrades in April and May. The first time they had this request, they planned on doing the work all at once, but we said we needed it staggered.
- ii. He's attending a Health Trust meeting Thursday.
- iii. He's working with HR to put together a Human Resources Director posting and Senior Coordinator posting. He's working with the Economic Development Director to create some office space for the HR Director, which will require building a wall. When Parks and Rec moves to 10 Hampton Road we should discuss office space.
- iv. He mentioned an email with Bob Kelley on Water and Sewer Rates. The fund balance is \$6M in sewer. The septage facility will be coming online, which is a revenue source.
- v. The Raynes Barn work is recommencing. The contractor did some installation of windows and will continue to work on that.
- vi. He's meeting tomorrow with Mark Leighton of PEA on the groundwater easement.
- vii. The Police Chief and Deputy Chief are in California this week for the CALEA certification.



- viii. He talked with the Fire Chief on a proposed ALS [Advanced Life Support] agreement with Exeter and the other towns. He and the Chief feel it's not in the town's interest to sign on. The first two years of the process are funded by donations and grants so we want to move slowly.
- ix. He attended a Housing Advisory meeting and discussed legislative initiatives on housing.
- x. The town has accounts with TD Bank; they're closing 4 branches and there were penalties imposed on them.
- xi. He's working on an issue for no parking signs on Drinkwater Road based on a resident's letter. He will come to the Board on the 31st with a recommendation for no parking on both sides. It would take three readings of an ordinance change to make that happen. Also Watson Road and other areas could be added to parking regulations.
- xii. He met with the new Library Director Julia Lanter last week and she joined our Ops meeting. She invited the Board or staff to attend the Trustees meetings or bring them to a Board meeting in the future.
- xiii. He toured Lindt on March 5. They are asking for an increased capacity for sewer discharge. The current agreement covers the Stratham industrial park at 75,000 gallons, and they've outgrown it. Mr. Chartrand asked if they're looking for an increase in water as well, and Mr. Dean said yes.
- xiv. The Webster Avenue Pump Station work is getting underway again.
- xv. The Westside Drive project is about to go out to bid. We're finalizing a few easements for that project.
- xvi. The Taxi ticket program has gone away because Academy Taxi has gone away, and there's no taxi service in town that could pick up the program.
- xvii. A boutique hotel project at the Blue Ribbon Cleaners site is going before the Planning Board tomorrow.
- xviii. There's a "Pizza with the Police" event this week.
- xix. Steve Bailey is looking for IT Tech candidates following Andy Swanson's retirement.
- xx. The GIS Coordinator interviews are continuing. We have a few good candidates.
- xxi. The Select Board meeting for the E911 Meeting Place issue will be April 14. We will take up again the issue of renumbering the Meeting Place. We're doing our best to notify the residents. Mr. Chartrand said these folks have special requirements and he would like to see more support for these folks than in previous E911 projects. Mr. Dean said the Board will hear from staff what kinds of resources they have to support this process.
- xxii. Mr. Chartrand asked about federal grant funding. He said we should approach Unutil about picking up the pace on the solar array. Ms. Roy said Dave [Sharples] reached out this week. Mr. Dean said he will check if we've sent them formal correspondence. We've been asking them on a regular basis to pick up the pace. Ms. Roy said it's a highly sought after piece of equipment among other communities as well.

- d. Select Board Committee Reports
  - i. Ms. Belanger had a Planning Board meeting. There were two ongoing applicants, Green and Company for the MUND [Mixed Use Neighborhood Development] project on Haven Lane and the StoneArch Development project on Portsmouth Ave. A traffic study was discussed, and there was conversation between the Town Planner and the applicant to do an exaction to invest in syncing the lights at Alumni Drive and Greenhill Road. There are some issues with the Haven Lane neighborhood; they're missing some stop signs. That will not fall on the applicant, but we will probably want to take a look at it. One of the abutters is looking for the Select Board to change the times that construction can happen. Right now it's 7 AM to 10 PM. There were some line-of-sight issues. We discussed that the roads at Haven Lane are wider than we require and don't have sidewalks. Regarding Portsmouth Ave, there was discussion about a corridor study for a future CIP, which would take care of any traffic concerns. The traffic study people said this particular project isn't an issue. The 112 Front Street project from StoneArch Development was tabled. At the Housing Advisory meeting, we heard a long summary of bills in Concord. Some of them are redundant. The Town Planner would be interested in going to Concord to testify. We discussed short-term rentals and the zoning amendment that passed. We talked about local government and our charter options, which we've tried to change twice.
  - ii. Ms. Cowan attended a Water/Sewer Advisory Committee meeting with a number of abatements, including a request to address a water quality issue in a specific neighborhood. Once the full neighborhood has been addressed, Bob Kelley will come before the Select Board for a formal vote. Mr. Chartrand said this will be a one-off solution that will not apply to anyone else.
  - iii. Mr. Chartrand said the Sustainability Advisory meeting was cancelled. He attended Andy Swanson's retirement. He was at the polls on Tuesday so missed the Conservation Commission meeting.
  - iv. Mr. Papakonstantis said he also attended Andy Swanson's retirement party. He was among the community leaders who were invited to read at Main Street School. The students told him what they liked best about our town, including the downtown businesses, animals and wildlife in town, and the Public Library.
- e. Correspondence
  - i. A notice of a public hearing March 31 at 7 PM for the new K9 program at the Police Department
  - ii. Correspondence on the Pickpocket Dam vote
  - iii. A legislative update from the Community Power Coalition. Mr. Dean said several bills did not make it out of committee. HB760 would have helped

prevent supply cost subsidization by customers served by third party providers, but it didn't pass.

- iv. An NHMA legislative update
- v. An email about the Housing Advisory Committee

9. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are March 31, April 14, April 28, and May 12. Mr. Papakonstantis said we'll schedule a goal-setting session when Ms. Gilman is back on March 31.

10. Non-Public Session

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II(a). Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 4-0 and the meeting went into non-public at 9:20 PM.

**MOTION:** Ms. Cowan moved to exit non-public session. Mr. Chartrand seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 4-0.

**MOTION:** Mr. Chartrand moved to seal the minutes. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

11. Adjournment

**MOTION:** Mr. Chartrand moved to adjourn. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 4-0 and the meeting adjourned at 9:48 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanna Bartell  
Recording Secretary