

All-Boards Meeting
Feb 8, 2023
6 - 9 PM
Exeter Public Library Community Room
4 Chestnut Street, Exeter NH

Board, Committee, and Commission Members Present: Select Board members Niko Papakonstantis, Nancy Belanger, Julie Gilman, and Molly Cowan; Planning Board Chair Langdon Plumer and members John Grueter and Gwen English; River Advisory Committee Chair Richard Huber; Energy Committee member Lew Hitzrot; Swasey Parkway Trustee Dwane Staples, Historic District Commission member Grayson Shepherd; Heritage Commission member Jay Myers; Sustainability Advisory Committee Chair Chetana Parmer and member Ryan Jean; Rec Advisory members Bob Dudra, Mike Wissler, and Nick Nordin; Conservation Commission Chair Andrew Koff and members Don Clement and Trevor Mattera; and Budget Recommendation Committee Chair Bob Kelly.

Town Staff Present: Town Manager Russ Dean, Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy, Senior Executive Assistant Pam McElroy, Sustainability and Natural Resources Planner Kristen Murphy, Town Planner Dave Sharples, Parks and Rec Director Greg Bisson, Building Inspector Doug Eastman, IT Director Andy Swanson, and William Tapley of EXTV.

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Papakonstantis called the meeting to order at 6:03 PM. He said the last All-Boards meeting was in 2015. The Select Board wants to work with the boards, commissions, and committees, particularly with the Advisory committees, and be a better resource to them. How can we cross-pollinate and better work together?

2. Review of All-Boards Meeting Process

Mr. Dean said the All-Boards meeting is rooted in communications. We want to get the rules out and establish a chain of communication between the Select Board and Committees. How do we best work together as a group?

Mr. Papakonstantis said our town runs through our volunteers. He encouraged board, committee and commission members to reach out to the Select Board or town staff with any questions.

Ms. Belanger and Ms. Gilman thanked the volunteers for their work for the town.

Ms. Cowan said points of contention in town could be worked out with better communication and collaboration. Sometimes our roles and responsibilities are in conflict with one another, so how can we best address that?

Mr. Papakonstantis said one Select Board goal this year was to look at Committees and identify areas that could be worked on. All Select Board reps are part of other committees and bring a report back into the Select Board. We're looking to put together a template for the Select Board to present committee work in a uniform fashion.

3. Master Plan Oversight Committee Report

Mr. Sharples said the Master Plan was done in 2018. It was created with input from almost 1,000 people. There's an action agenda at the end with 67 items to address. The three-member Master Plan oversight committee is a subcommittee of the Planning Board and ensures that action agenda is being implemented. Major initiatives that have happened include a revised flood plain ordinance done with the RPC and Kristen Murphy, and a townwide zoning ordinance update that you'll see more about in the coming year - it wasn't ready for the warrant this year. Of the 67 action items, at least 50 have been completed or are being worked on. It may be time to think about doing the Master Plan process again.

4. Ideas to Improve Intra Board Communications

Mr. Papakonstantis said the Select Board has been working on trying to improve communication around town. It's tough to find the best way to communicate. For example, the Sustainability Advisory would like to meet with the Energy Committee or Conservation Commission on new initiatives.

Ms. English asked if there could be a posting to board members that would outline the events and projects reviewed by each board. She often doesn't know about things to be discussed until they've come and gone. Ms. Gilman said we tried something like that with the land use boards - the Planning Department sent out an email of all the agendas for the land use boards. Mr. Clement said some towns such as Durham do a weekly or biweekly town newsletter. We do it with the EXTV Biweekly Report, but it's hard to reach people on all the different mediums. Mr. Grueter said everything you need is available on the website. Ms. English said you have to navigate through the system to see each one separately.

Ms. Parmar suggested that the Chairs of the different boards could meet once a quarter to see what was going on and what was coming up. Mr. Papakonstantis said it can be hard to find the time, but it's worth trying.

Mr. Hitzrot said Renay Allen [who was not present] suggested a monthly email newsletter that would go to each board with a paragraph of what they're working on that month. Ms. Gilman said the format we come up with for Select Board reports could be a helpful thing for the different Boards.

Mr. Papakonstantis said EXTV does a good job of posting the Exeter Biweekly Report on Facebook, and there's also a post where they list the town meetings for the week. Would our website have the capacity to absorb that video? Mr. Tapley said we link to all the videos from the meetings tab on the website. Mr. Papakonstantis said he'd like to see the report front and center on the website.

Mr. Clement said the problem with going to the website or social media is that people have to go there. It's more effective to push it out to them. Ms. Belanger said the town has three different emails, and we're looking to merge them into one user-friendly source. Mr. Dean said we're talking about doing that now. Ms. Gilman said we should allow people subscribe to an email. Mr. Hitzrot said if the goal is inter-committee communication, short is better than long. Mr. Wissler said on the launch page of the town website, we could have a "this week in town" feature.

Mr. Mattera said it makes sense to have thoughtful planning as to who the audience actually is and how we can reach out to them. Communication is all-encompassing, and when you start drilling down to audiences, some communications are going to be effective and some are not. If we could go to an agreed-upon place where all the information is, it's effective for board members, but for the public it's not going to be as effective.

Mr. Tapley said Bob Glowacky [who was not present] had been doing a Select Board recap every week, but recently it's been "meeting minutes," which covers more meetings but is just a minute and has some clips. They work well as reels on Instagram.

Ms. English suggested we have a bulletin board outside near the Town Office building with the information about which Boards are meeting and what they're discussing.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he agrees that there are two initiatives: inter-committee communication and public communication. Mr. Grueter said the website has agendas and minutes. Mr. Papakonstantis said it's more a question of ease of access. You have to put in some time and effort but the information is there. Ms. Roy said she met with Mr. Swanson about the website allowing the public to subscribe to the agendas for certain boards. Mr. Swanson said Bob Glowacky is working on an email newsletter which would be similar. Mr. Papakonstantis mentioned that in Shrewsbury, the Town Manager is doing a podcast. Mr. Dean said he can prioritize these ideas and if there are costs or in-house personnel needed, he can bring that forward to the Board.

Ms. Gilman said there was an idea that the Chairs of boards could go to different boards and introduce their work, but it never happened. Mr. Eastman said it appears that according to the RSA, the Heritage Commission and HDC could be one group. Would it make sense to combine them? Ms. Gilman said we would have to go to Town Meeting for that, since those boards were established by Town Meeting. Mr. Myers said it's worth discussing, because having enough volunteers is a problem that the Heritage Commission is facing. Ms. English asked how we can get the word out to the public that there's a need for volunteers. Mr. Papakonstantis said we've talked to people, put out pamphlets at voting and library, and the information is on the town website. We take that seriously. When people contact the Select Board, we talk to them about volunteering. The issue is that it's a huge time commitment. We've talked about childcare and other solutions.

Ms. Cowan said childcare at the Town Offices is virtually impossible. During Covid, we got more volunteers and people watching the meetings because they could sit at home. We're trying to loosen it up at the State house so that more people can Zoom in. Since we've had to meet in person, the number of volunteers has dwindled.

Ms. Parmar suggested having a table at town events such as TEAM festivals or the Independence Festival with someone from the committees or the Select Board to talk about volunteering. Mr. Papakonstantis said TEAM is a private group, but we could ask. Ms. Gilman said we once had a volunteer fair at Town Hall. Ms. Belanger asked if we could have volunteer pamphlets at the Town Hall entry area when there are events there. Ms. McElroy said yes, that's town property. Mr. Eastman said current volunteers should call their friends.

Mr. Wissler asked what's the best thing a citizen/voter can do to make Zoom meetings law. Ms. Gilman said she would like to update the town website to show you all the things you can do to communicate using the General Court's website. You can email committee members or the whole House, or go online and there's a thing at the bottom of the webpage that says "remote testimony." To hear about bills happening, you have to go look. She tries to highlight the ones that she can at Select Board meetings. Ms. Cowan said the Zoom bill is HB 254, and was sponsored by Alexis Simpson, our State Rep. Testimony is over but you can still email the House.

Mr. Sharples said 91-A requires that you have to have a quorum physically present unless there's an emergency, but a member of the public body may participate remotely when it's not "reasonably practical" to attend. Mr. Papakonstantis said when someone is participating remotely, all votes have to be a roll call.

Ms. Parmar said doing meetings remotely would reduce the carbon footprint.

5. Review of Board Training Needs

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Mr. Dean to walk through posting, meetings, and 91-A procedures. Mr. Dean said 91-A compliance is paramount. There are a number of court cases where 91-A was not complied with and there were penalties for the community. He described a flow chart from the packet on what constitutes a meeting. It's easy to conduct business with "sequential communications", and that's a violation. All meetings must have proper notice and be open to the public. There's no requirement in the Right to Know law that a board must approve its draft minutes, but it's a near-universal practice to review the minutes. Ms. Gilman said after 60 or 90 days, if the committee doesn't meet, the minutes are deemed approved automatically. Mr. Dean discussed non-public sessions and different reasons for going into non-public; they must be gone into with a roll call vote. Ms. Belanger said 91-A training is available every year.

Ms. McElroy said if there's a holiday or weekend, or if she's out of the office, the notification email for posting a meeting may not be received in time. A couple days' notice is preferable. Ms. Belanger said if the meeting is not posted, you can't have the meeting. She would like committees to go over their meeting dates at the end of year or beginning of the year. Mr. Papakonstantis said you don't need 24 hours to cancel a meeting; if you schedule you can cancel it that day. Ms. McElroy said she supports having the meetings for an entire year, because potential volunteers may want to look at the calendar to see when the meeting is each month.

Mr. Dean said depending on the time of the meeting, the Town Offices building may not be accessible. We need to ensure the meeting can be opened. Mr. Jean said as a member of the public, he would use the calendar to see when meetings were occurring. That was invaluable. He's passionate about the subject, but if he didn't know when the meetings were he couldn't show up. Sometimes he had moved his schedule around to attend but the meeting was canceled with no notification. He was a little put off. Ms. Belanger said we're trying to do better, and at least put notices on the door. Mr. Grueter said it's also on the website if it's canceled. Mr. Jean asked if the meeting can it be rescheduled at the same time it's canceled. Mr. Papakonstantis said it would need a 24 hour posting. Ms. Belanger said a lack of quorum can happen at the last minute. Mr.

Eastman said for ZBA and Planning Board, a rescheduled date is usually determined at the time of cancellation.

Mr. Papakonstantis said members can tell town staff about scheduling and have them communicate with the other Board members, not reply all. Mr. Plumer said there can be no discussion between meetings. Mr. Koff asked if we can email about planning a meeting. Ms. Belanger said it's not good practice. She mentioned that Ms. Murphy did a survey with different times for Conservation Commission rescheduling. Mr. Koff said it's not clear what is and isn't able to be provided. We need to communicate at some level through email because not everyone can come to every meeting. Email is an important tool for rescheduling meetings and communicating about events, but not things we're actually deciding. Mr. Papakonstantis said he heard during a 91-A training that if a quorum of a board start discussing town business, they've violated 91-A. Ms. Cowan said the point of 91-A is not to conduct business. Mr. Bisson said a Doodle Poll can give out specific dates and times and people can reply when they can make it.

Mr. Dean said people should avoid "replying all." That's a recipe for a problem. If you're scheduling a meeting, it can devolve into other business, and that's sequential communications. Town staff can herd the members. Mr. Hitzrot said the Community Power Aggregation Committee has no staff member. He sends out a draft agenda to members prior to the meeting, is that a violation? Mr. Dean said no, as long as they're not replying all. Mr. Hitzrot asked if it's ok if they're just replying to the Chair. Ms. McElroy said if they're referencing something in the agenda that's a problem; just the schedule or adding items to the agenda is not a problem. Mr. Clement said "reply all" is the death knell of 91-A. Even with scheduling, members should only reply to the Chair. Ms. Murphy said you can reply to staff as well.

Mr. Huber asked what happens if you violate 91-A. Mr. Dean said it could invoke a lawsuit and the town could pay a financial penalty. The Court could also invalidate an action by a committee.

Mr. Jean asked if 91-A training is mandated. Ms. Gilman said we can't mandate it. Ms. McElroy said the volunteer agreement packet includes the 91-A information. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Select Board is working on setting up onboarding criteria for committees.

Mr. Dean said there's a cheat sheet to Robert's Rules in the packet. In a meeting, if you're looking to do something, Robert's Rules shows you how to make the proper motion. Mr. Grueter said there must be a motion and second before any discussion. Ms. Belanger said after the gavel closes the meeting, there shouldn't be any continuing conversation of anything that was discussed in the meeting.

Mr. Wissler said that if there's something in a meeting that you think needs a vote, take a vote. Ms. Belanger said town staff can also clarify when a vote is necessary.

Mr. Papakonstantis said Mr. Dean can work on ideas about communicating, both with the committees and the public.

6. Schedule Follow-Up Meeting

Mr. Papakonstantis said he didn't want to schedule the next meeting yet, but perhaps it could be in the fall.

7. Adjournment

Mr. Papakonstantis moved to adjourn. Mr. Plumer seconded. The motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 7:49 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary