

Select Board Meeting  
Monday May 24, 2021  
6:45 PM  
Remotely via Zoom  
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Julie Gilman, Molly Cowan, Lovey Roundtree Oliff, Daryl Browne, Niko Papakonstantis, and Town Manager Russ Dean were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:30 PM.

Mr. Papakonstantis read a statement:

As Chair of the Select Board, I find that due to the State of Emergency declared by the Governor as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and in accordance with the Governor's Emergency Order #12 this public body is authorized to meet electronically.

Public notice of this meeting was posted on the town website and on the bulletin board of the town offices at 10 Front Street. As provided in that public notice, the public may access the meeting online and via phone. The usual rules of conduct and decorum will apply.

Please note that all votes taken during this meeting shall be done by roll call vote. Let's start the meeting by taking a roll call attendance. When each member states their presence, please also state whether there is anyone in the room with you during this meeting and who that person is (son, daughter, spouse, etc...), which is required under the Right-to-Know law.

2. Board Interviews

- a. Kathy Corson was interviewed for the Housing Advisory Committee.

3. Public Comment

- a. Darius Thompson of 15 Drinkwater Road said with the recent rise in vaccination levels, he would like to know when town committees can meet in person. Mr. Papakonstantis said there's still an emergency order from the Governor that allows for virtual meetings. They'd all like to be back live in the Nowak Room, but they're trying to figure out how to make them accessible to the public and those members not comfortable attending. Mr. Thompson said he would like to see a hybrid model for meetings going forward.

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. Mr. Papakonstantis read the Arbor Day proclamation:  
*Whereas, in 1872, J. Sterling Morton proposed to the Nebraska Board of Agriculture that a special day be set aside for the planting of trees, and  
Whereas, this holiday, called Arbor Day, was first observed with the planting of more than a million trees in Nebraska, and  
Whereas, Arbor Day is now observed throughout the nation and the world, and*

*Whereas, trees can reduce the erosion of our precious topsoil by wind and water, cut heating and cooling costs, moderate the temperature, clean the air, produce life-giving oxygen, and provide habitat for wildlife, and*

*Whereas, trees are a renewable resource giving us paper, wood for our homes, fuel for our fires and countless other wood products, and*

*Whereas, trees in our city increase property values, enhance the economic vitality of business areas, and beautify our community, and*

*Whereas, trees, wherever they are planted, are a source of joy and spiritual renewal.*

*Now therefore, I, Niko Papakonstantis, the Chair of the Select Board of the Town of Exeter, do hereby proclaim the 3 of June, 2021 as Arbor Day in the town of Exeter, and I urge all citizens to celebrate Arbor Day by supporting efforts to protect our trees and woodlands, and*

*Further, I urge all citizens to plant trees to gladden the heart and promote the well-being of this and future generations.*

Mr. Papakonstantis thanked the Memorial Day Committee for planning this year's parade, which will take place Monday May 31st.

5. Approval of Minutes

a. Regular Meeting: May 10, 2021

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve the minutes of May 10, 2021 as presented. Ms. Oliff seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

6. Appointments

a. There were no appointments at this meeting.

7. Discussion/Action Items

a. COVID 19 Updates

Fire Chief Eric Wilking said this week has seen another reduction in positive cases in the State, an average of 112 cases per day, and dropping to 90 towards the weekend. Exeter is averaging about 1 resident positive per day. Exeter is the only community of size with fewer than 1,000 total residents who tested positive. The fixed vaccination site is still running, and will serve anyone 12 years and older. The number of people taking advantage of this has dropped off, suggesting that almost everyone who wants to be vaccinated has been vaccinated. In the six New England states, 70% of people have had one dose, and almost 50% have had two doses. The fixed site should remain open through the end of May for first dose Pfizer and Moderna, and in June second dose only, along with the one shot J&J. They don't want people to start the series in June and then close the site before their second dose. Chief Pizon and James Murray are coordinating with the SAU; Exeter will be a regional school vaccination site for students ages 12 - 17. The first dose will be on June 6, the second June 27. This will be by appointment only.

Ms. Cowan asked if the vaccine is always free, and Chief Wilking said yes, whether at a pharmacy or the fixed site, the cost to the recipient is zero.

James Murray said he and Chief Pizon completed a Covid clinic at the FD, and nine individuals were vaccinated. He asked businesses to reach out if they're interested in a Covid clinic at their place of business.

b. Mask Mandate Discussion

Mr. Papakonstantis said the mask ordinance is set to expire May 29. The new CDC guidelines, which the NH DHHS has adopted, render much of the current ordinance no longer applicable. They received a lot of feedback from the public via email, including some that came in after the packet was put together; all correspondence was read and considered by the Board, and will be included in the next packet.

Mr. Murray said he recommends moving away from the ordinance and having a mask recommendation for the town. Current guidance says masks should be worn only indoors in specific circumstances. In light of that recommendation, the high vaccination rates, the low cases in Exeter, and the fact that other towns are letting their mask mandates expire, he thinks it would be in the best interest of the community to let Exeter's expire as well. Masks should still be used where appropriate, indoors when the vaccination status of people is unknown. He presented a draft mask recommendation advisory. The vaccine is now the best defense against Covid. If it's the will of the Board to keep the ordinance, he has an updated version that removes "outdoors" and makes it so any business that wants to opt out could; removes the penalties and fees; and is revisited every 31 days rather than 61.

Ms. Gilman said she likes the paragraph about no shaming. She asked residents to be respectful. Mr. Murray said they'd also respect any business's decision whether to participate or not.

Darren Winham said he talked to some businesses and surveyed all 900+; he received about 100 responses. 90% of those want to see the mask ordinance go away and have the decision rest with the individual business.

Ms. Cowan said she feels comfortable going with an advisory. With the new CDC guidelines and what they know about outdoor transmission, not wearing masks outside seems safe. What concerns her is that her two children are not old enough to get vaccinated, so she will continue to wear a mask. She thinks they can leave the decisions to their businesses and trust that the community will respect those decisions.

Ms. Gilman said that given the CDC guidelines and the numbers, she thinks they could rescind the ordinance rather than just let it run out, and post the advisory on the website along with a note encouraging vaccinations.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he's also inclined to let it lapse or rescind it. The mask ordinance was needed at the time, but things are getting better. He opened the discussion to the public.

Shawn Roussin discussed the current mask mandate and the small chance of getting or dying from Covid if vaccinated. He is not patronizing businesses that require a mask. He asked the Board not to extend the mask mandate, and suggested that they make it optional.

Darius Thompson of 15 Drinkwater Road said the mask mandate was necessary during the pandemic, but now he thinks the data suggests they can let it expire and have it be a recommendation only.

Robin Tyner of 9 Mill Stream Road said that seeing masks on kids and in schools concerns her. It's contrary to many health organization's recommendations. Masks cause mental, emotional, and physical issues in kids, and they aren't even at risk for Covid. She doesn't think masks do anything anyway. We now have 70% of people vaccinated. Anyone pushing vaccination should present the risks as well.

Kathleen Wikstrom of 7 Caron Circle said she hopes that they get rid of the mask mandate today rather than letting it expire. It sounds like there's a consensus among the public.

Ann Sorber of 5 Dolloff Farm Drive said she also hopes the mask mandate can be ended immediately. She appreciates the no-shaming comments, as her son has been yelled at downtown for not wearing a mask. Regarding vaccinations, all of the vaccines are still under trials, so we don't know any long term effects, especially for children. The vaccinations don't prevent getting Covid, only reduce the symptoms. It seems dangerous for the Select Board to encourage people to get vaccines.

Sally Ward of 72 Park Street said she thinks wearing a mask is a matter of personal choice. She doesn't want people to shame her for continuing to wear a mask. There's nothing wrong with the Select Board encouraging people to get vaccinated. Epidemiologists agree that vaccinations are what's ending the Covid epidemic.

Reverend Heidi Heath said she is uncomfortable with some language that felt like threats, for example of lawsuits, in public comment tonight. She hopes they can continue the discussion in the community without this rhetoric.

**MOTION:** Ms. Oliff moved to approve the recommendation given by James Murray, the Health Officer, to rescind the mask mandate, effective immediately. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

c. Exeter Police Stakeholders Committee Report

Anne Surman, the Chair of the EPSC, as well as members Katie Adams, Alexis Simpson, and Darius Thompson, gave a presentation on the Committee and its goals. The goals were to develop, strengthen, and sustain partnerships, provide effective police services, develop personnel, prevent crime, and enhance infrastructure, and they discussed the ways they had addressed those goals.

Chief Stephan Poulin gave a presentation on the two surveys they conducted, one internal and one external. There was no significant disparity between the results. 25 employees and 345 residents responded. The public was overwhelmingly supportive of the direction management is taking the organization. 94.9% of people said they are satisfied with the job they're doing. One comment they heard was they would like more traffic enforcement, and the Department is going to look for grants for enforcement and education.

Mr. Browne said he would like to acknowledge that domestic violence is more of a priority than traffic violations.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Chief Poulin about next steps. Chief Poulin said the committee has met its five goals, and he and the Deputy Chief will come up with a strategic plan. He suggested they leave the committee open through April 2022, and have meetings as issues come up. Mr. Papakonstantis suggested scheduling quarterly meetings but checking in with the Chief about the schedule. Ms. Surman said agreed, saying she wouldn't want to end the conduit that the committee has become.

d. Raynes Barn LCHIP Grant Application

Kristin Murphy, the Natural Resources Planner, gave a presentation on Raynes Farm, a town-owned property with a 100 foot barn, the largest remaining barn in Exeter. They are looking to make this a site for the public to enjoy as a conservation center. They are required by the deed to keep it in active agriculture, so they have a local farmer make hay, which also keeps them from having to mow it. She discussed several recent events at the site. The use of this property has the potential to sustain the repair needs going forward, but the condition of the barn is not conducive to events. They received a grant in 2005 for major structural repairs, but it only partially covered the cost of repairing the foundation and the sills. The flooring also needs work. A previous grant application in 2018 did not go through because the approval committee wanted to hear more of the vision and public interest in the property, but she thinks that they have a stronger application now. They are looking for \$242,000 for repairs with a 50% minimum match from the town, so they'll be seeking a town warrant contingent on award of the grant. She's meeting with DPW to see if there are any repairs they can do in-house. She will also be asking the Conservation Commission whether they can use Conservation Funds for the project. She's requesting endorsement from the Select Board for the application at this stage.

Sally Ward of 72 Park Street, the outgoing Chair of the Raynes Farm Stewardship committee, said the support of the Select Board would be impactful in the application. They also have the support of the Facilities Committee.

Bill Campbell of the Conservation Committee spoke in favor of the application. They would know in December whether they get the grant, so they can pull it from the warrant.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to endorse the Conservation Commission's Application to submit an LCHIP grant to assist with the remaining repairs at Raynes Farm. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

e. Classification Plan Amendment

Mr. Papakonstantis discussed the proposal to create an Assistant Town Manager/HR Director. This position would provide a high level of support to the Town Manager and Select Board, and create a clear succession plan for the Town Manager position if needed. The job of Town Manager has expanded to the point where one person cannot take on all of the tasks. With the pending retirement of the Human Resources Director, they have an opportunity to reorganize. They have an Assistant HR person who does many of the day to day tasks. There would not be any additional funding required, and there could be a cost savings by keeping the succession plan internal.

Mr. Dean said this is not uncommon in the area; Dover, Rochester, and Portsmouth have similar positions. Police, Fire, and Public Works all have an Assistant Chief or Acting Director.

Mr. Browne and Ms. Gilman said this is a good idea.

Darius Thompson said they shouldn't create a new position without giving the voters a chance to weigh in on this issue. This proposal creates a conflict of interest by combining a management and human resources role. The total cost of a position is more than the salary, it's the benefits as well. Mr. Papakonstantis said this sort of position is more common than not in municipalities of this size. The Town Manager reports to the Select Board; this Assistant Town Manager would be a Department head who would report to the Town Manager. Under the RSA 37, the Town Manager has the ability to bring forward such a proposal to the Select Board. It's very common to have Departments restructure to create succession, such as Police and DPW.

Anne Surman said this is a big step, and they should have more input from the public about it. Hampton created an Assistant Town Manager position for a few years but then determined that they didn't need the position. They could have someone else designated to step in, rather than create a new position. Human Resources is a big job and gets second billing in this position.

Ms. Gilman said she thinks it's a good idea but wants to hear more public input. Mr. Papakonstantis suggested putting it on the agenda for the next meeting.

8. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to accept a Yield Tax for 28/20 in the amount of \$374.79. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Ms. Gilman said they have two requests to remove interest from past due taxes. It falls under a non-public exemption, as it involves someone asking for a waiver.

91A:3II(c) talks about harm to reputation. She would like to move these decisions to the next meeting for a non-public session.

b. Permits & Approvals

- i. Greg Bisson, Parks and Rec Director, discussed the fireworks proposed for July 10th with American Thunder Fireworks of North Reading MA.

**MOTION:** Ms. Oliff moved to allow the Parks and Rec Department to proceed with the Fireworks display with American Thunder Fireworks of North Reading MA on July 10th from 7 - 9 PM. Mr. Browne seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

- ii. Mr. Bisson said Parks and Rec is looking to offer two movies this year in Swasey Parkway. They haven't yet decided on the titles.

**MOTION:** Ms. Cowan moved to allow the Parks and Rec to promote movie night on June 18, 2021 and August 27, 2021. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

- iii. Mr. Bisson recommended opening town buildings to rentals. The Kiwanis Club had submitted a permit for the UFO Festival, but decided to withdraw from using the Town Hall. Ms. Gilman asked if they should also shift to approving the permits just by Parks and Rec. Mr. Papakonstantis agreed, suggesting they should bring permits to the Board only when they feel it's appropriate. Mr. Bisson said in the past, they've only brought events to the Board when it's a permit for a Parks and Rec event.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to return the permitting process for renting town property back to Parks and Rec as previously. Mr. Browne seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor.

Mr. Bisson said in opening town buildings, they would be increasing cleaning, and the cost (\$80 - 100) would likely be turned over to the renter. Mr. Dean suggested using money from the maintenance budget. Ms. Cowan said she would like to explore getting the money from the American Recovery Project money. She wouldn't want to pass it on to renters. Mr. Papakonstantis asked that this issue be tabled pending more information about funding.

- iv. Mr. Bisson discussed masks at the Rec Summer Camp. They're proposing to have the kids not wear masks when outdoors in their cohorts. If parents don't feel comfortable they can offer a full refund, but he feels it may attract more campers. Primex is fully supportive.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. They submitted three projects to the ARPA program: the Webster Pump Station, Police body cameras, and an Epping Road widening project.
- ii. June 21 is the start date for the Network Administrator.

- iii. The Departments are working on the CIP for next year.
- d. Select Board Committee Reports
  - i. Mr. Browne said this week there will be a communications demo.
  - ii. Ms. Oliff Housing Committee had a presentation on affordable housing. They plan to invite people from neighboring towns to future meetings to talk about their housing.
  - iii. Ms. Gilman said the Heritage Commission held an information session about the Park Street Heritage Area, but she was unable to attend. They also had two demo requests, for a barn on Park Street and a garage on Salem Street. She also gave an update on State issues.
  - iv. Ms. Cowan said that at the EPSC, they discussed the presentation which was given to the Board earlier. Planning Board was cancelled.
  - v. Mr. Papakonstantis did not have a report.
- e. Correspondence
  - i. An email from Aryn Vogan, who set up a mobile vendor truck and said it was an outstanding start.
  - ii. An update from the Executive Council on their meeting.
  - iii. An email from Ms. Gilman on the American Independence Festival, which will be done over several weekends.

9. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are June 7, June 21st.

10. Non-Public Session

- a. There was no non-public session at this meeting.

11. Adjournment

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to adjourn. Mr. Browne seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor and the meeting adjourned at 10 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanna Bartell  
Recording Secretary