

Select Board Meeting
Monday August 23, 2021
7 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Julie Gilman, Molly Cowan, Daryl Browne, Niko Papakonstantis, and Town Manager Russ Dean were present at this meeting. Lovey Roundtree Oliff was not present. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 7 PM.

2. Public Comment

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

3. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. Mr. Papakonstantis said that on Wednesday he, Ms. Gilman, Mr. Dean, Ms. Roy, and Ms. Perry met with Congressman Chris Pappas to discuss the siphons project, and the meeting went well. Mr. Papakonstantis recognized Ms. Perry who gave an excellent presentation and Ms. Roy who started this process in Mr. Dean's absence. Ms. Cowan asked when they will know the status of this request, and Mr. Papakonstantis said likely in September.

4. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: August 16, 2021

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to table the meeting minutes. Mr. Browne seconded. All were in favor.

5. Appointments and Resignations

- a. Resignation

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to accept with regret the resignation of Anne Kenny from the Arts & Culture Advisory Commission. Mr. Browne seconded. All were in favor.

- b. Appointment

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to appoint Dick Matthews as a full member of the Rec Advisory Board, term to expire 4/30/23. Mr. Browne seconded. Mr. Papakonstantis and Ms. Cowan abstained, and the motion failed 2-0-2.

MOTION: Ms. Cowan moved to table the appointment of Dick Matthews to the Rec Advisory Board. Mr. Browne seconded. All were in favor.

6. Discussion/Action Items

- a. SAU 16 Opening

School Superintendent David Ryan was present to discuss the school district's opening plans. They will be opening on time, on Aug 30, with all students in school every day, for what they hope will be the duration of the

academic year. Given the resurgence of the virus and the rise of the Delta variant, they proposed masking guidelines based on the level of community vaccination and transmission. The COOP Board approved these guidelines August 3rd, and Exeter is discussing them tonight.

They will start the year with everyone back in school every day. They will follow all mitigation strategies recommended by DHHS. They didn't receive much guidance from the State regarding masking, so the District created a masking matrix, which was copied by DPHS in their recommendations to NH schools. If the schools were opening tomorrow, all students and staff would be wearing masks indoors, and will be for as long as there is substantial transmission. As they move to moderate or minimal, they will have different guidelines. They will follow the levels of the Seacoast Public Health Region, not just Exeter.

They will also follow physical distancing guidelines, and field trips and school events will be considered on a case-by-case basis. There will be frequent handwashing, improved ventilation, and all the standard mitigation. School buildings will be open for outside groups to use, and they've worked with Greg Bisson of Parks and Rec on resuming activities; there will be no additional surcharge for cleaning this year. Public meetings such as School Board meetings must now be held in person. IEP and 504 team meetings will mostly be in person, but if parents are more comfortable having them online they can accommodate that.

Regarding transportation, they're running into issues with staffing; they're down six drivers, who are in training now. They've had to compress four routes and may push some pickup times earlier. Masking on busses is a federal mandate. 80% of students have chosen to use school bus transportation.

Music, drama, clubs, and activities will all be in person. Coach Ball is looking forward to getting the teams out on the field, which has nice new turf. All sports programs will go forward.

Regarding contact tracing, quarantine and exclusion, DHHS says if there were a case, they no longer need to exclude any close contact, just the person identified as the Covid case.

Most Boards have accepted the guidelines, but the Stratham School Board wanted to develop their own masking matrix. Overall the plan had a positive reception.

The CMS renewal project is just about complete. The HS had a renovation of the commons areas, to give additional office and learning space. A house on Blue Hawk Drive was purchased by the COOP when the land was purchased for the construction of the new HS, and it was a rental unit until 2 years ago. Administration worked with the Department of Education to use IDEA Federal funding for special education to turn the house into a working laboratory classroom for special needs students 18 - 21; they will use this space to teach them life skills, such as how to cook a meal, clean a house, etc. The students previously had to go elsewhere for this instruction. This house is the first one of its kind in NH.

There are new employees at the SAU office, including Heather Murray, the new Director of Human Resources, and Andres Meija, the new DEIJ Coordinator. Regarding DEIJ, they had a public meeting where they heard support and concerns, which was facilitated by NH Listens from UNH. There's a new staff orientation tomorrow, and Thursday there will be an Academic Convocation, where students and staff will assemble to celebrate the beginning of the year.

Ms. Gilman congratulated Dr. Ryan for getting all this done. She asked if they'd taken all the lockers out at the High School, and Dr. Ryan said they took about half of them out. Ms. Gilman said her daughters never used their lockers. Dr. Ryan said they recognized a lack of use for lockers and an increased need for meeting and learning space. Even after this project, they will still return \$4.2M in unassigned funds to taxpayers.

Mr. Browne asked if they are offering any resources to the kids and staff for whom "safer at home" was not the case. Dr. Ryan said they understand the gap for students may have widened over the past year. They had a summer learning academy and tutoring for those identified as not having as successful a learning year. They will be working on reconnecting with students and families. With competency-based education, they can identify where students are and progress that they did or didn't make over the year. This year, the first few weeks of school will be focused on welcoming students back into the routine, creating relationships, and breaking some bad habits. They will spend more time with students in a tier 2 or 3 situation. At the HS, they have a Mental Health Counselor and School Social Workers. At the Elementary level, the Social Workers, Para Educators, and Counselors are devoted to Social Emotional Learning.

Mr. Browne asked about food security during the past year, and Dr. Ryan said Jeanne Pierce, the District Food Director, set up meal distribution points 2x/week to ensure all families had food. There have been free meals for all families, using Federal funding, which will continue through December. Counselors and Para-educators are looking into student homes and ensuring conditions are conducive for learning, for example with food security and connectivity.

Ms. Cowan thanked Dr. Ryan and the staff for all the work to get kids back in school. She asked if there is any extra funding through Federal Grants to supplement the wage for jobs such as bus drivers or Paras, people who are hard to find. Dr. Ryan said they have three different funding sources, and were just given green light on a FEMA reimbursement. They're getting into a wage war with area businesses, and staff is finding that they can make more money elsewhere. Creating a wage scale that can compete using public money is nearly impossible, so they have to be creative with how they retain employees, including treating them with care and compassion, publicly valuing their work, and creating a family atmosphere. They're not having a mass exodus of employees, and people are still clamoring to come work for the district.

Mr. Papakonstantis said during the pandemic it was good to know that every weekend they would get a communication from Dr. Ryan. SAU 16 took the ball and ran with remote learning, they didn't miss a beat. Dr. Ryan has an open invitation to come and talk about anything regarding the schools.

Ms. Gilman asked whether parents are going to be integrated into the classrooms through volunteering. Dr. Ryan said that was one topic of conversation at the Exeter School Board meeting. It's not going to be permitted at the beginning of the year, but once they move into moderate or minimal transmission they would invite those volunteers back in. For everyday issues, parents don't have to wait outside school this year, they can go inside with a mask.

Ms. Gilman asked about band. Dr. Ryan said they're doing a lot outside. The State has music guidelines for voice and instruments, such as using appropriate distancing and putting special masks on the instruments. They're coming up with ways to ensure that kids are enjoying the arts.

b. Communications Advisory Committee Report

Martha McEntee and Bob Glowacky were present to discuss the work of the Communications Advisory Committee. Ms. McEntee said the Select Board established the committee in 2018 to look into issues that have arisen with all of the new communication channels. They've spent the last three years looking at this, and are not done yet. They're losing Chairman Conor Barry, who was an effective leader and will be missed. The remaining members are Lindsay Sonnett, Nina Braun, Exeter TV Rep Bob Glowacky, and Select Board Designee Daryl Browne. Andy Swanson has also advised. Molly Cowan and Kathy Corson were former reps of the Select Board, and Debbie Kane and Bevin Kennedy were former members. They also had help from Town Manager Russ Dean and Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy in creating the report.

The committee was founded to have seven members, but they would like the Board to consider reducing that to five, as they've never had the full number. They were charged with evaluating the way the town communicates with the public and finding ways to maximize citizen engagement. They analyzed existing communications channels and usage, conducted a communications survey in 2020, and have written plain English summaries of town warrant articles for the last three years.

The basic question is, how do we want to present our town to the public? The Select Board needs to establish communications guidelines, policies, and best practices. They recommend designating a Communications Coordinator to oversee this process for the town. Each department should still be responsible for providing content about its own activities, and each department should designate a staff member to be responsible for its communications. They're not recommending that this new person or role would micromanage or preapprove all communications. They should establish staff training once they have guidelines in place.

Regarding the channels of communications, the priorities should be the town website, “push notifications” such as alerts and subscriptions, and a social media presence.

The committee did some research on the website platform, and it doesn't need to be replaced, but they should look at how to use it more effectively. There's no webmaster coordinating the website, which has led to some confusion and inconsistent presentation. Information can be unreliable or out of date. The search functionality doesn't work well, but this can be tweaked by designating top results for certain search terms. For about \$1,000, they can redesign the website to more prominently feature upcoming meetings/events and news.

Regarding texting and push notifications, people want to receive information, rather than have to look for it. Push notifications are already being used by some Departments, and they should expand this practice to other Departments. They need to replace the MyExeterNH App, which has not been well-used by residents or town staff. The town already has a mobile notification service through the EMS/PD/FD (Rave Mobile), which could also be used by the non-emergency uses in town. They should also create a handbook for new residents, perhaps in partnership with real estate agents or the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he and Ms. Oliff are in the process of looking at all committees and their functions, but he agrees that they have too many members and can't fill the committee. Five is a reasonable number. The Board will also try to recruit more members. Is the MyExeterNH App obsolete? Mr. Glowacky said the app itself had only minor issues, such as not working well with the town website. The main reason they got it was the “report an issue” feature, but the town didn't really adopt it. Department information would be better sent out to the public, rather than getting into a back and forth about it.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the website improvement they're already paying for should be the first point they address. Staff is one of the hardest things to review when going through a budget; there may be room for a new position down the road, but for now they should look at resources they have in place. Mr. Dean said they're always interested in improving the website. The website is decentralized at the Department level, and the closest to a webmaster they have is the IT department. They will look to start making incremental improvements.

Mr. Browne said the committee has done high-level strategic work on communications efforts and given best practices. The Assistant Town Manager is doing a lot of this work de facto by managing communication between the Town Manager and Department Heads. Technology expenses won't solve anything, it's got to be part of a greater initiative. The Communications Committee should stay strategic rather than being dragged into tactical details.

Ms. Gilman said she's impatient to have push notifications and accurate information on the website. They should use the report's information to get improvements started.

Ms. Cowan said there's the makings here of a strategic plan for communications going forward, including things that are free and low-lift. The Communications Coordinator would be a new position, which would be a BRC discussion, but they need to have the strategic plan in place so that it gets easier to bring someone on. They need to consider who's in charge of making Department pages look the same and ensuring that Departments are using the website to the fullest potential. She asked Ms. McEntee what skills they're looking for on the committee so that the Select Board can better help with recruitment. Ms. McEntee said it's important to have someone that loves technology and is comfortable with different channels of information.

Mr. Papakonstantis said for next steps, they should look at the website and extra things they could be doing they're already paying for. The website could be an agenda item for the next Department meeting, and Mr. Dean could ask the Departments how they want to communicate. Mr. Dean said they have a Department head meeting on Wednesday, and he will share this information with them and report back in September.

Ms. McEntee said the committee would like more guidance on what to look at next.

MOTION: Mr. Browne moved to change the size of the Communications Advisory Committee from seven members to five. Ms. Gilman seconded. All were in favor.

Ms. McEntee asked if they could change the original charge they gave the committee to remove point 3, "ensure that events, especially large ones, provide options for food and childcare." Ms. Gilman said that they'd heard that younger people would join more meetings if their children had a place to play. Ms. McEntee said they felt it's beyond the scope of the committee. Ms. Cowan said people are more adept at online options now, and there are more ways to participate not in person.

MOTION [not voted]: Mr. Browne moved to strike number 3 from the Communications Advisory Committee charge. Ms. Gilman seconded. Mr. Papakonstantis asked if the Board would allow him and Ms. Oliff to finish their review of all Committee mission statements. Ms. Cowan said she doesn't want the Communications Advisory Committee to get hung up on that point, but it's worth having a broader discussion about it. Mr. Browne rescinded his motion and Ms. Gilman rescinded her second.

c. Town Ordinance Update: Swasey Parkway One Way Street

Mr. Papakonstantis said they had the third reading of this ordinance change last week, but prior to making a motion, Mr. Browne had asked to reach out to Town Counsel re ADA requirements. They heard from Attorney Mitchell, who said there were no ADA requirements or DOT prohibitions that would keep the town from reopening Swasey Parkway. To keep it discontinued, even for public safety, would be opening them to legal challenges. Mr. Papakonstantis said if the Board moves to include Swasey Parkway as a one-way street, he

would encourage continued conversation about the Parkway, including changes that would require a town meeting vote. They will get input on these options from the Trustees and the public.

Ms. Gilman said regarding ADA compliance, there's only one crosswalk. Perhaps there should be more crosswalks with curb cuts, or they should restrict the size of the street to reduce speeds. It's not clear to pedestrians where to cross the road. They should talk to the Trustees about it. Mr. Papakonstantis said they've reached a point where after September 6th, the Board does not have the authority to restrict vehicular traffic. If they vote to make it one way, there will be some measure of safety; otherwise, on September 7th, it will be open to two-way traffic. He encouraged the public to read the Trust in its entirety to understand what the Board has the authority to do and not do.

Mr. Browne asked if a petition on the town warrant would be enough to close the Parkway. Mr. Papakonstantis said they could craft a warrant article, which would seem more binding than a citizen's petition. After that, they would still have to go before the State to handle the Trust part of it. Mr. Dean said it's a class 5 road, not a class 6 road as mentioned last week. They would have to work with the Attorney General's office to end the road in perpetuity

MOTION [not voted]: Mr. Browne moved to open Swasey Parkway for one-way traffic only, but to begin DPW work on crosswalks to make the road safer for pedestrians. Ms. Gilman said those things should be separate. Mr. Browne rescinded his motion.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to adopt an amendment to Chapter Three of the Exeter Town Ordinances, One-Way Streets and Traffic Circles, as follows: to 301 One-way streets, add "Swasey Parkway northerly from Water Street entrance to exit on Water Street," effective September 7, 2021. Mr. Browne seconded. All were in favor.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Mr. Dean to look into the possibility of crosswalks. Ms. Cowan said she'd like for the barriers to still be there blocking half the road, to make it clear that it's a one-way road.

Jennifer Perry, the Public Works Director, said she needs to confer with Jay Perkins, who's been giving this some serious thought. There needs to be a suite of improvements, messages, and barriers.

Ms. Perry added that the exit street is Newfields Road, not Water Street. Ms. Gilman asked if they would have to re-read it three times, and Mr. Dean suggested just amending the motion to say Newfields Road.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to reconsider the vote on amending Chapter 3 of the town ordinances. Mr. Browne seconded. All were in favor.

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Mr. Papakonstantis asked if the DPW could post the information about upcoming changes to the road on the website and share them back with the Board.

d. Bower Land Donation

Kristen Murphy, the Natural Resources Planner, was present remotely via Zoom to discuss a land donation. Ms. Murphy said the town was approached by the estate of the Bower family with interest in donating land to the town for Conservation purposes. The town is required to obtain recommendations from Conservation Commission and Planning Board, and have two public meetings before taking a vote to accept the land. This parcel is 5 acres, landlocked and undeveloped, and partly wetland. It would contribute to a large connected corridor of conservation land. She went to the Conservation Commission on August 10 and the Planning Board on August 12, and received a unanimous recommendation for acquiring the property.

Mr. Papakonstantis opened the discussion for public comment, but there was none. He brought the discussion back to the Board.

Ms. Gilman said the opportunity makes sense. It fits in with existing easements. Ms. Cowan said she voted to accept this land in the Planning Board. It's an interesting opportunity to get more wetland property into the town's use.

Mr. Dean said this process takes multiple hearings, so they will bring it back in September.

e. Water Resources Update

Jennifer Perry, the DPW Director, said the last time she gave an update, in July, they were at the beginning of a major change in precipitation. July 2021 was the rainiest July on record, with over 13 inches of rain; the July average is only 2 inches. The precipitation deficit was erased, and they town is no longer in drought. Groundwater levels are recovering at different rates across the states, but there is significant recovery in this area. They recommend removing the level 2 water restrictions.

MOTION: Ms. Cowan moved to remove the level 2 water restrictions, effective immediately. Ms. Gilman seconded. All were in favor.

f. Great Bay Permit

Paul Vlasich, the Town Engineer, was present to discuss the Great Bay Nitrogen Permit and the town strategic plan.

Ms. Perry said that when they received the final permit in Dec 2020, they were offered the opportunity to submit a voluntary plan, which they did. This plan will ensure they are reducing nitrogen, in both wastewater and stormwater. Exeter has been under an administrative order for several years and has been making significant efforts in total nitrogen reduction. There's developmental pressure and continued expansion of land use, so they have to be ready to offset

those increases in impervious surface if they want to make substantial reductions in total nitrogen. They have been addressing nitrogen with enhanced street sweeping and cleaning catch basins; there are 19 Pet waste stations to encourage the public to deposit pet waste. There's tracking and accounting of nitrogen with NH DES and the UNH Stormwater Center. They're involved in regional efforts, including the Watershed Integration for Squamscott Exeter (WISE), an integrated plan for reducing nitrogen. They're incorporating reductions in the capital projects, such as tree filters in the downtown sidewalk project and infiltration galleries in the Lincoln Street area. To get where they need to be at the end of the 5 year permit cycle, they need to identify ways to increase their efforts and make substantial improvements. Exeter has joined the Municipal Alliance for Adaptive Management (MAAM), which includes surrounding towns, to make contributions to water quality monitoring, track steel grass and other recoveries in Great Bay, and do further research, and there is a UNH grant to focus on this. MAAM submitted to the EPA at the end of July, but they want to accentuate some of the uniqueness of the Exeter approach.

Paul Vlasich presented the adaptive management plan, aspects of which will be in the CIP and budgeting process. They are looking to make improvements in water quality and monitoring, nitrogen tracking, and source reduction. Mr. Browne asked where the sediments from the catch basins are taken when they are cleaned out. Mr. Vlasich said to the transfer station.

g. Epping Road/Brentwood Road Intersection

Mr. Papakonstantis said they asked Public Works and the Town Engineer to take a look at this project and give suggestions, and asked Dave Sharples to create a survey of folks that live in that area.

Mr. Vlasich said per his memo from Aug 18, he went out there several times, and met with the consultant from Hoyle Tanner Associates. At that intersection, everyone he saw was making the correct movements. He focused on the drivers: it used to be an unconventional intersection and those not familiar with it had trouble, but now, out-of-staters managed it well and local traffic seemed confused. He presented a plan for additional striping and signage changes that may lessen the confusion. They can move forward for \$10,300, with a change order approved by DOT.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he heard positive feedback just from the stop sign installation. He likes all the new suggestions. Mr. Browne said he's comfortable with this, since Public Works are the experts. Ms. Cowan said it makes sense, but she will still recuse herself. Mr. Vlasich said they can come back with the change order and that can be approved by the Town Manager. Typically, minor changes don't need the vote of the Board.

Mr. Sharples said they're underbudget on the TAP project, so he's hopeful that they don't have to spend any new funds for these changes.

MOTION: Mr. Browne moved to authorize the Town Manager to approve the change order as recommended by the Public Works Department with respect to the Epping Road Winter/Spring TAP project. Ms. Gilman seconded. Ms. Cowan abstained, and the motion passed 3-0-1.

Mr. Vlasich said he talked to HTA and VHB regarding the proposed three-way stop at Washington Street at Spruce. During a recent police speed study, it was found that the average speed on Washington Street was 23 MPH, and the 85th percentile was 28 MPH, so generally people are obeying the speed limit sign. There have been few accidents at that intersection. An all-ways stop at that intersection is not recommended.

Ms. Gilman asked about sidewalks on Washington Street. Mr. Vlasich said there's a mix of sidewalk and no sidewalk. Ms. Gilman said she thinks lack of sidewalks is driving this concern.

Mr. Sharples said he sent a draft survey to the Town Manager. He talked to the RPC Planning Director, and they can use the Public Input software to do the survey. Ms. Gilman said this will be a good test run for looking at the other intersections. Mr. Sharples said he will work with Mr. Dean on putting out the survey.

7. Regular Business

- a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions
 - i. There were no abatements or credits considered at this meeting.
- b. Permits & Approvals
 - i. There were no permits or approvals considered at this meeting.
- c. Town Manager's Report
 - i. The Departments are continuing to work on budgets, which will be due this Friday.
 - ii. The 2nd public hearing on the CIP is at the Planning Board this week.
 - iii. He attended a meeting on voting accessibility, which went well.
 - iv. The tax deeding list is coming out soon.
 - v. The Town Electrician, Ron Wheeler, put in additional work on the electrical outlets at Swasey Parkway.
- d. Select Board Committee Reports
 - i. Ms. Cowan had no report. She won't be at the Planning Board meeting this week, and asked Mr. Browne to attend if possible. Mr. Papakonstantis said he can attend if not.
 - ii. Ms. Gilman said the Heritage Commission had a public demolition hearing which wasn't well attended. She would like to work on communications.
 - iii. Mr. Browne had no report.
 - iv. Mr. Papakonstantis attended the meeting with Congressman Pappas, and met with Mr. Dean and the Town Moderator re building accessibility.
- e. Correspondence
 - i. There was no correspondence considered at this meeting.

8. Review Board Calendar
 - a. The next meetings are September 13 and 27
9. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Cowan moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II(a) and (d). Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor, and the meeting entered non-public session at 9:53 PM. The Board emerged from non public session. Selectwoman Cowan moved to seal the minutes of the non public session until the matter was concluded. Selectman Browne seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

10. Adjournment. Selectwoman Gilman moved to adjourn. Selectwoman Cowan seconded. The Board stood adjourned at 10:05 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary