

Select Board Meeting
Monday February 22, 2022
6:40 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Julie Gilman, Molly Cowan, Lovey Roundtree Oliff, Niko Papakonstantis, and Town Manager Russ Dean were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:45 PM. The Board went to the Wheelwright Room to conduct interviews.

2. Board Interviews

- a. Eduardo Contreras for the Budget Recommendations Committee
- b. Joseph Alexander for the Historic District Commission

The meeting reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7:02 PM.

3. Public Comment

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

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. There were no proclamations/recognitions at this meeting.

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: February 7, 2022

MOTION: Ms. Oliff moved to approve the minutes of Feb 7, 2022 as presented. Ms. Gilman seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

6. Appointments

- a. There were no appointments at this meeting.

7. Discussion/Action Items

- a. COVID-19 Update

Fire Chief Eric Wilking gave a Covid update. The numbers continue to trend in a positive direction. Only 70 residents of Exeter tested positive last week. Only 5 people in Exeter were positive Wednesday and 2 on Thursday, but 10 on Friday. Generally we're doing much better than a few months ago. There are 2,683 cases in the State. We're still doing well compared to towns with similar populations.

Health Officer James Murray said last week the Health Department had a large increase in emails and calls regarding the mask regulations. Nashua, Manchester, and other towns are starting to drop the mask mandate. The Hospital as of Thursday only had 1 person with Covid, and they're modifying their mask regulations to focus on those who are unvaccinated. The NH Health Department is still recommending masking. The CDC will probably make changes to their recommendations this week.

Ms. Gilman asked about the State vaccination rate. Chief Wilking said it's about 56%.

Jeff Bouvier of 1 Hillside Ave asked if the Board would make a recommendation on masks tonight based on the data and other towns. Mr. Papakonstantis said the mask mandate is set to expire March 21st. Mr. Bouvier said the data speaks for itself.

Ms. Oliff proposed that we end the mask mandate. Ms. Gilman said she agrees, as she feels more comfortable now. People can still wear a mask if they want to.

Mr. Murray said it might be prudent that we move back to a recommendation, rather than a mandate, and support businesses and individuals who wish to wear masks.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he's concerned about school vacation next week. The last time we saw numbers surge upon kids returning to school. We also have an election on March 8th.

Mr. Bouvier said he's heard that we don't want to get rid of it before the election. Those who want to are welcome to wear an N95 or a respirator. They can say that they require masks only at that building on that day.

Ms. Oliff said we could have that option and a separate entrance for those who were unmasked at Town Meeting. We need to be realistic about what's happening. A lot of the children we were concerned about have been vaccinated.

Ms. Cowan said she's worried about the volunteers at the election. Ms. Oliff said this would not be the only town or group who does not have a mask mandate. We could still ask that people mask under particular circumstances such as town voting. This likely won't be the last time in the next few years that we will have to revisit this.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the town determines what happens in the school building on that day, despite what the school's guidelines may be at the time. No one will be prohibited from voting.

Ms. Oliff said we could consider tying regulations to the State vaccination percentage.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to lift our mask regulation and go back to a mask recommendation with the following conditions: we require masks at town meeting on March 8th, providing a separate entrance for those who do not wish to wear a mask. We will revisit this as necessary. This is effective Feb 23rd. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

b. Welfare Guidelines Update

The Welfare and Human Services Administrator Pam McElroy was present. Mr. Dean said in revising the guidelines, we followed the NHMA model. There were three core changes: the burial/cremation amount raised to \$2,000; the record retention clause has been changed to 7 years to comply with State law; and the definition of housing has been codified in the guidelines. Ms. McElroy said the last update to these guidelines was in 2015.

Ms. Cowan said she would like to hear an update on the program and its resources. Ms. McElroy said she does a monthly report that is submitted to the town manager on dollars spent and number of residents aided in different categories. We also have numbers on how many phone calls and emails we get, all of which are shared in the BRC meetings. Part of her job is to direct people to agencies that may be able to help when the town is unable to help. Ms. Cowan asked if there's any follow up on whether those people got help, and Ms. McElroy said yes, she does follow up. There are

months when she gets almost 600 calls from people, not agencies. She's been able to work through all of them, but there are some that are denied. In those cases, she tries to recommend other agencies that may be able to help them.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if Ms. McElroy could present the data sometime in the next couple of meetings.

Ms. Gilman asked about the workfare program. Ms. McElroy said she's never placed anyone in it because when you're working within the town, everything goes through HR and there are confidentiality concerns.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if the Human Services Funding Committee looks at other organizations you use as a resource, or just those seeking funding. Ms. McElroy said it's just the agencies that have submitted an application.

Ms. Gilman asked if the committee is solid, and Ms. McElroy said they're wonderful and have excellent discussions during their meetings. They only meet once a year.

Mr. Dean thanked Ms. McElroy for her work on the Town Report.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to adopt the Town of Exeter Human Services Welfare Guidelines as revised, effective Jan 22, 2022. Ms. Oliff seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

c. Communications Update

Ms. Cowan said she's been at the Communications Committee for the last few meetings since the resignation of Selectman Browne. The committee has traditionally provided summaries of the warrant articles to the paper, but we want to turn that over to the Town Manager, as his summaries are wonderful and we should not duplicate efforts.

Bob Glowacky said Andie Kohler revamped the election site since the last election. Exeternh.gov/elections has all the information. We had a website design workshop with town staff, the Communications Committee, and our website provider Municode. In about two weeks we'll have a first look at a new exeternh.gov design. He will also be meeting with the Police and Fire Chief about the texting service they have. Mr. Dean said the Myexeter app is no longer.

Mr. Glowacky said that IT just got a call that the motion regarding masks was not heard, and the Recording Secretary read the motion for the public record.

Mr. Papakonstantis said there were website capabilities that we weren't using. Mr. Glowacky said the main one was the keyword results that we can specify, such as automatically sending searches with certain keywords to the elections page. We could also have a place with a list and a map of all town projects and their status. Most of those are in DPW, so he's working with Trisha Allen to identify those projects.

Mr. Glowacky said regarding the elections, there are a lot of short videos on YouTube about the articles, with links to read more about them.

Ms. Gilman asked if we can get the Departments to work with the committees they represent to get more information on the committee webpages. Mr. Glowacky said we're working on a best practices policy and workflow charts for both staff and committees.

d. Assessor Contract Update

Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy was present to discuss the Assessing Contract. Ms. Roy said we have taken our Deputy Tax Assessor Janet Whitten and done a reclassification to make her the Assessor. We're now able to reorganize our MRI contract. This contract is for 2022 - 2026; the cost is split through five years, which guarantees our compliance with DRA and valuation cycles. We're planning a mid-cycle revaluation on condos and manufactured homes so they're not hit with a large tax increase at the end of the cycle.

Mr. Dean said these contracts can be terminated with 30 days' notice.

Mr. Papakonstantis said with Janet's reclassification, would it be cost efficient to hire someone to assist Janet rather than contract with MRI? Ms. Roy said using MRI is a greater savings.

MOTION: Ms. Cowan moved to authorize the Town Manager to sign the Professional Services Agreement dated January 1st, 2022 to retain professional consulting services for the town of Exeter for 2022 - 2026 to be provided by Municipal Resources Inc (MRI). Ms. Oliff seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to authorize the Town Manager to sign the Professional Services Agreement partial update to retain the services provided by Municipal Resources Inc (MRI). Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

8. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veteran's Credit for 27/12/8 and 33/9 in the amount of \$500 for the year 2022. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 97/9 in the amount of \$21,000 for the year 2022. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 95/79/12 in the amount of \$11,500 for 2022. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 65/169 in the amount of \$12,000 for 2022. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an Elderly Exemption for 104/79/612 in the amount of \$152,251 for 2022. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an Elderly Exemption for 87/14/20A in the amount of \$236,251 for 2022. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an Elderly Exemption for 104/79/226 in the amount of \$152,251 for 2022. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 110/2/81 in the amount of \$35.25 for 2020. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 104/71 in the amount of \$3,507.86 for 2021. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 104/71/1 in the amount of \$1,138.07 for 2021. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 104/71/2 in the amount of \$1,198.10 for 2021. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 104/71/3 in the amount of \$1,308.55 for 2021. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 104/71/4 in the amount of \$1,491.02 for 2021. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 95/75 in the amount of \$449.80 for 2021. Ms. Cowan seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

b. Permits & Approvals

Mr. Papakonstantis said we received a request to waive interest as they did not receive the first tax bill. It was paid immediately once received.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to waive the interest for 69/3/3 in the amount of \$68.40. Mr. Papakonstantis seconded. All were in favor and the motion passed 4-0.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. The Finance Director's last day was last Friday. We've begun the interview process for a replacement.
- ii. We've begun the bond bank application process for July.
- iii. He was invited to Riverwoods voter information night this week
- iv. The Route 108 corridor is active again for Water and Sewer in Stratham. He attended a remote meeting on this last week.
- v. He attended a Chamber of Commerce economic forecast meeting.
- vi. He went to Concord to testify on the Waste Water State Aid Grant. Mr. Papakonstantis asked if there had been updates from Congressman Pappas's office, but Mr. Dean said no.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- i. Ms. Oliff had no report.
- ii. Ms. Cowan had no report.

- iii. Ms. Gilman said the Conservation Commission talked about trail work. We're looking to cut off new little trails created by mountain bikers. There's a Facebook group that has volunteered to take care of the trails. There was a "Full Moon Snowshoe Trek" on Feb 12, but there was no snow, so they did a hike instead. The Tree Committee has an idea to do a big tree scavenger hunt. Exeter has 10 "big trees." The HDC approved the Academy's project on Gilman Lane and the final design of the church on Front Street. The Heritage Commission is applying for two grants, one for membership to the National Association of Preservation Commissions, and one to resurvey the waterfront commercial historic district because so much has changed there since 1980. On the State level, her committee killed several bills: one on different tax exemptions that would have added up to \$55M statewide; one regarding the budget procedures for the Gunstock Area Commission; one that would decrease the minimum lot size to .5 of an acre; and one limiting the number of parking spaces required for each building.
- iv. Mr. Papakonstantis attended the Housing Committee meeting along with town staff when Congressman Pappas and his staff came.
- e. Correspondence
 - i. Several communications regarding masks.
 - ii. A notice from Xfinity regarding program changes.
- 9. Review Board Calendar
 - a. The next meetings are March 14 and March 28. The election is March 8.

10. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Cowan moved to enter into non public session under RSA 91-A:3II(c). Ms. Oliff seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor and the motion passed 4-0. The meeting entered non public at 8:14 PM.

11. Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Oliff moved to adjourn. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion carried and the Board stood adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary