

Select Board Meeting  
Monday August 8, 2022  
7 PM  
Nowak Room, Town Offices  
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Julie Gilman, Molly Cowan, Niko Papakonstantis, Nancy Belanger, Town Manager Russ Dean, and Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy were present at this meeting. Ms. Oliff was also present, via Zoom; she stated that she was unable to attend in person, and that she was alone in the room. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 7 PM.

2. Board Interviews

a. There were no interviews conducted at this meeting.

3. Bid Opening- Sewer Siphons Project

a. J A Polito and Sons of Shrewsbury, MA. Addenda 1 is included. Total bid is \$1,989,250. The bid bond is attached.

b. NorthEast Earth Mechanics of Pittsfield NH. Addenda 1 is included. Total bid is \$1,681,975. The bid bond is attached.

c. N. Grenese and Sons Inc of Salem MA. Addenda 1 is included. Total bid is \$1,627,750. The bid bond is attached.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to forward the Sewer Siphon Project bids to the Department of Public Works for review and recommendation. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

4. Public Comment

Gerry Hamel of 17 Little Pine Lane expressed concern about a water bill late charge, which was higher than he expected. He talked to the town Tax Collector's office and found that if you're three days late you're charged a month's interest. He has talked to the Attorney General's Office and Consumer Affairs about this. This fee policy isn't noted on the bill. There must be people who are having trouble paying these bills. The tax collector said 20% of bills are paid late, which could be a few thousand dollars of extra revenue for the town every month. Does the Board feel that's fair? Is it legal?

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Mr. Dean to have some clarification at the next meeting about the practice. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Town of Exeter isn't trying to make money on delinquent bills. He's sure there's a reasonable explanation. The town has a new collections software, and maybe it doesn't correspond to our existing policy. If we're doing something we should not be doing, we need to correct it. Mr. Dean said the ordinance says amounts not paid within 30 days will be charged a 1% late fee for each month. He'll have a legal analysis done on that language and bring more information to a future meeting.

5. Proclamations/Recognitions

6. Approval of Minutes

a. Regular Meeting: July 25, 2022

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve the Select Board meeting minutes of July 25 2022 as presented. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

7. Appointments

8. Discussion/Action Items

a. Valuation Updates - MRI, Scott Marsh, Contract Assessor, Janet Whitten, Town Assessor

Scott Marsh of MRI and Janet Whitten, the Town Assessor, were present to discuss the proposed updates to the town valuation.

Mr. Marsh said that every year, the State reviews assessments and sale prices to find an equalization ratio. Over the last several years, manufactured homes on rented sites and some condos are at a different ratio than the rest of the town. We need to adjust the project factors for each of the mobile home parks so that the assessments are more in line with the town's average. This year, the ratio is around 68%, which shows that values are increasing. The "COD" tells you how close everyone is to the median, and that value gets better with these changes. Looking to ensure everyone's paying a fair and equitable portion of the taxes. There's a five year requirement to get it in line with value, but this is an interim year; the last revaluation was in 2019. He added that this wouldn't have any impact on the town's overall tax rate, which is driven more by spending than by the valuation.

Betty Jean Wright, resident of the Exeter-Hampton Coop and Chair of the Coop Board, spoke on this issue. These homes are affordable, and her neighbors are older folks and the working class. Water rates have increased 250%. Years ago the Coop took ownership of the land beneath their homes. Rents are affordable, but folks in this community are living on the edge. The assessment would go up \$12,000, which would mean a rent increase in the community. This will impact peoples' well being, health, and being stress-free. We pay more taxes because we pay taxes on the land and homes, but we don't get services like plowing, roadways, infrastructure, or Police Services. Owning a home and selling a home is something that gets people out of poverty. Residents of manufactured housing should be treated as equal and have more conversations about what services we're getting. Increasing taxes even by \$40 is a lot to these residents.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he appreciates Ms. Wright's passion for her community. He pledged to work with her in the future.

Ms. Belanger said the timing of this adjustment seems a little off. Ms. Cowan agreed, saying that there's a housing bubble.

Ms. Belanger said the Coop doesn't get the services that everyone else gets. She would like to hear more about how we can address the fact that they don't get services like Police patrol or plowing.

Mr. Marsh said all properties are assessed at the same tax rate, which goes back to the value of the property. The Coop land is one value, and the structure is another value, which are billed separately, but it's being treated the same as a house.

John Grueter of 3 Sterling Lane said condos and mobile home parks have private roads, so they don't get public services.

Ms. Gilman said the State has dealt with private roads not getting town services, which should affect their valuation, but it hasn't gone anywhere. People on these private roads do use the rest of the town's roads.

Mr. Marsh said every fifth year the town has to be in the 90-100% range. In the in-between years, the State is not going to order us to do anything specific. We're just looking at whether we want to bring the properties out of line with the town average into line. Ms. Cowan asked when the next revaluation date is, and Mr. Marsh said 2024. Ms. Gilman asked if we delay this, could the valuations could go up even more? Ms. Cowan said they could also go down. Mr. Marsh said if we wait, there could be a bigger increase at the end. Ms. Cowan said she thinks we're at the top of the market, but we don't know. She added that Exeter is economically diverse because of these communities, and she's concerned about the bump now or in two years.

Ms. Belanger said she doesn't want to vote on this tonight, as she doesn't want to be rushed into making a decision.

Mr. Dean said there's also the condominium element to this proposal.

Mr. Marsh said there's no deadline. If we wanted to do it in the near future, it would push out when we could get the MS1 in, which is due September 1st. Another option is to wait and look at this again in the Spring, which would split any increase over two tax bills and give homeowners a longer period to pay it.

Ms. Wright said she saw the value of the park increase. Mr. Marsh said this is the prior assessments, and doesn't have to do with the land. Just the home's valuation would increase.

Ms. Belanger suggested a work session on this issue.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he would be more comfortable dealing with this in the spring.

Ms. Wright asked if the town creates more tax revenue, where is it going? Mr. Marsh said there's no more revenue, the town can only raise what residents vote to spend.

Mr. Marsh said we've done the same process with the residential condominiums. The ratio overall isn't that out of line, but some projects are above and some are below, so we want to make adjustments to bring them back in line. Ms. Cowan said if we're putting off one discussion until the spring, we should put them both off, as we might have more information about where the bubble is. The Board generally agreed to put the discussion off until the Spring.

Ms. Belanger asked that they use the language "manufactured homes" rather than "mobile homes" in future discussion, per Ms. Wright's suggestion.

b. ARPA and CDS funding update

Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy presented a list of ARPA projects which have been proposed or approved. The second tranche of \$800,000 was received last week, so we have now received the full \$1.6M from the Federal Government.

The Winter Street BMP project was approved at \$42,586. There was \$185,000 for Pickpocket Dam; the total project cost \$300,000, but we got a grant. The Squamscott Sewer Siphons Project was approved at \$420,000; that's the second part of the project to drill a third barrel under the river. We have received \$600,000 in Congressional Directed Spending and the SRF program, and \$1.2M from State ARPA money in FY22 for that project. At the last Select Board meeting, the Board approved a reclassification study to look at non-Union and SEIU town employees to improve retention and recruitment. The Board also approved an update to Maps Online.

Regarding the rest of the projects, the Great Bay Total Nitrogen permit was discussed at the last budget process. \$99,600 was requested by the DPW to mitigate nitrogen, and it was proposed to fund this through ARPA. The IT projects, including Town Server equipment and support, backup servers, Aristotle Insight, ASCAP security penetration testing, and PC replacement, were all discussed in last year's budget process as coming from ARPA. One new project is Munis Transition team funding. The software that Finance and HR use for payroll and HR support has been in place since 2017 without an upgrade, and Munis is requiring an upgrade to the 2021 version. We could purchase a transition package to help at a cost of \$6,400. If all of the projects discussed are approved, we will have \$736,374 left in ARPA funding.

Mr. Papakonstantis said that he envisioned using ARPA funds for infrastructure improvements we could show off down the road, like Town Hall HVAC or improvements to 10 Hampton Road. Mr. Dean said when we made the FY2022 budget, we agreed to reduce the IT budget and submit the IT needs through ARPA. Ms. Roy said a lot of these IT upgrades were to support us through Covid, which is what ARPA was intended for. Ms. Belanger said in the last budget process, there was money in the budget to replace computers, so the money was put to help support Covid IT needs instead. Ms. Roy said these were discussions during the budget process of putting them t

Ms. Roy said at our level of funding, all of the ARPA money can be used for government services. It's not restricted as we had initially expected.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve expenditures from ARPA funds for the following: Great Bay Nitrogen General Permit in the amount of \$99,600; Town Server Equipment and Support Purchase in the amount of \$52,800; Aristotle Insight for IT in the amount of \$14,200; the ASCAP for IT in the amount of \$390; the Backup DNS server for IT in the amount of \$1,500; PC replacement for IT in the amount of \$6,350; and MUNIS Transition Team Funding for HR and Finance at \$6,400. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

c. Water Sewer Rates Discussion

Mr. Dean said he suggests having a consultant do a study on the water/sewer rates. Mr. Papakonstantis asked if we have funds. Mr. Dean said we would get a proposal from a consultant, and would split the cost between water/sewer reserve fund. The study would likely cost \$35,000-45,000 and might take 90 - 120 days to complete.

John Grueter of 3 Sterling Hill Lane, who is on the Board of Directors at Sterling Hill, said that Sterling Hill is in the 3rd tier, but the residents aren't using more water than other homes. Instead of dividing the charges into tiers, it would be more equitable to just have one rate across the board, or to just keep one tier for commercial use. We have done everything we can to help people conserve water.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked about the financial liability for each of the 32 units to have its own meter. Mr. Grueter said they would pay an additional service charge and the cost of the meter. The town would be collecting 128 bills instead of 4 bills. He added that other condo associations are in the same boat.

Mr. Dean said there was a time when we charged different fees for different meter sizes, but that was changed in 2006 to the more you use, the more you pay. Now residents pay one service fee across the board but different rates based on usage. If we adopted a flat rate, the residential rate would go up. The Water/Sewer Committee debated this at length in 2006, but perhaps it's worth a fresh look. Ms. Cowan said if it's a bunch of residences, can't we keep them at the residential rate?

Ms. Wright said that at the Exeter Hampton Coop, we had a master meter and individual household meters, and would end up paying the difference between the two. We ended up installing upgraded meters and got rid of the master meter. Now everyone is paying fees. She has a problem with only ratepayers paying for water, since we're all enjoying the benefits in going to town restaurants etc.

Mr. Grueter said the meter is not a profit center, it's about gallons used in a quarter. There should be just one rate, like in Londonderry.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he'd like to have more information to deliberate on. He thinks Mr. Dean should get a proposal for a review of the rates. Ms. Cowan said she is interested to hear how this can be applied to the mobile home situation as well.

Mr. Dean said the inverted block rate was adopted because we wanted to make sure people were conserving. We can look at the master meter situation.

Mr. Grueter said he understands that "the more you use, the more you pay," but we can't control it any more than we do. With 32 people using the water, there's no way to get under the third tier.

Ms. Belanger asked to hear from Bob Kelly, the Chair of the Water/Sewer Committee, on this issue in the future.

The Board generally agreed to have Mr. Dean get proposals for the study.

9. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 104/79/317 in the amounts of \$710.52 for 2013; \$276.97 for 2014; \$382.30 for 2015; \$422.09 for 2016; \$401.35 for 2017; \$397.04 for 2018; \$714.25 for 2019; \$752.95 for 2020; and \$743.23 for the tax year 2021. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Dean presented a Property Tax Abatement Request due to ongoing litigation. A writ of possession has been granted to the park, and we can't tax the park, so this is a request to forgive the taxes and interest due. A new mobile home will go onto the property.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to forgive the taxes and principal due for tax years 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022 for \$3,633.08 for 104/79/139. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

b. Permits & Approvals

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. The Water Department responded to the pool, which was closed for a few hours. We were able to get it back up and running.
- ii. There's a Budget Recommendations kick off meeting Wednesday
- iii. There's a Planning Board CIP meeting Thursday.
- iv. He attended a Health Trust Retreat last week, which was very informative.
- v. He's been talking to departments about shipment of vehicles and the ordering process. He will have more info Wednesday on the progress of the approved warrant articles.
- vi. He's looking for an update from Attorney Mitchell on Swasey Parkway.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- i. Ms. Oliff had no report.
- ii. Ms. Cowan had a Water/Sewer Advisory meeting where they heard some abatement requests. That committee is looking for members.
- iii. Ms. Gilman had no report. She attended National Night Out, which was a lot of fun.
- iv. Ms. Belanger said she attended the ribbon cutting for the Park Street Playground. There's a Public Input meeting for Planet Playground this week.
- v. Mr. Papakonstantis had no report. He thanked Parks and Rec and the Park Street Neighborhood for their work and feedback on the Park Street Common.

e. Correspondence

- i. A memo from the Chair of the BRC regarding their meeting dates.

- ii. A note from DOT regarding the Exeter Highway Block Grant.
- iii. A note from Xfinity re channel changes.
- iv. Notices of thanks from New Generation and Richie McFarland Children's Center for town donations.

10. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are Aug 22 and Tues September 6.

11. Non-Public Session

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session RSA 91-A:3II(a) Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0. The meeting went into non-public session at 8:49 PM.

12. Adjournment. Selectwoman Belanger moved to adjourn. Selectwoman Gilman seconded. The Board stood adjourned at 8:58 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanna Bartell  
Recording Secretary