

Select Board Meeting  
Monday February 13, 2023  
6:30 PM  
Nowak Room, Town Offices  
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Julie Gilman, Molly Cowan, Lovey Roundtree Oliff, and Niko Papakonstantis. Nancy Belanger was present remotely via Zoom. She stated that she was unable to attend in person and that she was alone in the room.

Town Manager Russ Dean and Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy were also present at this meeting.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:30 PM, and Ms. Cowan, Ms. Gilman, and Mr. Papakonstantis went downstairs to the Wheelwright Room for interviews.

2. Board Interviews

- a. Kathryn Ryder for the Human Services Funding Committee
- b. Theresa Page for the Zoning Board of Adjustment
- c. Laura Montagno for the Zoning Board of Adjustment

The Board reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7 PM.

3. Public Comment

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

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. Swearing in of Sgt. Sonya Robichaud  
The swearing-in was deferred to the next meeting.

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: January 30, 2023

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve the minutes of January 30, 2023 as presented. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

6. Appointments

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to appoint Theresa Page as a full member of the Zoning Board of Adjustment, term to expire April 30, 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to appoint Laura Montagno as an alternate member of the Zoning Board of Adjustment, term to expire April 30, 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to appoint Kathryn Ryder to the Human Services Funding Committee for an unexpiring term. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

7. Discussion/Action Items

a. Fire Department EMS Fee Update

Fire Chief Eric Wilking was present to discuss the proposed fee update. Chief Wilking said we haven't adjusted our ambulance rates since 2021. In 2013, the Select Board established a formula of the established Medicare rates plus a 30% administrative fee. Comstar is an independent third party that we've used for billing for 6-7 years. They advised us on best practices and established rates throughout New England. They bill for thousands of municipalities and private ambulance services, and our rates are at the bottom of almost every category. Maine is billing at Medicare plus 100%. Ambulance services peaked last year, with 2,342 requests for ambulances. Due to aging demographics, 60% of patient billing is for Medicare services. 30% is billed to private insurance companies.

Chief Wilking said we're proposing to move from Medicare + 30% to Comstar's model of Medicare + 100%. We will realize a \$40,000-44,000 increase in revenue from Medicare alone.

Ms. Gilman asked what Medicare plus 100% means. Chief Wilking said Medicare sets a rate of \$440 for an advanced life support call [ALS]. We can bill whatever we want, but we will only receive a \$440 reimbursement. It's the bar the industry uses to set the rate. Supplemental insurance can pay the remainder. Ms. Belanger asked what happens if the patient doesn't have supplemental insurance. Chief Wilking said we have several patients that we transport that have no insurance. We ask Comstar to send out two bills; if the first is not paid, we send a second reminder bill. If we don't receive the money after that, we would be notified, and a decision would be made if the patient could not pay and should have the cost forgiven or if it should go into collections. He added that 99.9% of the time we get paid.

Ms. Belanger asked about the revolving fund. Mr. Dean said it's a roughly \$500,000 fund, so it's fairly healthy right now. 95% of the fund balance is turned back to the General Fund to pay for EMT salaries. Chief Wilking said the FD used that fund last year to purchase Air Lifting Bags and a rescue tool.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to authorize the Exeter Fire Department to update the ambulance transportation rates to Medicare plus 100%, effective February 13, 2023. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

b. Squamscott River Siphons Project Update

Town Engineer/Interim DPW Director Paul Vlasich and Wright-Pierce Engineers Michael Theriault and Kevin Garvey were present to give an update on this project.

Mr. Vlasich said in 2021 a town vote approved the construction of an additional siphon barrel to go across the Squamscott River and flow to the pump station at Swasey Parkway. Flows there average 500,000 gallons a day. There are two existing sewer

siphons; siphons are a way to go through a dip in elevation without using a pump station. These are 8" siphon pipes from the 1960s. We wanted to do an additional barrel because they've reached their flow capacity, and any growth along Portsmouth Ave, Jady Hill, or Holland Way may not be allowed due to their capacity. Our contractor tried to clean the existing siphons and found holes in the pipes. We decided to construct three new siphon barrels to replace the two that were deficient plus a new one. This will bring us more in compliance. In FY22, there was Congressional directed spending and State and town ARPA funds to go towards the cost of the three siphon barrels. The preferred alternative was to directionally drill three barrels under the river. There were a couple of extra borings put in to test the conditions of the soil, and they did not find any ledge. Bids for construction came back at \$1.63M plus \$274,000 of design. Our subcontractor delivered the pipes, two 10" polyethylene pipes plus a 12" pipe, and started drilling around Christmas. The work was expected to take 5 days. The plan was to put a drilling head down at an angle on the Swasey side, get down about 20 feet under the river, then come up on the other side and pull the pipe under the river. They hit something at 80 feet, relocated, and hit something again in the same vicinity. This was presumed to be a ledge outcropping, which was a surprise. The bit they were using couldn't make it through rock, so they had to come in with a rock bit and an additional drill rig to enlarge the hole on both sides. There need to be three passes through any type of ledge to make a hole wide enough for the pipe. We only authorized one barrel under these conditions. They found they couldn't change directions under the river and hit the ledge deeper under the river, and the soft soils made it difficult to find the hole again. They're on their 5th attempt on the Swasey Parkway side, after two attempts on the Mill Buildings side. As of today, they're finally halfway across the river, but that bit will wear out before it finishes. We authorized the subcontractor to install a conductor barrel, which is another pipe they can put down to where it hits the ledge to enable them to hit the hole. The daily costs for this operation are significant. The production is only about 50 feet a day, and we have 500 feet done and 300 to go. Once there's a connection to the drill from two ends, we won't lose the hole. We need to evaluate how we want to move forward on this project. One option is to try a seismic monitoring technology, which will provide additional information about any ledge that's out there.

Mr. Papakonstantis said in December 2020, it was a situation that had to be dealt with with immediacy. Is the delay negatively affecting this neighborhood? Mr. Vlasich said it's the same emergency as in 2020, but since that time, we've developed a contingency plan if the existing siphons fail. We could get a pumping situation similar to the one done for the collapse on High Street a few years ago. Sewage would be pumped along the Mill property across String Bridge and tie into a sewer manhole near Water Street. If we can get the one barrel installed, we can use that to get the effluent to the main pumping station. We should be able to give an update in a couple of weeks.

Ms. Belanger said she would like to know the cost to date at that time, plus any expected bills. Mr. Papakonstantis asked for a rough idea of how much overbudget this could go. Mr. Vlasich said if we're only making 50 feet a day, one tunnel looks like doubling the cost of the project, and then we have to do two more. We'll have to evaluate whether we want to do the same process for the other two.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked how often they have project meetings with town staff, and Mr. Vlasich said every other week, coinciding with the construction meetings. Often we invite abutters but haven't been for the last few weeks due to the issues.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he learned about this issue from the Swasey Parkway Trustee meeting. It's frustrating to learn about significant problems with this project not in a timely manner. The Town Manager could give us an update as part of his report going forward so we don't have any more surprises. We have to start thinking of a way to pay for this, considering that the budget is already on the warrant.

c. OmniBallot Update

Mr. Dean said staff has been working on the OmniBallot issue. They told us they're only selling 100 units at a time, but we got them to offer us a test unit for the March 2023 voting. They will provide a tablet with the town ballot pre-loaded and we'll be testing the printing from the tablet. We're working on verifying the school ballot.

d. Legislative Update

Ms. Gilman presented a report on the bills that would be on the floor this week at the State House. She said that Judiciary, Education, and Criminal Justice are the biggest committees to be watching.

8. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veterans Credit for 72/58, 87/3/65, and 72/2/3, each in the amount of \$500, for tax year 2023. Mr. Papakonstantis seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve Disability Exemptions for 65/124/35, 95/64/188, 95/64/80 and 95/64/342 in the amount of \$125,000 each for the tax year 2023. Mr. Papakonstantis seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to deny a Disability Exemption for 104/79/1012 for tax year 2023. Mr. Papakonstantis seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve Elderly Exemptions in the amount of \$236,251 for tax year 2023 for 63/163, 72/117/9, 73/233, 80/6/41, 104/79/516, 87/14/20A, 73/136, 28/5, 65/56, 63/120, 32/12/22, 104/79/134, 80/7/2, 104/79/219, 68/6/421, and 104/79/132A. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve Elderly Exemptions in the amount of \$183,751 for tax year 2023 for 104/79/954, 95/64/148, 104/79/616, and 104/79/208. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve Elderly Exemptions in the amount of \$152,251 for tax year 2023 95/64/297, 95/64/349, 68/6/825, and 87/8/B-11. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

b. Permits & Approvals

Mr. Papakonstantis said in light of the recent settlement with Riverwoods, the Finance Director is asking the interest and fees be waived.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to waive the interest on late property tax payments for 97/23, 80/18, and 98/37, in the amount of \$1,187.67. Ms. Oliff seconded. Ms. Belanger recused herself. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 4-0-1.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. There is now a Helpsy bin at the Transfer Station. He reached out to School Superintendent David Ryan, and the SAU is also working on getting two bins.
- ii. Housing Advisory discussed 149 Kingston Road, a town-owned property.
- iii. Town Clerk Andie Kohler has fulfilled the requirements for Exeter to become an Athenian fellow. This is in honor of municipal clerks at their best.
- iv. He's attending a Health Trust meeting this week.
- v. The FD responded to 16 water emergencies during the cold weather. They had 61 calls during the three-day period. For town property, a sewer pipe burst at the library, and we're going through the insurance process.
- vi. The SCBAs for the FD came in today.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- i. Ms. Oliff had no report.
- ii. Ms. Cowan had no report.
- iii. Ms. Gilman had no report.
- iv. Ms. Belanger said that at the Planning Board meeting, the Town Planner talked about the zoning proposal. At Housing Advisory, representatives of the Housing Authority came to speak about public housing and rental assistance. Public Housing has a 3-5 year waitlist depending on income level, residence, and employment. She invited the Housing Authority to come to a Select Board meeting in the future.
- v. Mr. Papakonstantis said that at Sustainability Advisory meeting, guest speaker Ms. Gilman talked about State activity on single use plastics. The Committee discussed the Deliberative Session and the Citizens Petition. They welcomed new member Ryan Jean. They discussed initiatives regarding climate action. A subcommittee is working on a revised mission statement and charge. River Advisory is postponed until March.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the All-Boards meeting Feb 8 at the Library was well-attended and exciting, with a lot of ideas shared. We identified two areas of communication: internally between staff and

Boards, and externally to the public, and came up with some ideas for each. Folks are excited to work on this. The next meeting will be in the fall. The ZBA did not receive the email; he apologized and said he will fix that next time. Ms. Belanger said she was glad there were minutes and it was filmed by EXTV. It's important for the community to hear what was discussed.

e. Correspondence

- i. A legislative bulletin from NHMA
- ii. Minutes from the All-Boards meeting.
- iii. A business outreach update sent out by Mr. Winham which was not fully legible.
- iv. A notice about the Parks and Rec Summer Camp Scholarship Fund which was not fully legible.
- v. A notice about the Exeter summer music series
- vi. Further correspondence from Attorney Somers, which Mr. Papakonstantis said they have addressed by appointing two new members to the ZBA.
- vii. A notice of an Environmental Services groundwater permit

9. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are Feb 27 and March 6.

10. Non-Public Session

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

11. Adjournment

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to adjourn. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0. The meeting was adjourned at 8:36 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanna Bartell  
Recording Secretary