

Select Board Meeting
Monday January 9, 2023
6:15 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Julie Gilman, Molly Cowan, Lovey Roundtree Oliff, Niko Papakonstantis, Nancy Belanger, Town Manager Russ Dean, and Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:15 PM.

2. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II(L). Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, all were in favor and the motion passed 5-0.

The Board emerged from non public session.

3. Public Comment

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

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. Maple the Comfort Dog

Police Chief Stephan Poulin introduced Maple the Comfort Dog and her handler, Bailey Texeira, to the Board. Chief Poulin said regarding fundraising, the UFO patch did very well, with 200 patches selling out in 15 minutes; they will order more next time. The PEA Faculty and Staff raised money for Maple as well. The intention is for the program to be fully funded by donations. Any Department heads can reach out about having Bailey visit. Mr. Papakonstantis said this is an example of how the Police are proactive about providing comfort to people in need. Mr. Dean thanked Chief Poulin for hearing ideas like this and following up on them.

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: January 3, 2023
 - i. The minutes were not reviewed at this time.

6. Appointments

- a. There were no appointments made at this meeting.

7. Discussion/Action Items

- a. Community Power Aggregation Committee

Cliff Sinnott and Nick Devonshire of the Community Power Aggregation Committee were present to discuss updates to the Community Power Aggregation effort; Stephanie Marshall of the CPAC and Henry Herndon of CPCNH were present remotely via Zoom. Mr. Devonshire said there will be an

initial notification of rates to every resident, but no notification when the rates change every six months, although the information can be found online. Opt-out notification is sent out 30 days before launch, likely in early March 2023. The switch is targeted for April 2023.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if all residents will be enrolled unless they opt out. Mr. Devonshire said only those on the default service now; if they've already switched out to a different service, they will not.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked what we are doing to address public questions. Mr. Dean said we will have a dedicated area on the website and point people with questions to CPCNH. Mr. Devonshire said there will be a call center with folks educated on the plan, although they may not be able to give specifics for Exeter.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved that the Exeter Select Board hereby authorizes the Town Manager to enter into the Cost Sharing Agreement and Member Services Contract for the Complete Service Bundle with the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire, with Town Manager Russell Dean as the Authorized Officer and with elections on page 21 of the agreement being yes; and be it further moved, that the Exeter Select Board hereby approves the CPCNH's Data Security and Privacy, Energy Portfolio Risk Management, Rates, and Financial Reserves Policies; and also approves the amendments to the Electric Aggregation Plan for Exeter Community Power as presented in tonight's Select Board agenda packet. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Town Conservation Lands

Conservation and Sustainability Planner Kristen Murphy and Andrew Koff and Trevor Mattera of the Conservation Commission were present to talk about town conservation lands.

Mr. Mattera said it's not a matter of conserving as many acres as possible, there's scientific data that goes into prioritizing. The 2021 NH Coastal Water Conservation Plan is a regional plan which looks at such priorities as wildlife and habitat, groundwater protection, and climate adaptation, and it informs Exeter's priorities. Overall, 32% of Exeter is conserved, which is an admirable number. The percent of CFAs (conservation focus areas) protected is 48%.

Mr. Koff said this is regarding the \$50,000 request for the Conservation Fund. The majority of conservation land is in conjunction with development in town, such as the Gateway Project, Rose Farm, and 40 Epping Road. The Exeter Planning ordinance looks to cluster development in one part of a parcel and conserve the back part. The \$50,000 will help us explore potential projects, it's not just for purchasing the property.

Ms. Belanger said this came up because of a comment at the Budget Recommendation Committee meeting about where we want to go with conservation. The town supports conservation land, and this information gives us a broader picture. This isn't about conservation or housing; we can do both responsibly.

Ms. Murphy said 48% of our priority areas are preserved, which speaks to the science being consistent. We've also protected prime agricultural soils through conservation easements.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked about the existing balance of the Conservation Fund. Ms. Murphy said the fund has \$150,000; \$50,000 is committed to Raynes Farm, so this \$50,000 will get us back to \$150,000. Mr. Papakonstantis asked if \$50,000 is enough for Raynes Farm. Ms. Murphy said no, but we are looking into fundraising. The request was \$100,000 a few years ago, but it was reduced to \$50,000, so we're trying to stick to that. We can address the barn's structural issues, but we don't have \$12,000 for a stairway and \$8-9,000 for fire suppression. We did apply for a Hometown Grant which would cover all of our needs. She added that we have a contractor ready to go.

c. Black Heritage Park Update

Renay Allen gave an update on the Black Heritage Pocket Park proposal. This park would honor the historical Black community which settled in Exeter after the Revolutionary War. The community was focused near Swasey Parkway so that's why it was chosen as a site for the pocket park. She is donating the profits from a series of local mysteries to pay for the pocket park. A committee of seven was formed to inform the public about the proposal and present a design to the Select Board. They took a break while the town worked on partially closing the Parkway. The committee will partner with the Black Heritage Trail of NH on this project in 2024. She mentioned three locations which are being considered on the non-river side of Swasey Parkway. She thanked the members of the Pocket Park Committee and those who aided in their efforts.

d. FY23 Bonds, Budget, and Warrant Articles

Finance Director Corey Stevens, BRC Chair Bob Kelly, and Fire Chief Eric Wilking were present to discuss the proposed budget.

Ms. Belanger said she supports \$5,000 for the Fire Department Social Media. For budget reasons it was recommended to be cut in half, but she supports the full amount. The FD cut other money from their budget to support that request. The PD was the pilot program, and was very successful. It's important to get information out to the public.

Ms. Cowan said the Communications Committee endorsed having a communication team, which is a step we're probably not going to take. The committee had concerns that the social media consultant is not part of some larger plan that uses current staff and takes into account the communication needs of different Departments. The committee supported \$5,000 for the PD and \$2,500 for the FD, but just because they didn't want to touch anything already in place. Ms. Belanger said having both the PD and the FD work on with Mr. Schreiber but only giving the FD half doesn't make sense. She doesn't think the rest of the Departments are ready for this. Ms. Cowan said she would like to see

EXTV incorporated, but Ms. Belanger said she doesn't want to be throwing more responsibility on them right now.

Chief Wilking said he's respectful of the budget process. The FD found \$2,500 in the 2022 budget that we hadn't spent. We put out social media now, but it's reactive. Jason Schreiber prompts us with ideas. On the day of the train accident, a quick text to Mr. Schreiber about alternate routes had a post hit almost immediately. Having someone handle that was invaluable. The FD is relying on EXTV to get the word out about the situation with the current building, but Jason Schreiber also has a role in that. It's an opportunity for the entire town to have a writer who can create politically correct, "safe" stories. It keeps us out of trouble.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the increased number of engagements on social media are telling. We have a Communications Committee that gives us good ideas, but we have limited resources for a Communications Director or Communications Department. Having an experienced writer, journalist, and PR person is a benefit. If we decide to move forward, unlike hiring someone, if in a year we're not getting the return on investment, we can part ways.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Mr. Schreiber to speak about his role.

Mr. Schreiber said he was a reporter for 27 years in NH, but left in October 2021 and started working for Chief Poulin to boost the Police media presence. The reach is up 600% since he started. The hours he spends add up, and include him attending programs with Police and Fire to document what they do. It's not just posting about upcoming events. Many of the posts have been picked up as news stories. He's giving the town the opportunity to hire a professional writer to address the town's needs. The town would be hard-pressed to find anyone in a PR company who will do what he does. He's in Exeter trying to find things that keep the content going.

Ms. Oliff said he's providing a service that wasn't well explained. If she'd had these details, it would have been a different conversation last week.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if he's doing this for any other towns, and Mr. Schreiber said no, and he has no plans to expand to other towns. He mentioned that he also coordinated with reporters trying to get information from the Police Department on the Volvo Dealership crash. Mr. Papakonstantis said the local newspaper is stretched very thin, so Mr. Schreiber is a valuable resource. Mr. Dean said he was also at the water trough dedication and Jennifer Perry's retirement.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to increase Fire Department line item 55043, Community Relations, from \$2,500 to the original \$5,000. Mr. Papakonstantis seconded. Ms. Gilman said she's frustrated that we're still having these conversations about communication. We have a resource that's been tested and the feedback is it's working. We want to do stories about things that are good in this town. Ms. Cowan said she really wants to have a plan. We are undervaluing this. What's our bid responsibility? Do we have to do an RFP? We should do an assessment of Departmental needs. Ms. Belanger said this is just for the Fire Department. Mr. Papakonstantis said we may not be able to address anything beyond Police and Fire before the

budget is finalized. Maybe going forward we should have an RFP or reach out to other communities to see what they're doing. This isn't adding a budget line item, this is just increasing it to the original ask. Ms. Cowan said we're not having the discussion about what our town needs, it's just something that has been presented to us. Ms. Oliff, Mr. Papakonstantis, Ms. Gilman, and Ms. Belanger voted aye, and Ms. Cowan voted nay. The motion passed 4-1.

Mr. Dean said we're handling Mr. Schreiber's service as a sole source. There's not an active market out there; this has been created for us. Ms. Belanger said the DPW does a great job with social media, but she would like to see how this goes in the future and how we can get information out. She would like to continue to see statistics and talk about this again next year.

Mr. Papakonstantis said last week the Board proposed a line item for Parks and Rec water filling stations with a \$1 placeholder. Mr. Stevens said it's been added in.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the budget hearing is next Tuesday night.

Mr. Dean said regarding wage issues, he's looking at upping the \$40,000 in the current budget for reclassification to \$80,000 total plus \$10,000 each in water and sewer. This would be a \$60,000 increase. The reclassification study won't be done until the end of February. The \$40,000 additional could come from ARPA funds. Mr. Papakonstantis said he sees ARPA being for projects, not for wages, and the Board agreed. Mr. Stevens said with this increase, the overall budget increase is 3.1%. Mr. Papakonstantis questioned the point of getting the data if we're not going to have the resources to implement it. Mr. Dean said the current wage issue is unprecedented..

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to increase line item 55371, Wage Reclassification, to a total of \$80,000. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Dean said he and Mr. Stevens will create the new wage reclassification line items in Water and Sewer and bring them back next week.

8. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 61/18 in the amount of \$12,500 for the tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. All were in favor.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 61/3 in the amount of \$11,500 for the tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. All were in favor.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veteran's Credit for 68/6/621 in the amount of \$500 for the tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. All were in favor.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veteran's Credit for 71/88 in the amount of \$250 for half ownership for 2023 and \$1,000 for Disability for half ownership for 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. All were in favor.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veteran's Credit for 30/2 in the amount of \$500 for 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. All were in favor.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veteran's Credit for 95/64/371 in the amount of \$500 for 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. All were in favor.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the Board met with counsel to discuss abatement requests to avoid potential litigation for Riverwoods. There will be abatements for 2019 and 2020, and we've agreed to apply the same assessment in 2021, 2022, and 2023. The total abatement amount is \$1,349,548.37. In addition, both parties will continue to agree upon how the assessment for the property is derived in 2024 - 2029.

Ms. Gilman said regarding Town Hall, she applied for a grant from the NH Preservation Alliance which needs to be matched. She suggested using \$4,000 from the Town Hall Building Fund, which has a balance of around \$14,000.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve the use of the Town Hall Revolving fund as matching funds for the NH Preservation Alliance Historic Building Assessment Grant for the Town Hall, not to exceed \$4,750 if the grant is awarded. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

- b. Permits & Approvals
 - i. There were no permits or approvals considered at this meeting.
- c. Town Manager's Report
 - i. The Drinking Water Workshop is on Jan 11
 - ii. He's working on the budget and warrants for the budget hearing next week.
 - iii. He's meeting with reps from the Downeaster next week.
- d. Select Board Committee Reports
 - i. Ms. Oliff had no report.
 - ii. Ms. Cowan said the Board already heard about the Communications Advisory Committee meeting.
 - iii. Ms. Gilman had no report.
 - iv. Ms. Belanger attended a public meeting on the zoning ordinance change at the HS. 20 people were in attendance. There was a good Q&A. There will be two public meetings at the Planning Board level on this issue Jan 12 and Jan 26.
 - v. Mr. Papakonstantis said Sustainability ran concurrently with the Select Board meeting last week, so he doesn't have an update.
- e. Correspondence
 - i. An email from a resident regarding a pedestrian safety concern at Main Street School. Jay Perkins responded that he and Paul Vlasich have been working on this issue and will follow up with the resident.
 - ii. A letter to Mr. Winham from NH Business and Economic Affairs.

9. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are Tuesday, January 17 and Monday, January 30th

10. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II(a). Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0. The Board emerged from non public session.

11. Adjournment. Motion by Selectwoman Gilman to adjourn, seconded by Selectwoman Belanger. The Board stood adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary