

Select Board Meeting
Monday July 24, 2023
6:50 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Chair Niko Papakonstantis, Clerk Julie Gilman, Dan Chartrand, and Nancy Belanger were present at this meeting. Town Manager Russ Dean and Finance Director Corey Stevens were also present.

Members Absent: Vice-Chair Molly Cowan

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:50 PM. The Board went downstairs to the Wheelwright Room for an interview.

2. Board Interviews

- a. Amanda Kelly for the Budget Recommendations Committee

The Board reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7 PM.

3. Police Department - Swearing In

- a. Police Chief Stephan Poulin introduced Caleb Daniels and Eric Worden, and Town Clerk Andie Kohler swore them in as Officers.

4. Public Comment

- a. Mr. Papakonstantis said the second session of the Special Town Meeting will be August 15. Absentee ballots are available now.
- b. Ken Damsell of 6 Dewey Street commented on how loud they play music at the Parkway. He said that the Manager of the concerts put a restraining order on him so he can't go down to the Parkway. His house was vibrating from the music.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if he was referring to the Saturday festival or the Thursday concerts. Mr. Damsell said it was last Thursday. Mr. Papakonstantis noted that this was a concert sponsored by the Town Rec Department, and he will follow up with them.

Mr. Damsell added that there is a note in the ordinance about how loud you can play an amplifier.

5. Proclamations/Recognitions

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

6. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: July 10, 2023

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve the Select Board regular meeting minutes of July 10, 2023 as presented. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

7. Appointments

- a. Amanda Kelly to the Budget Recommendations Committee

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Amanda Kelly to the 2023 Budget Recommendations Committee. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

8. Discussion/Action Items

- a. Tree Committee - Progress Report

Eileen Flockhart of the Tree Committee gave a presentation on the origin of the Committee. In 2014, Unitil cut down 90 trees and she was upset, so she met with Jay Perkins. In 2015, Unitil planted little trees and they died; her group helped the town buy two trees to plant. In 2019, the group met and went to the Conservation Commission, which suggested going before the Select Board. The group then became a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission. Its first project was Exeter's Tree City USA certification.

Kristen Murphy, the Natural Resources Planner and town staff liaison to the Tree Committee, said the Committee has many partners, including town staff, school staff, EXTV, Stratham Circle Nursery, Unitil, and private citizens who give donations.

Ms. Flockhart discussed their accomplishments, including being a Tree City since 2019, receiving a Growth Award for Excellence in 2021 and 2022 for working with students and for the Arbor Day volunteer work done on the Parkway, and getting the Tree Ordinance adopted in 2021. The Tree Committee makes videos and social media posts.

Tree Committee member Sally Ward said the Committee has been instrumental in planting 18 trees in different locations, including Park Street Common, Gilman Park, the schools, and the intersection of Park Street and Water Street. We have citizen and neighborhood support, such as from the Park Street Common neighborhood. We've tried to plant diverse species, such as Elm, Sweetgum, and Cherry. We've been labeling established trees, especially on Swasey, to educate the public. We did a tree survey recently and most are doing well. Some did not survive and were replaced.

Ms. Flockhart described the events that the committee has participated in, including the Alewife Festival, a Tree Walk and Talk, and tree plantings.

Tree Committee member Deb Twombly said the committee has focused on public outreach and education. We want to be a resource where people get in touch with us with questions about trees.

Ms. Flockhart said the Committee will continue applying for Tree City USA, expand plantings, add more labels, expand and continue outreach and education, ensure the diversity of trees, improve the canopy and update the street tree inventory regularly. She added that it would be nice to know there was some financial support from the town.

Tree Committee consultant Steve Jones said managing your woodlot in town requires diversity. We want to avoid mass disasters like in the 1960 Elm blight. It requires a range of ages and heights.

Ms. Twombly said one future goal is to have a tree canopy of 48%; it's currently 27%. This is only counting the public property. We want to look at how many and what kind of trees we need to attain that goal. This is what the budget would be aiming for.

Ms. Flockhart mentioned that Peter Waltz has been giving saplings to the 5th grade at LSS for over 30 years. Efforts like his create a connection to the trees.

Mr. Papakonstantis said other committees are given budgets through the Department they belong to, so he encourages the Committee to ask for money in the budget. Ms. Belanger asked if they have a figure in mind. Mr. Papakonstantis asked Ms. Murphy to work with the Town Manager on a number. Ms. Twombly said the tree inventory update will be significant. We would need to pay someone to do that. We would like to talk to someone more knowledgeable to recommend trees. Ms. Belanger said this subcommittee has proven their ability to get things done. She'd like to see a budget line item for them.

Mr. Jones said increasing the Committee's visibility is a goal, so anything the Board can do to help with that would be appreciated. Ms. Belanger said it may help to be a full committee rather than a subcommittee.

Ms. Gilman mentioned that on the Tree Committee's webpage, there's a list of trees recommended for planting.

Mr. Chartrand said Dutch Elm disease was a real loss for the town, and we really haven't recovered. We should put money into this to get us back where we were. The Tree Committee should include our Town Planner, Dave Sharples, who's doing a lot of work on sidewalks.

Ms. Belanger said she would like to see the report posted in color.

Ms. Flockhart said the reason they were a subcommittee was that there was less bureaucracy with meetings and term limits.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked them to come back to the Select Board with their proposal.

b. Energy Efficiency and Community Block Grant Application

Renay Allen of the Energy Committee said she found a grant from the Office of Economic Impact and Diversity, the "Justice 40" grant. In this grant, 40% of the overall benefit of certain Federal investments will flow to disadvantaged communities. To qualify, we're required to engage community stakeholder consultation. Exeter does have a J40 community, the folks in the mobile home parks. NH Saves is a matching grant program, but we're seeking to remove the barrier of the match for low income mobile home owners.

Ms. Murphy said under the NH Saves program, you have to have an initial \$2,000 investment to get matching funds. This grant seeks \$200,000 for 100 individuals to qualify for the NH Saves program. Applicants would reach out

to the town of Exeter for the \$2,000 match. We're seeking Select Board support to put in the official application. Through this process, we're looking to establish knowledgeable experts in these communities who could shepherd others through the program. The grants would be used for making energy-efficient upgrades to these homes. There would be a savings in their energy bills over the life of the equipment. We need a letter of support from the Select Board.

Mr. Chartrand and Ms Belanger spoke in favor of the program.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to support the Energy Committee and Planning Department's application for a \$200,000 Energy Efficient block grant application offered by the Dept of Energy. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

c. Black Heritage Pocket Park Update

Renay Allen of High Street said a volunteer committee has been working on creating a small pocket park with a bench and a stone with a marker to honor the historic Black community. Determining its position on the Parkway has held the project up. We're now proposing a site on town property adjacent to the Parkway, on the Water Street side of the stone entranceway, which is currently a shade garden. If approved, we plan to install the stone and bench and small ceremony in May 2024. The Black Heritage Trail will create and cohost a ceremony. Our Committee will provide matching money for the stone and marker. We ask that the town provide a metal bench similar to others around town.

Mr. Chartrand and Ms. Gilman expressed their support. Mr. Dean said he will work with Renay and the DPW to make it happen.

d. Accept \$5,200 in Police Department Unanticipated Revenue

Finance Director Corey Stevens said the Police Department had unanticipated revenue from earlier this summer. They purchased body-worn cameras and worked with a vendor to retrofit the uniforms for the cameras, and there was a refund of \$5,200 involved.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to accept \$5,200 as unanticipated revenue for a refund from Utility pursuant to RSA 31:95b. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

e. Accept \$14,972.50 in Unanticipated Revenue for the Highway Patrols

Mr. Dean said a Highway Safety grant was offered to our Police Department for additional enforcement activities, including DUI enforcement, speed enforcement, and driving while distracted enforcement. The amount is \$14,972.50.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to accept \$14,972.50 as unanticipated revenue for a refund from the NH Department of Highway Safety. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

f. Classification and Wage Update

Mr. Papakonstantis said the Select Board voted at the last meeting for one of the options which would reclassify some jobs and wages. The Board was

also presented with some options for the three union contracts. We have a lot of talent in Exeter that we want to retain. Some Departments, such as Public Works, consistently have 8-10 openings. The increased dollars here are not cost, but value.

Mr. Dean said we rolled out a program to each of our three employee groups. Police and Fire employees would get a \$2,000 retention bonus in each of two years. Both Departments accepted the proposal. For Public Works, we granted two additional step increases at 2.5%, and members at the top step will receive a 5% bonus.

We're faced with a competitive marketplace around us. We worked diligently to come up with a program to make sure our employees understand how valuable they are to us. We need to make sure our wages are as competitive as they can be to enhance recruiting as well as retention.

Mr. Papakonstantis said it's been 8 years since this was last performed. The cost to recruit, train, hire, and lose an employee is significantly higher than rewarding valuable employees with the hope of retaining them.

Finance Director Corey Stevens said when he was part of the the Budget Committee, he saw a presentation on maintaining our roads and protecting our investments, and this is the same thing.

9. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

- i. There were no abatements or exemptions considered at this meeting.

b. Permits & Approvals

Mr. Stevens said we're concluding the lease purchase financing for items we're purchasing this summer. We're requesting that the Board allow us to move forward with TD Bank financing and the Chair sign the lease resolutions.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve TD Bank's financing as follows: an interest rate of 4.36% for 7 years on the Vactor Truck as approved by the voters in Warrant Article 13 and 4.5% for 5 years for the Sidewalk Tractor as approved by the voters in Warrant Article 16, and to further approve the Select Board Chair to sign the lease resolutions respectively authorizing the Town Manager to execute all documents related to the closing on this financing. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 4-0.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. Mr. Dean gave an update on the Sewer Siphons project. On July 11, we had the Special Deliberative Session for additional funding. On July 12, the Contractor was pulling the siphon pipe through the hole under the river. The equipment had a lost connection about 240 feet into the hole. The Contractors met and decided to construct a 24" steel conductor pipe to preserve access to the 18" core in the ledge. On July 18, materials for that were delivered to the site. A pneumatic pipe ramming tool was used to push sections into the ground and additional pieces were welded on.

On Friday July 21, at 50 feet, the 12” pipe inside started to move. Today, July 24, a camera was inserted and showed that the pipe was beginning to squish. Tomorrow they will remove the soil between the pipes and continue ramming. Mr. Chartrand observed that there is no additional cost to the town because of the flat rate we agreed upon.

- ii. Andy Swanson has been managing the town website when Bob Glowacky is on vacation.
- iii. DPW employee Chris Eaton has been running the Wastewater Treatment facility under the nitrogen threshold. They’re getting great results there.
- iv. Andie Kohler let him know that Concord is testing three voting machines. He will come back to the Board about it once they make a decision
- v. He attended an Energy Forum at Winnacunnet HS with good discussions.
- vi. COAST told us the on-demand service is under threat. They’re anticipating some cuts in Federal funding.
- vii. The Chamber of Commerce Lease is coming due. He met with Jen Wheeler last Wednesday, and they seem interested in renewing.
- viii. The Department of Labor did an in-person visit Tuesday July 18, which seemed to go well. We’re waiting to hear what they will say.
- ix. A work group met to talk about next steps on the Police station and Fire Substation.
- x. He met with Unitil, and heard that they’re changing direction on municipal representation. The new person, David, will deal with the town on all municipal issues.
- xi. The town took the Rugg property in the Oaklands via tax collector deed many years ago. The Ruggs have done \$250,000 worth of title research and they believe they own some land. If ownership is retained, they’re interested in selling the land, and the town or SELT could buy it. Legal counsel has been involved.
- xii. Last Friday, he met with Bob Kelly and Melissa Roy on the Water Sewer Rate study. It’s in its final draft. He will likely bring it to the Select Board August 21st.
- xiii. On the Groundwater project, we’re waiting for a draft letter of intent from PEA.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- i. Ms. Belanger had a Conservation Commission meeting, but didn’t attend. Regarding the Rugg property, there are 148 acres, 46 of them are Exeter and the remaining are Newfields. The Conservation Commission had a letter of support to apply for grants to purchase it. The Conservation Commission also heard a wetland dredge and fill application for Riverrun at Exeter, because of some bank erosion issues there. The Conservation Commission wanted to limit access to that area. There was a sitewalk of 24 Powder Mill Road on July 11, but she did not attend. The applicant was approved to put another house there, but they changed their mind

about the driveway and now there are some wetland issues. The Conservation Commission made a motion to draft a memo to the Planning Board regarding their concern about the wetlands, but the applicant withdrew the application. There was a Minimum Impact application for Epping Road expansion. There was a conceptual design meeting for Foss Motors to put pavement down. At the Planning Board meeting, the application of the Exeter Country Club and restaurant was approved. At 2 Meeting Place, there are housing units in the back and the front lot has been subdivided. There's a proposal that a bank will go in one side. She also attended a Potential Hazard Damage meeting and a meeting on the State of our Estuaries. Mr. Papakonstantis said he wanted to have a Select Board rep and alternate for the potential hazard meetings. The next one is in September.

- ii. Ms. Gilman attended the Deliberative Session and the Energy Roundtable at Winnacunnet. The Heritage Commission tried to meet but didn't have a quorum. At the HDC, they heard 107 Water Street, which wants to make changes to the windows and doors.
- iii. Mr. Chartrand had no report.
- iv. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Tree Committee worked on the presentation. The Deliberative Session was that evening, and had a great turnout. The Swasey Parkway Trustees met and talked about siphons, tree pruning, and signage. He also attended the Public Safety Complex meeting.

e. Correspondence

- i. The proposed BRC meeting schedule
- ii. A memo from Eversource
- iii. The lease agreement for the Chamber of Commerce
- iv. A letter from Library Director Hope Godino about a digital conversion program for residents.
- v. A memo from the Sportsmans Club. Mr. Dean said he was contacted by NH DES on the remedial action plan on the Exeter Sportsmans Club and the Blanchard property. We're beginning to meet with the State to see what their expectations are.

10. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are Aug 7, Aug 21, Sept 11, and Sept 25. The election is Aug 15. The procedural defect meeting is September 5th.
- b. Ms. Gilman said National Night Out is August 1st at Townhouse Common.

11. Non-Public Session

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

12. Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Belanger made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 4-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:56 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary