

Select Board Meeting
Monday December 4, 2023
7 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Chair Niko Papakonstantis, Vice-Chair Molly Cowan, Clerk Julie Gilman, Dan Chartrand, 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 7 PM.

2. Bid Opening - Water/Sewer Chemicals

Bidding on the following items: 1) Sodium Hypochlorite Solution for use at the Surface Water Treatment Plant and Groundwater Treatment Plant; 2) Activated Carbon for use at the Surface Water Treatment Plant; 3) Free Flowing Potassium Permanganate for use at the Surface Water Treatment Plant; 4) Sodium Hydroxide 25% "caustic soda" for use at the Surface Water Treatment Plant and Groundwater Treatment Plant.

- a. Coyne Chemical of Croydon PA: 1) no bid; 2) \$2.2084 per pound; 3) \$2.622 per pound; 4) no bid
- b. Borden & Remington Corp of Fall River MA: 1) \$3 per gallon; 2) no bid; 3) \$2.93 per pound; 4) \$1.480 per gallon
- c. Harcross of Nashua NH: 1) \$2.2630 per gallon; 2) no bid; 3) \$2.4675 per pound; 4) \$3.2300 per gallon.
- d. Univar Solutions of Morrisville PA: 1) \$2.486 per gallon; 2) no bid; 3) \$2.91 per pound; 4) \$1.6652 per gallon.
- e. Shannon Chemical Corp of Malvern PA: 1) no bid; 2) no bid; 3) \$2.47 per pound; 4) no bid.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to forward the bids to the DPW for review and recommendation. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

3. Bid Opening - Audit RFP

- a. Plodzick and Sanderson PA from Concord NH: \$45,500
- b. Vachon Clukay & Company of Manchester NH: \$37,500
- c. Clifford Larson Allen LLP of Corporia IL: \$52,500

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to forward the bids to the Finance Department for review and recommendation. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

4. Public Comment

- a. Jaye Garnett said she lives upstream of Pickpocket Dam. Residents haven't been heard because we didn't know about these meetings happening. We weren't notified as abutters. The VHB study has not addressed the abutter's concerns, such as impact to the environment, impact to the properties along the rivers, alternatives to dam removal, impact to recreational use of the river, etc.

The River Advisory Committee voted and recommended that the Select Board apply for a NOAA grant to fund 100% of the dam removal. The Brentwood Conservation Commission and abutters were not notified. Legal requirements were not met. The study determined that one house was at risk, but it did not rely on historical rainfall and projected the result of climate change. She doesn't want her house to slide into the river if they remove the dam. She doesn't see how the town could shore up her house. How many other people risk losing their houses?

Mr. Papakonstantis said if the town of Exeter is granted the grant, prior to accepting it, we would hold public hearings. He is willing to meet with her offline and hear her concerns.

5. Proclamations/Recognitions

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

6. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: November 20, 2023

Corrections: Under approval of minutes, it says "July 25", but it should be "November 6". Ms. Cowan's name is also misspelled.

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to approve the minutes of November 20, 2023 as amended. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

7. Appointments

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

8. Discussion/Action Items

- a. Trustees of Trust Funds - Investment Advisor Warrant Article Proposal

Trustees of the Trust Funds Peter Lennon (Chair) and Leone Atsalis, as well as Zachary Zwick of Three Bearings Fiduciary Advisors, were present to discuss the Trustees' proposal to work with a Financial Advisor. Mr. Lennon said we're seeking support for a warrant article on the town ballot to pay investment advisory fees from the income of the publicly funded Trust Funds. We have the authority to access fees from non-publicly funded Trust Funds, but we want access to the rest of the investment portfolio and to pay the advisors from the income. We made the same request to the Exeter Elementary School Board, and they decided they would like to have more information, so we will meet with them again on December 12. We're scheduled to go before the Exeter Region Coop Board on December 19.

Leone Atsalis said the Trustees unanimously decided to update the existing investment policy to invest in a diversified range of assets that have great potential for growth and stronger protection against inflation. This change requires us to hire an investment advisor under State law. The Trust Funds are only earning 3.5%. Money market accounts underperform almost any other investment asset. Our goals are to preserve principal and liquidity and maximize return. Investment fees will be paid from the annual income, not principal. We will

structure our investments to provide 2 - 5 day liquidity, which has never been needed in the past. Hiring an investment advisor in NH is a widespread practice; out of the 280 towns and cities in NH, $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ have hired them. Three Bearings also works with 12 of our neighbors, including Hampton, Kingston, East Kingston, Newington, Plastow, and Raymond. Voters in those towns have approved paying the fees from the income of the Trust Funds. Using a professional investment advisor will enable stronger growth of invested funds, improve returns, minimize the loss of value from inflation, and improve monthly and annual reporting. We ask that you recommend to the voters the approval of the attached warrant article.

Mr. Chartrand asked if there were no investment income in the period, would we still pay out? Mr. Lennon said the only other way to pay would be in a budget line item. If there's no income, he thinks they're not going to get paid. The types of investments we're contemplating are large capital dividend-producing corporations that have always have dividends. It's extremely unlikely that there wouldn't be income.

Ms. Gilman said the warrant article language seems accurate for what you want to do. Why are you recommending Three Bearings? Mr. Lennon said we put out an RFQ to 10 firms, and 8 submitted proposals. We chose 4 and interviewed all of them. The other candidates were Cambridge Trust, Citizens Bank, and PFM Asset Management. We concluded that Three Bearings best understood our needs. They have a number of clients in our area.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked for the percentage of financial responsibility for the town and school. Mr. Lennon said based on a snapshot of right now with the underperforming money market accounts, there would be a town fee of \$3,339.56 for the year. We haven't told the other claimants what those fees would be so we'd like to tell them first. The problem with this snapshot is that we're looking to earn more money, so the fees would go up. Mr. Papakonstantis said the town would only be paying for the town part, and Mr. Lennon said that's correct.

Finance Director Corey Stevens said the Trustees are doing an excellent job. They've done their due diligence on the market and vetted the one they chose. Our major concerns are minimizing risk to our funds and maintaining liquidity. Our needs are different than a private fund where it can sit for a while. For example, our Park Improvement Fund goes up and down on a yearly basis. The investment philosophy of Three Bearings is in line with what we need.

Mr. Dean said most of his questions are based around the risk issues, and they were answered satisfactorily. He thinks it's a good route to go down.

Ms. Belanger asked about the 5-year time frame in the warrant article. Mr. Lennon said it's a statutory requirement. We're not stuck with a particular Investment Advisor for 5 years; we could fire them without notice.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked about the language of the warrant article. Mr. Dean said it looks good but he'd like to run it by Counsel.

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to authorize the Town Manager to work with Counsel to develop a warrant article for the March 2024 Warrant with respect to the Town of Exeter adopting an Investment Advisor as written in the proposed article as submitted by the Trustees of the Trust Funds. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Budget Recommendations Committee Recap

Bob Kelly, Chair of the Budget Recommendations Committee, said we had a great group of volunteers this year: Liz Canada, Andrew Elliot, Enna Grazier, Timothy Gwynne, Amanda Kelly, Darden Rives, Dr. Judy Rowan, Christine Soutter, Chris Zigmont, and Dr. Anthony Zwaan.

Mr. Kelly discussed the General Fund. The proposed budget was a “people budget” where we were going to focus on employee retention and recruitment to fill empty spaces in Public Safety and Public Works, as well as employee wellness and a more comfortable working environment. The budget is close to an 8% increase over FY 2023, but we felt this was the right way to go. We’re already seeing fruit from those efforts.

There were two key additions to the General Fund: the Tree Committee improvements and the results of the Water/Sewer Rate study. One of the items from the study was a Fire Hydrant Maintenance Fee, which is currently about \$20,000 in the Fire budget. Not everyone in town is on the water service, so this is a way to allocate a percentage to provide the water for fire suppression. The American Waterworks Association says that a town of our size should be allocating \$750,000 from the General Fund, but that isn’t going to happen. The BRC recommended \$100,000 to start. Water users are 60% of the town and we’re providing fire suppression to the whole town.

We were able to reduce the Water Fund a bit. With Federal Regulations getting tight, our chemical and equipment costs have gone through the roof. We get better loan terms when we go after projects if we’re shown to be in compliance with regulations. Two critical highlights are a new position for the Water Plant, a 5th operator, which the BRC supported; and support for our expanded meter replacement program. We’ve fallen behind with replacements. We had a bond to replace half the meters but now we need to chip away at the other half. These are our “cash registers.” They tend to slow down rather than speed up over time, so we’re losing revenue.

For the Sewer Fund, we’re adding a 6th Wastewater Treatment Plant operator. We’ve done well managing the regulations but need another operator to maintain compliance. Part of the plant was a septage receiving facility, which accepts septic tank pumping and is a revenue source for the town. We will be upgrading that with new user capabilities. The Water/Sewer Advisory Committee recommended increasing the current fee from 8 cents to 12 cents per thousand gallons, and the BRC supported that. Everyone around is in the 10 to 12 cents range and we will be a top facility once we make these upgrades. We will pay for the facility from the revenue within 3 years.

Regarding the Capital Improvements program, there were 17 items to review. About half a dozen were deferrals that management recommended, and we supported most of those. The Surface Water Treatment Plant was originally presented as a design effort with a 5-year bond at \$2.5M, but Water/Sewer and the BRC felt it was premature as there is still some planning to be done, such as the size of the facility. We recommended \$500,000 to plan the basis of that facility rather than going into design. Regarding the Public Safety Complex, the BRC supported this effort. The presentation helped illuminate the critical issues. The ADA Improvements Fund was originally set at \$50,000. Management suggested reducing it to \$25,000, but the BRC recommended bringing it back up to \$50,000. We live in an old community and should be leading the charge to make as many of our public buildings ADA accessible as possible. The Parks Improvement Fund was presented at \$100,000 this year and management suggested reducing it to \$50,000, but the BRC supported \$100,000. Parks in town are a critical component of the infrastructure and contribute to why this town is a great place to live. Regarding the Planet Playground renovation and sidewalk fund, the Sidewalk Fund was presented at \$200,000 but management suggested deferring it. There's a potential grant that would take care of half of the cost of Planet Playground. The proposal was that if we get the grant, we would go ahead with Planet Playground, but if we don't the \$200,000 could be put back to the sidewalk fund. However, the BRC said we'd like to see at least \$50,000 in Sidewalk Fund regardless. There were 8 vehicles/equipment; 6 were deferred by management, which the BRC supported, and one went into the budget. The only capital vehicle which was approved was the replacing of an old Crown Vic.

Mr. Papakonstantis said it was an interactive committee with great discussions. There were respectful challenges. He thanked Mr. Kelly and the Board for their work.

Ms. Belanger said during the CIP evening, Mr. Sharples had a slideshow on the Police Station and there was a suggestion to add it to the end of the video. She thinks that was a good suggestion.

Ms. Cowan said the process seemed to be very thorough. She would like to be thinking about what kind of communications we will need around the warrant articles.

Mr. Chartrand said he was impressed with this committee.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the committee really seemed to understand the cost of having to recruit and retrain employees rather than retain.

Mr. Kelly said regarding the School Street Design and Construction project, we have a 35% sewer grant that would offset \$900,000 of the project. We shouldn't deny the \$900,000 grant and delay another year, so we felt it was in our best interest in bringing it forward. We should find a way to explain it to people.

Ms. Belanger said the budget process is available on our website. The amount of work is so extensive and there's great conversation.

Mr. Papakonstantis said EXTV has a "newsletter" weekly quick video.

Ms. Cowan said it's important to increase transparency and awareness.

c. Water Street Parking Permit - IOKA

Mr. Papakonstantis said a request for a parking permit for the IOKA was submitted to the Town Manager's office last week. We received some concern from folks in town about the lack of parking spaces.

Mr. Dean said we've been hearing from local businesses in the past few weeks about this project. There's a lack of spaces on Water Street, especially with the holiday season. It seems like there needs to be a better plan laid out. We have a request that would block off 5 spaces on Water Street, but that doesn't include the dumpster in front of the IOKA. That would be all day each weekday and would create a parking situation. The request is through May 31, 2024.

Jay Caswell of IOKA Properties LLC said we're trying to be as painless as possible. We're trying to be good neighbors. We need the spots for deliveries, because the logistics of getting things in and out of there are challenging. We make anyone who's not actively going in and out of the van park in the other lot. With us across the road, some of the pain has subsided.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked why they are tying up multiple spots through May when they may not need them. Mr. Caswell said we were just filing a permit.

Mr. Chartrand said this is an extremely difficult project. This is the most incredible rehab of a building we've seen in the downtown. Deliveries are difficult. Sending them elsewhere is helping. The most critical time is over the next month, so whatever you can do to minimize. He'd be in favor of approving this. He [Mr. Chartrand] is a downtown merchant and we make our living from people parking, but we appreciate how difficult this project is.

Ms. Cowan said she understands the concerns, but if we make them wait longer, it will just prolong the process. If the people who do not need to be there aren't parking there, that feels ok. This project is not stopping, so she doesn't know of another way to deal with this.

Mr. Dean asked if there is a better way to make deliveries. Could the spots be blocked off only at specific times? Maybe we could make an effort to have the contractors park in the back of the municipal lot which would free up spaces in the front. Mr. Caswell said he can't guarantee the deliveries will come in at certain times. If we have a boom truck come in, we need 5 spaces or we're in the road.

David Cowie of IOKA properties LLC said if we didn't hold the spaces, we wouldn't have them clear for the deliveries. The trash dumpster is in the no parking zone, so we're not taking up any spaces with that. The guys are gone at 3:30 PM so it doesn't go into the evening. We're through with bringing the steel in and we replaced the utility lines.

Mr. Dean said there's one more excavation that needs to be done in the street. This time of year we typically don't approve them unless weather permits, and he doesn't think we want to approve that during the holiday season.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he doesn't want another day during holiday season to happen like last Tuesday or Wednesday. This is an exciting and difficult project but you're looking for 5 spaces to be held for the next 5 months, over which time they may not all be needed. He's against taking away spots between now and December 31. Mr. Cowie said it's the last leg. We wanted to get it done while the weather is still in our favor. Mr. Chartrand asked if it could be done overnight. Mr. Caswell said we have to have concrete work, which the concrete companies won't do at night.

Ms. Gilman said this document says 5 spots for 5 months. Can we reword it like "as needed"? You'll know at some point during the day if it's needed. Mr. Caswell said the deliveries don't happen daily but he can't predict it. If we know we have a big delivery, we try to schedule it first thing in the morning, but we're not supposed to be making noise before 7 AM. Ms. Cowan asked if he can coordinate with the Town Manager on which days the parking permit was needed. We don't want the Board to hold it up. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Town Manager is the permitter, but he received correspondence from multiple people that owned businesses. The Board and the Town Manager didn't know that this was going on. The way this permit is written, we don't want to handcuff 5 spots for 5 months. Mr. Dean suggested a week-to-week arrangement. Mr. Caswell said he could do that. Ms. Belanger asked how much of a lead time do you have on deliveries? Mr. Caswell said we're doing masonry work now. We might have a truck in with masonry stuff. Mr. Cowie said we're still going to have to have some trucks in front of the building working. Sometimes they need to be there all day. Mr. Cowie suggested only getting delivery into mid-morning. Mr. Chartrand said typically peak customers are in the afternoon, so he would prefer if they could do everything by mid-morning.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if it would be helpful for business owners to know ahead of time. Mr. Chartrand said we would just need to talk to the businesses in that area and across the street, not everyone downtown.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked if the electrical work has to be done in December. Mr. Caswell said he can talk to Unitil. Mr. Cowie said the ground is going to freeze and then we won't be able to do it. It will take two days. Mr. Papakonstantis asked them to look into whether they can do anything possible to not affect two days in December. Mr. Chartrand said he thinks the Board should stay out of this. The project's got to get done. Mr. Dean said he would take his cues from DPW on whether it could be done in January. Mr. Papakonstantis asked about the last week of December between the 26th and the 1st. Mr. Cowie said he will consider that.

d. Town Manager Contract Renewal

Mr. Papakonstantis said the Select Board and Town Manager have reached an agreement on the Town Manager contract that will go into effect December 28, 2023. It's a one-year contract. We're excited to continue our work

with Mr. Dean. A copy of the agreement is in the packet and will be posted online when it becomes effective.

9. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 110/2/430 in the amount of \$206.21 for tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 63/23 in the amount of \$45.53 for tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 47/8 in the amount of \$5,637.19 for tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 110/2/16 in the amount of \$401.70 for tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve an abatement for 111/5/31 in the amount of \$183.30 for tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Permits & Approvals

- i. Mr. Papakonstantis said we have a one-day malt wine license application from Industry Alliance and TEAM for an event to take place tomorrow. This event was approved by Parks and Rec. Mr. Dean said we were able to confirm today that their liability has been attained.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to grant the special one-day malt wine license to Arts Industry Alliance/TEAM for the event to be held for the Exeter Scholarship Fundraiser at Town Hall December 5, 2023. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. He thanked the staff members and volunteers who made the Holiday Parade a success.
- ii. He attended the Housing Advisory Committee to talk about 79E. They had a conversation around goals and priorities. He will bring back suggestions on how to move forward.
- iii. There will be a downtown public parking presentation and open house on December 13 from 6:30 - 8:30. The consultants will be showing the results from the study.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- i. Ms. Belanger had no report.
- ii. Ms. Gilman had no report.

- iii. Ms. Cowan said the Communications Advisory Committee is eager to get out information about the Sewer Siphons project restarting. Mr. Dean said he doesn't have a confirmed date yet.
 - iv. Mr. Chartrand had no report.
 - v. Mr. Papakonstantis attended the River Advisory meeting where they had an update on Pickpocket Dam from the consultant. We had a full room of both Exeter and Brentwood residents. Paul Vlasich did a good job of answering or at least acknowledging questions. We put the presentation online. There were folks who got up who didn't have a full grasp of all of the facts, so we did our best to explain it. He suspects we'll see them at future meetings. The feasibility study will be finished in January 2024 and presented in February 2024.
 - vi. Ms. Gilman discussed proposed Federal bill HR3557 that would take away the cable franchise fee from the town. Residents should call and raise their objections.
- e. Correspondence
- i. A notification from Comcast about services and pricing
 - ii. Several pieces of correspondence regarding the Rugg property.

10. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are December 18, January 8, Tuesday January 16 (budget hearing), January 29, February 12, February 26, March 4, and March 18.

11. Non-Public Session

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

12. Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to adjourn. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 8:53 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary