

Select Board Meeting
Monday October 2, 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, Finance Director Corey Stevens, and Interim Public Works Director Paul Vlasich were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 7:04 PM.

2. Public Comment

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

3. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. There were no proclamations/recognitions at this time.

4. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: September 25, 2023

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the Select Board regular meeting minutes of September 25, 2023 as presented. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

5. Appointments and Resignations

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to accept the resignation of Chris Zigmont from the Communications Advisory Committee. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

6. Discussion/Action Items

- a. PEA Update

Phillips Exeter Academy. President Bill Rawson was present to give an update on the academy. PEA History Teacher Bill Jordan also brought his class in American Politics and Public Policy to the meeting, and the Board answered questions that the students had submitted.

Mr. Papakonstantis read the first student question: Are there any plans to address traffic flow downtown to improve pedestrian safety? Ms. Belanger said there will be an open house on pedestrian safety Wednesday at Town Hall with Stantec, which is conducting the study on parking downtown. Another student asked if there have been any accidents there. Ms. Cowan said there are other intersections that are more dangerous, but if there are complaints or incidents it's helpful to know about them. Mr. Chartrand said he has a long-term dream of moving the bandstand out of the intersection and connecting it to the Town Hall with a small lawn to address pedestrian issues. Mr. Vlasich said the bandstand intersection was looked at for improvements a few years ago. Most accidents are caused by those who park near the bandstand and back out, so we eliminate

parking right there. Ms. Gilman said the Board talked years ago about how to make the bandstand safer, and proposed making it a roundabout. We even staked it out, and she thought taking a left was much easier, but people said it didn't work. A student asked if the study is only on parking. Ms. Belanger said no, it looks at parking, pedestrian issues, and traffic flow. Another student asked if the study looked at traffic only during the day, and Ms. Belanger said no, they looked throughout the day and at night.

Mr. Papakonstantis read the next student question: Have you observed polarization in the local government like the polarization on the national level? Mr. Chartrand and Ms. Belanger said no, it's not as bad on the local level. Ms. Cowan said she disagrees, although it's gotten better since Covid. Mr. Papakonstantis said it's better now, but Exeter was the first town in New Hampshire to have a mask mandate - only one city was before us - and it was contentious. Now he doesn't think we have that sense of polarization. Mr. Chartrand said that in the 2022 election, residents voted to reject those officials who were the most divisive. Ms. Gilman spoke about her experiences with Covid measures at the State level.

Mr. Papakonstantis read the next student question: Is there anything on the town warrant that's noteworthy? Mr. Papakonstantis mentioned the Police Station and Fire Substation. There was low voter turnout last year due to weather and it only lost by a few votes. Mr. Chartrand mentioned Water/Sewer improvements. Mr. Papakonstantis said it's important to pass the budget, which allows the town to operate. A student asked about the best way to inform voters about issues like the Safety Complex, rather than just showing them the price. Ms. Cowan said that's something that we struggle with at all levels of government. The Communications Advisory Committee has worked on getting information to voters, and we've worked on social media and newsletters. Mr. Papakonstantis said we had public hearings and an open house for the Police Station and no one came. For the Siphons project, we had a 15 minute video explanation; people loved the video and it led them to pay more attention. We're looking at doing that with the Public Safety Complex project. Mr. Stevens said there's power in residents talking to each other about these issues.

Mr. Papakonstantis read the next student question: Why are there so many Boards, what motivates people to volunteer, and are there problems getting people to volunteer? Mr. Papakonstantis said these Boards and Committees do the work for the Town and Select Board and communicate with the public. Mr. Chartrand said he used to think the Committees were too much, but the volunteers who staff those committees are the ones that kick off the person-to-person communication process. The more people the town can get involved, the more the word goes out. Ms. Cowan said New Hampshire is a State that is largely run by volunteers and it would fall apart if not for volunteers. Many Boards arise due to a need. Ms. Gilman spoke about her experiences at the State level and Ms. Belanger spoke about her experience with the Housing Advisory Committee.

Mr. Papakonstantis read the next student question: How would you change the jurisdictional balance between the State, local, and national government? Ms. Cowan said she would like the State to stop cutting into municipal services. Mr. Chartrand said west of the Hudson, many services are delivered at a county level, but here, services are delivered at a town level, which involves a great deal of duplication and waste. That system is a tradition and difficult to change. Ms. Gilman said she would change that there are only two senators from each state. Mr. Papakonstantis said he would change the level of State Aid municipalities receive. In an SB2 government, any big decisions have to be made by the voters; it can make things frustrating, but it's incredibly democratic. More people should attend Deliberative Session and have it be what it's meant to be. It's the best form of government for a community our size.

Mr. Papakonstantis read the next student question: What's up with the seals in the Exeter River? Ms. Cowan suggested climate change. Mr. Papakonstantis said we'll try to get you an answer.

Mr. Papakonstantis read the next student question: Is there anything the town can do to improve nightlife for teenagers? Ms. Belanger asked for ideas. Ms. Gilman said the work we're doing on the Town Hall could allow for more performances. A student suggested expanding store hours in the town. Mr. Chartrand said regarding expanded hours, a lot of businesses have single proprietors. He asked what time the curfew is, and a student said it's 10 PM for seniors during the week and 11 on Saturday, but 8 or 9 PM for other classes. Ms. Gilman said places are having a hard time with getting help. A student added that having restaurants open past 7 PM would be helpful for students, as the PEA dinner service closes at 7.

A student asked about the relationship between the Academy and the town. Mr. Papakonstantis said during the pandemic, the Board started getting updates from Principal Rawson several times a year. Mr. Chartrand said 10 years ago, the town gave Gilman Lane to the academy for the campus and they allowed us to lease a well that they own, so there's been that kind of cooperation.

Principal Rawson said when he started as Principal he reached out to the Town Manager. He thought it was important to know the town. There are many points of contact with the town besides the Principal. We want to be good citizens of the town.

Principal Rawson said regarding businesses open at night, perhaps they could rotate with one open late each night?

Principal Rawson gave an update on PEA. The construction of a faculty neighborhood at 35 High Street will have a huge impact for faculty. We installed 86 new geothermal wells on the Academy lawn, and there were already 49 wells there. The new wells will support the new Dining Hall and Academy Center. The project is finished and we will put down seed, not sod, so it should be in good shape for graduation. The Dining Hall should be completed next fall. The next project is renovating the Academy building, a massive and expensive project. It was built in 1914 and expanded but never renovated. It will cause inconvenience

for the students. We're expanding the hall so all students and faculty can fit in there, and it can possibly host town events. This work is consistent with the academy's Master Plan and Climate Plan. We're looking to be zero carbon by 2050. We're grateful for the strong relationship with Fire and Police. Regarding the new Public Safety Complex, he suggested that on July 4 or Memorial Day they could have an open house to draw people in. Regarding the crosswalks, we have mandatory safety training on how to cross and show respect. At critical high traffic periods, we have safety officers there. We sometimes hire a police detail. We had a good opening of the school year. We had an Exeter Leadership weekend with alumni and parent volunteers. Family weekend is in 2 weeks, which is a big event. This weekend, we have the rivalry games with Phillips Andover. Covid is not over, but we're managing it differently. We don't seem to be exceeding our capacity in the health center. If they can, students go home to isolate. He added that the Academy pays quite a bit of property tax, not on its academic buildings but on the many residential units it owns.

b. Voting Machines

Mr. Papakonstantis said regarding the new ballot counting device, the Select Board approved the expenditure, but the Secretary of State requires that the Board move to approve using the machines and have it recorded in the minutes.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the use of the ImageCast pre-synced tabulators made by Dominion and have the recorded minutes forwarded to the State by the Town Clerk. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Ms. Cowan said the State has HAVA funds that should be spent to support voter initiatives, and yet the town of Exeter has to pay for new voting machines to replace the out of date ones.

c. Pickpocket Dam Removal

Interim Public Works Director Paul Vlasich and Jacob San Antonio of VHB were present to discuss the Pickpocket Dam study. Mr. Vlasich said we're underway with a feasibility study at a cost of \$373,000. We had a letter of deficiency and we're figuring out how to bring the dam into compliance. We have to make a decision by June of next year, and by December of 2027 the work needs to be complete. We have two grants, one a Coastal Resilience Grant for \$40,000 and a Stormwater Planning Grant through DES for \$100,000. Recently he had a phone call from NOAA regarding a "Restoring Fish Passage through Barrier Removal" grant. This would meet 100% of the cost for design, permitting, and construction. The grant application was ahead of our schedule, but he wanted to see if it made sense. He had the Chair schedule a September River Advisory Committee meeting. The town would need to commit to the dam

removal option. The Committee voted to approve dam removal as the preferred option.

Mr. San Antonio gave a presentation on the dam feasibility study. The alternatives considered were different approaches to dam stabilization, modification, or removal. There's one house that if the dam were to fail during a 100 year flood event, the water would be above their first floor. Kingston Road is also overtopped at that event, which would make it still a significant hazard dam. We're required to pass the 100 year storm event with one foot of freeboard, but the abutments are already being overtopped, so we would still need to upgrade the dam. That analysis doesn't take into account climate change.

Mr. San Antonio said the NOAA fisheries grant, Restoring Fish Passage Through Barrier Removal, is focused on sea-run fish that spend part of time in the ocean. There is no cost matching by the town. This year, the grant is heavily funded, up to \$175M. Our cost estimate is about \$1M, so we're eligible to apply. The application is due October 16 and we would hear back July 2024.

Mr. San Antonio said that part of the feasibility study is still underway, evaluating impacts of the various alternatives on issues like cultural resources and fish passage, but his opinion is that water levels downstream won't change much with dam removal. The impoundment is a narrow valley and doesn't hold a lot of water. Sediments in the river are relatively clean; there was some arsenic found, but it's thought to be naturally occurring.

Mr. Chartrand asked if we did decide to pursue the grant, what is the process? Does it need to be a town vote? Mr. Papakonstantis said we would just move to authorize the town to move forward with pursuing the grant. If we got the grant, we would contact the administrator in Brentwood and we would likely have a public hearing at some point. Mr. Vlasich said for the application, he would want a support letter from the town that dam removal is our preferred option. Mr. Papakonstantis asked how it would go on the town warrant. Ms. Gilman said the cost has to be on the warrant to appropriate the money.

Mr. Chartrand said he's in favor of proceeding. Ms. Belanger asked if there would be additional costs not covered by the grant. Mr. San Antonio said the estimate built in everything, including sediment removal and disposal, design and permitting, and a three to five year monitoring period. To the best of his knowledge, it covers everything.

Ms. Belanger asked about the impact on wells. If there is a cost there, is that included? Mr. San Antonio said replacing residents' wells is not included. We have a legal opinion that the town wouldn't be responsible for impacts to upstream wells.

Mr. Chartrand said it makes fiscal sense to pursue this grant, which would take care of the issue at no cost. There are some questions about process, but the grant application needs to be made in two weeks. It would be negligent not to move forward on behalf of the town. Mr. Papakonstantis said we could have a vote in March 2025. Ms. Cowan said we would be pushing for this even if there weren't a grant. Something has to be done. Mr. San Antonio said this is once in a

lifetime funding. Mr. Stevens said could we put together a warrant article for 2024 contingent on getting the grant.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the River Advisory Committee unanimously recommended moving forward with this.

Ms. Belanger asked when the rest of the feasibility study would be done, and Mr. Vlasich said January 2024.

MOTION (not voted): Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Interim Public works director Paul Vlasich to move forward with the application process for the Barrier Removal Grant offered by NOAA. Ms. Cowan seconded. Mr. Vlasich said the motion must include the endorsement of dam removal as the preferred option. Ms. Belanger withdrew her motion and Ms. Cowan withdrew her second.

MOTION (not voted): Ms. Cowan moved to authorize Interim Public works director Paul Vlasich to pursue and submit the application process for the Barrier Removal Grant offered by NOAA and for the Select Board to submit a letter of support endorsing the project to be submitted with the grant. Ms. Gilman said the motion still doesn't include the endorsement of dam removal. Ms. Cowan withdrew her motion

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Interim Public Works Director Paul Vlasich to pursue and submit the application process, for the purposes of removing the Pickpocket Dam, the Restoring Fish Passage Through Barrier Removal Grant offered by NOAA, and for the Select Board to submit a letter of support endorsing the project. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

7. Tennis Court Resurfacing Request

Parks and Rec Director Greg Bisson said we previously discussed repaving the tennis courts, but the cracks were more substantial than we anticipated. They were last repaved 20 years ago. We can't do it in-house. New England Courts LLC can do the leveling and put two coats of acrylic paint on the patched areas. To do the full repainting would have been \$80,000. The current balance in the Rec Revolving Fund is \$152,000.

Mr. Chartrand asked how long the repair will last. Mr. Bisson said 5-10 years. He added that one of the reasons it cracks so much is the lack of drainage

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the use of \$28,000 from the Rec Revolving Fund to contract with New England Courts LLC to resurface the courts. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Ms. Cowan asked Mr. Bisson to give a Rec Advisory Board update. Mr. Bisson said he will be coming to the Board for a new field rental pricing update. It hasn't been updated in 20 years. We have such high use that we have to get something back from the user groups.

8. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

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

- b. Permits & Approvals
 - i. There were no abatements or exemptions considered at this meeting.
- c. Town Manager's Report
 - i. The Town Manager was not present at this meeting to give an update.
- d. Select Board Committee Reports
 - i. Ms. Cowan had no report.
 - ii. Mr. Chartrand had no report
 - iii. Ms. Gilman said the Town Hall Stakeholders group met on Wednesday to look over three ideas the consultant has proposed.
 - iv. Ms. Belanger had no report.
 - v. Mr. Papakonstantis attended a Budget Recommendations committee meeting, where Mr. Dean presented the budget
- e. Correspondence
 - i. A letter from the Planning Board to the Select Board endorsing the CIP and the Safety Complex.
 - ii. An NHMA Legislative Bulletin
 - iii. A notice from the Town of Hampton Planning Board on a Public hearing.

9. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next Board meetings are October 16, October 30, November 6, November 20, December 4, and December 18. Oct 11 is the "All-Boards" meeting at the Library. October 18 is the Right to Know training, also at the Library.

10. Non-Public Session

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

11. Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to adjourn. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 9:56 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary