

Select Board Meeting
Monday February 12, 2024
6:30 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 Finance Director Corey Stevens were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:30 PM.

2. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II(a) and (l). Ms. Gilman seconded. Ms. Cowan was not yet present and did not vote. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 4-0 and the Board entered non-public session at 6:31 PM.

The Board reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7:04 PM.

3. Septage Bid Award

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to award the Septage Receiving Upgrade project bid to Claro Environmental Technologies at a cost of \$288,200 and to authorize the Town Manager or his designee to sign all corresponding contracts and agreements. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

4. Public Comment

- a. Robert Span of Brentwood indicated that he wished to speak, and the Board had no objection.

Mr. Span asked for an update on the Pickpocket Dam study meeting. Mr. Papakonstantis it will be on Feb 27. It's a public hearing, where the public will be able to ask questions. Mr. Dean said the time is 7 PM, subject to confirmation, at Town Hall. The Rockingham Planning Commission will be moderating. He will check if it's posted on the website. He sent Karen Clement, Town Administrator in Brentwood, a notice of the meeting.

5. Proclamations/Recognitions

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

6. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: January 29, 2024
Corrections: Ms. Belanger said on page 4, "the acquisition of Planet Playground" should specify that it's the land acquisition. On page 6, regarding the Deliberative Session, add "Ms. Belanger had article 6."

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the minutes of January 29, 2024 as amended. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

7. Appointments

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

8. Discussion/Action Items

- a. Organizational Study

Bill Keegan of Keegan Associates gave a presentation on the results of the organizational study. He said he looked at what already worked well and what can be improved in collaboration and communication between the departments, the Select Board, and the Town Manager's office. He also looked to identify succession plans for leadership in town departments. He showed the current organizational chart, which has a linear orientation where everyone reports to the Town Manager. This is common in local government, but it's not very efficient and information doesn't get circulated as well as it could.

Mr. Keegan said he interviewed the key personnel to understand the current operations and their relationships with other departments and the Select Board. Some departments felt the organization was working well, others felt that there were gaps. With a one- or two-person department, if someone gets sick, things won't get done or will fall on the shoulders of someone already burdened. They identified issues with filling vacant positions, which are taking a toll on existing employees, and the inability to retain good talent. There are a limited number of people coming out of school interested in local government when considering the salaries offered by private industry. They have to pay back more student debt and can't accept a \$60,000 or \$70,000 job. Another issue is the lack of ability to grow talent from within the organization. Leaders are developed over time. The town should develop training programs to create new leaders. In tough times, training budgets go away, but that cuts off the future.

With 15 direct or indirect reports to the Town Manager, this is an inefficient design. The Town Manager can lose focus on strategic initiatives. The number of staff in the Town Manager's office is inefficiently low and offers no backup when there is an absence in the office. Communication throughout the organization could be improved. The proposed organizational chart has the Assistant Town Manager serving as an Operations Director; department heads could report operational issues to this role. Police, Fire, DPW would report to the Town Manager, as well as Inspections, Land Use, and Finance, plus the Town Clerk, although that's an elected position. Human Resources, Social Services, Parks and Rec would report to the Assistant Town Manager. Treasury, Accounting, Collections, Assessing, Purchasing, and IT would all report to the Finance Director. Planning, Conservation, Zoning Administration, and Economic Development will report to the Planning Director. Welfare and Social Services should have a Social Services Director who would report to the Assistant Town Manager. This is a private situation for the clients and doesn't fit with the Town

Manager's office. Human Resources should eventually be led by a separate HR Director who will report to the Assistant Town Manager. The complications of that job make it almost impossible for the Assistant Town Manager to focus on anything else.

The inspections and code enforcement role will eventually work directly with the Fire Department, to handle fire inspections as well as building inspections. They're public safety functions. Zoning Administration, which is combined with building inspection currently, should stay in the Land Use department, but that can only occur when an additional Planning professional can be added to the staff.

The Police Department is well organized, but should add a third Lieutenant to balance administrative responsibilities and fill in for the second Lieutenant's absence.

Parks and Rec will report to the Assistant Town Manager. This department needs additional staff support to keep programming vibrant, especially senior programming. Parks Maintenance needs additional assistance to keep up with the workload; they need four instead of two.

One issue is that communications tend to become siloed. He suggests a weekly team meeting between the new Department and the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager. The Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager should also meet with the Chair on a weekly basis, and keep the remaining Board members informed.

There should be proactive Labor meetings. He met with the union presidents and union leaders, and heard that meetings do not generally occur outside of grievances and negotiations. The union and the administration don't always have to be at odds with each other. There's a perception that the town's wages and compensation offerings are not competitive in the region's market.

Some departments have done succession planning, but some have not. Some of these are one-person operations or in a situation where it's difficult to find someone. Succession planning for these departments should be considered with any future recruitments. Should develop "succession binders" or an operating manual for each position.

The next steps are to review which organizational changes make sense; develop an implementation strategy; develop a financing strategy for staffing additions; identify professional development plans for each individual; evaluate job descriptions and salary plans for those with expanded roles; and provide coaching and mentoring to the leadership team.

Ms. Belanger said this is an incredible tool. She's not sure about merging the inspections with the FD. She values continuing education so she agrees with not cutting training. Our budget process includes supporting training.

Ms. Gilman said none of the recommendations surprised her. The Land Use restructuring makes sense, as does reducing the number of direct reports to the Town Manager.

Ms. Cowan asked about the costs associated with some of these things. That would be important to evaluating the next steps. Some might actually be cost saving. The recommendation to move the Welfare Office makes sense because it seems like such a critical role.

Mr. Dean said the cost of implementation is one of the main questions. We have recommendations from the Keegan Group on positions which we can put a dollar figure on. Mr. Keegan said it could be five years before the whole thing could be done, but some of it is just reshuffling.

Mr. Chartrand said he appreciates the work of having these detailed conversations throughout the organization. This will inform our goal-setting sessions. One challenge is marshaling the staff to embrace changes and adjustments.

Mr. Papakonstantis said Mr. Keegan met with everyone over six months. This will not be one of those studies that gets put on the shelf, it will be a resource for this and future Boards. Regarding the union concerns, we did a wage reclassification study to address that. The Welfare position is in our budget, and provided it passes we will be able to hire for that.

Mr. Dean said there are some things that we're already doing internally as a result of this report, and he can see differences already.

b. Stantec Consultants: Downtown Parking, Pedestrian & Traffic Study Results

Evan Drew, Project Manager at Stantec, gave a presentation on the Parking, Pedestrian, and Traffic Flow Study.

Mr. Drew said the project goals were to create a comprehensive inventory of downtown parking; assess how parking areas or regulations can better support the long-term economic vitality for downtown; identify opportunities for long-term parking; improve traffic flow and safety; and create or improve pedestrian and bicycle connections.

The study counted on-street public, off-street public, and private parking spaces downtown. There are 500 on-street parking spots, $\frac{1}{4}$ of them signed as two-hour parking, and $\frac{2}{3}$ of them open parking. Off-street there are about 1,000 spaces, 50% of which are private parking and 10% PEA. Some facilities are not visible from the street. Aside from the Post Office, the short-term spaces were not near businesses that had short-term visits. His group created a survey and did a door-to-door survey for business owners, and found that 52% of visitors park on-street. 74% are willing to walk 3 or more minutes to or from parking. The top preferred amenities downtown were safer crosswalks and more parking.

Mr. Drew discussed the findings of the study. On a weekday at 6 AM, parking was 23% utilized. At 9 AM, parking was 50% utilized, with the Water Street core around 85% full. The peak was at noon, at 57% utilized, with the municipal lot off Water Street full. Within a 3-minute walking distance, there was still some availability. At 6 PM, it was 41% utilized, with the municipal lot at optimal utilization. According to the typical land use parking models, the area would need 1,900 parking spaces, but from our analysis, the model's peak

demand is around 1,165. Peak utilization is 60% of total inventory, but there is high use of certain sections. To determine parking turnover, his group used the town webcam to get a timelapse of 22 spaces on Water Street. Each space had an average of 5.5 vehicles per day. The average duration was 2 hours. The Water Street daily traffic volumes remain similar between 1966 (11,730) and 2022 (13,662).

For pedestrian safety, some issues are the roadway curvature and limited warnings to drivers; wide, ambiguous unmarked areas; obstructed sightlines; unclear refuge/stopping areas; unclear pedestrian connections; and interrupted sidewalks.

There are some deficiencies in finding the parking, such as no signs at parking entrances.

The study had several recommendations. The town could share the private parking supply by working with property owners to open underutilized parking to the public at certain times or for select groups, such as employees at downtown businesses. The town could establish short-term loading areas on Water Street, possibly with specific times. The town could bring back paid parking. Exeter had it in the 60s and 70s. This helps enforce turnover. The town could expand permit parking for business employees along side streets or underutilized lots. For orientation and enforcement, the town could introduce Parking Ambassadors downtown. The Police don't want to do it. Could be younger people guiding people through the rules. It could be an internship or a program with PEA. The town could reconfigure the bandstand intersection. An all-way stop would improve safety in that area and reduce the pavement needed at that intersection, making it possible to give the downtown some green. It would require reducing eight parking spaces. The town could establish new truck routes. The NH DOT has an oversize overweight permit which can be reviewed. There could be "no thru trucks" or preferred truck routes. It could have time-based restrictions. The town could adjust the zoning for small-scale developments to reduce or eliminate parking requirements, or simplify them. This is something the town's already been working on. The town could revise the winter parking plan, such as having bans during weather emergencies only, which decreases the need for off-street residential parking. This would require a communication plan to notify people. There could be multimodal improvements to close sidewalk gaps and reduce sidewalk obstructions through utility pole licensing, enhancing crosswalks and additional pedestrian warning signage. The town could improve signage and markings for cyclists. The town could consider reimagining parking on Water Street by changing the angled parking to parallel and installing a bike lane. This would be a minus of 33 spaces. If this change were made, the town could expand the sidewalk in front of businesses and have curbside dining.

Dave Sharples said this is a dense report with a lot of recommendations. He has some concerns about certain recommendations, but they could be further

developed. Parallel parking is difficult and will back up traffic. We'll want to go through the public feedback process as well.

Lang Plummer of the Planning Board said when the town approved the new gymnasium at PEA, there was parking under the whole building to get daytime parking off the street. How is that being used? Mr. Drew said that was not included in this study.

Mr. Chartrand said there's been a lot of focus on the illustration for recommendation 6, which showed a reconfiguring of the bandstand. He would like to have something in this report distinguishing short term and longer term or visionary items. 1-5 are low-hanging fruit and will help the downtown tremendously. People will be more amenable towards changes when they realize that there is more parking than we need. Mr. Drew said we have a separate timeline in the report, but we can tie the timeline to each recommendation. He added that there is money out there for safety and improvements.

Ms. Belanger asked if they talked to DPW about snow removal. Mr. Drew said no. Ms. Belanger said it's important that the DPW weigh in on that. Also, we have some dark areas downtown where the crosswalk is. From Town Hall to the Town Offices is dark. Regarding enforcement, that's how our parking is going to loosen up. How are other towns doing enforcement? Mr. Drew said he can go back to the staff.

Mr. Papakonstantis said parking ambassadors is an intriguing idea. Can staff reach out to the city doing that to get data? Mr. Sharples said it's a civilian staff that monitors enforcement.

Ms. Belanger said if we don't get rid of the winter parking ban, can we expand our permit parking? There should be a section in town where we accommodate people who live downtown. She also raised concerns about traffic backing up at Portsmouth Ave and High Street. Mr. Drew said the town does have control over the intersection, but the study didn't pursue it further. The town could optimize the timing of the light or could consider not allowing a right turn on red at certain times.

Ms. Gilman said regarding Water Street and parallel parking, is there space for a bike lane separate from the driving lane? Mr. Drew said Stantec is doing the designs. Keene has wide roads, but bike lanes are also expanding through Boston which has tighter right of ways than Exeter.

Fire Chief Eric Wilking said it's an exciting plan, but he noted that the FD makes left turns at the bandstand 20 times a day. Traffic needs to come to a stop and pull over to the right. Perhaps there should be a left-hand turn lane. He urged caution about narrowing Water Street; 80% of their call volume is downtown, and to park an engine there, they already have to double park. He's excited about a better way to mark and protect the crosswalks. There are so many people downtown that do not cross at a crosswalk, but having bump-outs and well-marked crossings would help, and maybe a blinking light at the crosswalk. Regarding trucks downtown, it will be tough to communicate. At least

one truck a day has to stop at the train trestle because they didn't get the message.

c. Planet Playground

Parks and Recreation Director Greg Bisson said Planet Playground has been there a long time, over 20 years. In 2016, we brought Leathers and Associates back to do a playground inspection, and they outlined the deficiencies and said that it needed to be replaced. We started coming up with a design in 2019 and collected over a hundred suggestions about what people would like to see. We knew the obstacle was that we didn't own the property. In 2022, we looked for a grant from the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which needed a basis of a design. We launched the first survey last spring and threw a number of elements out there. The first survey had 300 responses. We're looking to target accessibility. The top three designs were a castle from Gametime and two space-themed playgrounds, but the price came in too high. We launched another survey to narrow it down, and Miracle Playground was the leading vote getter and the most affordable. We're looking to form a Playground Subcommittee to discuss what we can tweak and add onto the concept plan, as well as come up with a fundraising mechanism to offset those costs. We're closing on [the land associated with] Planet Playground in a couple of weeks. If we are selected for the grant by the State of NH, it would go to the National Park Service, then it would come back to the NH Governor and Executive Council for approval.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the open house at Park Street Common was well-attended and a positive experience. Would Mr. Bisson consider doing something like that once the weather gets better? Mr. Bisson said with how enthusiastically residents bought into the original planet playground, we may be able to recapture some of that engagement.

Mr. Papakonstantis said in putting together a subcommittee, we should find a way to get a diverse and inclusive representation. Parks and Rec looks to make life better for children and seniors, can seniors become a bigger part of kids' lives with this project? Mr. Bisson said down south, they have senior playgrounds, we could incorporate that. The resilient surfacing will be important.

Ms. Gilman asked what age these playgrounds drop off being used. Mr. Bisson said ages 2 - 5 and 5 - 12 have different regulations. There's not much for teens, other than a zipline.

9. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a tax abatement for 69/19/2 in the amount of \$399.02 for tax year 2023. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veteran's Credit for 32/28 in the amount of \$500 and a second for \$2,000 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veteran's Credit for 68/6/145, 95/64/23, and 55/26 in the amount of \$500 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 94/15 in the amount of \$12,500 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

b. Permits & Approvals

i. Snow and Ice Deficit Fund

Finance Director Corey Stevens was present to discuss these requests. There's a request to access funds from the Snow and Ice Deficit Fund to cover a \$64,655 deficit in 2023. In 2022, the deficit was \$87,000. This covers the plowing and salt budget, as well as maintenance and repairs.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize a withdrawal of \$64,655 from the Town Snow and Ice Deficit Fund to cover spending in excess of budget during FY2023. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

ii. Water and Sewer Impact Fees

Mr. Stevens requested to use Water and Sewer impact fees to cover debt service in 2024. He said that two years ago, we started taking the income from two years back and applying it to the current year debt service. Two years ago is the last year that was audited. He's asking for \$100,971, with \$37,532 from the Water Impact Fee account and \$63,439 from the Sewer Impact Fee account.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to transfer \$37,532 from the Water Impact fees and \$63,439 from Sewer Impact Fees to the General Fund to offset debt payments on Water/Sewer Capital Projects. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

c. Town Manager's Report

i. Deliberative Session was Feb 3. He asked if the Board would like to make any changes to their recommendation to the Police Station/Fire Substation Article now that it's been amended to add the words "net zero" in front of "design engineering and construction."

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to Recommend article 4 as amended. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

- ii. With the DPW, he visited Connie Road, and we have some ideas we will work on.
- iii. He was part of the Seabrook Drill on Feb 7.
- iv. He's been working on the committee replacing the Executive Director of Health Trust.
- v. He attended Housing Advisory Feb 9.
- vi. We've held two weekly operations reports, and plan on holding a third on Feb 16.
- vii. He attended Trustees of the Trust Funds meeting today.

- viii. He's wrapping up Employee Reviews
 - ix. Regarding the Siphons project, a pilot hole was successfully drilled, and the reaming process is beginning.
 - x. We're expecting flooding tomorrow with the high tide at 2 PM. Latest prediction is 3-5 inches of snow. School is canceled. Trash pickup is still in play.
- d. Select Board Committee Reports
- i. Ms. Belanger attended the Communications Advisory meeting. The committee asked the Town Clerk if there were any complaints during the primary regarding the ballot pads, but Andie Kohler said no, they heard the opposite. The committee heard that the town newsletter started in Fall 2023, and they have 500-600 on mailing list with an 80-100% open rate. The DPW has an 800-member mailing list with 67% open rate. The current application can handle 15,000 people. The Select Board could put Bob Glowacky on the agenda to demonstrate. Bob is beginning an analysis of Channel 6 operating procedures. The Communications Advisory Committee is meeting every other month, but their next meeting will be April 4th. The Planning Board heard one application for 81 Front Street, a multifamily site plan review. There were some questions about parking spaces and seminary lane and the Planning Board tabled that to Feb 27 while the Town Planner speaks with Town Counsel regarding Seminary Lane. Dave Sharples gave a Master Plan update: of 67 specific action items, 66 are completed or being worked on. Only one has not begun: a Complete Streets policy planned for 2025. A Master Plan update is in the CIP for 2028, but we could possibly move it earlier. At the Housing Advisory Committee, we talked about the tax exemption and the new tax committee. Mr. Sharples went through proposed ordinance updates. Nick Taylor of the Workforce Housing Coalition, Julie Gilman, and State rep had a back and forth. We looked at our goals for 2024. We will look at current NH legislation and how it could help Exeter. There's a potential expansion of units for Exeter Housing Authority. There's a future potential at the Crossroads property for affordable housing. There are zoning changes planned for 2025.
 - ii. Ms. Cowan had no report.
 - iii. Mr. Chartrand had no report.
 - iv. Mr. Papakonstantis met with the Trustees of the Trust Funds and the Swasey Park Trustees at their dual meeting.
 - v. Ms. Gilman attended the Housing Advisory Committee meeting. There are a lot of good ideas coming out of legislation and what we want to see next year. She gave an update on State issues.
- e. Correspondence

- i. An email between Greg Bisson and an individual looking to volunteer at the current Parks and Rec office second floor. Ms. Belanger said she was concerned about liability but she saw that there was insurance.
- ii. A revaluation update from MRI. Ms. Belanger said questionnaires went out but there's nothing on our website so people were asking questions. Mr. Dean said there was something on the website, he'll look into it.
- iii. Correspondence between the Chair of the Trustees of the Trust Fund and the Chair of the Swasey Parkway Trustees regarding a disbursement.
- iv. The NHMA Legislative Bulletin

10. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are Feb 26, March 4, and March 18. On Feb 27 the Pickpocket Feasibility Presentation is at Town Hall, 7 PM. March 12 is the town election.

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 9:52 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary