

Select Board Meeting
Monday February 26, 2024
6:50 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Chair Niko Papakonstantis, Vice-Chair Molly Cowan, Clerk Julie Gilman, and Nancy Belanger. Dan Chartrand was present via Zoom; he stated that he was unable to attend in person and that he was alone in the room. Town Manager Russ Dean and Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy were also present at this meeting.

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

2. Board Interviews

- a. Rachel Adams Ladeau for the Recreation Advisory Board

The Board reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7 PM.

3. Public Comment

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

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. There were no proclamations/recognitions.

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: February 12, 2024
Corrections: Ms. Belanger said on page 3, in the discussion of the Public Safety Complex, please add "Ms. Belanger said our budget process includes supporting training."

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the minutes of February 12, 2024 as amended. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

6. Appointments

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Rachel Ladeau to an alternate position on the Recreation Advisory Committee, term to expire April 30, 2024. Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

7. Discussion/Action Items

- a. Update on Pairpoint Park
Mr. Chartrand recused himself from the discussion.
Mr. Dean said there's been interest in forming a citizen group to address Pairpoint Park.

Dave Short of 1 Dewey Street said a couple months ago during the donation of the property of 23 Water Street, it was proposed that it was put into the CIP as a low priority. He is proposing to get this moving without any tax dollars. It needs the foundation hole filled, grading, a fence put down by the water, and the existing fence removed. This would allow landscaping, fundraising, and grant seeking to begin. The final phase would be the actual construction of the park. He's gotten together a diverse group of people to serve on an ad-hoc committee to move this forward. Because of the seasonal nature of some of the volunteers' businesses, this work would have to be done in the off-season, which is ending soon.

Mr. Papakonstantis said this opportunity came hastily to the Select Board in December. He read part of the motion regarding the acceptance: "The Select Board would authorize the Town Manager to work with the Town Planner and other town staff to develop a formal plan for 23 Water Street; for that plan to be placed as a Capital Improvement Project in line behind other existing projects; to authorize the Town Manager to move forward with developing a formal plan; for the Select Board to consider all other fundraising donations or donations of time; and once a formal plan is developed, the Select Board will consider organizing an ad-hoc committee of staff and citizens of Exeter appointed by the Board." It wasn't that we were kicking this to the end of the line, it was that it had to be in its place. Organizing an ad-hoc committee is typically done by the Board. We want to make sure we're including everyone who wants to be included.

Resident Lara Bricker said she would like to be involved in this committee. She's active in fundraising activities for some large annual events. We have a group of people who are enthusiastic and desire to get this done, and local businesses willing to donate goods and services to the town. It's a win-win. She hopes we don't lose the opportunity to have this work done by getting caught up in the process.

Dave Short said Bell & Flynn would provide gravel to fill the cellar hole. Keith Whitehouse will provide machinery to spread it. It will be minimal disruption and a quick process over a half day where parking spaces in front would be taken up. We need to get a fence up by the river to secure people from falling in. We've gotten quotes for chain link and aluminum fencing.

Ms. Belanger asked to hear from Town Planner Dave Sharples on this proposal. Mr. Sharples said his involvement so far has been minimal. The Town Manager sent him the shoreland permit application to check if it was complete to submit to the State. He concluded that it was complete, but there was no further analysis.

Ms. Belanger said we were going to wait a while and see our options. We were rushed into accepting this property. We accepted with the understanding that we were going to take a strong look at it and not be rushed further. We have a process on creating a committee, but now the Town Manager has been meeting with a committee we haven't appointed. She's not comfortable with being rushed through another process. Mr. Dean said there was only one

meeting which happened on February 16, and the Chair of the Select Board was there as well.

Ms. Gilman said she agrees with Ms. Belanger. She wants to have a sense of what the entire project would be before starting to mess with the site. She is concerned about its accessibility for those with disabilities.

Ms. Cowan said she was not at the meeting in December when the Board accepted the property. It's hard to get volunteers, and we have to meet the moment, but we get into trouble if we rush the process. We have a process for a reason. If we haven't vetted this or had full discussions, that goes against what she's imagining. Town government can be glacial for a reason.

Mr. Short said the impetus behind this was to save tax dollars. We're proposing to do a small part of what needs to take place down there. The real work of design and engineering will be slow. This does seem a little rushed but it's a necessary first step.

Mr. Staples said he approaches a project with "what's the goal," and more questions come out of that. Obviously, the goal is a park, but what kind of park? Would people sit? Would they eat? Would there be gardens? Should the entire area be accessible? What experience should people have when they're there? Then you form a ballpark of where to go and how much to spend and you can design the park. There are some existing site constraints: foundations on either side, one of which has some quick cement on it and dilapidated pavement; an old granite cellar foundation; and a drop from the sidewalk to the retaining wall. The grade is 10% and for a public park it should be 2% or less. There are different ways to approach this. We haven't done a brainstorming/workshop session on what the final goal of the project is.

Ms. Bricker said this is everyone's not-busy season. Otherwise we would have to wait another year. If we could just get this done now, we can go back to the slow pace for the rest of the work. We should have these people do this work and get the application to the Wetlands Board, and then take our time. This is just getting to a starting point so people can see what's there and be more apt to donate money.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked what the site would look like when they were finished. Will people be able to use it right away? Ms. Bricker said it's more about visibility and not being an eyesore.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Mr. Dean if he's talked to Primex. Mr. Dean said we talked to them and they did a site visit as part of the donation process, but no further work has been done.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Mr. Sharples if this area would be safe for folks. Mr. Sharples said he doesn't know where the property lines are. What does that transition look like? On the shoreland permit, there's about 900 square feet of fill. Beyond that there are some issues, like concrete blocks, holes, and pipes. We should probably smooth it out if we want people to walk on it.

Mr. Short said regarding the concrete on the Chocolatier side, the intent was to take the fence to the top of the wall and once we reach the area where

those blocks are to come back up towards Water Street. We don't want people getting to those. On the Cornicello side, there's one granite block that needs to be raised or replaced so there's no room under the fence. Then it will be a safe environment.

Ms. Belanger asked how quickly this has to get done. Mr. Short said the permit would be submitted to the State with a 5 business day turnaround, so if we submit right away it could be done within the next two weeks. The whole process would slow down once this step takes place. Ms. Gilman said we haven't seen anything, we're only hearing about it verbally. Mr. Short said we will have quality contractors in there. What is done will meet the satisfaction of the town. The upper fence wouldn't immediately come down, we would get the say-so of the Board first. We haven't formed our own committee, we're offering to volunteer our services. Ms. Belanger said there is a committee process that must be followed. The town ultimately must approve. Mr. Short said we're happy to put in an application to be part of a committee.

Scott Ruffner of 11 Hall Place was present remotely via Zoom. He said he is part of the group helping to push this forward. He's confused by the difference between ad-hoc and regular committees. With the Town Hall Committee, this ad-hoc committee was put together by the town and there wasn't pushback or concern on that initiative. Ms. Gilman said the Town Hall Committee was a project that we got a grant for and hired an architecture firm to study accessibility issues and other concerns. The group was put together at the invitation of Ms. Gilman, the Architect, and the Assistant Town Manager. It was just for preliminary input on user needs, not for designing or volunteering to build something. People in that group are not going to be making final decisions, it will go to the general public and this is at least a two-year project.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the idea that this Board had was to put together an ad-hoc committee. We have all kinds of advisory committees that support town staff. This is a finite project. It's similar to the Police Stakeholders Committee, which had one purpose for a finite period of time. They brought their proposal to the Select Board and the committee was done. That was what he was envisioning for this project. We try to get a diverse group of people who bring something different to the table to put together a plan. The town needs people who are generous with their time and money, but it was a letter to the Select Board less than a month after the donation with "here's the committee we put together and here's what we're going to do." We have a process for utilizing staff, and one of our Department heads was put in a compromising position. Someday Mr. Bisson will be overseeing this park, but he doesn't know anything about this yet. Folks should have gone to the Town Manager before they included Mr. Bisson. January and February are the Board's busy season, with our Budget Hearing, Deliberative Session, and helping people understand warrant articles. He's excited about 23 Water Street but we didn't get right on this because we're trying to get ready for the election. Folks want to do something nice for the town but we're elected to do what's best for the entire town and

following town procedures. If we accept this donation, what is it we're getting? What will happen? There's no plan.

Steve Hermans of 21 Forest Street said he's been part of this group; it's not a committee, it's just a group of people who want to see this happen. There should be a way to receive these offers of donated services to stabilize this area, make it safe, and create a "blank slate" to help people see and understand this park. The Board and the Town Manager could decide which town employee could coordinate with those contractors. It would be at no cost to the town, other than the impact fees for the fence. Ms. Gilman said the Board has to approve using the impact fees, so we need more information about what will happen with those fees. If you have a staff person to coordinate, that's budgeted time. It's hard enough to have staff coordinate our existing committees. It's not as easy as you'd like it to be.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked Mr. Dean to discuss the process when the town acquires a piece of land and who the staff member should be to work with the group. Mr. Dean said in this situation where it's proposed to be a park, it would be the Town Planner and the Parks and Recreation Director. The Board has to be the entity that accepts a donation, so it's up to the Select Board to decide whether to accept these offers of services. This is not a very typical situation. Mainly we get conservation land and easements, so we turn them over to Kristen Murphy, our Conservation Planner, to administer them with the Conservation Committee. Ms. Belanger asked about Stewart Park. Mr. Dean said that was before his time. The Chamber of Commerce was involved in that effort.

Florence Ruffner of 5 Pine Street said we know how much Keith Whitehouse does for the town. Bell & Flynn does a lot for the town. This hole has been there for 35 years. If these people we already use can fill in the hole, and we have the resources to save the taxpayers money, \$5,000 or \$10,000, she doesn't understand what the issue is. Ms. Gilman said the Memorial Day Committee started out as appointed, but Ms. Ruffner took it over and now we don't know who's on it. Ms. Ruffner said no one ever asked her. She provides all of her receipts. Mr. Dean said there are some committees, such as the Holiday Parade committee, that aren't put together by the Select Board.

Keith Whitehouse of Westside Drive said he will make the area safe, as safe as it can be. That's his guarantee.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked about the deadline for submitting the Shoreland Permit Application. Mr. Dean said he doesn't believe there is one.

Nancy Phillips of Water Street said sometimes the fence is secured, sometimes it's not. Sometimes there are kids in there, or things get thrown into the river. It would be a huge improvement to remove the fence and let people see the river. It would be better for the town's insurance policy and our long-term goals.

Ms. Belanger said it would cost about \$5,000 to fill in the hole. If we don't know what we want to do on this property and we change the design to include a step or something, is it going to cost us money to take that out? Mr. Short said

due to ADA regulations, he doesn't think they'll want to do stepping. That's part of Jen Martel's expertise. Once she has time to work on it, that can be figured out. He doesn't see a lot of fill coming out of there.

Mr. Papakonstantis said we can wait a week for Mr. Bisson to work up impact fees and what a fence would cost. When we closed on the property, he was already working on fencing. He asked the volunteer group to come back with a picture or design. Does it make sense to accept the generous donation from Mr. Whitehouse and Bell & Flynn, fence it so there's no access to it, and come back to the table to put together a committee and start talking about a plan? Mr. Short said yes, but the permit is good for 5 years, and it will be a limiting factor. It could be submitted now. Mr. Papakonstantis said it can wait a week.

Ms. Cowan said some people think this is a no-brainer. It would be helpful for our staff to work with folks so we're able to articulate the process and timeline. They should be laid out in a scope of work. Everyone has the best intent and she doesn't want it to feel like anybody is cutting corners.

b. Master Plan Update

Town Planner Dave Sharples said in 2018 he worked with Horsley Whitten to make a document that covers everything and specific action items to meet our goals. He's never seen community engagement like that, with several hundred people at the Master Plan meeting at the High School and more via survey, email, and in person. There were 67 action items. The Town Manager asked him to complete an analysis and 66 of the items are completed or being worked on. Only one hasn't been started, the Complete Streets study, which has been in the CIP since the Master Plan but is up for funding in 2025. It's pretty much a completed document. Every Department was involved and it was a collaborative effort. We'll need to update the Master Plan; he put that in the CIP for 2028 but we may need to look at that sooner as funding allows.

Ms. Belanger said the Master Plan connects everything. The Planning Board refers to it a lot. One of the questions in Mr. Keegan's report was, "does the town want to grow." When she heard that, she thought it may be time to move the Master Plan up.

Mr. Chartrand said he participated in the Master Plan process and it was a time of incredible citizen energy. We harvested a number of volunteers who have been working in town government since. It's wonderful that we've executed so brilliantly on this Master Plan. He's excited about the idea of initiating another round of Master Planning.

Mr. Papakonstantis said this should be part of our goal-setting session in April.

Mr. Dean said now is the time to seriously consider updating the Master Plan. The town has continued to evolve.

c. RSA 41-14-a Public Hearing: Planet Playground Land

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to open the public hearing on the acquisition of Planet Playground land, map 69 lots 4 and 6, pursuant to RSA 41-14a. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

Parks and Rec Director Greg Bisson said this is an exciting time. There will be a notification coming out about a subcommittee for the playground. He added that the hazardous trees came down today and it's a very open look now.

Mr. Papakonstantis asked for public comment, but there was none.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to close the public hearing. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Papakonstantis said there will be two more public hearings. The third will be at the Select Board meeting on March 18. The second will be a special meeting on Friday March 8 at 8 AM.

Ms. Belanger said she saw in the packet a letter from the Conservation Commission recommending the acquisition. The Planning Board recommended it at their meeting on February 22nd. Mr. Dean said the Heritage Commission met on February 21 and endorsed it as well.

Ms. Cowan asked for an update on the last Rec Advisory meeting. Mr. Bisson said we talked about Planet Playground. We talked about 10 Hampton Road and asked for volunteers for a subcommittee to meet the contractors. We talked about robots, which he will be coming to the Board for approval on: a field-lining robot and mowing robots. These would relieve some of the pressure on our two Park staff. We talked about 23 Water Street and the possible green space in front of Town Hall. We also talked about programming which is going well.

d. Public Hearing: E911 Committee Recommendation – Paws Way

Deputy Fire Chief Jason Fritz was present to discuss the E911 Committee's recommendations. The first is a recommendation to name an existing private right of way at 70 Beech Hill Road, south of 62 Beech Hill Road, as 51 Paws Way.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to name the existing private right of way located on the property currently identified as tax map parcel 18-3, which is located south of the residence 62 Beech Hill Road, to 51 Paws Way, and to number the structures and/or dwellings accordingly, in compliance with chapter 14 of the Town Ordinance, as depicted on the map in our packet. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

Deputy Fritz said the next is regarding 82 Linden Street, currently known as the Linden Fields apartment complex. We are looking to give them the street address of units 1-17 Linden Fields. We have a voluntary change of address form filled out by the Exeter Housing Authority.

MOTION (not voted): Ms. Belanger moved to change 82 Linden Street to 82 Linden Street units 1-17. Deputy Fritz said it's Linden Fields. Ms. Belanger withdrew her motion.

MOTION (not voted): Ms. Belanger moved to change 82 Linden Street to 82 Linden Fields units 1-17. Deputy Fritz said it's just 1-17 Linden Fields. Ms. Belanger withdrew her motion.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to change 82 Linden Street to Linden Fields, units 1-17. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

Deputy Fritz said the new property subdivision at 131 Portsmouth Ave is getting their access off of Holland Way, and we've assigned them 181 Holland Way. We have a voluntary change of address form from Wakefield Thermal.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the application for a change of address from 131 Portsmouth Avenue to 181 Holland Way. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

8. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve acceptance of a timber tax from 54/5,6,7 and 63/205 in the amount of \$278.40 for the tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to deny a disability exemption for 95/64/94. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a disability exemption for 95/64/315 in the amount of \$125,000 for the tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve a solar exemption for 85/21 in the amount of \$36,000 for the tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

MOTION: Ms. Gilman moved to approve elderly exemptions for 64/105/80 and 74/39 in the amount of \$183,751 each for the tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

b. Permits & Approvals

Mr. Dean said this was a suit filed by the State of NH against several companies regarding opioids. We participated in the proceedings. The settlement will bring \$100,000 into NH to fight the opioid crisis. The town needs to sign these agreements, the State will collect the money, and hopefully in the future will dole them out to the towns and cities.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Town Manager to sign all appropriate paperwork relative to the opioid settlement brought by the Attorney General. Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

- c. Town Manager's Report
 - i. Our groundwater exploration program is continuing. We have an agreement with PEA to do pump testing off Drinkwater Road.
 - ii. The town-wide revaluation is progressing.
 - iii. The Zoning Board approved four units where the old Mobil Station was on Main Street.
 - iv. The siphons project is continuing. We're at 500+ feet and the drilling is going well. Mr. Papakonstantis asked if it would conclude in late Spring, and Mr. Dean said later than that, possibly in June.
 - v. The Pickpocket Dam feasibility study is tomorrow February 27 at Town Hall. We did a lot of notification for that, including putting the trailer [signboard] at the dam site.
 - vi. He is going on vacation through March 5th. The Assistant Town Manager will be acting in his stead.

- d. Select Board Committee Reports
 - i. Ms. Belanger attended a Conservation Commission meeting. They recommended the acquisition of the Planet Playground land. An Academy student reached out to Kristen Murphy about the native seed library at the Public Library; the Conservation Commission voted to expend some funds to have the volunteer organize it. Earth Day is coming up and there will be a student tree project. Last Saturday was the first in a series of sustainable films. People gave donations to Helpsy. The Conservation Commission works hard to put on public events. The Alewife Festival is May 11 from 10 - 1. There was talk of participating in a State program to count fish from mid-April to the end of May. The Planning Board tabled the application for 81 Front Street. Mr. Sharples introduced two maps, one from 1884 and the other one current, showing density to consider filing for an urban exemption. The Planning Board supported it; if the Conservation Commission supports it, it will also come before this Board.
 - ii. Ms. Gilman gave an update on State legislative issues.
 - iii. Mr. Chartrand said there was a joint Energy and Sustainability Advisory Committee meeting last Wednesday February 21. The purpose was to see if those committees want to merge, but the timeframe for a merged committee to meet just wasn't there. They reviewed projects that each committee had been working on and there was a lot of energy for each others' projects. They ended by continuing as separate committees but trying for joint meetings on a quarterly basis.
 - iv. Ms. Cowan had no update.

- v. Mr. Papakonstantis had a quick Swasey Parkway Trustees meeting. Not much can be done because of the siphons project and the soft ground. They talked about the joint meeting of them and the Trustees of the Trust Funds and the decision to leave the trust in Ohio for now, since there's a guaranteed 5% rate of return and the bank does the tax return.

e. Correspondence

- i. A letter from Dwane Staples, Chair of the Swasey Parkway Trustees, to Peter Lennon, the Chair of the Trustees of the Trust Funds, with a check for the deposit to the maintenance fund.
- ii. An NHMA Bulletin
- iii. A memo from the NH Local Welfare Administration Association about volunteer income tax assistance.

9. Review Board Calendar

The next Select Board meetings are March 4 and March 18. The Pickpocket Feasibility Study presentation will be at Town Hall at 7 PM tomorrow. March 8 at 8 am is the second Planet Playground hearing. Town Election is March 12 from 7 AM - 8 PM.

10. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A3II(a). Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0 and the Board entered into non-public session at 9:20 PM. Ms. Belanger moved to exit non public session. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion carried and the Board exited non public session at 9:35 pm.

11. Adjournment. Ms. Belanger moved to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Cowan. The Board stood adjourned at 9:35 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary