

Select Board Meeting  
Monday April 1, 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 Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:30 PM and the Board went down to the Wheelwright Room for interviews.

2. Board Interviews

- a. Mary Tegel for the Pairpoint Park Committee
- b. Bill Campbell for the Pairpoint Park Committee
- c. Don Briselden for the Facilities Advisory Committee
- d. Lisa Dolloff for the Communications Advisory Committee

The meeting reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7:10 PM.

3. Public Comment

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

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

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

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: March 25, 2024

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve the minutes of March 25, 2024 as presented. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

6. Appointments

**MOTION:** Mr. Chartrand moved to appoint Don Briselden to the Facilities Advisory Committee as a regular member, term to expire April 2026. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Lisa Dolloff to the Communications Advisory Committee as a regular member, term to expire April 2025. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the Board also conducted two interviews for the Pairpoint Advisory Committee. We will continue to interview 2 - 3 candidates before each meeting and make the appointments to that committee once the interviews are complete.

## 7. Discussion/Action Items

### a. Award Two Contracts Webster Avenue Pump Station

DPW Director Steve Cronin recommended two awards for the Webster Avenue Pump Station project: Northeast Earth Mechanics at \$4,481,231 for construction, and Wright-Pierce at \$805,000 for construction phase engineering services. Mr. Dalton said that voters approved supplemental funding at the 2024 town meeting so we have the funding for both these contracts.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to award a contract to Northeast Earth Mechanics for the Webster Avenue Pa contract and Forcemain Upgrades project in the amount of \$4,481,230 and to award a contract to Wright-Pierce for construction phase Engineering services in the amount of \$805,000, and to further authorize the Town Manager to sign the associated contract documents. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

### b. 2023 Year End Financial Report

Finance Director Corey Stevens gave the year-end report. Mr. Stevens said 2023 was a fairly solid year financially. In the General Fund, receipts from sources other than property taxes continued to grow, such as motor vehicle registration, building permits, Meals and Rooms tax from the State, and interest income. We had \$700,000 more in revenue than 2022. We maintained a solid working fund balance, after using \$1M to lower the 2022 tax rate and paying \$3M to settle a tax abatement case. We are projecting \$5.9M in unassigned fund balance, unaudited, versus \$4.9M at the end of 2022. There were challenges such as the Sewer Siphons project, for which we borrowed an additional \$3.5M from the State to complete, although at a favorable 2% rate. There were challenges in each department. The DPW and Water/Sewer continue to struggle to retain and attract staff. The underspending is mostly related to labor. In the Water/Sewer Enterprise funds, last year we analyzed and adjusted the rate structures. Overall, it was a solid year.

The General Fund had a budget of \$21.3M. Revenue was \$1.2M in excess of budget, and expenses were \$750,000 under budget. Our net income was \$1.5M. Operating Revenue was \$22.3M or 105% of the 2023 budget. \$13.96M was from property taxes, \$7.5M was from other sources, and \$517,000 from transfers from the Ambulance Fund, Trustees of Trust funds, and proceeds from unused bonds. We used \$300,000 of fund balance for tax rate setting. Property taxes had a \$61.9M billing; 74% of that, or \$46M goes to schools, and 26% to the town. Of the \$15.9M, \$2.2M was turned back to the TIF in 2023, so the town was left with \$13.7M tax revenue. There was also a \$700,000 increase over 2022 from other sources. Motor vehicles were at \$3.3M collected, which was stable year over year. Building permits were at \$571,000, an increase of \$273,000 over 2022 due to large housing projects such as the PEA housing on High Street and the redevelopment of 131 Portsmouth Ave. We received \$1.5M in Meals and Rooms tax revenue from the State. It's been climbing over the past few years, but we're projecting a leveling off in 2024. Income from Departments

was at \$1.2M, which was \$177,000 more than 2022. Some factors were insurance reimbursements for claims, an employee contract buyout in the Police Department, and accounting adjustments in Finance.

Interest income was \$317,000 on idle cash, which was \$292,000 more than 2022. We took advantage of the short-term interest rate climb. In FY24 we're buying 30-day CDs with idle cash, and our APR has been over 5%. We had a property tax collection rate of 97% at the end of the year, which is typical.

In General Fund expenses, operating expenses were \$20.5M or 96% of budget. Another \$137,000 was encumbered at year end. We had \$756,000 in unspent budget; 96% of that was related to wages, tax and benefits, with the largest turnback in DPW. Welfare exceeded the budget, with social service needs remaining high. General Government was spent at \$1.14M, or 3% over budget. There were insurable events of \$100,000, for which we received \$91,000 in reimbursements. This was offset by underspending of \$21,000 in the Select Board budget related to the Keegan report. In Human Resources, there was a vacant part-time position, and it was \$18,000 underspent. The Legal budget was underspent by \$25,000. The Finance Group was at 95% of budget spent, with another \$15,000 encumbered for audit services. We had some difficulties getting the audit finalized before, but all is well this year. Tax Collection was at 86% of budget spent due to staff turnover and legal lines. The Planning group was 90% spent, with part-time wages underspent by \$4,000, and Studies underspent by \$5,000. Building Inspections was \$39,000 underspent due to the vacant Electrical Inspector position. We pulled that position for FY2024, but we should expect to see it back in FY 2025.

The Fire Department and Police Department were spent out at year end. Police were \$4.1M spent, or 99%. In staffing, one retirement at mid-year left the Wages line underspent. Dispatch had open positions. In the Patrol division, the Wage lines for overtime and other categories were underbudgeted and were over by \$50,000. We tried to fix this for 2024. We paid retention bonuses to Union employees. The Police budget was able to contribute \$16,000 towards that, and the rest was from ARPA. The Fire Department was at \$4.2M spent, or 99%. The Fire Department contributed \$38,000 towards retention bonuses. Most of their surplus came from the Suppression position, which with staff turnover was underspent by \$30,000. In the Health budget, the turnover of the Health Officer position and a new mosquito control contract led to underspending of \$22,000.

In Public Works, there were \$5.1M expenditures, 88% or \$676,000 below budget. Administration was spent at 26% of budget, due to the DPW Director position being open. The General Expense lines were spent. In Highway, 92% of the budget was spent. Snow Removal was \$21,000 overspent. This relies on contracted plowing, which was over budget by \$72,000; salt costs were over by \$45,000, which was offset by a savings on snow removal downtown of \$45,000. General Maintenance was 83% spent at end of year. There were open HVAC and Electrical positions. Cleaning continues to be overspent, it was over by

\$46,500. Building Maintenance was underbudget by \$10,500. Mechanics Garage was 69% spent, with one open position.

Welfare was overspent, with expenses at \$104,000 over budget, an increase of \$58,000 year over year. There was outside relief, mainly from the Wentworth Trust, of \$35,000. Most of the spending was direct relief for rent assistance and hotel stays. We don't have an option on making sure our citizens are taken care of.

In Parks and Rec, the budget lines were generally spent. There was one open Laborer position for 3 months, so Wages was underspent by \$10,000, but Contracted Services were overbudget by about \$11,000.

The Library was \$1.1M or 94% of budget. They returned \$72,000 back to the General Fund. Full-time wages were overbudget by \$17,000, but this was offset by underspending in part time wages of \$89,000.

Debt Service was \$118,000, which was 9% greater than 2022. There was new debt for 10 Hampton Road of \$173,000 which was offset by retiring debt of \$55,000. Considering our 5-year trend on debt service as a percentage of the General Fund, in 2019 it was 5.5%, in 2023 it was 7%.

The net operating income was \$1.78M, which was \$1.5M after encumbrances and appropriations raised from taxes. We're projecting a fund balance of \$5.9M.

Voters voted on amounts to use from fund balance, with \$512,000 approved. \$330,000 of that was used to replenish reserve funds, and the balance used to purchase equipment.

Ms. Belanger asked about the cleaning overage. Mr. Stevens said he thinks they're still doing an elevated level of cleaning for Covid.

Mr. Stevens said the Water Fund budget was at \$4.55M, a 7% increase over 2022. FY23 Operations had a net deficit of \$88,800. Revenue trailed the budget by \$411,000, while spending was below budget by \$386,000. Water rates were increased 15% in January of 2024. Revenue was \$4.1M, which was \$50,000 less than 2022. Water Consumption had \$3.4M revenue. Collections were \$38,500 less than 2022. There was a decline in usage over the last three years of 3M gallons by users. Revenue was \$650,000, a slight increase over 2022. There were transfers in of \$31,000 in unused construction proceeds. Water Fund operating expenses were \$4.18M, or 92% of budget. 54% of the unspent budget was due to compensation and benefits. In Water Administration, Wages and Benefits were underspent by \$54,000 due to a vacant Water/Sewer Managing Engineer position. Distribution was underspent with 4 open positions; only 1 was filled in 2023. Wages, tax and benefits were underspent by \$142,000. In General Expenses, underspending was a direct result of not having people to do the work. It was \$87,000 below budget. Water Treatment was fully staffed, and the overtime budget was overspent. There is required after-hours monitoring leading to more overtime. Debt service had an increase of \$108,000. There was new borrowing of \$1M for groundwater exploration, for \$138,000 of new debt service, offset by retiring debt of \$30,000. There was a net deficit of \$88,000 for

the year. Fund Balance is projected to be \$1.29M, including the \$20,000 going towards the Water portion of the rates study.

The Sewer Fund was at \$7.4M, a slight increase of \$46,000. FY23 Operations net income was \$1.7M. The one-time use of unused bond proceeds contributed \$281,000 to revenue. Expenses were below budget, especially in Collections and Treatment. Operating revenue was \$8.48M. There was a scheduled decline in our State Aid grant for the Wastewater Treatment plant; it will continue to decline by \$15,000-20,000 a year. Usage charges \*\*\*. Septage Collection was on hold, resulting in a \$274,000 decline in revenue. There were unused bond proceeds of \$281,000. Expenses were \$6.7M, or 98% of budget. \$325,000 of the underspending was due to open positions. General Expenses were underspent by \$400,000 due to staffing issues. The net income of the Sewer Fund was \$1.75M, which was \$200,000 less than prior year. There was an unassigned fund balance of \$3.18M, of which we're allocating \$1.9M to the siphons project and septage receiving upgrades. Accounts Receivable was at \$1.3M at end of year.

Regarding the CATV Fund, 2023 was the first year the Select Board was allowed to adjust the allocation, which the voters approved in March 2023. For the past several years, CATV has had an operating deficit. The adjustment will allow us to replenish the fund balance. They recommend investing \$100,000 every 4-5 years in equipment. The Fund had revenue of \$138,000 with a straight 50/50 split. Transferring in from the General Fund is recommended to bring our investment in Capital Outlay to \$25,000, with \$15,000 from spending in the budget and \$10,000 to the bottom line. This would bring the balance of the fund to \$146,000 at year end. Wages, Tax and Benefits were in line with budget. This budget has 3 part-time staff and ½ of Bob Glowacky's salary.

The Rec Revolving Fund saw strong participation in senior trips and sports programs in 2023. Revenue from the town's special events such as the chili and beer festival, as well as sponsorship opportunities, grew in 2023. The total revenue was \$718,000, an increase of \$47,000 over 2022. Labor costs increased by \$19,000. General costs were \$406,000, an increase of \$55,000. There was Capital Outlay of \$52,000, which was over the budget of \$15,000. Overall operations were in a deficit of \$6,000. We're projecting a \$155,000 balance at year end, net of commitments to the Hampton Road project at \$73,000.

The EMS Fund had a net income of \$359,000, which was \$50,000 over the prior year. Call volume increased by 5% and the billable rate increased in 2023. Expenses were in line with budget. We used \$151,000 of the EMS fund balance towards a new communications console. We're projecting a fund balance of \$221,000.

Mr. Papakonstantis said the Parks and Rec Director should work with the Town Manager to utilize the concession stand more. Many people attend weekend tournaments and we're missing the opportunity for additional revenue there.

Ms. Belanger said she'd like to know more about cleaning because the expenses may be due to unfilled positions.

Mr. Stevens said he intends to coordinate further with Departments to add more of the "why" to these reports.

Ms. Gilman asked if the decline in water use was because of a rainy year or promoting water conservation. Mr. Stevens said there was a drop of 3M gallons each year in 2021, 2022, and 2023. We should keep our eye on the rate increase and see if that was enough.

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve a transfer in the amount of \$46,026 from the General Fund to the Cable Access TV Fund to cover 2023 operations and capital investments related to CATV. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

- c. Select Board Representatives to Town Committees
  - i. Planning Board - Ms. Belanger is the primary rep, Mr. Chartrand the alternate. They will continue.
  - ii. Rec Advisory Board - Ms. Belanger will be the primary rep, Ms. Cowan will be the alternate.
  - iii. Conservation Commission - Mr. Chartrand said he would be interested in being the primary rep. Ms. Belanger agreed to be the alternate.
  - iv. Heritage Commission - Ms. Gilman agreed to continue as the rep.
  - v. Historic District Commission - Ms. Gilman agreed to continue as the rep.
  - vi. Rockingham Planning - Ms. Gilman said she will continue, as she has to be there as the State Rep.
  - vii. Swasey Parkway Trustees - Mr. Papakonstantis is the primary rep, Mr. Chartrand the alternate, and they will continue.
  - viii. Communications Advisory - Ms. Cowan is the primary rep, and Ms. Belanger the alternate. They will continue.
  - ix. Energy Committee - Ms. Gilman would like to continue. She's the rep to the CPCNH. Mr. Papakonstantis will remain the alternate.
  - x. Facilities Advisory Committee - Mr. Chartrand is the primary rep, Ms. Gilman the alternate. They will continue.
  - xi. Housing Advisory Committee - Ms. Belanger is the primary rep, Mr. Chartrand the alternate. They will continue.
  - xii. River Advisory Committee - Mr. Papakonstantis is the primary rep. He said he should stay as we're in the middle of the Pickpocket Dam conversation. Mr. Chartrand agreed to be the alternate.
  - xiii. Sustainability Advisory Committee - Mr. Chartrand is the primary rep, Mr. Papakonstantis the alternate. They will continue.
  - xiv. Water/Sewer Advisory Committee - Ms. Cowan is the primary rep. Mr. Chartrand offered to be the second primary rep to that committee.
  - xv. Tree Committee - Mr. Papakonstantis will continue as the primary rep.
  - xvi. E911 Committee - Ms. Cowan will continue as the primary rep.

- xvii. Tax, Exemption & Credit Advisory Committee - Mr. Dean said we had one interested person, but they withdrew. Mr. Papakonstantis said we should hold off until it's a committee. Ms. Gilman said we should warn our Tax Assessor that we will want this information. Ms. Belanger said the Tax Assessor has already done some reports for the Housing Advisory Committee.
- xviii. Pairpoint Park Stakeholders Committee - Ms. Belanger suggested holding off on selecting a rep until they choose when they're going to meet. Mr. Papakonstantis offered to be present at the first meeting.
- xix. Arts & Culture Advisory Committee - Mr. Papakonstantis is the primary rep. He said they've had quorum issues. Ms. Belanger said it's the one night a week she has a class until 7 but she will be the primary rep if they accept that she may be late. Ms. Gilman agreed to be the alternate.

## 8. Regular Business

### a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Blind Exemption for 68/6/745 in the amount of \$15,000 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veterans Credit for 104/79/304, 68/6/334, and 53/1 in the amount of \$500 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Veterans Credit for 68/6/334 in the amount of \$2,000 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 62/30 in the amount of \$13,500 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to approve a Solar Exemption for 86/27 in the amount of \$10,500 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

**MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to deny an Elderly Exemption for 104/79/266 for tax year 2024. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

### b. Permits & Approvals

- i. There were no permits or approvals considered at this meeting.

### c. Town Manager's Report

- i. We completed the Planet Playground closing, and the deed was recorded on Friday.
- ii. He met with Mark Leighton on the Police Station/Fire Substation project regarding Construction Manager and project owner relationships. The Board should have a presentation and recommendation shortly.
- iii. He had a weekly Operations meeting March 29.

- iv. He is attending the first meeting of the Finance Revenue Policy Committee with NHMA in Concord on Friday.
  - v. The Auditors Plodzik & Sanderson will be in town Friday to begin their work in the field.
  - vi. Regarding the sewer siphons project, there was a break in the rod on March 19. The contractor brought in 500 feet of steel casing and will make efforts to reconnect the drill rod. There is no additional cost to the town.
- d. Select Board Committee Reports
- i. Ms. Belanger attended a Conservation Commission meeting. They're looking for stewards to open the McConnell conservation gate. There's an "Exploring Exeter" program March 27 with Parks and Rec. Kyle Walsh is still doing the "Heard Bird" contest; there is an app that will record the bird's sound and tell you about it. There is a seed library at the Library. They're planning the second Sustainability Film Festival. For Earth Day, there will be a town-wide cleanup April 15 - 22. Supplies will be available the week before. The Alewife Festival is May 11 10-1. The river herring migration count needs volunteers. At the Rec Advisory Board, there was an organizational meeting before the regular meeting regarding Planet Playground. At the regular meeting, we were updated about the Select Board approving the lease and funds for the robots and mowing. There are tennis court repairs underway, but the upper court is still open. The tree removal worked great at Planet Playground. Field requests are filling up at pre-Covid levels. The town website has the availability of fields. There was a Neptune Radio discussion, they're looking into buying music licenses for music at the pool. There could be ads to offset the cost. Seasonal hiring is going well. Parks and Rec will request an RFP for 10 Hampton Road. They will pull together a Senior Council update for the Select Board. At the Planning Board meeting, we heard a request for 81 Front Street conversion to 6 residential condos, and two lot line adjustments. All were approved. She also watched the Westside Drive facility meeting online.
  - ii. Mr. Chartrand attended a Facilities Advisory meeting, where they discussed the right format for building the newly approved Public Safety Facility. He said Ms. Gilman gave a report on her work at the Town Hall.
  - iii. Ms. Cowan had no report.
  - iv. Ms. Gilman said the Facilities Advisory Committee has been waiting for the Maintenance supervisor to come to a meeting regarding the projects list for 2024. Ms. Roy said Jeff and Steve are going to the next meeting. Mr. Chartrand said Parks and Rec should give Facilities an update on 10 Hampton Road.
  - v. Ms. Gilman gave an update on State issues.
  - vi. Mr. Papakonstantis had no update.



e. Correspondence

- i. A list of those serving in Boards Committees and Commissions. Most have agreed to come back, but some committees will need recruiting.
- ii. The NHMA Legislative Bulletin
- iii. A notification of the Black Heritage Trail of NH marker unveiling to honor Exeter's Black Revolutionary War Soldiers at 223 Water Street.

9. Review Board Calendar

- a. April 13 is the goal setting session. The next regular meetings are April 15, April 29, May 13, Tuesday May 28, June 10, June 24, and July 8. Ms. Cowan said she may be late on April 15.

10. Non-Public Session

**MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II(a). Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0.

The meeting entered non-public at 8:42 PM.

11. Adjournment. Ms. Belanger moved to adjourn. Seconded by Ms. Cowan. The Board stood adjourned at 9:10 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Joanna Bartell  
Recording Secretary