

Select Board Meeting
Monday July 28, 2025
6:15 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Draft Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Chair Niko Papakonstantis, Vice-Chair Molly Cowan, Clerk Nancy Belanger, Julie Gilman, Dan Chartrand, and Assistant Town Manager Melissa Roy were present at this meeting. The meeting was called to order by Mr. Papakonstantis at 6:15 PM.

2. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II (I). Mr. Chartrand seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0, and the meeting entered non-public session at 6:15 PM.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to exit non-public. Ms. Gilman seconded. Motion passed 5-0, and the Board exited non-public at 6:58 PM.

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to seal the minutes until the subject matter is resolved. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

The Board reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7 PM.

3. Public Comment

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

4. Proclamations/Recognitions

- a. There were no proclamations/recognitions.

5. Approval of Minutes

- a. Regular Meeting: July 14, 2025

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve the minutes of July 14, 2025 as presented. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

6. Appointments

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to appoint Maisie Sanderson from an alternate to a voting member of the Pairpoint Park Stakeholder Advisory Committee. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

7. Discussion/Action Items

- a. Police Station/Fire Substation Update

Finance Director Corey Stevens, Police Chief Stephan Poulin, Deputy Police Chief Josh McCain, and Fire Chief Justin Pizon were present for this

45 discussion. Ms. Roy presented a conceptual drawing of the Police Station/Fire
46 Substation. She said this has not yet been bid out, it's all preliminary. It's
47 basically a rectangle - a lot of the design elements had to be removed - but it
48 does function for what we need. In 2024, there was a \$17.5M project cost
49 approved at Deliberative Session. It was voted to include net zero construction,
50 but with no dollar amount associated. A lot of construction costs have changed
51 since then, so it has been difficult. We hired an OPM (Owner's Project Manager),
52 a company named CHA from Boston, and a Architect group called Ted Gallante
53 Architects. We also hired Eckman Construction as our Construction Manager. In
54 2024, LBA (Levallee Brensinger) had proposed a 23,000 square foot building to
55 meet our program requirements, and we went to the warrant with \$17.5M, but
56 costs ended up coming in significantly higher. With the help of our OPM and
57 Architect, we came up with a design of about 20,000 square feet based on the
58 budget we had and that we needed net zero. The initial cost estimate came in at
59 \$19M, so we had to pivot. CHA had multiple staff changes, and the entire
60 building project group decided to move on from the company.

61 Chief Poulin said Town staff still has the same energy for the project and
62 has been collaborating with the Architects. Deputy Chief McCain has been to
63 every meeting on the design. Deputy Chief McCain said this group has been
64 cohesive and focused on delivering a cost-effective facility for Exeter. It's been a
65 labor of love for the last four years. One of the biggest challenges other than the
66 budget is the site. We didn't know that there were two wetlands in the southern
67 part, which constrains the asphalt around the building and limits the building to
68 one place. The site has a lot of ledge, which is the biggest unknown we have.
69 Some of our contingency has been dedicated to that issue. Also, the site has a
70 grade, so it will have to be levelled. There's been so much talk about how to
71 lower costs and reuse materials on the site. We will be the first net zero Police
72 Department in NH, which is a huge challenge. We have to generate our own
73 energy. Because the building is smaller, there's less area for solar panels on the
74 roof. We can't afford geothermal wells. The building itself will be constructed in a
75 way that will save energy; the hurdle is generating the energy, although we think
76 we've found a solution. The last challenge is the budget. Our dollar isn't worth as
77 much as when this project was approved. Construction projects are seeing
78 unparalleled inflation. Tariffs are affecting the costs of different parts of the
79 building. We had to design the building to meet the budget. We've gone over
80 every square inch of this building to make the best use of the space and
81 maximize our dollar. During value engineering, we were able to shave off \$1M
82 from the cost without compromising on the programming space. We identified
83 areas of IT that we didn't need, without compromising on security. We eliminated
84 extra security cameras, door readers, fingerprint readers, and other unnecessary
85 security items. He added that he feels very positive about this facility. There's no
86 excess in the building, but we're not compromising so much that the town won't
87 be happy with it.

88 Chief Pizon said Josh has been spearheading this and advocating for
89 both sides [Police and Fire]. The Police Station is a lot more involved than the
90 Fire Substation. We need space but not the technology. We all shaved off space.
91 Early projections were \$689 a square foot and today we're at \$800 a square foot.
92 We cut off 3,000 square feet. This is still a building we will all be proud of. We're
93 at 50% complete on construction documents. The finish line is not far away.

94 Ms. Roy said we started with our initial construction estimate at \$19M
95 project cost in February 2025. We reduced the project scope, and received a
96 construction estimate of \$16.5M, which we were able to reduce through value
97 engineering to \$15.6M, but that leaves us with a \$660,000 gap. To address the
98 funding gap and move forward, we would like the Select Board to consider using
99 the \$560,000 of the Invest NH State program received because of the affordable
100 housing at Gateway, which we are able to use for any purpose. We would still
101 have about a \$100,000 gap. We are waiting for final numbers on the IT items that
102 we scaled back, and with a little more value engineering we should be able to hit
103 the \$100,000 mark. If the Board does not want to use the Invest NH money, we
104 would have to go back to the warrant in March for additional money. We do not
105 have access to any other money we would be able to use on this. The building is
106 at the minimum size needed to continue to function. Typically there is a 10-15%
107 contingency for a construction project; right now, we only have a 4%
108 contingency. We're trying to get the site work started in October/November so
109 that if we come across things we can't overcome, we haven't missed the
110 opportunity to put something on the warrant if we need to. We may hit something
111 in the site that we're not prepared to deal with. Regarding net zero, geothermal
112 wells aren't an option due to budget. We're focusing on solar panels. In order to
113 generate that much energy, we need to put in a carport to put in more solar
114 panels, at a significant cost. If we have to pull that carport, we could get the site
115 ready to accept a carport and put it on a future warrant. The building would not
116 be net zero until that time, but it would be net zero ready. If we continue to delay,
117 it will just cost us more.

118 Ms. Belanger asked if legally we're ok with "net zero ready." Ms. Roy said
119 the main building would have net zero construction. This would be a phase 1,
120 where phase 2 would be net zero. Ms. Belanger asked if there is 3,000 square
121 feet left, is future growth on that site a possibility? Chief Poulin said we can
122 always go up. Ms. Roy said for Fire, there is more opportunity for growth. Police
123 won't have a lot of extra space. Chief Poulin said this is the best we can do with
124 what we have. We're good at adapting and making things work.

125 Ms. Belanger asked if we're seeing tariffs affect costs. Deputy Chief
126 McCain said the construction company said it's on the horizon but it's not
127 something they're overly concerned about. The steel might be an issue, but that's
128 a small percentage. What they're concerned about is the inflation in construction.
129 We're at almost 25% more in inflation than in 2022.

130 Mr. Chartrand said he's been concerned about Tax Incentivized Finance
131 [TIF] money for this, but this is money from the State. We talked about how there

are no strings attached to this. Ms. Cowan said we should use it how we think we should use it.

Mr. Chartrand said he's comfortable with this building being net zero ready. Deliberative Session putting net zero on this without raising a dollar amount was a mistake. We're honoring the intent of Deliberative Session when we say we may need to complete that with additional dollars. He added that he has been impressed with the cohesion of the group working on this and the involvement of the executive team.

Ms. Cowan said she thinks net zero is an important policy. It was passed by the voters. Using the Invest NH money makes sense and sends a message that Public Safety is important in our community, although she's concerned because it was intended for affordable housing.

Mr. Papakonstantis said he's glad that they never considered not doing net zero to save money. He's interested to see how a net zero building will tolerate New Hampshire winters.

Ms. Belanger said regarding electric cars, she understands that there won't be chargers, but will the piping infrastructure be installed for the future? Deputy Chief McCain said yes, it's more cost-effective to do it now.

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to authorize the use of the \$560,000 received from the Invest NH program towards the design and construction of the Police and Fire Substation at 6 Continental Drive. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Chief Poulin discussed the plans for the National Night Out event.

b. 2nd Reading - Ordinance 802.3(j) & 802.4(c-6) Update NH RSA

Mr. Papakonstantis said this is going through and referencing the new RSA, no other changes were made. He read the changes to Ordinance 802.3(j), and 802.4(c-6). This is an amendment to Chapter 8 of the Town of Exeter Ordinances, the ordinance to regulate vendors, hawkers, peddlers, solicitors, and other itinerant vendors and door-to-door solicitation and canvassing. The change to 802.3(j) is to change NH RSA 321:19 to NH RSA 31:102-a, and the change to 802.4(c-6) is to change NH RSA 321:19 to NH RSA 31:102-b.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to adopt the revisions of Exeter Town Ordinances Chapter 8 as read in the two public readings of July 14, 2025 and July 28, 2025. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

8. Regular Business

a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

i. There were no abatements or credits considered.

b. Permits & Approvals

i. Pickpocket Dam Removal Engineering Design Phase 1

Stephen Cronin, Public Works Director, said this is for Phase 1 Design services for the Pickpocket Dam removal project. Town Meeting

approved up to \$2.1M for the removal; we've also applied for several grants. We're asking for a contract specific to design in the amount of \$300,000. The scope of work includes topographic survey, wetland delineation, and geotechnical work, as well as preliminary permitting and required archaeological survey. There will also be public design meetings, abutters-only meetings, and a public sitewalk. The funding is from the grant.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to award the Pickpocket Dam removal Phase 1 design services to VHB in the amount of \$300,000, with the Great Bay 2030 funds to be utilized for this work; and to further authorize the Town Manager or their designee to sign the appropriate paperwork. Ms. Gilman seconded. Mr. Chartrand asked if the scope of the work is now through January 2026 for phase 1. Mr. Cronin said yes. The motion passed 5-0.

ii. Westside Drive Construction Phase Engineering Services

Mr. Cronin said we're recommending an award to Underwood Engineers for Construction-phase Engineering services for the Westside Drive project. The Board awarded the construction contract to Granese at the last meeting; this contract is to provide full-time Construction Administration and on-site inspection during the project. The cost is \$563,500. This will be funded by the appropriations made at Town Meeting.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to award the contract to Underwood Engineers Inc for Construction-phase Engineering services for the Westside Drive project at a cost of \$563,500, and to further authorize the Town Manager or their designee to sign the contract documents. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

iii. NH Office of Highway Safety Traffic Enforcement Patrols & Equipment Grant Application, and Grant Agreement Addendum

Ms. Roy said this is an annual grant application that the Police Chief put in.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to authorize the Exeter Police Department's application for the FFY26 NH Office of Highway Safety Traffic Enforcement Patrols & Equipment Grant Application as presented in the amount of \$10,900 and the amended grant terms as presented in the grant agreement amendment, notice for an adjusted total grant limitation of \$16,610.50, and to further authorize the Town Manager or their designee to sign the agreement and the amendment. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

iv. Tax Interest Refund Request

Mr. Papakonstantis said there is a memo from our Deputy Tax Collector describing a request for a refund of \$782.32 for Unitil. Unitil mailed checks for three subsidiaries that own property in Exeter, but these were not received by the town. Unitil paid the tax and interest via overnight mail, which was received on July 22, 2025. Unitil is asking a refund of \$782.32, which cannot be refunded by the Deputy Tax

Collector. They did waive other interest fees of \$11.87, as they have authority to do so for amounts up to \$25.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to refund the tax interest fee in the amount of \$782.32 for Unitil Energy Systems for properties 51-11 in the amount of \$600.61 and 46-3 at \$181.71. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

v. Exeter Area General Federation of Women's Clubs – Yuletide Fair

Mr. Papakonstantis said this is the 46th Yuletide Fair and will be held Saturday, November 22, 2025. Ms. Cowan said she dislikes when people address the Board as "Selectmen." Mr. Chartrand said he would like someone to reach out to them about changing that to "Select Board" going forward. A correction should go out anytime we are addressed that way.

MOTION: Mr. Chartrand moved to approve the Exeter Area General Federation of Women's Clubs' request to place small 21x18" signs along the roadsides in the Exeter area and a larger sign to be placed at the corner of Guinea Road and Hampton Road between the dates of Sunday November 16 and Sunday November 23, 2025. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. Ms. Roy said she and Corey Stevens have been reviewing CIP proposals from the various departments.
- ii. She's been attending the 10 Hampton Road updates. We're about a month away from completion. We're still on budget and on time.
- iii. She's involved with the Police and Fire Substation Committee.
- iv. She participated in required harassment training.
- v. She had several personnel issues from the HR side which she can't discuss, but that have been taking a lot of her time.
- vi. She attended a biweekly leadership meeting that was only by her, Corey, and the Police and Fire Chiefs, so they had an opportunity to discuss the Police/Fire building further.
- vii. She met with Steve Jones and Amanda Kelly of the Pairpoint Park Committee to answer their questions about fundraising.
- viii. She and Corey attended the BRC kickoff meeting. On Friday the Department Heads got their budget templates and had three weeks to get them in.
- ix. She is working with MRI and we will have a temporary Planner that will be coming in two days a week in-person and will attend the Planning Board meetings. Ms. Belanger said there's a Planning Board sitewalk on Wednesday August 13 at 97 Portsmouth Ave and it will be on the agenda for the next night, so we may wish to let this person know.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- 263 i. Ms. Gilman said the Tax Exemptions and Advisory Committee met and
264 came up with some recommendations, but she wants to wait until the
265 committee is complete and votes on the proposed changes to the Elderly
266 Exemption and service-related disability credit. Mr. Chartrand asked if she
267 attended the Facilities Advisory Committee meeting that he missed, but
268 she said no.
- 269 ii. Ms. Belanger attended the first half hour of the BRC kick-off meeting and
270 watched the rest of it later. She then went downstairs for the Rec
271 Advisory Board. 10 Hampton Road is on schedule. They're looking at a
272 potential move sometime in September; the Rec Department will be
273 closed for up to three days. Regarding Planet Playground, there was a
274 glitch on social media with the incorrect time for the ribbon cutting, which
275 she pointed out. The last day of camp is August 8th. There should be a
276 contingent of camp kids there. The Rec Advisory Board were able to do
277 their elections: Jenn Harrington is the new Chair, Nick Nordin is the Vice-
278 Chair, and Brin Sullivan is the Clerk. There was a big thank-you to
279 longtime Chair Stephanie Papakonstantis.
- 280 iii. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Swasey Parkway Trustees did not meet, as
281 they did not have a quorum. He attended the Pairpoint Park Advisory
282 Committee where they talked about how to fundraise. He attended the
283 River Advisory Committee where they heard an update on the reservoir
284 dam study and the Pickpocket Dam removal and voted to approve the
285 \$300,000 grant. The big grant is still pending, and Mr. Vlasich thought we
286 may know by the fall. The NOAA grant is delayed due to Federal process,
287 but Mr. Vlasich didn't think we were a good match for that. There is an
288 additional Coastal Resiliency Grant. The Pickpocket Scope of Work was
289 discussed, and Mr. Vlasich plans to come to the Select Board to give an
290 update soon. Mr. Papakonstantis said he was unable to attend the BRC
291 kick-off meeting, but gave Chair Kelly a statement to read on behalf of the
292 Board. That evening he attended the public meeting in Kensington over
293 the groundwater investigation, along with Public Works Director Cronin
294 and Water and Sewer Director Steve Dalton. There were about 25
295 Kensington residents present and they seemed satisfied with the answers
296 from DES. There was one person who offered formal testimony, a
297 consultant hired by the Town of Kensington. Kensington residents can
298 offer written testimony until September 7, at which point we can move
299 forward. He attended the Trustees of the Trust Funds meeting, at which
300 they discussed bringing the Swasey Trust, which is at Key Bank in Ohio,
301 back to New Hampshire. They will discuss it with the Swasey Parkway
302 Trustees and the Select Board in an upcoming meeting.

304 e. Correspondence

- 305 i. The NHMA Update

306 ii. A note regarding Swasey Parkway which Mr. Papakonstantis said he
307 would follow up on with a letter.
308
309 9. Review Board Calendar
310 The next meetings are August 11, August 18, Tuesday September 2, September
311 15, and September 29.
312
313 10. Other Business
314 a. Mr. Papakonstantis said National Night Out is August 5 from 4-7 PM at
315 Townhouse Common.
316
317 11. Non-Public Session
318 **MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public session under RSA 91-A:3II (a) and (I).
319 Ms. Gilman seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0, and the meeting entered non-
320 public session at 8:15 PM.
321
322 **MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to exit non-public session. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion
323 passed 5-0.
324
325 **MOTION:** Mr. Chartrand moved to seal the minutes until the matter is resolved. Ms. Belanger
326 seconded. The motion passed 5-0.
327
328 12. Adjournment
329 **MOTION:** Ms. Gilman moved to adjourn. Ms. Belanger seconded. The motion passed 5-0.
330 The meeting adjourned at 9:09 PM.
331
332 Respectfully Submitted,
333 Joanna Bartell
334 Recording Secretary
335
336
337
338