

Select Board Meeting
Monday September 29, 2025
6:30 PM
Nowak Room, Town Offices
Final Minutes

1. Call Meeting to Order

Members present: Chair Niko Papakonstantis, Vice-Chair Molly Cowan, Clerk Nancy Belanger, Julie Gilman, Dan Chartrand, and Interim Town Manager Melissa Roy 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 3:II(c) and (I). Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll-call vote, the motion passed 5-0 and the Board entered non-public session at 6:30 PM.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to exit non-public at 6:55 pm. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

The meeting reconvened in the Nowak Room at 7 PM. Mr. Papakonstantis welcomed Mr. Jordan's class from Phillips Exeter Academy, who were present.

3. Public Comment

- a. Resident Silas Richards expressed his concerns about the lack of implementation of the "Complete Streets" program, especially on Epping Road. Mr. Papakonstantis said we are making progress with Complete Streets. There was a warrant article passed and the Board can give an update on the progress before the end of the year.
- b. Robin Davies, a senior at PEA, asked what the Board's relationship with the State Government is like. Ms. Gilman said she tries to inform the Board on what is happening at the State level and will ask for the Board's support in certain matters. Ms. Cowan said budget decisions are made by the State and forced on us. We have to abide by their policy changes. Mr. Chartrand said we're non-partisan at the municipal level, but the State level is highly partisan. Ms. Belanger said we also interact with State and Federal officials for grants.
- c. Another PEA student asked about engagement in politics at the local level. Mr. Chartrand said we could not run our municipal government without volunteers. We took a huge hit on volunteerism during Covid, but we've started to fill those seats back up. Ms. Gilman said she misses the remote meetings which had more public attendance and participation. Ms. Belanger said Exeter TV covers the meetings and we keep trying to reach out to a younger demographic. Ms. Cowan said the State Government is also run by volunteers. State reps are paid \$100 a year plus mileage, even though it's practically a full time job for half the year. That affects what kind of families can afford to volunteer.

- 45 d. Truman Yea, a student at PEA, asked about non-partisan action in the Select
46 Board in contrast to partisan action in the State House. Ms. Gilman said if there
47 were non-partisan State elections, there would be better discussions. Right now
48 people don't want to talk to each other. Here, we do talk to each other and come
49 to a consensus.
- 50 e. Another PEA student asked how the American media has evolved. Ms. Belanger
51 said the discourse has become increasingly negative, especially on social media.
52 She's hoping it evolves into a better resource. Ms. Cowan asked where the
53 students get their news. Students indicated that they read national newspapers,
54 watch YouTube and listen to podcasts. Ms. Cowan cautioned about getting
55 pulled down an "algorithmic path" on media like YouTube. Students should look
56 at who owns the media and what they want from you.
- 57
- 58 4. Proclamations/Recognitions
- 59 a. There were no proclamations or recognitions at this meeting.
- 60
- 61 5. Approval of Minutes
- 62 a. Regular Meeting: September 15, 2025
- 63 **MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to approve the Select Board meeting minutes of September 15,
64 2025 as presented. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.
- 65
- 66 6. Appointments
- 67 **MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to appoint alternate Marty Kennedy as a voting member of the
68 Planning Board, term to expire April 30, 2027. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.
- 69
- 70 7. Discussion/Action Items
- 71 a. Tree Committee Update
- 72 Natural Resources and Sustainability Planner Kristen Murphy and Tree
73 Committee Chair Eileen Flockhart were present to discuss the committee's work.
- 74 Ms. Flockhart said over the last six years we've planted 52 trees. We've
75 had Tree City USA certification for all six years and received growth awards. Ms.
76 Murphy said only 16 towns and cities in New Hampshire are Tree City USA
77 communities and only six have had growth awards. This committee has built
78 relationships with the utilities to discuss tree trimming in the utility corridor. There
79 is a project to create new software to track trees in the community. The tree
80 dashboard tracks the location and health of the trees. Only 54% of our trees are
81 in good condition.
- 82 Mr. Chartrand asked if citizens can participate in monitoring. Ms. Murphy
83 said yes, they can monitor and report issues to her or download an app to report
84 it directly on the dashboard. Mr. Chartrand asked if people can report trees on
85 their property and Ms. Murphy said no, it's just for public trees. The town doesn't
86 have authority on what people do with their own trees, although the committee
87 has done a lot with education. The public trees are a town asset.

88 Ms. Flockhart said we got approval in last year's Town Meeting for a
89 water truck to maintain the trees we've planted, and we watered in the summer
90 until the drought. Without that, the trees would be severely compromised now.
91 We had hoped to plant trees in the fall but it's been so dry, that may have to wait
92 until spring.

93 Ms. Murphy said we've been conservative in requesting town funds. We
94 have a \$25,000 grant opportunity which would help fund our goal.

95 Mr. Papakonstantis said the passage of the Tree Ordinance was a huge
96 contribution from the Tree Committee. Ms. Belanger said this group is a great
97 resource for other committees, such as the Swasey Parkway Trustees. Ms.
98 Gilman asked the committee to consider a "Liberty Tree" program or a program
99 on the "Tree Riot" for the 250th celebration next year.

100 Ms. Murphy mentioned that there is a State "Champion Tree" in Swasey
101 Parkway, a river birch. The Trustees are ordering a plaque for it.

102
103 b. Permits & Approvals were discussed at this time - see below.

104
105 c. Fiscal Year 2026 Suggested Budget Presentation

106 Ms. Roy presented the FY26 proposed budget. The General Fund
107 proposed budget is \$27,547,562, a 12.64% over FY25. The Water Fund
108 proposed budget is \$4,891,813, a 5.54% increase. The Sewer Fund proposed
109 budget is \$8,178,815, a .04% decrease. Our tax rate in 2024 was \$4.20 per
110 thousand for the municipal portion and the total tax rate was \$17.79 per
111 thousand. Debt service is 53% of our increase; the second year of our Collective
112 Bargaining Agreements is 17%; and our reserve for insurance is 17%. The net
113 increase on debt service is \$1,636,769 over FY25. There is about \$348,000 of
114 debt coming off the books, which is offset by new debt for the Police Station/Fire
115 Substation at \$1,664,479, the Linden Street Bridge project at \$175,715, and the
116 Public Works Fuel Island at \$137,158.

117 Last year we renegotiated three contracts: SEIU Local 1984 (Public
118 Works), the Exeter Police Association, and the Exeter Professional Firefighters
119 Association. Each had only six months of the increases last year, so this year we
120 have the full budget cycle of twelve months for those increases. Even with these
121 new contracts, we're having a difficult time recruiting and retaining staff.

122 Regarding insurance, we participate in the Health Trust insurance pool.
123 Last year we saw an 18% increase in premiums, and we expect to see that
124 again. We used to put aside 10% for that increase, which will be determined in
125 October, but we're seeing the national trend of insurance costing significantly
126 more, so we put a 20% reserve in the draft budget. In some departments, you'll
127 see salary decreases, but that's because of the 27 pay periods in 2025; this year
128 we're back to 26 pay periods. The 2026 budget also includes a 4% cost of living
129 allowance (COLA) for all non-Union employees; some staff are near the end of
130 their STEP opportunities, so this would be more equitable to every employee.

131 Almost all of our Departments were at or around their budgets from last
132 year, with the exception of Benefits and Taxes, Debt Service, Human Resources
133 due to the first full year of the HR Director, and Elections because there are more
134 elections in 2026 than 2025.

135 The Select Board is level-funded. Board members receive a stipend of
136 \$3,000 per year and the Chair receives \$4,000 a year. The Town Manager's
137 Department is level-funded. This is a Department of three employees; our Town
138 Manager is leaving but we will be replacing them this year. Human Resources
139 has a 13% increase because this is the full year cost of the HR Director. We
140 decreased training by \$3,000 in that budget. Transportation is just a placeholder.
141 Legal is level-funded at \$100,000. Media and Communications is down 2.9%.
142 That salary is split 50/50 between the General Fund and the Cable Fund.
143 Trustees of the Trust Funds is level-funded. Town Moderator has increased by
144 116% due to more elections, but it's a small amount of money. The Town Clerk is
145 up 2.6%; two employees in that Department are SEIU members which includes
146 some increases for them. They also decreased conferences/rooms/meals by
147 \$1,000 but increased postage by \$1,000. Elections is up 35% due to the number
148 of elections. The Finance Department is down by 1.9%. They decreased training
149 by \$2,000 but needed an increase for audit compliance services. The Treasurer
150 is level-funded. Tax Collection is down by 2.2%; there is a new Deputy Tax
151 Collector and they decreased the training budget. Assessing is down by 3.6%.
152 This Department is one full-time person plus contract services with MRI. The IT
153 Department is down 3.1%. There was a retirement of a long-time employee and
154 restructuring, which led to a decrease of \$52,625. There were increases of
155 \$15,000 for software, \$21,000 for contract services, and \$16,000 for internet
156 services, but decreases of \$11,000 in network supplies, \$9,000 in contract
157 services, and \$9,700 in computers. The Planning Department is 2.5 people, and
158 they are near level-funded with a 0.8% decrease. Economic Development had a
159 0.7% decrease. Code Enforcement had a 0.06% decrease. The Building and
160 Planning Department supports the Land Use Boards, and those budgets have a
161 slight decrease except for the Conservation Commission with a 0.1% increase.

162 The Police Department has 29 full-time and 2 part-time staff. There's an
163 increase of \$219,339, which reflects the full-year cost of the Police negotiated
164 contract. Administration decreased by \$4,000 because we moved their IT
165 contract into the IT budget. Fire and Emergency Management had an increase of
166 4.3% which also reflects the full year of the Fire Union contract. This Department
167 includes 28 Firefighters, the Chief, an Assistant Chief, two Deputy Chiefs, and an
168 Office Manager. In suppression, salaries increased by \$157,540 and benefits
169 increased by \$16,236. General expenses increased by \$28,000. We used ARPA
170 money last year for fire protective equipment, which has a regular replacement
171 cycle. We had an increase in uniforms of \$4,000. In Education/Training, we have
172 a few people getting their degrees. Vehicle Maintenance had an increase
173 because the person in DPW who was helping with our Fire Trucks is no longer
174 with us. Emergency Management had a reduction of \$5,000 and a reduction in

Education/Training of \$1,500. We also moved their IT contract to the IT budget. In Dispatch, there was an increase of 2.6%. This is a Department we've been struggling to staff. There was a \$20,000 decrease in benefits due to an elections change. The Health Department had a decrease of 5% because our Health Officer finished her degree.

In DPW, Administration and Engineering saw a 13% decrease because of a re-allocation of an Engineering position to the Maintenance Department for a Mechanic. We also had the retirement of our Town Engineer. In the Highways/Streets Department, there was a 6% increase. These workers are part of the SEIU Contract so have the full 12 months of the increase. We increased Paving by \$75,000 to get us back up to the 2023 level. Snow Removal had an increase of .1%. Solid Waste increased 7%, due to a \$125,000 increase in fuel charges and tipping fees. Streetlights are a decrease of 4.8%. We have some traffic signal maintenance planned, leading to an increase of \$3,000. Stormwater is level-funded. The Maintenance Department is getting a new Mechanic position in addition to the SEIU increase, leading to an increase of 10% in this budget. Town Buildings had an increase of 3.2%. Our rates for electricity and natural gas expire 10/31/25 so there may be an adjustment. Maintenance Projects is level-funded at \$100,000. We presented a joint project to the Facilities Advisory Committee to use \$50,000 from the Maintenance Projects line for a Facility Needs Assessment to determine what town buildings are being used for, and the committee approved this project. Maintenance/Garage is a decrease of 6.3%; the contract increases were offset by turnover in staffing.

Welfare is up 11% and Human Services is up 1.1%. We added a part-time Welfare Administrator last year, and this is the first full 12 months of that position. The Human Services Committee voted to increase the budget by \$1,125. There's an increase in rental assistance of \$20,000 due to increasing need.

The Recreation Department had a 7.2% increase, reflecting the full-year cost of the Senior Coordinator. This is offset by a grant from Exeter Hospital. The Parks Department had an increase of 14.8%; their two employees are part of the SEIU contract, leading to salary increases. Other Culture and Recreation, which includes the Christmas Parade, summer concerts, and the brass band, is up 6.8% with additional money for the Christmas Parade.

The Library budget, which is submitted by the Trustees of the Library, has an increase of 5.2%. The long-time Library Director retired, leading to a decrease in salaries, but there was an \$80,000 in the public services line.

Debt Service is an 84% increase from FY25, as discussed earlier.

Regarding Fire Protection, the Water Fund can charge the General Fund for services. The study recommended increasing this fee each year, but with the difficult budget year, we recommended level-funding at \$130,000.

Vehicle Replacement/Leases had a 15.7% increase for our Police Cruisers. These are in the budget, not separate warrant articles.

Benefits and Taxes, which represents Health Insurance, Dental, etc, is up 103%.

Mr. Chartrand asked if the solar array would lead to a decrease in electrical costs. Ms. Roy said it's too early, we're working on selling our RECs and determining whether that will go into a reserve fund. We won't see it in the budget this year.

Mr. Chartrand said the 12.9% increase is much larger than the usual budget increase of 3-4%, driven by retention of employees and health insurance.

Ms. Roy said we had a lot of discussion on the CIP. We just passed the Police Station/Fire Substation, and wanted to make sure we weren't doing a lot of projects that we could wait on. Last year, the only article that didn't pass was the Street Sweeper. She heard from residents that it was just to make things pretty, but it's actually important to our nitrogen reduction program. If we can keep our nitrogen low, we won't have to redo our Wastewater plant that we just built. The cost is \$412,000, but we expect there to be loan forgiveness.

For articles funded by taxation, we're recommending funding the Parks Improvement Fund at \$50,000; Pairpoint Park Design and Engineering at \$35,000 to facilitate grants for that project; a Pedestrian Improvement project at \$266,988, contingent on a TAP grant of \$200,000; and a Library Building Fund of \$75,000.

We're recommending additional articles to be funded by Fund Balance: the ADA Capital Reserve Fund at \$25,000, Fire Car #2 Replacement at \$67,194, Dump Truck #52 Replacement at \$85,000; the Snow & Ice Deficit Fund at \$75,000; the Sick Leave Trust Fund at \$100,000; and the Sestercentennial Fund at an amount to be determined. No lease purchases are proposed for 2026.

The proposed budget is \$27,547,562. If all of the warrant articles coming from taxation were approved, that would be an additional \$426,988, for a total of \$27,974,550, an increase of 13.55% from 2025.

The proposed Water Fund budget is \$4,891,813, a 5.54% increase over FY25. There were cost increases because of the SEIU contract, as well as an increase in debt service, the increased cost of chemicals, and a larger reserve for insurance benefits. The proposed Sewer Fund budget is \$8,178,815, which is a decrease of 0.04% from FY25; although they were affected by the SEIU contract and insurance reserve, the increase was mitigated by a \$139,639 reduction in debt services.

For Water Fund Bond Articles, we're proposing a \$2,000,000 bond for the Surface Water Treatment Plant Design, which will have \$500,000 forgiveness and a \$1.5M low-interest loan through the SRF [State Revolving Fund] from New Hampshire DES [Department of Environmental Services]. It's time to start on the replacement of that plant. We would also put on the warrant an article for a Lead Surface Line Inventory at \$173,000, and Surface Water Treatment Plant Residuals Removal at \$495,061. For Sewer Bond Articles, we propose funding the High Street/Cross Country Sewer Rehabilitation Project at \$4,304,000.

262
263 8. Regular Business

264 a. Tax Abatements, Veterans Credits and Exemptions

- 265 i. There were no credits or abatements considered at this meeting.
266

267 b. Permits & Approvals

268 i. Sewer Reserve Funds – Request for Repair

269 Public Works Director Steve Cronin and Water/Sewer
270 Superintendent Steve Dalton were present to discuss this request. Mr.
271 Cronin said we requested a reserve fund transfer of \$40,000 in April for
272 repairs to Clarifier 1 at the Wastewater Treatment Facility. In August, we
273 discovered cracks in the walls of the tank that were allowing groundwater
274 infiltration. We're looking to move forward with repair under warranty, but
275 the warranty doesn't cover mechanical removal or re-installation. The
276 \$40,000 covered the removal, but we're asking for \$150,000 for the
277 modification and re-installation of the mechanical components.

278 **MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to release \$150,000 from the Sewer Reserve Fund to purchase
279 parts and contract services needed to reassemble Clarifier 1 so it can be returned to service.
280 Ms. Gilman seconded. Ms. Gilman asked how much is left in the reserve fund. Ms. Roy said she
281 can get that information from Finance Director Stevens. The motion passed 5-0.
282

283 ii. DPW Grant Acceptance

284 Mr. Cronin said in recent years there were revisions to the lead
285 and copper rules that require us to identify all lead surfaces in our system.
286 That inventory needed to be completed by October of 2024, and we've
287 done that. We now need to confirm any services of an unknown material
288 type. We're working with a consultant, Weston & Sampson, to do that
289 work, and they applied for a grant on behalf of the town. We're asking the
290 Board to accept the grant for \$60,000 so we can begin the next phase.

291 **MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to accept a lead service line grant from the NH Department of
292 Environmental Services in the amount of \$60,000 to the Town of Exeter and to authorize the
293 interim Town Manager or their designee to sign the associated paperwork for such agreement
294 on behalf of the town. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.
295

296 iii. Parks & Recreation Senior Lounge Dedication Request

297 Assistant Parks and Rec Director David Tovey was present to
298 discuss this request. The Department is looking for permission to name
299 the new Senior Lounge after former Parks and Rec Director Doug Dicey,
300 who recently passed away.

301 **MOTION:** Ms. Belanger moved to dedicate the Senior Lounge at the 10 Hampton Road
302 Multigenerational Community Center to Doug Dicey by naming the room the "Doug Dicey Senior
303 Lounge." Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.
304

305 iv. Intent to Cut Request

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to approve an intent to cut for 65/118. Ms. Gilman seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

c. Town Manager's Report

- i. The Police Department got their colors and design for the new Station.
- ii. 10 Hampton Road has a final walkthrough tomorrow.
- iii. Parks and Rec is preparing for the Powderkeg Beer and Chili Festival this weekend.
- iv. She worked on confidential HR issues over the last two weeks.

d. Select Board Committee Reports

- i. Ms. Gilman attended a 250th Commission meeting, and the committee voted not to do any fireworks in 2026. That group is looking to create a purpose statement for people to use when soliciting donations, using words from the Constitution or something more specific to Exeter. She missed the Tax Exemption Committee meeting. HDC had one case for Front Street, an addition which is sensitive to the original building and won't be visible from the street.
- ii. Ms. Belanger attended an election law webinar. She attended a Planning Board sitewalk at 73 Winter Street for the Presbyterian Church, and they considered the case at the meeting that night. That project was approved. Also approved were an application for a shoreland conditional use permit on Powder Mill Road and an application for Eversource to provide routine maintenance.
- iii. Ms. Cowan had no report.
- iv. Mr. Chartrand had no report.
- v. Mr. Papakonstantis said he attended a Pairpoint Park Advisory Meeting that started with a quorum but a few people left and they had to end the meeting.

e. Correspondence

- i. An abutter notice from the Town of Hampton for a proposal for 169 Ocean Boulevard. Ms. Gilman asked if the town wants representation at that hearing. Mr. Papakonstantis said the Board is stretched pretty thin.
- ii. A notice from Gannett that they are going paperless.

9. Review Board Calendar

- a. The next meetings are October 14, October 27, November 10, November 24, December 8, and December 22.

10. Non-Public Session

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to enter into non-public under RSA 91-A:3II(a). Ms. Cowan seconded. In a roll call vote, the motion passed 5-0 and the meeting entered non-public session at 9:20 PM.

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to exit non-public at 9:17 pm. Mr. Chartrand seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

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

11. Adjournment

MOTION: Ms. Belanger moved to adjourn the Select Board meeting at 9:18 pm. Ms. Cowan seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell
Recording Secretary