

MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 2, 2023 SELECT BOARD MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT: Board Members Chair Mike Houghton, Joe Anderson; Vice Chair Allison Knab was not present.

OTHER ATTENDEES: David Moore, Town Administrator; Christiane McAllister, Police Chief Anthony King, Planning & Community Development Director Mark Connors

Mr. Houghton requested a motion on the draft minutes. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the minutes of Sept 18, 2023 and September 28, 2023. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton opened the Public Hearing to discuss the donation of a second set of fire gear. Fire Chief Jeff Denton spoke in support of accepting the \$50,000 donation from the Stratham Volunteer Fire Department Association which has been raised through various fundraisers for the purpose of providing a second set of fire gear. A second set of gear enhances readiness, provides protection of firefighters from carcinogens. \$50,000 will buy 10 sets. Upon hearing no further discussion or comments from the public, Mr. Houghton motioned to close the Public Hearing. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Mr. Anderson motioned to accept the donation of \$50,000 from the Stratham Fire Association for a second set of turnout gear. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton called attention to the other Fire Department agenda items. Mr. Moore explained why the Morgera Room Policy needed clarification and updating. Mr. Houghton suggested requiring a credit card be kept on file in the event clean up isn't done properly the user would be charged a specific fee. Mr. Moore agreed to revisit that and the fee policy in general at a later date. Mr. Houghton observed that the policy still said "Interim". With the removal of the word "Interim", Mr. Houghton motioned to accept the revised policy on the Morgera Room. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore recalled that at the last meeting a ride in the fire truck and/or police cruiser was offered as a prize for the golf tournament. He clarified that this would be adding another event to the First Responder Golf Raffle. Chief Denton said this has been done before and received a great reception, making it a good fundraiser. Mr. Houghton motioned to approve that a raffle be held at the First Responders Golf Tournament for a ride to school in a fire truck/police cruiser. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Mr. Connors who came before the board to discuss an update to the building department fees he is beginning to work on. Depending on the type of project, the criteria on which the fee is based can vary a great deal. Most towns have moved to a fee model based on the total cost of the project, such as \$8 per \$1,000 for residential projects; commercial projects might be \$1 per \$100. Stratham sees primarily residential projects. Currently, we utilize the square footage of the project. He noted larger towns also impose extra fees. He compared what the permit fee would be using a cost basis vs square footage basis. Typically, our fees are less than surrounding towns. Mr. Connors went on to say that some of our commercial fees are capped (electrical, HVAC, etc.) at \$350. This is not done for residential

projects, resulting in higher fees. Commercial projects are more complicated, warranting higher fees.

In addition, we give commercial permits a discount based on the expense of the project. This results in smaller projects costing more than the larger projects. We are the only town that gives discounts for large projects.

In summary, Mr. Connors would like to simplify the process. He is not ready to make a formal proposal at this time but is suggesting \$.75 per cent per dollar for residential and a 1% on the dollar for commercial projects. Mr. Connors compared the fees to other towns. He also suggests a discount for residential for HVAC and electrical permits. Mr. Connors wants to investigate the proposed change in more detail, but wanted the Board's feedback before going further. The Board supports moving forward.

Mr. Houghton recognized former Town Administrator Paul Deschaine who gave a historical perspective on the fee structure. He pointed out several potential issues with the proposed change, but acknowledged no system is perfect. Mr. Connors thanked him for his input.

Next, Mr. Connors reported on Open Space planning. There is a 17-acre property which abuts SMS and is also used as part of the Stratham trail system. The Town has been interested in acquiring the property for a long time. Recently an appraisal was done. Because the property is landlocked and has steep slopes, the appraisal was quite low, \$150,000. The owners have agreed to sell the land at that price. The Conservation Commission is seeking a grant for a little more than half of that cost for the purchase. We are hopeful that we can obtain the property with the assistance of the grant and remaining funding from the Conservation Fund.

Mr. Connors said the MS4 annual report was submitted last week. He was appreciative of the teamwork with DPW, noting it was a big effort to complete the work. Requirements have been increasing year after year. CIP money might be required in the future to make sure we are hitting the marks we are supposed to hit.

Mr. Connors has been working with Ms. Cronin, Library Director, to make AV improvements to the Hutton Rm and Room A. The Board agreed the technology advances were needed and encouraged the research to continue. The group is also recommending looking at issues of comfort in the Room A meeting room, including a new seating solution.

Next, Mr. Connors spoke about going through a process with ISO, which is a collection of insurance companies. They assign a grade based on our Fire Inspections and Building permits (1 is best, 10 is worst). The last time this was done (2013) we received a 4, which is better than state average. This rating matters because any time there is a property liability, this is the metric they use.

Mr. Connors reported that Ms. Chirichiello the new office coordinator is settling in very well. They are still utilizing Mr. Rowell as interim inspector.

Lastly, Mr. Connors said the Planning Board is finalizing the language for the zoning amendments which must be done by Dec. They are also going through site regulations.

Mr. Houghton recognized Police Chief Anthony King who gave a brief history on the Taser lease. Their current Tasers are being discontinued next year. Sergeant Doucette negotiated an upgrade and a new lease, reducing the cost from \$60,000 to \$43,000. He hopes to add to his budget line for new equipment. Mr. Houghton inquired about a reduction in price if we purchased them outright. Chief King explained that the value in the equipment line item has risen because of an increase in the number of officers. In addition, technology has quadrupled and the cost of cartridges is also included in the price. Mr. Houghton summarized that this request would add \$9,500 to the line item budget for the next four years. Mr. Moore asked for timeline for the purchase. Chief King indicated he would like to make the purchase ASAP to avoid a price increase. Sgt. Doucette offered to contact the company to answer Mr. Houghton's question on an outright purchase and the cost of delaying the purchase. Mr. Houghton asked about other options. Chief King said there weren't any. Chief King offered to rework the numbers, possibly asking for a reduced number of Tasers. Ms. McAllister noted that any time we have a multi-year lease, the lease has to include a clause to indicate that it is depending on whether the budget is approved. Mr. Houghton supports obtaining the Tasers but wants to ensure we receive the best price. Mr. Moore suggested bring it back Oct 16. All agreed.

Mr. Houghton called attention to the Community Power item on the agenda. Mr. Moore stated that the Energy Commission recommends the Select Board state their intent to move forward with CPCNH as the competitive energy provider, which we are required to do under our Plan. They recommend CPCNH. Town counsel has reviewed the documents. This action is subject to Town Meeting approval. Mr. Anderson motioned to select Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire as Stratham's competitive energy provider under RSA 53-E. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton called attention to the other Police Department items. Chief King referred to a discussion in a previous meeting regarding the Highway Safety Grant of \$8,200. As part of the grant, we must submit the minutes when the grant was accepted. A formal acceptance was missing from the minutes. Mr. Anderson motioned to accept the \$8,200 in funding from the DOS Highway Safety grant for the year 2024. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Moore clarified the Board had previously only signed the document.

Chief King acknowledged that the Town is in need of a replacement vehicle, which they could release. However, they are able to purchase a new 2023 Tahoe out of the Detail Fund which currently has a balance of \$101,000. Purchasing and equipping the new vehicle would cost \$60,000. Delaying the purchase would increase the cost by approximately \$6,000. Mr. Anderson confirmed that this is to replace an existing vehicle. He then asked for a spreadsheet detailing the various town vehicles, to which dept. they belong, who was eligible to drive them, etc. Ms. McAllister said we don't currently have a spreadsheet with that specific information, but it could easily be assembled because of the information we must provide to Primex. Mr. Houghton noted that if we move forward with this, we won't need to carry the line item in 2024. Mr. Houghton motioned to move forward with the purchase of a 2023 Tahoe at a cost of a total

of \$63,000 with said funds coming from the Police Detail Fund to replace an existing vehicle. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 8:04 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II(c) to discuss a matter which, if discussed in public, would likely affect the reputation of another. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Anderson-yes

At 9:22 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to come out of the non-public session and seal the minutes noting failure to do so may render a proposed action invalid. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

ADMINISTRATION

Referring to upcoming budget planning, Mr. Moore was informed that there would likely be a 15.4 – 15.6% increase in HealthTrust rates.

Mr. Moore said recruitment efforts continue for the Finance Assistant and DPW Director positions.

Next Mr. Moore reported that he, along with DPW Coordinator Jenn Schaaff, and Town Clerk/Tax Collector Deborah Bakie met with the Cemetery Trustees. The group has followed-up on recommendations from the State to make changes to the cemetery deed. It will no longer be an interest in land to be recorded at the Registry, which is cumbersome, expensive and not the recommended practice in NH. It is being re-written by legal as a Right to Inter. They are also working to make clarifications to the cemetery land funds in order to ensure usage to offset expense to the Town for cemetery maintenance. To ensure that we are going to benefit in the future from having funds for general maintenance for the cemetery, we will be collecting general maintenance funds instead of setting up individual perpetual care funds. We will research options for utilizing perpetual care funds and potentially going thru process with State to change legal status to make them accessible.

The police parking lot paving project is moving forward. Ms. Schaaff is working with Bell & Flynn and Chief King.

Mr. Moore said he met with Rockingham Planning Commission staff, the Portsmouth City Manager, and Greenland Town Administrator to discuss the long-term planning needs for the Rt 33 corridor. The RPC is drafting a letter in coordination with the communities along the corridor and he will bring it to the Board for their signature.

RESERVATIONS

Mr. Houghton moved to Reservations. Mr. Moore received a request through Mr. Hickey from the Scouts who wish to camp at Stratham Hill Park overnight on Oct. 14th and 13th. They plan to camp out of the way at the old site in woods. This is a similar request as in the past. Mr. Houghton motioned to allow the Scouts to utilize the park for overnight camping on the nights of Oct. 13 and 14 as requested. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

APPOINTMENT

Mr. Houghton motioned to appoint Drew Bedard to an alternate position on the Heritage Commission for a term of three years. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Discussion about Heritage Commission membership ensued, noting there were some discrepancies. Mr. Moore will follow up.

At 9:36 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary