

MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 1, 2022 SELECT BOARD MEETING

Meeting held in the Hutton Room at the Stratham Municipal Center

MEMBERS PRESENT: Board Members Chair Mike Houghton, Vice Chair Allison Knab, Joe Anderson

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator David Moore, Finance Administrator Christiane McAllister

At 7:00 pm Mr. Houghton opened the meeting.

The minutes from the October 20, 2022 Select Board meeting were still being reviewed by Mr. Moore.

Mr. Houghton recognized Police Chief Anthony King for his department report. He began by reviewing the active shooter event that took place at SHP on Oct. 27th. It was a successful event with over 230 people involved. Actors, Homeland Security, 23 different area departments and various municipalities participated. Currently, we are waiting for the evaluation from Homeland Security on our response and collaboration efforts.

Next, Chief King reported that the initial draft of his department's budget has been submitted. He thanked Ms. McAllister for her assistance, recognizing her as being a tremendous asset. Performance evaluations are now underway. The department had their first year review as part of CALEA. He praised Police Administrative Assistant Kate Drago for her outstanding work assisting him in the policy review process. They passed the review with no problems.

Chief King said that he is waiting for a deployment date to begin using body worn cameras. Prior to implementation, they'll review the policies and training with staff. Once it is closer to deployment, he will do a media release. He expects to begin using the cameras by Christmas.

Chief King thanked Mr. Anderson for being on the hiring committee for the full time officer position. He described the difficulties in finding a qualified candidate. He has identified one who has met all the requirements; we are waiting on a background check.

Chief King spoke about promotions within the department. There have been two sergeant promotions and a lieutenant promotion. Once Sergeant Emerson retires, the second promotion will be made. A swearing in ceremony will be held.

Finally, Chief King directed attention to the dog issues at Stratham Hill Park. To curb some of the complaints they've been receiving about dogs at the park, he's increased presence of the officers there. He feels this is a temporary approach. Chief King introduced the idea of an animal control officer (ACO). He is recommending it be a salaried, yearly position with assigned hours; either part-time or on-call. Mr. Houghton inquired about the drivers behind his request. Chief King explained that he sees a gap in coverage for these types of calls. The park is a destination for many people with dogs; they are not all residents. The police receive an

average of 250-300 calls annually but Parks & Recreation receives more calls and complaints. He feels it's time to create this position to assist the officers and help them do their job.

Parks and Recreation Director Seth Hickey expressed appreciation for the increased police presence at the park. There are signs indicating when dogs must be leashed but people weren't adhering to the rules. The police have been helpful in enforcing the regulations. Mr. Hickey observed that there are multiple parks; each one has its own rules. He is trying to be proactive in making people aware of the rules and regulations as it pertains to our ordinances. There has been growing concern about dogs and behavior at the park. We need a more sustained way of supporting the animal issues in town. Chief King added that an ACO could assist with education, outreach and community engagement. The Police Dept. survey results indicated 106 yes, we need an ACO and 41 no's. Chief King explained that the no's were a result of residents not understanding the need behind the request. Mr. Houghton supported the idea of proactively engaging the community by talking about the transition over the years and the burden it places on the officers to do their work.

Fire Chief Denton spoke in support for the ACO position noting that our EMTs have responded to several dog bite calls recently. It would be valuable to have someone knowledgeable about animals so they can deal with the patient.

Ms. Knab inquired about the regulatory authority of the ACO. Chief King said that they can write citations but are not sworn officers.

Mr. Houghton directed attention to the proposed change to the parking ordinance for the lot off of Jack Rabbit Lane. Mr. Hickey began by recalling that in June parking access to the lot off of Jack Rabbit Lane was temporarily restricted to residents only on the recommendations of the Trail Management Advisory Committee, the Conservation Commission and the Stratham Hill Park Association. This was done in an attempt to reduce the traffic in that small space. Traffic spills onto the fields because the lot gets overfull on weekends. Typically, the lot is closed during mud season and sometimes during snowfall. The trial period is coming to an end and, after seeing the benefits of the closure, all committees, and the police, support the parking ban becoming an ordinance. It is important to note that this parcel of land is Town Forest and under different set of rules than the park.

Next, Mr. Hickey discussed how parking on Jack Rabbit Lane has been restricted for the past several years. It is extremely difficult for the DPW and for emergency vehicles to go down that road if cars are parked on the sides. The Police Chief would be able to waive this restriction for certain events.

Mr. Hickey explained that they've been determining proof of residency by requiring Transfer Station stickers. Going forward, the police will run the plates of vehicles without stickers. Non-residents may park in the main lot. Mr. Hickey presented the draft Ordinance for the Board's consideration. In response to Mr. Anderson's enforcement question, Chief King said it would be considered a parking ticket violation. He would like to adjust some of the fees to ensure they are in line with surrounding communities. Mr. Hickey said that although they saw initial compliance with the changes, it quickly waned. He'll continue using signs and social media to educate the

park users. This ordinance would allow for enforcement. The group discussed what appears to be an increase in traffic. Ms. Knab asked that Mr. Hickey notify and include the Conservation Commission about signs in the town forest. He assured her that he would include the Conservation Commission as well as the Stratham Hill Park Association and the Trail Management Advisory Committee in any proposed changes.

Mr. Moore joined the meeting.

Mr. Anderson congratulated Chief King on being appointed as Vice Chairman of the NH Police Accreditation Commission.

Mr. Houghton recognized Fire Chief Jeff Denton for his department report. Chief Denton began by giving an overview of the Active Shooter exercise. He felt it was a successful event and a good opportunity to work with the Police Department. Some areas were identified as a needing improvement.

Chief Denton submitted his department's budget to Ms. McAllister. He spoke about costs of dues, EMS supplies and gas and oil increasing. The cost of fire gear is up and there is supply chain issues. The fleet is older; he will need to budget for vehicle maintenance. Mr. Houghton asked about replacing them. Chief Denton described the long lead time involved, noting we still don't have the new ambulance.

He continued, describing the impacts to the Fire Dept. budget regarding building security and payroll. The payroll budget is underspent because of lack of personnel to fill 100% of the shifts. Recruiting new personnel will be a focus going forward. He described the difficulty in getting people interested in joining the dept. He has considered going to a paramedic level, which would open the pool, but would cost more too. Mr. Houghton spoke about generating interest in high school students. Chief Denton is supportive of this idea but said that finding instructors is a problem, as is not being able to test until you are 18. They discussed planting the idea of a career in fire service in younger children in groups such as the Scouts.

Next, Chief Denton reported on fire inspections. There is a big gap in what we should be doing and the capability of what we can do. He and Deputy Fire Chief Josh Crow have been doing all the inspections. It is a tremendous amount of work to ask of a volunteer. He and Deputy Crow are in class and will be certified as Fire Inspector I by the middle of this month. Chief Denton described an inspection at CMS and the follow up reports that are necessary. It is a job that takes experience and knowledge. Completing the reports are difficult and time consuming. In addition to schools, there are many other locations in town that need inspections. Regular inspections are important for life safety; some businesses lose sight of the hazards. Because the CEO/BI and Planner's jobs are linked to fire inspections, he is planning to have quarterly meetings with them to ensure a more coordinated response. Chief Denton then proposed hiring a part-time fire inspector. Not necessarily as the sole provider, but someone to lead the program, build it, make sure we are following the code, and provide peace of mind in terms of compliance with state law and fire codes. He and Deputy Crow will provide supplementary services. Ideally, the candidate would already be qualified and have experience dealing with fire codes. They discussed inspection fees in general and the time involved in performing inspections. His

initial proposal for the Fire Inspector is two 8-hour days, however, this will likely increase. Mr. Houghton acknowledged that former Fire Chief Matt Larrabee had brought the issue to their attention previously and agreed the town should be more accountable. To obtain community support for a fire inspector, Mr. Houghton asked about number of inspections. Chief Denton indicated he could report back on that and responded that it is much more involved than going on inspections – it is responding to businesses questions, fire pump issues, change of use permits, occupancy changes – all these make a difference in fire codes. Chief Denton continued, saying the inspection fees will not cover an inspector's salary. Mr. Moore agreed that we need to revisit the fees. The Board commended Chief Denton for identifying this gap and taking the class needed (along with Deputy Crow).

Mr. Houghton recognized Mr. Marchese who spoke in support of Chief Denton's request for a Fire Inspector.

Chief Denton continued his report saying that the Fire Engine Committee is waiting for bids to come in and will be making a recommendation for Engine 1 within the next week or two. It will be a significant cost (approximately \$800,000) and approximately a 2 year wait to receive it. New trucks are expected to be in service for 15 – 20 years.

Finally, Chief Denton explained the need for a second set of fire gear for each responder. Gear must be washed immediately after use, which is a lengthy process. If a second fire comes in, he cannot use the staff that responded to the first fire. Secondly, there is a growing concern of cancer causing chemicals on dirty gear. It's his responsibility to ensure the safety for his staff. Once an order is placed, it can take a year to receive it. Each outfit expires in 10 years. The department has succeeded in raising \$25,000 in donations for this need. Lights 4 Lives will be supporting this fundraiser this year to offset the funds needed for this. Mr. Moore assured him that if the board supports this purchase, we can ensure a sustainable and regular investment to keep it going when we understand the costs and the replacement schedules. Mr. Houghton wondered why we haven't done this before now. Chief Denton responded that it is funding. There is a large initial investment. In addition, new research has confirmed the danger of carcinogens on the gear seeping in to skin. He is aware of young firefighters passing away from cancer. He explained the time consuming process for cleaning the gear and the protective measures they take with dirty gear. Regarding the Lights 4 Lives fundraiser, he said they would like to have the parade, then hold an outdoor event at the park. He asked for and received the Board's support. He also asked to waive the alcohol prohibition for the department holiday party. Mr. Houghton motioned to waive the alcohol prohibition at the Morgera Room for the Fire Department holiday party on December 3. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Town Assessor Chris Murdough for her department report. Referring to a handout with a list of appeals, she noted that the first two had been settled. We are still awaiting word from BTLA on the Lindt case. The hearing for Pipers Landing will be on Dec. 21st. She will have more information at a later date. Ocean State Job Lot filed with Superior Court; our attorney will be handling that. We are looking for commercial appraisers to be able to testify to market value.

Ms. Murdough continued explaining she researched the history of tax rates going back to 2004 and can see what we're trending towards for 2022. She is working on the equalization which is due to DRA by Dec. 15. They publish the ratio early 2023.

Ms. Murdough reported that it will soon be time for the next re-valuation. Mr. Moore reminded the Board that the Town has an annual contract with Ms. Murdough for assessing services. That work is supplemented by our former assessing assistant. Mr. Moore discussed the impact of the ratio on those looking to appeal their commercial appraisal. We have been considering moving our re-valuation up to best manage the risk associated with commercial assessments, in particular, taking advantage of these lower ratios for a two year period. They continued to discuss how escalation of residential sales drives the ratio down. It takes time for the market to turn around.

Mr. Moore suggested he draft a RFP by the end of the year to secure an appraisal firm and lock in a price, allowing us the option of moving forward in 2023 or 2024. He believes finding a commercial appraiser may be difficult which is part of the rationale for moving in advance of the planned timeline. Mr. Moore said he wanted to introduce the idea with Ms. Murdough present and get some initial feedback; he would like to confer with the Town's counsel handing our assessing cases and return to the Board with more information.

At 8:36 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II (a) (c) and (e). Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes.

At 9:30 p.m. Mr. Houghton motioned to seal the minutes in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, III noting that divulgence of the information would render the proposed action of the board ineffective. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned to open the public hearing to review the ordinance for solid waste. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Houghton asked for comments on the proposed revised solid waste ordinance. Upon hearing none, Mr. Houghton motioned to close the public hearing. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Moore recommended a third public hearing on Dec. 3. Upon doing some research, he was unable to determine that the town adopted the appropriate RSA to allow the Select Board to set fees. He is recommending a Warrant Article to be voted on at Town Meeting to allow the Select Board to set fees.

Noting the hour, Mr. Moore requested moving the capital program discussion to Nov. 21; he would send the draft materials the Board tomorrow in preparation for the next meeting.

Mr. Houghton brought attention to the Nov. 8 election preparations. Mr. Moore reported that Town Clerk/Tax Collector Deborah Bakie has preparations well in hand. To support the clerks, Mr. Hickey bought "I heart my town clerk's" buttons for the staff to wear. Former Select Board member Joseph Lovejoy will be standing in for Mr. Houghton at the election. Referencing the discussion related to pro-tem Select Board members at the last meeting, Mr. Moore indicated he

would suggest a schedule of appointments utilizing known residents who will be at the polls and are eligible to be designated as pro-tems. They discussed their coverage for Election Day.

Mr. Houghton brought attention to the request from the Amateur Radio Emergency Service to use top of hill at SHP on Nov. 5. Ms. Knab motioned approval to let Amateur Radio to use the top of the hill on Nov. 5th. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Houghton noted that Nathan Allison has submitted his application for the Planning Board. Ms. Knab motioned to appoint Brent Scott to the Recreation Commission. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Anderson said that he knows Mr. Allison and, with his background in civil engineering, he would be a desirable addition to the Planning Board. They observed that Mr. Allison would have to attend a Planning Board meeting before being considered for appointment. The Board chair also needs to recommend.

Mr. Moore said that the Moderator has made the appointments to the Budget Advisory Committee. Many members are returning. Tracy Abbott will be the new addition. The Moderator has reached out to the School Board to ensure we have a representative. The Moderator also appoints the financial advisory committee to the school board: Lester Cuff, Heidi Hansen and Kevin Madly have been appointed to serve in that role. Also, a Select Board representative is designated. Mr. Moore noted upcoming dates for the FAC meetings. He will work with Mr. Houghton at a later time to decide whom the Select Board representative will be.

Mr. Moore received a request from the Library to release CIP Library Improvement funds in the amount of \$11,836.19 for installation of a book drop. This improvement was discussed at a previous meeting. Our DPW will be doing the work. Ms. Knab motioned approval of release of the Library related CIP funds up to \$12,000. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore said he could not find the vote where funds were released for replacement of DPW Truck 10. We now have a more precise number than was previously presented - \$235,000, which includes emergency lights, hydraulic sander, plow assemblies, etc. To ensure there is a vote on record, Mr. Moore requested the Board reaffirm the vote. Mr. Anderson motioned to release funds up to \$235,000 from the CIP Stratham Highway Vehicle Capital Reserve Fund for the purpose of replacing Truck 10 which was in the CIP for purchase in 2022. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore noted that the DPW Director has reported that one of our rental units will need significant work totaling \$11,300. This raised a more general question of a planning for the future needs of all town owned rental properties. Mr. Moore asked if the Board wanted to view the properties. The Board enthusiastically agreed. He will post the meeting when it is set up. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the release of up to \$11,300 from the Town Buildings and Grounds Maintenance Fund for the repairs to the rental property as stated. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Anderson asked about the status of the DPW Administrative Assistant. He voiced strong support for the position. He said we have the financial ability to fund the position now. The payroll line item is underspent because they were unable to hire a

crew lead. This position was restructured and filled by current staff. Ms. McAllister suggested having someone from this building be in the DPW with this person temporarily to assist with onboarding. The board agreed that a job description should be drafted. Mr. Moore will follow up.

Mr. Moore noted that business cards were done for each of them with their personal emails. He suggested they be redone and that residents contact them through the website.

Mr. Moore said that we are waiting to hear from the State for revenue finalization that allows us to set the tax rate. The Board plans to have a preliminary meeting to review the tax rate setting, recommit to the fund balance use and the overall strategy. Ms. McAllister explained that final revenues are pending. Once DRA receives the signed revised revenues, they'll set a preliminary tax rate. The tax rate can be adjusted by modifying the amount we use for fund balance or modifying amount applied for abatements. We are tracking on the projected rate which is the same as last year.

Ms. McAllister reported that the auditors were here last week. We are awaiting Comstar documents for final receivables for the ambulance service. We should be receiving the audit in January.

Ms. Knab motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary