

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 19, 2022 SELECT BOARD MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT: Board Members Chair Mike Houghton, Joe Anderson

ABSENT: Vice Chair Allison Knab

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator David Moore, Finance Administrator Christiane McAllister, Fire Chief Jeff Denton, Police Chief Anthony King

Mr. Houghton opened the meeting at 6:24 and motioned to go in to 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 adversely the reputation of another. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-Yes; Anderson-Yes

At 7:05 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to come out of the non-public session and seal the minutes noting failure to do so would render a proposed action ineffective. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the Select Board minutes from December 5 and December 14, 2022. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Dan Crow of the Volunteer Fire Dept. Association who introduced Deputy Fire Chief Josh Crow and Les Barker, Treasurer of the Golf Tournament. Deputy Crow reported the event was, once again, very successful. He expressed appreciation for the rest of the committee members who worked hard to ensure this event went well. He then asked Lt. Pierce and Chief King to accept the donation of \$29,465.11 from the First Responder Golf Tournament. This is a 50/50 split between the Fire Dept. and the Police Dept. The Board congratulated them on a job well done. Chief King noted that last year's revenue went towards body worn cameras. Deputy Crow said that some of the revenue this year will be allocated a second set of bunker gear for the fire dept. to keep them as safe as possible and to raise awareness of cancer among firefighters.

Mr. Houghton recognized members of the Energy Commission. Joe Van Gombos gave a summary of the Energy Commission's research on community power. Community power is a way for residents and municipalities to band together to obtain a lower rate on electricity. The process involves forming a committee, drafting a plan, creating a warrant article. If the article is adopted, it would then be submitted to the Public Utility Company. If approved by them, a consultant would be hired to manage the activities. There would be public forums while drafting the plan and then (if adopted), there would be public forums to make residents aware of their options. There appears to be no down-side to pursuing this program. They discussed the timeline of the warrant article, public hearings and implementation. Mr. Houghton motioned, as authorized in RSA 53-6, the Select Board hereby individually appoints the members of the Stratham Energy Commission to serve as members of the Town of Stratham Energy Aggregation Committee. Those appointees are Matt O'Keefe, Joe Van Gombos, Charlie Case, Mike Ream, Mike Welty and Joe Anderson. The Committee's charge shall be to develop an Energy Aggregation Plan in accordance with RSA 53-E and the committee's term shall sunset on April

1, 2024. In accordance with the RSA, the plan shall be prepared for Select Board consideration to advance to a Town Meeting. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Fire Chief Denton for his department report. He reviewed the year, calling particular attention to the transfer of leadership, the Homeland Security exercise, Summerfest (in place of the Fair), the Golf Tournament, and the Lights 4 Lives fundraiser drawing awareness to increased cancer rates among firefighters. He recognized several members of the department who advanced their certifications.

As mentioned at a previous meeting, he hopes to hire a Fire Inspector. He has formed a Recruiting and Retention Committee. Deputy Crow is heading up a Training Committee. They intend to reformulate and reorganize trainings. Although there has been some delays, they should be receiving the new ambulance in 2023.

Chief Denton reported that all schools have been inspected by the deadline. They received correspondence from the Fire Marshal's office commending them for their reporting in 2021. Lt. Dardani was heading up that program.

Chief Denton expressed concern with 28 Portsmouth Ave. The fire pond hasn't been dredged due to delays with contractors. Currently, they do not have a sprinkler system and are doing a nightly fire watch.

In an effort to address Mr. Houghton's previous questions regarding inspections and permits, Chief Denton submitted a spreadsheet with types of permits (approximately 30) that we should be doing. We are able to collect fees for these permits. He reiterated that hiring a Fire Inspector who is knowledgeable about the fire codes would be extremely valuable.

They are testing AT&T First Net with the ambulances and it is working well. It's slightly more expensive but provides better connectivity throughout town.

Mr. Houghton asked if the Opticon lights were working properly. Chief Denton described damage to the Market Basket location. Mr. Moore thought the issue was resolved. He will follow up with the DPW Director.

Chief Denton reported that we have a recommendation from the Fire Engine Truck Committee. It is estimated to cost approximately \$941,000. It's a good quality truck that should last 15 – 20 years.

Mr. Moore explained that the request for a Fire Inspector will go before the Budget Advisory Committee. Chief will make a case for the position. Mr. Houghton asked about health inspections. Mr. Moore said the building inspector is our health officer, but the restaurants rely on the State food inspection program.

Mr. Houghton recognized Police Chief Anthony King who thanked the Board for participating in the swearing in ceremony. The new officer will start January 9th. Body worn cameras will be in

use the beginning of January. Chief King developed the policy in line with CALEA standards but also in line with the NH Attorney General's guidance and the NH RSA on the program.

Chief King reported meeting with Bob McGrath who helped the Town of Rye establish their Animal Control Officer position. Mr. McGrath suggested starting with 16 hours a week, salaried position. Ms. McAllister asked about the vehicle the officer would use. Chief King described some options from the cars currently in service. They can outfit it with a kennel from their budget.

Chief King plans to hold a Civilian Police Academy in February. After discussions with residents, it appears there will be a good community response. He gave a brief description of the program.

Ms. McAllister noted that there is a \$600 line item for an Animal Control Officer that appears through the DRA every year. Three part-time officers have been budgeted for; two will be filled by officers moving to part-time after retirement.

Chief King was happy to report that the toy drive was extremely successful. Every year bypasses the previous year.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Houghton recognized Ms. McAllister for an update on the banking transition. Ms. McAllister explained that the main objective for the banking transition was to consolidate bank accounts, choose one banking institution, and institute fraud protection. It was a time-consuming, involved process which is almost complete. The accounts have been reduced to five. The General Fund has the highest level of fraud protection. She described the safeguards that are in place regarding check writing. In addition to three check writing accounts (General Fund, EMS Fund and Rec Revolving Fund) are a Disbursement Fund which operates like a segregated savings account and an Electronic Deposit Account, which is part of the General Fund. By isolating daily electronic receipts into one account, it is easier to reconcile the accounts.

The Select Board thanked her for all the work she put into this project. Ms. McAllister expressed appreciation for the cooperation and assistance she received from the Town Clerks office. She explained how involved the process was for them. She was also grateful for the cooperation she received from Town Treasurer Tracy Abbott and Accounting and Benefits Coordinator Shandy Supit.

Mr. Moore moved the conversation to the Eversource request. Mr. Anderson inquired about liability. Mr. Moore believes there is indemnification language in the letter but will obtain confirmation from legal counsel. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the Eversource Energy temporary access as outlined in the letter to include the indemnification and authorize the Town Administrator to enter into that agreement. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Next, Mr. Moore addressed the Veteran's Credit item on the agenda. The State recently changed the law and expanded eligibility. They are requiring communities to re-adopt the law as

amended. This is an opportunity for us to revisit the level of credit we offer. At this time, there isn't a way to estimate the cost impact of this change. The Public Hearing on the Warrant is scheduled for February 6th.

Mr. Moore reported that the line item budget has been sent to department heads. There is a 2.2% increase in the budget. Some of the increase is associated with the addition of three new positions. Mr. Moore is working on the department head line up for the Budget Advisory Committee meetings. He hopes to take the CIP to the Planning Board on Wednesday. ARPA funds will be used to defray some of the expenses in the CIP.

Mr. Anderson asked about the impact an economic downturn would have on the Town. Ms. McAllister replied that the biggest impact would be in motor vehicle registrations, as this is our highest revenue source.

Mr. Moore is working on a narrative and presentations for the Budget Advisory Committee. Mr. Anderson compared last year's budget to this years. Ms. McAllister reminded the group that the tax rate is calculated on the budget, not the actual.

Mr. Anderson noted that some compensation line items were listed individually and some were grouped by department. He recommended it be presented consistently. Ms. McAllister explained that, historically, payroll is divided by salary, wage payroll and part-time payroll. They discussed why it might have been presented that way. They agreed to make it consistent throughout the report.

Mr. Anderson also observed that there is a "compensation adjustments" line under Personnel and questioned if it should be in each department. Ms. McAllister responded that it is reflected in both areas. The compensation adjustment line was kept so that in the future, adjustments, not raises, could be made. Currently, the payroll items reflect a true amount of 4% above the past years' wage or salary. Making a change to these items is complex. She and Mr. Moore will discuss further at a later time.

Mr. Houghton asked about any encumbrances or expenses that might affect year end balances. Although she wasn't aware of anything significant, Ms. McAllister said there will be changes to the fund balance due to 2022 expenses still coming in in January. She observed that the budget is tight, but offers a small cushion, as it should. She talked about impacts to the fund balance.

ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Anderson moved to accept the resignation of Jason Warren from the DPW. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

As discussed in a previous meeting, Mr. Moore reported that we've been invited to submit an application for improvements to the Stratham Historical Society building. The lease for that building is with the Library Trustees and the Town and will need to be discussed further at a later time.

Mr. Moore will ensure the assessing form regarding equalization will be in the folder for signatures on Wednesday.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

Mr. Moore stated that the Governor and Council will act on our \$350,000 PFAS application.

Boards & Commissions attendance reports have been submitted.

We are part of pilot to provide free water tests for residents. Project Planning Assistant Susan Connors and he are working on a well water workshop to be held in February.

Mr. Anderson directed the conversation to trash collection costs. They speculated that the cost should be decreasing post COVID and wondered if this is an area that can be reduced. They discussed the reason for the rise and fall attributing the spike to more residents working from home. It was felt the 2023 budgeted amount was too high. Mr. Moore will follow up with DPW Director Nate Mears.

RESERVATIONS

New Life Baptist Church requested use of Room A under the same conditions as the past. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the New Life Baptist Church request for continued use of Room A based on the same arrangement as in the past. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Houghton motioned to reappoint the three members to the Conservation Commission for three year terms to expire 2025. Those members being Timothy Copeland, William Kenny and Kyle Saltonstall. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept the resignation of Pamela Hollasch from the Planning Board. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 8:55 pm Mr. Houghton made a motion 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 adversely the reputation of another. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-Yes; Anderson-Yes

At 9:24 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to come out of the non-public session and seal the minutes noting failure to do so would render a proposed action ineffective. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 9:25 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard, Recording Secretary