

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 1, 2021 SELECT BOARD MEETING

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING: Board Members Chair Mike Houghton, Vice Chair Joe Lovejoy, Board Member Allison Knab along with Town Administrator David Moore, Finance Administrator Dawna Duhamel and Parks & Recreation Director Seth Hickey.

The Board Chair opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Lovejoy motioned to approve the minutes from January 25, 2021 as presented. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Mr. Hickey to give his department report. Mr. Hickey addressed the formation of ad hoc committee whose purpose would be to review the recommendations and concerns raised by the trail assessment report, make policy recommendations and develop strategies for necessary improvements as found in the report and submit recommendations to the Select Board. It will also serve as a public forum for input regarding the trail system. Other committees, such as the Conservation Commission, PCAC and Park Association are also proposed to be represented. There has already been a great deal of interest from the community. Mr. Lovejoy emphasized that applicants be interested in the broad, comprehensive use of the park and not one specific aspect of its use. Ms. Knab motioned for Mr. Hickey to move forward with forming an ad hoc committee to review the trail management system. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Hickey continued his department report listing the programs that he is hoping to begin in the spring while keeping guidelines regarding pandemic realities in mind. He then raised the issue of events at the park. They discussed the issues and policies in providing activities in light of the pandemic. Mr. Hickey continued his report covering items such as senior programming, the ski program, the ice rink, PCAC, and Conservation Commission Monitoring Reports.

Mr. Houghton moved to item VI, Correspondence – the emails regarding dogs as well as item X. Trail Management Inventory Plan. Resident, Christine Burns, spoke about the many groups enjoying the park and what a beautiful place it is. Resident Elizabeth Graciano-Smith, author of the letter, asked how the company was chosen to do the assessment on the trails. Mr. Hickey replied that of the two recommended vendors, Snowhawk LLC was the most engaged and had the lower price point. Ms. Graciano-Smith noticed a decline in the trails and questioned the cause. Another resident, Mr. Burns, hopes the committee keeps an open mind and has a focused charge. Another resident requested when applications for the committee would be available. Mr. Moore said the application would be coming out through the Select Board Newsletter and the website during the week of February 8th. Resident Stacey Dresser, Stratham Heights Road, wanted more information about the work of the ad hoc committee. Mr. Moore said they would be familiarizing themselves with findings of the report that has been developed and working on recommendations for how to move forward. Intent would be focused on ways the town should move forward by recommending policies or projects to the Board. Resident Jessica Francour requested notes from tonight. Mr. Moore will distribute the charge and narrative. A resident then asked about dogs on or off leash? Mr. Moore explained that this is one among many identified in the report the issues the committee will address.

Hearing nothing further Mr. Houghton recognized Bill Martel who came before the board regarding parcel 18-042-000. He would like to build a single family home on property that is not accessible. Mr. Houghton directed him to the Planning Board for guidance. He advised Planning Board input will be helpful for the Select Board. Mr. Moore will introduce him to the Town Planner Mark Connors.

Mr. Houghton moved on to the next item on the agenda - PFAS remedial action plan and groundwater permit application. Mr. Moore said that we plan to submit the remedial action plan to the state. Due to the evening's weather, the evening's presentation will be rescheduled.

Mr. Houghton directed attention to Finance Administrator Dawna Duhamel who explained that the audit was late this year because of Covid (timing of auditors ability to do field work). She went on to report that it was a good year financially and reviewed the town's financial standing in detail. She explained that once again we received an adverse opinion on GASB Statement 75 related to insurance for retirees. The Board noted that we have received the adverse opinion for many years prior. She and the Board discussed the financial costs and benefits of resolving the issue; the Board determined not to take any action at this time.

Mr. Moore reviewed the upcoming meetings, including the Public Hearing on the Warrant on February 8 and a joint meeting with the Budget Advisory Committee meetings.

Town Meeting was next on the agenda. Mr. Moore noted regional discussion has advocated not postponing town meeting. He has been working with Ester Asbell of SAU16. A Covid friendly way to manage town meeting is to hold it at Exeter High School. Audio-visual support through the school would be available. Overflow spaces would also be available. Ms. Knab attended the school deliberative session and thought it was a safe meeting. The Board discussed the available dates and chose March 27. The typical day of the Friday after the Town Meeting was not available.

Mr. Moore noted there was an abatement request from Chris Murdough for 3 Kirkwall due to an incorrect assessment. The Board approved and executed the abatement request.

Mr. Houghton moved on to the Budget. The BAC meeting was last Monday. As a result of recommendations from that meeting, cuts have been made to the proposed budget. The cuts were discussed. Town meeting expenses, compensation, and library were reduced from what was previously requested. A la carte items, including a DPW lead position and a police officer, were proposed to be funded for half a year. The Fire Dept. would like to increase coverage and training, but also reduced their proposed budget. Adjustments were made to the CIP and CRF. The Police Dept.'s request for body worn cameras could be covered through their Detail Fund versus general taxation. They discussed using the unassigned fund balance for PFAS remediation. Mr. Houghton advocated doing the work later in the year and paying half this year and half next year.

They continued to discuss ways to be responsive to the BAC's recommendations, discussing ways to further reduce expenses, including managing supplies and the town vehicle costs. Some expenses, such as municipal solid waste disposal fees and NH Retirement, are significant budget drivers affecting the overall increase. Each line item in the Operational Budget was reviewed in an attempt at further reductions.

It was decided that the Police Dept.'s body worn cameras should be a Warrant Article. All Board Members supported adding a police officer based on safety concerns of having a lone officer during certain night shifts. Discussion ensued about adding positions. The board agreed that it should be theirs and the department heads responsibility to determine if additional positions are necessary. They reviewed the Fire Departments request for increased coverage and discussed the possibility of a reduction to the full amount. The Board noted all of these issues should be revisited following further input from the BAC.

Mr. Houghton turned the conversation to Highway and Fire Dept. vehicles in the CIP and CRF. Ms. Duhamel created a chart to describe how she allocated funds for the highway capital reserve fund. She explained that in addition to planning to replace vehicles, there needs to be some funds held aside in case of emergency. Mr. Lovejoy wants to keep funding amounts consistent from year to year but doesn't want an excess balance. Mr. Houghton noted that the board's policy is to put together a budgeting process for replacement of vehicles based on that vehicles useful life so that the residential tax rate would remain steady. Mr. Houghton then said he favors repairing the highway vehicle, not replacing it at this time. They discussed what account the repair should come from (Operating Budget).

Next, Ms. Duhamel reported on the conversations she and Fire Chief Matt Larrabee had regarding the Fire Dept. vehicles. Engine 1 will need replacement in 2023. She noted that the Fair has been bringing in less revenue. Ms. Duhamel went through various scenarios for funding the Fire Dept. vehicles. No funds have been set aside to replace Engine 1. It was noted that the BAC expressed concern that there might be an excess of funds in accounts in the future, but this is very unlikely to happen since decisions on what to raise versus expend from revolving funds are made each year.

The Board briefly discussed funding the PFAS response. The Board requested Ms. Duhamel make all the changes discussed at this evenings meeting and give them a revised report tomorrow.

Mr. Houghton motioned to approve the abatement for 3 Kirkwall Drive regarding the error regarding the second floor. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab said that Pat Elwell hopes to stay on as the Conservation Commission Facebook

With concern for safety in light of the snowstorm this evening, they agreed to defer the non-public session to a later date.

At 10:30 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Richard, Recording Secretary