

MINUTES OF THE MARCH 4, 2024 SELECT BOARD MEETING

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

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator David Moore, Finance Administrator Christiane McAllister, Town Clerk/Tax Collector Deborah Bakie, Town Moderator Dave Emanuel, Parks & Recreation Director Seth Hickey

At 6:36 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to open the Select Board meeting and go into a non-public session. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes.

The public session reconvened at 7:05 p.m.

At 7:05 p.m. Mr. Anderson moved to seal the minutes finding that failure to do so would render a proposed action ineffective; Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton began the meeting by recognizing Mr. Moore for the coordination discussion with the Town Moderator and Town Clerk for the Town Meeting preparations. Mr. Moore began by stating that Tuesday, March 12th is Election Day; Saturday, March 16th is Town Meeting at 9:00 am. Voter information night is Thursday, March 7th.

Mr. Moore reviewed the draft Town Meeting agenda. They talked about which Select Board member will motion, second and speak to each article. The citizen's petition was briefly discussed. Because there is no financial impact, the board is not obligated to take a position. Each member of the Board noted their own position, which is not to not support the article as written. Mr. Emanuel felt certain that the Town Elections were a separate entity from the Stratham School District and the Cooperative School. The Town has no jurisdiction over the schools. Mr. Moore will look into the matter.

The group discussed the possibility that a request to reorder the agenda could happen.

Mr. Emanuel stated that he will be traveling but expects to be back the evening of Monday, March 11. Deputy Moderator Beth Dupell is aware in case he is delayed.

Ms. Knab stated that she may be unable to attend the Voter Information Night on Thursday.

The Board thanked Mr. Emanuel and Ms. Bakie for coming in.

Mr. Houghton recognized Seth Hickey for his department report. Mr. Hickey reported on his outreach efforts to increase the attendance of the Parks & Rec programs. Conversation moved to the website. It was felt that it wasn't user friendly. Mr. Hickey has been talking to Library Director Kerry Cronin because she has expressed interest in updating it. Mr. Anderson noted that all departments should be involved in the discussion.

Mr. Hickey noted good communication with the new DPW Director Tim Stevens. A large section of fence around the courts had come down during the storm. Mr. Stevens will work on repairing it and the insurance company has been on site.

Mr. Hickey reviewed his memos. He is working with other committees about addressing the invasive species at the park. With Stroll magazine coming to an end, Mr. Hickey emphasized the need for a communication strategy. Conversation turned to the need for an update to our website but to also identify other means of communication. He will continue to move this forward. New gaga pits are proposed by Rec Commission at the park, with the funds to come from the Recreation Revolving fund. Discussion about placement of the pits ensued. Mr. Hickey will discuss with Mr. Stevens and return to the Board with additional details. Preparations for the Food truck festival have been ongoing for some time. The group talked about keeping the size of the event the same but making enhancements.

Earlier today Mr. Hickey met with UNH students to try to recruit an intern for the summer to assist with communication and social media, and special projects, like Thursday Nights in the Park and Summerfest.

Mr. Hickey introduced a new spreadsheet that will be a regular part of his dashboard report. It lists Parks & Rec projects, including other departments or committees that are involved and funding sources.

Finally, Mr. Hickey gave an update on the Trail Management Advisory Committee. All members are interested in being re-appointed for another term. They plan to focus on user conflicts and policies related to animal control at Stratham Hill Park. Ms. Knab asked about the Committee's charge and how it relates to the trail management and animal control. The group generally discussed the charge and the Board expressed an interest in seeing an updated charge prior to adopting. Mr. Hickey will follow-up.

Mr. Houghton raised the issue of signage at the park. Mr. Moore reminded the Board that is has asked that no permanent signage will be moving forward at the park without coming before the Board first. Some collaborations have been made with private property owners and adjustments to existing signage are made on occasion. TMAC will develop guidance and come back to the Board. Mr. Houghton feels the appropriate constituencies are engaged. Alignment of the various groups and uniformity of the signs are important. Informational signs are needed. They continued to discuss the vision for signage at the park.

When asked about the new Parks & Recreation van, Mr. Hickey reported on several trips that they've used it for already.

Following, the department presentation, Mr. Houghton moved to the minutes. Ms. Knab was absent from that meeting and therefore abstained. Mr. Anderson motioned approval of the minutes of February 20, 2024. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Mr. Anderson motioned to accept the resignation of Nico Garcia from the Alternate position on the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Houghton moved to cemetery burial fees. Mr. Moore explained that he received a request from the Cemetery Trustees to adjust the fee as described in the memo. Ms. Knab motioned to change the fee for a full burial from \$750 to \$900. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton asked for comments on the auditor's report. Ms. McAllister brought some excerpts for them to review. The adverse opinion we received is not unusual among NH municipalities as it relates to post-employment obligations, which the town is not responsible for financially. It is not viewed by the auditors as negative. The remedy is costly and time-consuming.

Ms. McAllister went into detail reviewing her handouts, describing the relationship between the auditor's preparation of the 535 and the DRA's preparation of the tax rate setting and the auditor's statement of the fund balance. We are where we should be. The Board thanked her for all her work noting that the work done by her office made this year's audit manageable and much smoother than in the past.

She asked if we were doing a RFP for auditors, as the Board had suggested at a previous meeting. She recommended, if we go with Vachon Cluckey again this year, we request a set fee price. It was felt there wasn't enough time to do an RFP for this year; perhaps one will be done after the audit.

Mr. Moore reported that Ms. McAllister sent a summary of the DRA and Assessing meeting she attended last week. Mr. Moore commented on DRA's observation of our calculation of ratio of assessment to evaluation at 65% is an average. Properties that were valued under that will go up dramatically. The Assessors are putting together a list of the most vulnerable parcels. Outreach will be targeted to parcels that will likely see a change in value. Initial assessing website content is moving forward. Additional outreach will also be done. They've heard evidence that the content about the re-val that has been in the Select Board Newsletter has been making an impact on the residents.

Mr. Houghton returned to Town Meeting preparations. The Board discussed their availability to attend the election.

ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Moore reported that the Trustees of the Trust Fund are following up on Town Counsel's advice regarding the Conservation Fund custody issue. The result will be that a Conservation Fund will be transferred in order to comply with the State law.

Mr. Moore informed them that the Auxiliary is creating a blood drive expressly for anyone affiliated with the town, for example town employees, fire department members, elected officials, etc. The goal is to have at least 30 people donate.

Mr. Moore brought to the Board's attention political advertising that had been posted on town property. The group discussed what they felt was appropriate and not appropriate to be displayed. It was decided that voters seeking to obtain information should go to Voter Information Night on Thursday and the Board expressly prohibited hosting political advertising materials from being hosted in the Town Offices.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Houghton moves to re-appoint Drew Bedard to an Alternate position on the Heritage Commission for a three year term ending 2027. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned to appoint Mark Connors, Director of Planning and Community Development, to serve as Stratham's rep to the Transportation Advisory Committee of Rockingham Metropolitan Planning Organization with Susan Connors, Planning Project Assistant, to serve as Alternate. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 8:51 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, (a) Personnel. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 9:30 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to come out of the non-public session and seal the minutes. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore reminded the Board to sign the paperwork.

At 9:32 pm Ms. Knab motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary