

MINUTES OF THE JULY 10, 2023 SELECT BOARD MEETING

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

ALSO PRESENT: Finance Administrator Christiane McAllister, Fire Chief Jeff Denton

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and asked for motions on the minutes. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the June 19, 2023 minutes. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Mr. Houghton recognized Fire Chief Jeff Denton. Chief Denton reported that Jeff DiBartolomeo has started as Fire Inspector. Chief Denton is hoping Mr. DiBartolomeo will build the program eventually getting businesses on an annual inspection schedule as well as address any issues and new projects. They will need to address how the inspection fees are processed. He will utilize the utility truck for now.

Chief Denton reported having mechanical issues with Ambulance 1. He is awaiting the status of Ambulance 2. Delivery has been delayed again; he doesn't expect to receive it until next spring.

Chief Denton is organizing a training to ensure all officers are pump operator certified. A company coming will do training on August 26 and 27 and give individualized training. Fifteen officers will become certified.

Chief Denton is working with appraisers and the insurance company to repair the command light on the engine. Work might not be completed until the fall.

Chief Denton reported that the fire pond at Ocean State Job Lot is finally being dredged. This was necessary to get the sprinkler systems online at that Plaza.

The Chief went on to discuss his forecast for capital improvements to be included in CIP planning for the year ahead. Chief Denton reported that the station radios are failing and need replacement. They will need a \$30,000 investment to bring them up to current standards. Also in the next year, it will be necessary to transfer from our Emergency Reporting Program. That program got bought out by ESO and they will be sun setting the program we currently have. The new program, though more costly, will better address our needs. Initial investment is \$11,000, then approximately \$8,200 yearly. He's done research, but has found no comparable alternatives.

Assumptions for cost escalations in past years' CIPs needs to be revisited due to current trends and pricing.

Chief Denton reported on upcoming needs such as the roof and compressor that have not been upgraded since it was installed when the station was built in 2008. Also, fire gear needs to be replaced every 10 years. It is unsafe to have firefighters wear expired gear. He would like to have every firefighter have two sets of gear, replacing one set every five years.

Chief Denton will be looking at these budget issues in depth in August.

Next, Chief Denton talked about competition with other fire departments to maintain and hire staff. He cited salaries of comparable towns, noting Stratham's compensation falls below. He briefly discussed different employment models. Currently, many duties of officers are being done on a volunteer basis. He feels a stipend system should be explored. He also talked about offering other benefits to people who meet a minimum response standard.

He indicated he is still looking for the right fit for leadership training for the officers.

Chief Denton stated that we've got a great department; morale has improved. He hopes what he's doing is resonating with the department. He feels fortunate that we've maintained our ability to cover calls. Past leadership has set a good foundation and he is hopeful for the future of the department.

At 7:36 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 may affect adversely the reputation of another. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Anderson-yes.

At 8:55 pm, the public session resumed. Mr. Houghton moved to seal the minutes noting failure to do so may render the proposed action ineffective. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion.

Mr. Anderson noted he has received many complaints about Comcast, connections in particular. Originally, he didn't think the Town had control over this issue, but after reading the Comcast contract, he believes we might have some ability to improve the issue. Mr. Moore said he would follow-up with the Comcast representative.

Referring to the July 10, 2023 discussion on Fire/Police Parking Lot Funds, Mr. Houghton asked for an update. Mr. Moore recapped that the DPW Director needs \$50,000 to move forward with reconstruction of Police Dept. parking lot. We currently have \$36,000 available for the PD parking lot. There is \$40,000 available for the Fire Dept. project. Mr. Anderson motioned to release up to \$14,000 from the CIP Fire Dept. funds to be used for the Police Dept. parking lot. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Mr. Moore reported he's gotten another request to install a bench at Stratham Hill Park, unrelated to the request that has been discussed recently. Mr. Moore talked about working with the families donating the bench to honor their loved ones while maintaining quality and consistency of the bench and ensuring public benefit. The Park Association has provided initial input that any new memorials should be for replacing existing elements. Mr. Moore has a draft policy regarding memorial benches that he recommends the Board adopt. Mr. Houghton felt uniformity throughout the park is important. The bench that is being recommended is of high quality. The Board would like to have the Park Association's input before making a motion on the bench.

INFORMATIONAL

The group discussed the staff appreciation event, agreeing that it was well received.

Mr. Moore said that preparations are being done for Summerfest. The Select Board Chair will speak at the Opening Ceremony.

Ms. McAllister reported on the audit. Having the audit scheduled at this time during the year allowed the MS-535 to be completed earlier than had been done in the past. She explained that the auditors submit the MS-535 to DRA; once she reviews it, she will present it to the Select Board for signature. The MS-535 is one of the reports that needs to be completed in order for us to set the tax rate. Ms. McAllister explained that items are being cleaned up which allows for a smoother process going forward.

Mr. Moore returned to the Summerfest program explaining the Select Board role in the opening ceremony.

Mr. Moore drew attention to the Community Power process steps, noting the Energy Aggregation Committee has been working diligently on the details so that it will pass the expectations of the Public Utility Company. They will be presenting their Plan to the Select Board on July 31. If approved, the plan will be submitted to the PUC. Mr. Anderson explained that once the PUC completes their 60 day review, a special Town Meeting could then be held to see if the residents will vote to accept the plan. He noted the community power rate was announced for Aug through Jan 2024. The rate is 10.9 cents per kWh which is 21% below Unutil.

Mr. Moore said he is working to update the annual goals document with progress and plans to report out at the next meeting. Referring to Ms. McAllister's report, Mr. Anderson suggested some of the easier items be tackled first.

Mr. Moore called attention to the PFAS Groundwater Management submittal for the most recent round of testing.

Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the raffle permit request for the Summerfest event. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned to approve the NH Society of Physician Assistants request to use the 4-H Pavilion on July 29th and to waive the fee. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Mr. Houghton motioned to approve Decoding Dyslexia to use the Scamman Pavilion on Oct. 1 and to waive the fee. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Mr. Houghton motioned to approve the fireworks permit request for Blueridge Circle for July 15, 2023. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Motion passed.

At 9:36 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 may affect adversely the reputation of another. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Anderson-yes.

At 10:10 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to come out of the non-public session and motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary