

MINUTES OF THE JULY 31, 2023 SELECT BOARD MEETING

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

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator David Moore, Library Director Kerry Cronin, Town Planner Mark Connors

At 7:00 p.m. Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and asked for motions on the minutes. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the minutes from July 10, 2023, and July 17, 2023. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized the Energy Aggregation Committee and thanked them for the effort they've put in thus far. Chair of the Energy Commission Matt O'Keefe introduced the other members of the Energy Commission, noting that the membership is the same on the Energy Aggregation Committee: Mike Welty, Joe Van Gombos, Paul Deschaine, Joe Anderson (all were in attendance with the exception of EAC Chair Charlie Case. They updated the Board on their work on the Stratham Community Power program. Mr. O'Keefe reviewed the electricity rates, indicating competitive rates of the communities with existing aggregation programs were much lower. We have access to this information because we are members of the Community Power Coalition of NH (CPCNH). The Committee has gone through the required steps of the Public Utility Company and are now seeking Select Board approval of their plan. It will then be submitted to the PUC for approval, which could take up to two months. If it is accepted by the PUC, a Town Meeting will be needed to affirm that the residents want to proceed with the Community Power program. The EAC's hope is to hold a special Town Meeting in October since it would mean that residents could save money on their electricity supply much earlier than if the action was taken in March. This timing for a Town meeting would also allow sufficient time to hold public information sessions. If the voters support moving forward with the plan, there will be final steps involving Unitil, our selected provider, and informing the residents of their options. Then we would wait for the time period in which we could opt in with our community power provider.

Mr. Houghton offered residents in attendance an opportunity to ask questions. Delores Benevento asked if rates would be re-evaluated every six months. Mr. O'Keefe said it depends on the provider that we choose. Any Stratham Community Power program would only begin if the rates offered would be less than the Unitil default price. The EAC would evaluate to get the best rates and limit the risk of paying a higher rate. Mr. O'Keefe described how they would evaluate the rates.

Ms. Knab asked about the percentage of renewables. The Town would choose the default rate based on the priorities of the residents, but individual residents may choose their own options. With the various companies who could administer our program there are likely to be rates offered at the minimal renewable standard all the way up to 100% renewable.

Mr. Anderson moved that the Select Board approve the Stratham Community Power Electric Aggregation Plan as adopted by the Energy Aggregation Committee on July 11, 2023. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson asked for a general timeline for holding the special Town Meeting. Mr. Deschaine noted that it would take an additional 5 months, after voter approval, before they could choose a rate. Seeing no reason to delay implementing the program, the Board supported holding a special town meeting. Mr. Moore will mail the package to the PUC tomorrow. Mr. Moore advised the Board he would work on logistics related to Town Meeting timing and bring them a recommendation at their August 14th meeting.

Mr. Houghton recognized Library Director Kerry Cronin. Ms. Cronin has reached her six month mark. She reported on resident participation in library events. The volunteer fair was successful. She thanked DPW for installing the raised garden bed. She continued her report, describing upcoming library events. She's been doing outreach to seniors to learn what programming they desire. She talked about the groups and committees she's become involved with and the new programming she's created to foster community engagement.

Before she began, a library space study was performed. The final report was recently completed. After evaluation, the Library Board of Trustees decided to renovate the bathroom spaces as a priority. Renovating the bathrooms won't be impacted if they later decide to make changes to the layout of the library. Maintenance Foreman Jason Pond will be installing an art hanging system this week. Two new employees, Penelope Lee and Rhonda Cunha have recently started. They discussed the door between the library and the municipal center. Lastly, Ms. Cronin informed the Board that they had secured bookkeeping services and that contracted person had been helpful and made important changes in financial management. She gave the Board a financial spreadsheet which showed that they had been under budgeting for their bookkeeper and media materials, therefore, these items will need an increase in the budget.

Mr. Houghton recognized Town Planner Mark Connors. Mr. Connors introduced William McCarthy of the Conservation Commission. The Conservation Commission held a Public Hearing to support committing \$500,000 out of the Land Conservation Fund for the conservation of Squamscott Fields (aka Stuart Farm). Some of this land is already preserved, but this would preserve the rest, including a large amount of shoreline on the Squamscott River. Grant opportunities exist for coastal communities, of which Stratham qualifies, for large amounts of money. The Town would be pursuing a \$1.8 million dollar grant but would need the Town's commitment of up to \$500,000 to apply for the grant. After this purchase, there will still be funds left in the Land Conservation Fund of approximately \$450,000. The Conservation Commission voted unanimously in support of this purchase. SELT has been vital in helping the Commission get to this point. Public access is a requirement of the grant. They discussed the challenges this requirement poses with an operating agricultural use on the property but are confident it can be done. Ms. Knab motioned support for committing \$500,000 out of the Land Conservation Fund towards the Squamscott Fields project. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Connors then gave an update on the Open Space Plan. There are two surveys available to the residents to gain their input. He discussed the surveys and other public outreach opportunities.

Mr. Connors talked about the process he is following to evaluate the candidates for the Planning and Community Development Office Coordinator position.

Mr. Connors reported on general economic development news. Optima Dermatology Clinic opened, which is helpful for building our commercial tax base. Ginger Fox bakery will be opening at the end of August. They would like to collaborate with the Town on a Grand Opening in September. He is preparing performance guarantees to be released. He briefly discussed the Heritage District and gave a quick update on Planning Board applications.

Ms. Knab asked for information about tidal culverts. Mr. Moore explained that it is a state project run by environmental advocates. The project will not begin until next year. We will get more information as it gets closer. Mr. Connors went to the public hearing and was informed that the road (Squamscott) will be closed during the project.

Mr. Houghton moved to New Business. Mr. Moore addressed the memorial bench request and summarized that at a previous meeting, the Board wanted the opinion of the Stratham Hill Park Association on the request for a memorial bench at Stratham Hill Park. SHPA guidance is that the Town focus on establishing memorials that would replace existing elements. Mr. Moore has worked with the family who is agreement with placing a six-foot Victor Stanley park bench, which would replace a worn bench in the vicinity of the playground equipment. Mr. Anderson motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to work with Ms. Carissa Murray to install a bench as described and dedicate it to three recently deceased Stratham residents: Andrew W. Scamman, William C. Chisholm and William J. Perry and to accept a donation of up to \$4,500 for this purpose. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Moore was also approached by another organization regarding a memorial bench for a different resident. He is awaiting their follow up and he will bring that forward to the Board.

Mr. Houghton moved to the agenda item regarding the CIP funding for the Fire Tower. Mr. Houghton motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to spend \$5,400 for HEB Engineers to pursue the engineering assessment for the Stratham Hill Fire Tower. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton asked about the candidates for the Treasurer position. Mr. Moore suggested the Board confer on the recommendation from the selection committee in non-public session and take an action in public session.

Mr. Houghton moved to the goals update. Mr. Moore explained the difficulties with hiring DPW personnel and summarized recruiting efforts and the stages of various other searches. Contracting lawn cutting has gone well. DPW has produced a draft of a of Standard Operating Procedures manual. The DPW Administrative Assistant is assisting the DPW Director with duties related to the JLMC and the Cemetery Trustees.

Mr. Moore and Ms. McAllister have been working on the Employee Manual. Some items require Select Board input. They decided to do an in-depth review during their August 14th meeting.

Mr. Moore noted that the Parks and Recreation programs are running well and participation and satisfaction with the summer camp program has been high. We hope to have a recommendation for a Program Assistant soon.

Fire Chief Denton found a Texas A&M University leadership training for his captains.

The Request for Proposals for the Re-val process has closed. This will be a major priority for next year.

Mr. Moore has not made any progress on finding a replacement for the Emergency Management Director.

Mr. Moore appreciates the encouragement the Board has given him regarding training and development. He shared with department heads about their desire to invest in people and help them grow. All employees recently attended a Right-to-Know training. CPR and Joint Loss sponsored trainings are being planned.

Mr. Houghton asked if there were any general public comments. Hearing none, at 8:31 p.m. Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II (c) on a matter which, if discussed in public, would likely affect adversely the reputation of another. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes.

At 9:33 p.m. 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. Anderson motioned to approve Rebecca Tremblay as the Town's Deputy Treasurer. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton asked about the Town Administrator report. Mr. Moore highlighted the ARPA use roster of projects. We must have our projects contractually committed by the end of the year, Dec. 2024. He has been working with DPW; there are plenty of projects that qualify for ARPA funding.

Mr. Moore is working with Nate Merrill on a dedication ceremony for the Joan Sewall room. They hope to hold it in October.

Mr. Moore attended the Summerfest event. The Open Space and Community Power tables saw a lot of engagement with the public. Residents engaged less with the Town volunteer and employment but were happy to meet, connect with Town leaders and sign up for the newsletter. He noted the Fire Recruitment tent was busy and energetic.

Mr. Houghton moved to liaison report outs by Board members. After speaking with Mr. Mears, Mr. Anderson wanted clarification on the number of plow drivers we had on staff last winter noting our vulnerability with staff transitions or outages due to sickness or injury. He pointed to concerns of staff needing to cover multiple plow routes on occasion. Mr. Anderson suggested we be prepared for potential protracted staff challenges and consider establishing contracting relationships to supplement our forces. The Board supported exploring options.

Mr. Anderson reported being impressed with the trainings Fire Chief Denton has lined up for the fall. They have recruited 4 or 5 new members. At Summerfest, 13 residents expressed interest. Initial projections indicate attendance at Summerfest this year was higher than last.

Mr. Houghton reported that Police Chief King was occupied with staffing issues. His new admin started today. Ms. Knab suggested a new employee coffee meet and greet some morning. She also reported receiving feedback about communication challenges but provided no elaboration.

RESERVATIONS

Ms. Knab motioned to allow the Reproductive Freedom Fund of NH to use the Front Pavilion and waive the fee. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 9:45 p.m. Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary