

MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 18, 2023 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

At 7:00 pm Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and asked for a motion on the minutes. Ms. Knab motioned approval of the September 5, 2023 minutes as written. Mr. Anderson seconded the motioned. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton moved to reservation requests. Mr. Moore presented a raffle permit request from John Cushing, who was present, for the First Responder Golf Tournament. Mr. Anderson approved Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore then presented a request from Cub Scout Pack 185 to use the top of the hill at Stratham Hill Park the evening of Sept. 29. Their event will include a hike and use of 2 – 3 solo stoves. The Parks & Recreation Director supports their holding this event. The Fire Chief also supports it but is requiring they obtain a burn permit prior to the event. Ms. Knab motioned to approve the Cub Scouts use of the top of the Hill at Stratham Hill Park on 9/29. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Ms. McAllister for a financial update. Ms. McAllister had submitted reports on the revenue and budget which are on target for this point in the year. She reviewed the financial summary. The new treasurer is continuing to onboard and acclimating well. Mr. Anderson questioned why the reconciliations didn't match. Ms. McAllister believes it is a timing issue and will address it. Mr. Anderson asked about the new Transportation Improvement Fund. Ms. McAllister explained the accounting for the funds. Ms. McAllister moved to an update on the tax rate setting process for 2023. She submitted the required DRA and MS reports and is now waiting for the auditors to approve. Ms. McAllister's initial calculations indicate the tax rate may be \$2.12 over last year, which is an 11.3% increase. The schools increase is the largest year to year driver of the number but there is potential for differences as final documentation comes from DRA.

Ms. McAllister wondered if it would be beneficial to use the DRA portal to demonstrate that interactive method of using something between the overlay and the fund balance usage so the Board could see how it would work in live time. The Board thanked her for her time.

Mr. Houghton recognized Town Assessor Chris Murdough who briefly reviewed the five phases in the re-valuation process: 1. Sales data collection 2. Market analysis 3. Field review 4. Notices to property owners and meetings with the Assessor 5. Final values. She reviewed the timeline emphasizing the importance of adhering to it closely in order to get the MS-1 submitted on time next year. Current data shows that sales are up over past years. She explained that the Dept. of Revenue employs monitors who closely follow the town's process. Ms. Murdough urged the Board to do as much public outreach as possible to ensure the residents are aware that a re-valuation will be taking place. Surrounding towns will be going through the same process. Mr. Moore reasoned that that is why competition for consulting services is tight.

Ms. Knab wanted to ensure we emphasize to the public information about changing party affiliation. She noted voters often forget to go back to undeclared after an election. Residents can and should check their voter status. Oct 6th is the deadline for changing party affiliation.

Mr. Moore advised Chief Denton is requesting permission from the Select Board to offer a ride to school in the fire truck as a first prize for a children's Halloween costume competition. He would like to do so as a part of their fire prevention month pancake breakfast and open house Oct. 28th. If someone from out of town wins, they would ride around town. Mr. Moore noted that our Police Dept. has a ride-along program and speculated that we would be able to utilize the same waiver or another process recommendation by our risk insurer. The Select Board approved the request from Chief Denton.

Mr. Moore addressed Trick or Treat Night, asking if the Board wanted to keep the hours the same as previous years. After a brief discussion, it was decided to hold Trick or Treat Night on Tuesday, October 31 from 5:00 – 7:30 pm.

Mr. Moore called attention to the Community Power Plan, alerting them that the Energy Commission is moving forward with public outreach and he is preparing the relevant legal postings. At the Oct 2nd Select Board meeting, Mr. Moore recommends they review the plan in more detail and vote to enter into an agreement pending the vote at Town Meeting. This will enable the Town to move forward with the plan as quickly as possible if an affirmative vote is reached at Town Meeting. Mr. Moore outlined the steps, including legal postings, to hold a Town Meeting.

Mr. Houghton inquired about the informational items from the Recreation Commission and Trail Management Advisory Committee. Mr. Moore said there are no action items, it was simply informative. Mr. Houghton was supportive of the transportation request to go to a third party vs the Town. Mr. Houghton would like Primex's insight. Mr. Moore will bring details back at a later date. Ms. Knab inquired about TMAC and the dog issue. Mr. Moore explained that TMAC is having an outreach session on the 24th. Any recommendations will come back to the Board when and if TMAC brings them forward.

ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Moore gave an update on the transitions in the building department. He called attention to the resignation from Nate Mears. Mr. Anderson motioned to accept the resignation of Nate Mears. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore and Mr. Hickey met with the engineering firm who gave an assessment of the Fire Tower. Their recommendations are being prepared but he does know that they do not have major concerns that would prevent us moving forward with some repairs before painting.

Mr. Moore reported that they are getting preliminary numbers in regarding the budget. Items impacting the budget include four elections in 2024, increasing DPW wages to be more competitive, an initial report from HealthTrust noting they are anticipating a double digit increase.

Mr. Moore expressed gratitude for having great staff in place, especially the DPW Coordinator who is managing operations very well. He reported that contracted services for field work are going well. Mr. Hickey is assisting with over oversight of the contractor for the fields for this work.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Houghton noted there was an appointment for consideration, Drew Bedard as an alternative for the Heritage Commission.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Houghton recognized a resident, Kirk Scamman. Mr. Scamman came to discuss the Open Space Planning Committee work. Ms. Knab said their next meeting is tomorrow at 1:00. Mr. Scamman expressed dissatisfaction with the timing of the meetings and the makeup of committee members. He is frustrated with what he feels is a lack of communication from the committee regarding meeting notices and posting of minutes; he doesn't think the meetings are warned sufficiently even if they meet technical requirements. Mr. Scamman doesn't believe farmers are getting fair representation on the committee. Ms. Knab explained that the committee has been trying to collect public input with surveys, by attending town events and involving members of other committees. Ms. Knab asked Mr. Scamman to send her an email with his concerns and she will address them with the committee. Mr. Scamman is concerned that restrictions might be placed on his rights as a landowner. Ms. Knab explained that their effort is towards connectivity while also respecting landowner rights. Mr. Houghton noted that the committee has a purpose and intent and that they are only advising/making recommendations. If any changes were to be made, the public would have every opportunity to comment, participate before actions are taken. Ms. Knab said they are trying to think creatively about connecting parcels, making it easy for residents to travel throughout town without driving and enjoying access to public lands or lands over which the public is formally invited such as through easements or access rights over common lands for condominium developments. Mr. Scamman reiterated his concern about his rights and rights of future landowners. Mr. Houghton assured him that nothing would be implemented without the appropriate process of engaging the public. The Board thanked Mr. Scamman for his input.

At 7:49 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 9:12 p.m. the public portion of the meeting resumed. Mr. Houghton moved to seal the minutes. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 9:12 p.m. Mr. Anderson moved to adjourn. Ms. Knab seconded and all voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard, Recording Secretary