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MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 17, 2026 COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT: Joe Anderson, Geri Denton, Lauren Schmidt, Diane Smith, Kyle Hollasch, Seth Hickey, Steve Butzel and Karen Richard

Mr. Anderson called the meeting to order and requested a motion to approve the minutes. Ms. Denton moved to approve the October 20 meeting minutes, and Mr. Butzel seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson thanked Ms. Denton and Ms. Smith for their efforts during the election and at the Friday Coffee Hour, where they encouraged residents to sign up for the town newsletter. Their outreach resulted in approximately 60 new email subscribers. He asked whether there were other town events that could be used to increase newsletter subscriptions. Mr. Hickey suggested promoting newsletter sign-ups at Town Meeting, noting that attendees are typically engaged in town affairs. He also recommended outreach during Thursday Nights in the Park events over the summer, basketball registrations, and other elementary school activities. Ms. Smith suggested hosting a "Get to Know Your Community" event. Ms. Schmidt noted that Memorial School would be holding a winter carnival. Ms. Denton added that flyers had been distributed to students through their backpacks.

Ms. Schmidt reviewed the upcoming events calendar and identified several items to be promoted on Facebook, including the Winter Transfer Station schedule, the cookie competition, the Police Department Toy Drive, the library craft extravaganza, holiday office hours, and trash collection delays. She also reported creating a new video template featuring a moving background with static text to make posts more visually appealing.

The group discussed the town's Instagram and agreed to create a new Instagram account.

Ms. Schmidt presented a proposal for a photo contest designed to encourage residents to visit and engage with the town's Facebook page more frequently. She outlined a three-week contest in which participants would submit photos through the town's Facebook page. Community members would then vote for their favorite submission, and the winning photo would be announced publicly and featured as the town's Facebook cover photo. Ms. Schmidt reviewed the proposed contest details and noted that official rules would be established and posted.

Ms. Denton suggested updating the cover photo approximately every six months. Ms. Schmidt responded that the contest could potentially be held every 18 months to generate ongoing community interest. Ms. Denton also suggested placing a sign in the park with a QR code to help promote the contest and increase participation.

Ms. Schmidt reported that she would develop a standardized template for Town Clerk Facebook posts and would work with Ms. Bakie on its design.

Ms. Denton raised the possibility of printing copies of the newsletter and making them available near the newsletter sign-up board. The group also discussed the idea of mailing a newsletter summary to residents once or twice per year. Ms. Richard noted that postage costs would need to be considered, as the current postage budget has been exceeded. She indicated that funding for such a mailing would need to be planned in advance. Ms. Smith suggested that a postcard mailing could be a more cost-effective alternative. Ms. Denton commented that residents might be more likely to pay attention to information received in an envelope bearing the Town's name.

The discussion then returned to ways to improve the newsletter. Mr. Anderson asked whether the newsletter could be made more engaging. Mr. Hollasch suggested incorporating artificial intelligence tools to assist with content creation and design. Ms. Schmidt noted that Mailchimp offers a variety of newsletter templates that could enhance the publication's appearance and readability. The group reviewed several template options and subsequently examined newsletter analytics. Members noted that newsletter performance metrics were strong and showed continued improvement.

Mr. Hollasch presented a draft Board & Committee Digest intended to provide residents with a concise summary of key topics discussed and actions taken at recent board and committee meetings. He explained that the digest would be distributed through a subgroup of newsletter subscribers within Mailchimp. The digest would use AI-generated summaries based on agendas and draft meeting minutes and would include links to relevant agendas and minutes for those seeking additional information. Mr. Hollasch noted that the success of the digest would depend on the timely posting of draft minutes to ensure the information was current. The group agreed to implement the digest on a trial basis amongst themselves first. Mr. Hollasch will work with Mr. Hickey to develop and launch the initiative.

Mr. Anderson then turned the discussion to the town website. The group reviewed the newly configured calendar and agreed that it represented a significant improvement over the previous version.

Ms. Denton noted that the Boards & Committees section of the website was not organized alphabetically. Ms. Richard stated that she would investigate the issue.

Mr. Anderson reported that the Town of Exeter had recently launched a new website. The group reviewed the site and commented on some of its design elements.

Ms. Smith reminded the group of a suggestion made at a previous meeting to incorporate video content into the Town's communications strategy, noting that she believed it was an excellent idea. Ms. Schmidt responded that developing video content would be her next project. Ms. Denton asked whether the videos would be intended for the website or social media platforms. Ms. Schmidt explained that the content would vary by platform. Social media videos would be more informal, such as employee spotlight features, while the website would serve as a repository for meeting recordings and other informational videos.

Ms. Smith provided an update on the proposed digital display system, reporting that the initial implementation cost would be approximately $600, with an additional $100 training fee. She

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stated that she would continue researching the cost of the monitor itself. Mr. Butzel noted that a similar display at the library had cost approximately $2,000 in total. Mr. Anderson suggested that a larger screen may be more appropriate for the Municipal Center lobby. Mr. Butzel added that the library may consider purchasing a second display for its Youth Services Department.

Ms. Denton asked how the content displayed on the digital screen would be selected and managed. She observed that the library's display contained a significant amount of information when she viewed it. The group agreed that careful consideration would need to be given to content selection and presentation to ensure the display remained effective.

Mr. Butzel reported that the library's Strategic Plan would be made available both in print and as a digital flipbook. He also noted that the library is planning to conduct a social media audit.

At 10:29am Ms. Denton motioned to adjourn. Ms. Schmidt seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,
Karen Richard

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