

MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 18, 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, Parks & Recreation Director Seth Hickey.

At 7:00 pm Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and asked for a motion on the minutes. Ms. Knab motioned to approve the November 4, 2024 minutes as amended. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton then recognized Mr. Hickey. Mr. Hickey introduced Bruce Scamman of Emanuel Engineering who was invited to speak on behalf of the Stevens Park project. In March, the Town entered into a contract with Emanuel Engineering to perform design work at Stevens Park. The project goals include hard court expansion, construction of a pavilion, and additional parking as well as related drainage. Mr. Scamman reviewed the plan and the reasoning behind why they were proposing it as they are. The pavilions will have bathrooms. They provided estimates for construction, including septic and drainage improvements. Mr. Scamman felt a grass parking lot was more economical, better for the environment and required less maintenance. He explained that by changing the angle of the lines and adding the additional lot, there would be an additional 74 spaces.

Mr. Hickey stated that this is in the final phase before going to the Planning Board. It's been reviewed and approved by the Recreation Commission. Mr. Moore asked for a phasing approach. Mr. Scamman replied that the upper parking lot could be built at any time. Pavilions, leach fields and bathrooms would increase use of the park. Mr. Hickey said that requests for a pavilion there have been on the wish list since before his arrival. Ms. Knab felt the pavilion was a need and the pickle ball court a want. The pavilion could be considered a safety issue; a place to pick up kids and get out of the sun. Mr. Hickey spoke in favor of not having to rely on chemical toilets. Providing water would be a huge benefit as it gets very hot. Mr. Scamman gave a design overview, describing the excavation, drainage and electricity. He speculated on how an electrician might make some of the underground connections causing as little disturbance as possible. Mr. Scamman added that they redesigned the pavilion to include a storage shed in back for power and water. The Board thanked Mr. Scamman for his work on the project.

Mr. Hickey continued with his department report, noting successes with the coffee social mornings and trips. Jean Marquis will be doing the monthly activities calendar going forward in order to make better use of Mr. Cherry's time. Mr. Hickey will do another open house in February. Youth sports are going well. They are looking for additional practice spaces. The Recreation Commission is examining their youth sports guidance and will update the Recreation Revolving policy to reflect changes. The Recreation Commission approved a stipend to be paid to the Treasurer through the Recreation Revolving fund to manage that account. The Treasurer is doing a great job tracking the expenses and revenues through that fund. This is essential to developing an accurate budget.

Mr. Hickey continued, reporting on upcoming meetings. They are attempting to revitalize the Baseball Board and pump energy into softball program.

Next, Mr. Hickey reported that 36 people attended the Trail Management Advisory Committee public forum last week. In response to the feedback, TMAC is revising their recommendation. A videotape of the meeting will be posted soon. Mr. Hickey requested Select Board representation at the next public forum on January 16th. He also noted that TMAC is trying to educate the public on how the different spaces are managed. Attendees of the public forum felt it was very informative. We want to keep spaces open and accessible, but if people can't be respectful of the landowners, especially the private ones, additional restrictions will need to be implemented. TMAC is also working on trail signage. A UNH intern determined where posts might be placed at trail intersections. They are hoping to install them before the ground freezes. Mr. Hickey broke his wrist and wasn't able to do additional work on the trails. Mr. Hickey concluded saying that TMAC is doing great work and are looking forward to focusing on broader topics. Mr. Houghton asked if they are leading up to recommending a revised ordinance. Mr. Hickey said that they are, however they are reluctant to come forward at Town Meeting because of the adverse social media comments; no one wants to be singled out. The enforcement piece is a recurring issue.

Mr. Hickey reported the ice skating rink at the 4-H barn is moving forward. Mr. Moore said the project scope summary and responsibilities is with the project proponents and the next step is to confirm agreement. As a staff are standing by, ready to do our part.

Mr. Hickey continued his report. Crack sealing at the courts at Stevens has been done. Programs are selling out. He has two UNH interns; one is working on a reservation and rate schedule for Town fields and rooms. The other is doing trail work at the park. Mr. Hickey plans to get a trailer to haul bikes. He had submitted a memo on after school rock climbing. Mr. Hickey wants to create a pool of people to assist him with his programming. It would be Rec. Revolving funded. Mr. Moore said it was akin to hiring summer counselors. Ms. McAllister said it would be a stipend. Program related expenses would be recouped through fees.

Mr. Moore requested he talk about budget challenges. Mr. Hickey said his budget is pretty narrow; only includes payroll, office supplies, senior programming. He is trying to focus on the common good, not specific programming. Previously, the department supported participant fees; we now charge participants. Programs are still filling up. They wish to grow and expand programming, but questioned how the budget would support that. They are self-funding. They've done some great things this year and are figuring out how to move in the future. Mr. Moore asked if he planned to increase his dept. headcount. Mr. Hickey replied that they contract for different things. There are large segments of the community (such as working adults) they want to include in their programming but are limited by space and staff support. Much behind the scenes work is done for every event/program. Ms. Knab would like to see better synergy between the Library and Recreation. Mr. Hickey felt definition needed to be a part of that effort and with a director in place at the library that effort can take place.

Mr. Houghton recognized Keith Pratt of Underwood Engineers who updated the Board on discussions of a water connection to surrounding communities to address the PFAS

contamination. The most feasible direction is towards the Rt 108 corridor and Newmarket. Newfields is facing challenges with their wells and Exeter is not in a position to extend water services due to supply concerns. Both Newmarket and Newfields have participated in discussions and willing to explore further. The State is supportive of this direction too. No commitments or agreements are in place yet. Deliverables include a conceptual design, updated costs and a strategy to continue. It all fits within the scope and grant from DES. Mr. Pratt asked the Board if they were supportive of this direction. In response to a question from Mr. Anderson, Mr. Pratt indicated surrounding communities are willing to talk, but present different challenges. The Newmarket/Newfields direction is the easiest path. Mr. Moore asked for clarification on the remaining work deliverables and schedule. Mr. Pratt said the Town would receive detailed drawings, allowing them to come up with a better cost opinion, a better idea of the DOT corridor, a technical memo with tasks and recommendations and an outline of an agreement. The Board was supportive of proceeding.

Mr Houghton moved to the agenda item regarding the human remains found on a property in Stratham. Mr. Moore explained that the State is asking us to accept the remains for burial in Stratham. The Historical Society, Heritage Commission and Cemetery Trustees all have an interest. Mr. Houghton recognized Ms. Lucy Cushman from the Cemetery Trustees. The Trustees met and noted there would be an expense of \$3,000 - \$5,000 if we accept the bones. They do not recommend the Town accept them, noting no connection to Stratham has been identified. Ms. Knab expressed her reluctance to not accept the remains and prefers to keep them in Stratham. The Board wants to hear from the other interested. A decision will be deferred until further input can be obtained.

Mr. Moore reported that the Windsong Performance Agreement is not in place yet but should be here Wednesday. The road is Tilton.

Mr. Moore called attention to the 2025 holiday schedule, noting Christmas 2025 is on a Thursday. He asked the Board if they would consider closing the building to the public and have employees take a vacation day for Dec. 26, 2025, which is what has been the practice for the day after Thanksgiving. Mr. Houghton was opposed to closing the building. Ms. Knab motioned to close the Municipal Center the day after Christmas next year and have employees use a vacation day if they choose. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Motion passed. Ms. Knab motioned approval of the 2025 holiday calendar as is in the packet. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Referring to the Rental Rates in the packet, Mr. Moore felt the Board should identify a strategy of managing the rates of the properties in order to better align with prevailing market rates. A stepped proposal for increasing the rents over time was discussed. Ms. McAllister reminded them that the auditors want a renewed lease for the properties. The Board agreed the rates should be raised and all favored the stepped approach. The rates and leases should be reviewed annually.

Referring to the road naming policy, Mr. Anderson didn't feel the policy had been updated to reflect the Board's revisions. Mr. Moore will review it.

Mr. Moore reached out to the Town Moderator for Budget Advisory Committee appointees. Mr. Anderson had been on the School's Financial Advisory Committee in previous years. Mr. Houghton volunteered to do it this year. Preliminary budgets for most departments have been reviewed. Mr. Moore reviewed his budget. Contracted services for Assessing should be the same. Once every two years the assessing process will be discussed and be reflected in the Capital plan. Ms. McAllister has been taking a closer look at IT expenditures which will be reflected in the budget. IT is projecting a 9% increase. We're underinvesting in hardware. This will be addressed in the future. No changes to BI/CEO budget. No requests for increases from any committees. The Library has been informed about budget assumptions. The new Library Director is starting on Monday. Mr. Houghton is not supportive of a 5% increase in the budget. He would like a more complete picture of the Capital Plan. He will examine the materials further and clarify his concerns. He favors a maximum 3% increase. Ms. Knab said that the changes in the Fire Dept. will be impactful and it will be easy for people to understand the reasoning behind the increase. Interviews have taken place and Chief Denton will have a clearer picture next time they meet. Mr. Anderson thought they had an accurate picture of Fire Department needs. A recommendation will likely be presented at the December meeting. Mr. Moore acknowledged that it's hard to see what 5% increase in the operating budget will look like without knowing the overall amount for the appropriated funds across all the articles. Mr. Moore mentioned making assumptions on the exemptions and elderly tax credits.

Mr. Moore gave an update on the fire tower project saying we had two reasonable estimates and two scopes of work. We need to decide on a level of investment. The Board wished to involve the Park Association, Heritage and Conservation Commissions for the path forward.

Mr. Moore reported that he and Mr. Hickey met with residents Kate Dardinski, Jeff Hyland and Kyle Hollasch met at their request regarding the Open Space project. They were concerned that the plan had stalled and offered some ideas to move it along. Currently, we don't have the staff support, however, Mr. Moore said he would do his best to advance it.

Mr. Moore reported an increase in applications for the Building Inspector and Planner positions. He and Mr. Houghton will hold interviews for both positions later in the week.

Mr. Moore invited the Board to a meeting regarding the Bunker Hill intersection on Nov. 25 with DOT and Planning Project Assistant Susan Connors. Mr. Anderson said he would attend.

Mr. Moore directed attention to the paramedic program sponsorship contract which Town Counsel has reviewed. Mr. Houghton motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to enter into a contract with Exeter Hospital for the medical response agreement. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore called attention to resident concerns regarding exemptions and the assessing process. Exemptions will need to be discussed before January for the Budget Advisory Committee meetings. The assessor is preparing a response to the resident comments and issues he raised. Mr. Moore suggested the Board have a conversation with the assessor regarding exemptions and the frequency of reevaluations. At that time they will also be able to discuss the assessing concerns that had been brought forth by a resident.

Ms. McAllister gave a recap of the Board's signing schedule. With the holidays approaching, she wanted to ensure they would be available to sign payables and other documents.

Mr. Moore updated them on the Fire Station paving and painting.

RESERVATIONS

Mr. Moore said there were two requests to waive the alcohol prohibition. Mr. Houghton motioned to approve the Fire Department's request to waive the alcohol prohibition at their holiday party on December 7th.

The next request is for a family party requesting the alcohol prohibition be waived. Mr. Moore recalled that in past meetings, the Board expressed concern regarding alcohol consumption on Town property so he reached out to Primex. They indicated the Town would be liable should there be an issue. Mr. Hickey had also expressed concern about liability to the town and the fact that staff is not in attendance to enforce a policy. Mr. Houghton conceded that this is a bigger discussion. Ms. McAllister recalled a cleaning deposit was discussed previously. Mr. Moore said that, and adjusting the rental fees, will be addressed in the policy update. Ms. Knab felt there were so few requests it didn't appear to be a problem. Ms. Knab motioned support for waiving the alcohol prohibition in the Sewall Room for the holiday party on December 21st for Katherine Nichols. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 9:00pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, (a) and (e) to discuss personnel matters and legal guidance. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 9:51pm Mr. Houghton motioned to come out of the non-public session and seal the minutes noting failure to do so may render a proposed action invalid. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. At 9:52pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary