

## **MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 2, 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,

At 7:00 pm Mr. Houghton opened the public meeting. Mr. Moore hadn't yet reviewed the Nov. 18 minutes so a motion on them was deferred to the next meeting.

Mr. Houghton recognized John Cushing, SVFDA, who reported that the 4<sup>th</sup> annual First Responder Golf Tournament held Oct. 3 produced a record profit. The net profit totaled \$72,814. A donation was made to the Fire Dept. Lights4Lives PTSD fundraiser. Proceeds from the event will be split between the Fire and Police departments. Mr. Cushing spoke highly of the committee and acknowledged the support from the community. Josh Crow, Deputy Fire Chief, expressed gratitude for the support. He said the department will be using the funds to purchase tools and equipment to help firefighters be as safe as possible. The Board thanked the committee for its great work.

Recognizing that there was a crowd, Mr. Houghton opened the meeting to the public. Dolores Benevento, 29 Montrose Dr., spoke about how her elderly tax exemptions have not kept pace with her taxes which have increased dramatically because of the revaluation. She observed that in other towns, the elderly exemptions increased along with the revaluations. She asked if this could have been anticipated and if a change would have to wait until Town Meeting. Mr. Anderson responded that we couldn't have anticipated the extreme price escalation; our assessors started January 1<sup>st</sup>. It would have been impossible to have had something for the last Town Meeting. If the Elderly Exemptions are approved at Town Meeting, it would take effect with the May bill. It is not retroactive. Ms. Knab added that this is all guided by State laws. Mr. Houghton confirmed Mr. Anderson's statements, saying we follow a process. The steep rise in revaluations is unprecedented. Going forward, exemptions will be reviewed in conjunction with revaluations. He assured her they are mindful of the impact and will look at the process to make improvements. Mr. Anderson assured her it would be an article at Town Meeting.

Two residents from Aberdeen Drive spoke with similar concerns. The lower priced homes had the biggest appreciation. David Johnson, 31 Glengarry Dr., was so concerned he wrote to his State Reps. He had three questions. 1. What is the plan for reinstating an equitable elderly exemption? 2. He echoed Ms. Benevento's question – could this issue have been anticipated? He was able to anticipate the tax increase and took out a loan to pay for his taxes. 3. He referred to a letter, undated, from the Select Board chair stating steps. He asked when these steps occurred. Mr. Moore said the letter went out in July. Mid-August were meetings with assessor. Mr. Johnson stated he did not receive a letter with his revaluation. Ms. Benevento didn't receive one either. Mr. Johnson feels the Town let him down and requested a meeting with the Assessor. Mr. Moore said he would arrange the meeting with the Assessor.

Next, Tim Mason, Winnicutt Rd, spoke, saying that he felt the homeowner assessments were accurate. He is in the real estate business. He said he made numerous unsuccessful attempts to discuss his properties on Portsmouth Avenue with the Assessor. He explained that he has been

tracking what the commercial properties have been selling for and contends that they have been under-assessed, and therefore, under-taxed. This led to more of the burden falling on property owners. He made several attempts to bring this situation to the attention of the Assessors but each attempt was unacknowledged and unsuccessful.

Glen Wass, Gifford Farm Rd, agreed with Mr. Mason in that commercial property assessments should be more closely scrutinized.

Mr. Houghton said he appreciated the comments and will continue to pursue a better understanding of the issues and concerns.

Mr. Houghton moved to the Police Dept. dashcam contract item on the agenda. Mr. Moore noted that Sgt. Doucette was in attendance and could speak to the rationale and need for the contract. Over half the cost will be funded by a Federal Grant that the Police Dept. has been successful in acquiring. We have negotiated a payment agreement to spread out the cost over the five years of the contract. Sgt. Doucette explained that the cameras they initially received almost two years ago had failed from the beginning. It was learned that they were Watchguard cameras that were relabeled with Motorola branding. After working with Motorola Solutions, and in conjunction with the grant, they restructured a plan that outfits us with top of the line cameras. They are giving us a credit because of the original problems. With the grant, there will be an \$8,000 charge annually. Sgt. Doucette then explained that a cloud-based storage system, though more expensive, would provide more adequate storage. The current system with the server is starting to fail. Mr. Houghton asked where the funds to cover the costs of this contract would come from. Mr. Moore said that Chief King is looking to increase his IT budget line. Ms. Knab motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to enter into a contract with Motorola as described in the memorandum from Chief King dated Dec. 2. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Mr. Houghton recognized Tim Stevens who reported on projects coming to a close. Winter preparations have begun. The DPW recently hosted two regional snow plow classes.

Next, Mr. Stevens recommended his department join the DPW Mutual Aid program. This is a reciprocal agreement with surrounding communities. Participation will give us access to documentation that is required to obtain grants from FEMA or the State. Ms. Knab motioned to authorize the DPW Director to join the Public Works Mutual Aid Program after review by counsel. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Next Mr. Stevens reviewed his budget. Referring to his list of items he is requesting to purchase, he is prioritizing a brine applicator and two mowers.

Mr. Stevens reported that recycled heat and collection of oil is robust. The excess oil is used to heat the garage at little cost. The issue is that there is no secondary containment for it. Currently, they are storing it in plastic totes which are aging and starting to crack. Mr. Stevens is concerned about the impact if a 300 gallon tote cracked or got punctured. He urged them to invest in a secondary containment system. The Board asked questions about the current system.

Mr. Stevens discussed additional upcoming costs: new picnic tables at SHP, upgrade the bathrooms at the Municipal Center and the Library.

Mr. Stevens recommends the Town use a brining solution as opposed to salt to deice the roads. This will reduce the environmental impact for our MS4. He explained the benefits of purchasing the premade brine solution from the State. Though we would be purchasing the brine solution, we would be saving money on salt. He doesn't advocate for purchasing the applicator from the state, he prefers to purchase that separately. We currently spend \$55,000 annually on salt. The brine would be \$10,000 annually.

They discussed the Town's participation in the Exeter Holiday Parade.

Mr. Houghton recognized Jason Cohen from Block 5, the Town's IT consultants. Mr. Cohen gave an update on the issues they encountered and corrected since they began providing services to the Town one year ago. He advised on recommendations going forward. Stronger security upgrades are recommended. A gap in asset management was found. The Town must replace 38 computers because of expiring Windows 10 licenses. It wouldn't be safe to have them continue on the network. The library's public computers will be replaced with refurbished computers for a lower cost. The Town's computers will be replaced with lower cost items if possible. Mr. Moore noted ARPA funds were used for IT upgrades. Mr. Cohen said the funds were used on firewalls and servers; they are moving on to switches. Protections are now in place so that internet doesn't fail at the Police and Fire departments. Finally, Mr. Cohen addressed Microsoft office subscriptions. The retail licenses of Office which are currently in place are not able to be moved from computer to computer. This is not cost effective. Microsoft is moving to subscriptions. As we replace computers, he recommends moving to a subscription. In addition, retail licenses aren't compliant for municipalities.

Mr. Cohen described classes of Office 365 tenants. A tenant is an email server in the sky which is managed by Microsoft. There are several classes of tenants you can lease from Microsoft. Our Police Dept. is in the wrong kind of tenant. They need an enterprise class license to become a GCC tenant. Though it is difficult and expensive, it's strongly recommended. He explained why the change is needed. They plan to do a cybersecurity assessment next year. Mr. Cohen is hoping a path for migrating to GCC at a lower cost will be offered in the future.

Mr. Houghton noted a discrepancy between the contract and the number of computers Mr. Cohen stated. Mr. Cohen explained that the number fluctuates based on hardware that accesses the network. Block 5 monitors antivirus, alerts, remote access. Mr. Moore said we have 38 replacements remaining for the switch over, which he would like to spread out over the next couple of years. Mr. Moore praised the work Block 5 has provided the Town staff. Mr. Cohen expects enhanced technology will improve the available options.

At 8:44 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A (hiring and compensation). Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 9:59 pm 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.

Mr. Houghton moved to Correspondence. Mr. Moore explained that the Town holds several historic buildings that are eligible to be in the historic plaque program. The Board was supportive of the signs and expressed appreciation for the Heritage Commission funding them.

Referring to the Clean Diesel grant, Mr. Houghton asked for details. Mr. Moore said DPW applied for the grant, worth approximately \$74 – \$80,000 for replacement of the diesel power loader. It is scheduled to be replaced in 2025. Cost is estimated at \$310,000. This is in the CIP. Ms. McAllister said we must have a Public Hearing to accept the grant. The funding for the grant is in 2026. It fits well with our rolling stock replacement strategy.

Mr. Moore moved to elderly exemptions. Whitney submitted an analysis including the total value of those that would qualify with the adjustments they are recommending. Mr. Hamilton will provide more information during his next presentation. Mr. Anderson felt there should be less of a gap between single and married. He observed there are less people with pensions; more are moving to 401Ks. This will cause a lot of people to be excluded. Mr. Moore called attention to the abatements for veteran's credits prepared by Jim Joseph were in the folder for signature.

#### ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Moore said a draft of the noise ordinance is being reviewed by Town Counsel. It will be on the Dec 16 agenda. The petitioner is aware of the timeline and he's been in touch.

Mr. Anderson, Ms. Connors, Mr. Moore met with the NHDOT team regarding the Bunker Hill intersection project. They provided traffic counts, cueing times and other traffic data causing them to develop potential improvements to the intersection. He has recommended DOT elevate the discussion to the public as soon as DOT is ready.

Mr. Moore called attention to a conflict in the date of the 3<sup>rd</sup> BAC meeting and the TMAC public forum which the Board had expressed interest in attending. They discussed moving the time of the budget meeting.

Next, Mr. Moore addressed funding for the Marin Way project. He is requesting a transfer of funds from the state roadway intersection CIP to the road reconstruction program to be used for the Marin Way intersection project in order to free up ARPA monies. Ms. McAllister explained that transferring from one line to another allows us to charge the costs of the Marin Way project to road reconstruction as opposed to ARPA where the funds are now. Approving the transfer allows her to adjust the budget to cover the expense of the project. Ms. McAllister confirmed that she is transferring \$10,000 from one line in the budget to another.

Mr. Moore gave a summary of year end expenses. Mr. Houghton wanted clarification on the number of computers. Mr. Moore will get back to him with details.

Mr. Moore continued to discuss proposals for end of year purchases that would have a direct benefit on 2025 operating and capital needs. IT items will be discussed on the 16<sup>th</sup>. Mr. Houghton suggested the computer replacements be on a continually rotating basis, perhaps every 5 years. Ms. Knab supports ARPA funds being used for computer replacements and fire dept. switches.

Ms. Knab asked to return to the Marin Way conversation. Ms. Knab motioned to transfer \$10,000 from the state road intersection CIP to the reconstruction and paving CIP line. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Noting the late hour, Mr. Moore informed them that the Moderator had appointed the Budget Advisory Committee. Heidi Hanson and Pat Abrami have been appointed to FAC. Mr. Houghton will be the School Board rep. Mr. Moore expects to have the budget by the 20<sup>th</sup> to send to the BAC. Starting point for discussions with BAC. Mr. Anderson requested they talk about the budget earlier at the next meeting. Ms. McAllister asked about budget items to be included. Mr. Houghton would like to dedicate the entire meeting to the budget. The Board felt uncomfortable with the way it sits now. Mr. Moore continued to discuss the budget.

Mr. Moore gave a snapshot of the Warrant Articles for Town Meeting. Voters will be asked to vote on a Veteran's Credit, and possibly adopt other credits, including an exemption for the disabled. Stevens Park already has \$125,000 appropriated to it. We are getting cost estimates for the project refined. A phased project is favored by staff, with expanding the parking lot in the lower section, improving drainage and building a pavilion in the first phase. Mr. Moore anticipates additional funds in the amount of \$500,000 to be added to the already appropriated funds in order for a meaningful phase 1 to move forward.

Mr. Moore addressed some CIP items. New projects include town website update, police cruiser, library bathroom renovation, building security upgrades for town offices, fire and police stations, maintenance of buildings, including siding and painting on Fire Station (\$50,000), Fire Dept. cistern and fire pond assessment. He reviewed another worksheet explaining the funds that were in each account and what they might be used for. He noted that in the past few years, the Town's PFAS issues have been addressed using ARPA funds. With ARPA ending, there is the possibility that new properties will be added to our list which would increase our expenses. He also feels assessing will have more work to do, including doing revals every couple of years.

Mr. Houghton wants to prioritize the budget discussion at the next meeting.

At 11:01pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard  
Recording Secretary