

## **MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 20, 2025 SELECT BOARD MEETING**

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

**ALSO PRESENT:** Town Administrator Tim Roache, Finance Administrator Lori Ruest, Director of Planning & Building Vanessa Price, Code Enforcement Officer/Building Inspector Jason Durrance

At 7:00pm Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and welcomed our new Town Administrator, Tim Roache. Mr. Houghton asked for a motion on the minutes. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the October 6, 25 Select Board minutes. Ms. Knab wasn't present at the meeting and therefore abstained. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. Motion passed. Ms. Knab motioned to approve the October 14, 2025 Select Board minutes. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton welcomed Ms. Ruest, the Town's new Finance Administrator, and invited her to highlight key items from the finance report. Ms. Ruest noted that highlighted items in the report indicate missing information, likely due to the recent vacancy in the position and the process of catching up. She plans to coordinate with the Town Treasurer regarding the timing of receiving necessary data.

She also drew attention to a \$606,000 entry at the bottom of the revenue report, which is affecting the month-to-date totals. This entry relates to a portion of the fire truck purchase and was temporarily recorded in this account to facilitate check processing. The amount will be reclassified to the appropriate account in October.

Mr. Anderson asked about Revenues from Meals and Rooms. Ms. Ruest, we haven't received that information yet.

Ms. Ruest noted the police grant was not included in the budget. She will research the reasoning behind this.

Ms. Ruest informed them that the open enrollment forms were distributed today. Department heads' budgets are due tomorrow. She is working with Mr. Roache on them.

Ms. Ruest said two departments are requesting an additional full-time person.

Mr. Houghton initiated discussion on the upcoming budget cycle and CIP planning, noting that the Board will be approximately one month behind by their next meeting. To expedite the process, the Board discussed inviting department heads to attend a Select Board meeting in November to present and discuss their budget requests.

Mr. Houghton encouraged department heads to submit their budgets and capital requests in advance, allowing the Board to review materials ahead of time and focus on questions during the meeting. This approach is intended to accelerate the review process.

He also asked Mr. Roache to reach out to department heads regarding their capital budget submissions, emphasizing the need for dialogue around specific items.

Mr. Anderson noted that the Town should anticipate significant cost increases in its contract with Casella. He also reported that the DPW budgets are complete, and the department is actively working to downsize where possible.

Ms. Ruest acknowledged there is a lot of work ahead. HealthTrust and Primex costs will have a significant impact on the budget.

Mr. Houghton asked Mr. Roache to follow up on the Budget Advisory Committee.

Mr. Houghton recognized Ms. Price and Mr. Durrance for the Planning Department update. Ms. Price reported ongoing updates to site plan and subdivision regulation changes for the amendments to clarify the application processes. They are also updating their road standards. Ms. Connors submitted Stratham's Year 7 MS-4 annual report. In September, the Town received SolSmart Silver designation, recognizing zoning code alignment with solar-friendly practices. Ms. Knab suggested highlighting the award in the newsletter.

Ms. Price reminded the group of the upcoming GACIT hearing. She noted that six zoning amendments are in development for next year. One amendment will clarify the purpose of the Route 33 Legacy Highway Heritage District; another is a housekeeping update for solar energy systems. She also proposed re-establishing the Technical Review Committee to streamline application review.

Mr. Anderson asked for clarification on the committee. Ms. Price explained it was originally created for Gateway and Town Center projects but was dissolved in 2021. Mr. Houghton added that the committee was intended to ensure compliance with regulations tied to infrastructure that was never built because the town voted it down. Mr. Anderson asked Ms. Price to clarify her proposal. She explained that she is recommending the formal re-establishment of the Technical Review Committee, expanding its scope to include all applications going through the Planning Board process—both preliminary design and formal review—not just those within the Gateway and Town Center districts. She also noted that the Heritage District Committee has formed its own advisory group.

Ms. Knab asked whether the proposal would require a Town Meeting vote, and Ms. Price confirmed that it would. Ms. Price is consulting with Town legal counsel to determine if an engineer can participate in Technical Review Committee (TRC) meetings, noting that while the Town does not have an engineer on staff, many applicants require engineering review. Public attendance at TRC meetings would be allowed, but public comment would be reserved for Planning Board meetings. Meetings would have agendas and recorded minutes to promote transparency and streamline the review process.

Mr. Houghton asked who would cover the cost of an engineer. Ms. Price said she is exploring the possibility of requiring escrow from applicants to fund third-party engineering reviews. She noted that the Planning Board has the authority to require such reviews, and fees would be applicant-funded. Perhaps escrow could be added to the application checklist. Engineering review would be necessary for major subdivisions or site plans. Ms. Price will continue to define the process.

Mr. Houghton expressed the importance of being mindful about the number of fees imposed on applicants. Ms. Price clarified that any proposed fees would apply primarily to larger applications. Mr. Anderson noted that while most neighboring communities have impact fees,

Stratham currently does not.

Ms. Price reported that the state has updated definitions related to accessory dwelling units (ADUs). She is also proposing significant amendments to the residential open space cluster development to improve design standards and yield plan requirements.

Regarding impact fees, Ms. Price noted that the Planning Board had a split vote at its last meeting. She emphasized the need for further education to clarify that including impact fee language in the zoning ordinance does not automatically impose fees. She supports adding the language to the zoning warrant to allow the Town to implement fees in the future if a major capital project arises.

Mr. Houghton added that the proposal is intended to establish enabling regulations, acknowledging that there are differing opinions on the matter.

Ms. Price reported that five projects have received conditional approval since her start, with eight additional conceptual projects currently in early stages. Mr. Durrance has been actively involved with the Windsong development and other responsibilities.

Mr. Durrance noted that permit activity is down by approximately 100 compared to the same time last year. Mr. Houghton asked for the value of those permits, and Mr. Durrance will follow up with that information.

Mr. Durrance also shared that recent changes to State RSA now prohibit local amendments to the building ordinance. Mr. Houghton clarified that towns must now follow the State-adopted building codes, which are typically one cycle behind; the current standard is the 2021 code, with the 2024 code expected in the next session. While towns can still maintain a building ordinance, it is now limited in scope. The Town continues to have a building inspector and enforce applicable codes.

Ms. Price is working with the Planning Board on an open space connectivity plan and forming a subcommittee to address actionable items. She is finalizing the contract with FBE to clarify deliverables and is reviewing an electronic storyboard, considering removal of certain maps to create a more interactive version for public use. The finalized story map will be presented to the Planning Board, with potential adoption as a master plan chapter in December or January, depending on zoning amendments and workload.

In collaboration with the Conservation Commission, the Town received and officially accepted a NOAA grant for the Stewart Farm. All required documentation has been completed after nearly a year, and funding remains available.

Ms. Price explained the goal is to simplify the fee structure, including a new non-refundable processing (administrative) fee for all permits. Other updates include a flat rate of \$6 per \$1,000 of construction cost and revised square footage calculations.

The department is exploring online permitting and adding a credit card payment option. Applicants may now hire their own third-party reviewers, potentially lowering permit fees.

Ms. Price referenced Mr. Durrance's report comparing current and proposed fee structures. If implemented, the changes could generate approximately \$900 in additional revenue, based on 20 hours of weekly administrative work. The credit card machine would cost \$325.

Mr. Durrance noted that a new State RSA allows applicants to hire third-party inspectors or plan reviewers, reducing permit fees by 40% for each service, or 80% if both are used. He mentioned a list of qualified reviewers exists but has not reviewed it.

Ms. Knab requested clearer language in the refund policy to ensure applicants understand the application fee is non-refundable. Mr. Anderson asked if the fee increase would cover processing costs; Mr. Durrance confirmed it would. Mr. Anderson also asked how Stratham's fees compare to other towns, and Mr. Durrance said they are generally in line, though structures vary.

Mr. Houghton asked if Ms. Price had spoken with the Finance Administrator about a credit card machine. Mr. Anderson supported the idea, noting the Transfer Station is also considering one. Ms. Price clarified that processing fees would be paid by the applicant.

Mr. Houghton asked for comments from the public.

A resident asked if applicants are charged a fee for using a credit card; Ms. Price confirmed they are, and the fee will be disclosed before the transaction.

Mr. Houghton motioned to close the public hearing. Mr. Anderson then moved to adopt the building permit fees outlined in Jason Durrance's September 8, 2025 memo, effective January 1, 2026. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

The Board then discussed road naming for the 80 and 80R Winnicutt Road subdivision. Mr. Anderson noted one proposed name was a proper name and the other used "circle," though the road is not a circle. Ms. Price explained "Gallant" was submitted to honor the former Gallant Farm, and the road ends in a cul-de-sac, suggesting "Place" might be more appropriate. Ms. Knab asked if five separate road names were necessary. Ms. Price clarified that E-911 requires naming for roads with more than three homes. The developer is open to alternative names. The Board discussed naming conventions and agreed to take time to consider options, including input from the Conservation Commission and Nate Merrill, and asked Ms. Price to request additional suggestions from the developer.

Mr. Houghton referenced correspondence regarding McFarland, noting it appears the project will continue progressing. He suggested the Board revisit the value of monthly reports at a future meeting. Mr. Roache supported continuing them, while Ms. Knab noted she reads them but doesn't always have questions, which may give department heads the impression they're overlooked.

The Board then discussed the proposal to nominate Stratham Hill Park for the State Historic Register. Mr. Houghton explained the Heritage Commission is working to identify properties for potential state or federal historic designation and has contacted two entities to assist with inventory and proposal development. Mr. Anderson asked about implications for the park; Mr. Houghton said it would raise its profile but may limit future changes. Ms. Knab expressed concern about restrictions, especially regarding potentially costly features like the fire tower, and requested more clarity.

The Board agreed further discussion is needed, including input from other commissions, to weigh pros and cons. Ms. Knab noted potential funding opportunities tied to the designation but questioned its overall benefit to the Town. She also raised concerns about multiple groups with interests in the park. Mr. Houghton said this highlights the need for a broader conversation about

the park's long-term vision, which could include the historic designation. Ms. Knab hoped the Heritage Commission would fund the project. Mr. Houghton emphasized the Select Board's role in decision-making due to the park being Town property.

Mr. Houghton encouraged harnessing the current momentum around the park, and noted Mr. Roache is well-positioned to lead coordination efforts. Mr. Roache called the park "the jewel of Stratham," and said he has ideas for bringing stakeholders together.

#### ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Roache reviewed the updated Goals chart. Mr. Houghton provided comments, including the upcoming Casella contract renewal, with discussions expected to begin in November. With no Public Works Director, Mr. Roache, Mr. Anderson, and Mr. Batchelder may lead those talks.

Brandy Rock is a low-priority item. Mr. Roache should follow up with Nate Merrill. Ms. Knab will follow up with the Discovery Center.

The Transfer Station redesign is awaiting preliminary plans from CMA. Fee changes are set to take effect January 1. Budget concerns were raised, with Ms. Knab recommending caution on large expenses. Mr. Houghton suggested identifying available funds and holding them if necessary.

PFAS efforts continue, with Mr. Roache asked to contact Underwood for updates. Public water infrastructure discussions with Newmarket have not progressed; Underwood is assisting, but funding for interconnections remains uncertain. Wilcox and Barton are managing the PFAS concerns. Ms. Connors was recognized for her diligence with the project.

Mr. Houghton continued reviewing Planning and Building Department items. Ms. Knab suggested looking at Newmarket or Newfields for a noise ordinance model. Mr. Houghton noted that 249 Portsmouth Avenue, a historic property, is in distress and has been discussed with the Heritage Commission. He recommended placing the Open Space project under the Planning Department. He also commended Mr. Hickey for his strong engagement and work on IT projects.

The Board received an update on the website project. Mr. Anderson requested to see a preview before training begins. Ms. Knab noted the site is still being populated and reviewed the Conservation Commission page, which currently includes outdated content and broken links. Items will be cleaned up over time. Mr. Roache said Revize is providing a refreshed design that can be tailored later. Mr. Anderson hoped Boards and Commissions were involved. Ms. Knab confirmed the basic structure is being built and will be editable. While Mr. Anderson expressed concern, Ms. Knab said the layout is simpler and easier to navigate. Mr. Roache noted that Revize uses its own content management system. Staff training was briefly discussed, and the final product is expected to be an improvement.

Mr. Houghton suggested scheduling a meeting with Whitney Consulting to review the frequency of property revaluations.

Stoneybrook has been resolved and is now solely a Planning Board matter. Aberdeen West has also been resolved.

Mr. Houghton reviewed three assessing cases, noting that Whitney Consulting is working to explore settlement options before court proceedings. The drafted noise ordinance still needs

resolution, potentially with input from Town Counsel. Rental property leases will be reviewed and renewed annually.

Mr. Houghton asked Mr. Roache to get a status update on renovations at the Historical Society building. He was also asked to meet with Ms. Bakie to better understand election and town meeting processes. She has it well under control and will be able to provide good insight. Mr. Roache expressed appreciation for the guidance.

Mr. Houghton also discussed Board of Tax and Land Appeals cases and recommended that Mr. Hamilton from Whitney Consulting meet with the Board.

#### PERMITS

Ms. Knab motioned approval of the raffle permit application for the Stratham Memorial School PTO with a drawing to be held on Oct 24. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned approval of the Friends of the Library raffle application for a raffle to be held from November 10 – 21 to benefit the Wiggin Memorial Library. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned support for the Seacoast Beekeepers Association to use the Sewall Room for the requested dates in January and February and to waive the fee because they are a non-profit. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned support for Eastern Rockingham County Amateur Radio Service to drive to the top of the hill at Stratham Hill Park for an exercise on November 1, 2025. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson requested approval to purchase a new \$8,000 road sprayer for DPW, noting it's not in the CIP but needed for stop lines, parking lines, and bike lanes. Though the line item will be overspent, the overall budget remains under. Mr. Houghton motioned approval for DPW to spend \$8,000 on a road sprayer. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor..

Mr. Houghton provided an update on the Lane homestead transition, which was expected to close on the 17<sup>th</sup>. He is awaiting confirmation.. He is working with Town Counsel and the Lane family attorney, who requested renaming the document to a “gift agreement.” Mr. Houghton prefers not to accept the gift until the agreement is finalized. Accepting and signing the gift agreement would be done at a public meeting. He remains optimistic and discussed next steps following the transaction.

Mr. Houghton requested an update on the TMAC meeting. Mr. Roache shared that an e-bike policy is being developed, with plans to gather input from the public and nearby landowners. The committee also discussed dog-related issues at the park but acknowledged their advisory role.

Mr. Houghton called the current ordinance outdated and supported revising it, though Ms. Knab was hesitant, citing enforcement challenges and public noncompliance. Mr. Anderson suggested enforcing the existing ordinance. Mr. Roache mentioned the Community Service Officer provided an update, and Ms. Knab noted confusion about off-leash areas. Mr. Houghton emphasized the need for clear expectations and expressed interest in finding a path forward.

At 9:14pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II (a) personnel. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes. At 9:48pm Ms. Knab motioned to come out of the non-public session. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Seeing no further items of discussion, at 9:49pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard  
Recording Secretary