

MINUTES OF THE JULY 7, 2025 SELECT BOARD MEETING

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

ALSO PRESENT: Finance Administrator William Roy, Parks & Recreation Director Seth Hickey, Planning and Building Director Vanessa Price

Members of NH Dept. of Transportation:

David S. Smith, P.E., Project Manager, Bureau of Highway Design with New Hampshire Department of Transportation, Ellen Moshier, CHA Solutions: Contracted through NHDOT, Meli Dube, Environmental Manager with New Hampshire Department of Transportation

At 7:00 p.m., Mr. Houghton welcomed representatives from the New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NH DOT) to present updates on the Bunker Hill Avenue and Route 108 intersection project. Dave Smith, the NH DOT Project Manager, introduced the initiative, which stemmed from town and Planning Commission requests for its inclusion in the State's Ten-Year Transportation Improvement Plan. Ellen Moshier, Project Manager at CHA Solutions, shared the results of the intersection assessment, citing safety issues such as limited sight distance and a history of crashes. With future development expected to boost traffic, the team analyzed roadway constraints and presented three improvement alternatives: a roundabout, a signalized intersection, and restricting left turns from Bunker Hill Avenue. The roundabout, while suitable for current traffic, wouldn't support projected volumes for 2049 and doesn't fit the existing footprint. The traffic signal proposal would require widening Route 108 and potentially realigning a nearby driveway, offering engineering advantages but raising concerns about zoning and preserving the area's character. The third alternative—a "pork chop" island—would prohibit left turns from Bunker Hill Avenue, potentially shifting traffic to residential streets like Tall Pines Drive and Frying Pan Lane. NH DOT explored the implications for Frying Pan Lane, which already shows higher traffic volumes and meets criteria for signalization. Proposed upgrades there include a multi-lane roundabout at an estimated \$5 million or a signalized layout requiring added lane capacity. Both options come with residential impacts and right-of-way challenges. Currently, about \$1 million is allocated for improvements in FY 2027, but either full upgrade exceeds that budget. In the short term, prohibiting left turns from Route 108 onto Bunker Hill Avenue is recommended for immediate safety, though it may further affect traffic flow on nearby streets. The team emphasized continued collaboration with stakeholders and introduced Ms. Meli Dube from NH DOT to support further dialogue.

Ms. Meli Dube, Senior Environmental Manager at the NH DOT, plays a key role in ensuring that transportation projects are environmentally responsible by coordinating among design teams, consultants, regulatory agencies, and construction crews. She oversees compliance with regulations such as NEPA and leads comprehensive environmental reviews during planning to assess potential impacts on natural and cultural resources, including wetlands, protected species, air and water quality, noise, and historic sites. The project area includes sensitive archaeological zones and properties qualifying for historic designation, as well as recreational assets like Smyk Park—prompting additional scrutiny under Sections 106 and 4(f) of federal law. Ms. Dube invited community stakeholders to engage in the consulting party process to provide input and stay informed. Initial findings suggest minimal environmental concerns within the proposed

work area, though further review will continue as plans evolve. Mr. Smith reiterated the team's commitment to balancing engineering goals with environmental, financial, and property considerations, noting that restricting left turns from Bunker Hill Avenue could offer a near-term solution apart from broader changes at Frying Pan Lane.

During the discussion, Ms. Knab asked about the criteria for installing a traffic signal, and the project team explained that it follows standards in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), with current traffic volumes meeting the necessary warrant. She also raised concerns about potential backups to Route 101, and the team responded that adding a second lane could ease congestion. Mr. Anderson cautioned that a mandatory right-turn-only design could lead to increased illegal U-turns and noted residents prefer a traffic signal. Ms. Knab feared that without a traffic signal, drivers might divert to side roads, while Mr. Houghton emphasized that the success of a right-turn-only setup would depend heavily on its design and enforcement, citing similar issues in Millbrook. Mr. Smith acknowledged the complexity of the issue and the need for practical mitigation strategies. Additionally, Mr. Anderson stated he did not share the commercialization worries raised by Mr. Moore. Mr. Houghton expressed skepticism about enforcing right turns and suggested that installing a traffic signal would be the most viable next step, pointing out that roundabouts often create unintended problems. He emphasized that Frying Pan Lane, which handles more traffic than Bunker Hill Avenue, aligns with the Master Plan and is a strong candidate for improvement.

Mr. Houghton noted that although he wasn't familiar with concerns about commercialization near Bunker Hill, he recognized the area had been under DOT consideration for over twenty years and emphasized the urgent need for action. Given current budget limitations, he viewed left-turn mitigation as the only viable short-term solution and questioned how much longer a comprehensive fix might take, especially in light of continued growth along Route 108. Mr. Anderson cautioned that adding a traffic signal at Frying Pan Lane could lead to more complex traffic sequencing for northbound vehicles. Tim Roache from the Rockingham Planning Commission offered perspective on commercialization concerns, urging the group to view the corridor through a long-term, community-focused lens. He described a shift in character near Bunker Hill, marked by local landmarks and growing pedestrian appeal, and recommended careful study of the corridor from Stratham to the Target retail area to guide future development. He warned against traffic-heavy solutions like a five-lane expansion and suggested Frying Pan Lane may provide a more appropriate balance. Ms. Knab expressed similar reservations, describing the Bunker Hill traffic signal proposal as overly aggressive and advocating instead for improvements at Frying Pan Lane, citing its proximity to commercial zones. She also raised questions about funding flexibility, wondering whether postponing the project could unlock greater resources down the line.

Mr. Smith acknowledged that funding remains a major obstacle, explaining that New Hampshire's Ten-Year Transportation Plan—currently undergoing its biennial update—is shaped in coordination with regional planning commissions. He described the broader situation as difficult, with resources stretched thin and tough decisions required. Originally identified through RPC and the Governor's Advisory Commission on Intermodal Transportation (GACIT), the project's \$1 million allocation no longer sufficiently addresses current needs. If Frying Pan Lane is chosen as the preferred improvement site, Mr. Smith committed to advocating for

additional funding and a revised timeline, while urging stakeholders to maintain realistic expectations. He emphasized that any improvements at Frying Pan Lane must be coupled with a restriction on left turns from Bunker Hill Avenue, as signalization alone wouldn't solve existing traffic issues. Town discussions have surfaced concerns about added traffic along Frying Pan Lane, but Mr. Smith reiterated the importance of finding a balanced, functional solution—even if it isn't perfect.

Fire Chief Denton voiced serious concerns about how the proposed traffic changes could impact emergency response times. He highlighted that restricting left turns from Bunker Hill could delay crews during emergencies. He described congestion around the traffic circle already poses challenges for vehicles trying to yield to emergency responders, and increased traffic would make matters worse. Mr. Smith assured that any signalized intersection would include an Opticon system to prioritize emergency vehicles, but Chief Denton questioned the reliability of such systems and emphasized the need for coordinated signal timing between the fire station and Bunker Hill. Mr. Smith recommended working with the Bureau of Traffic to align signal operations with emergency needs. Chief Denton suggested widening areas to improve vehicle maneuverability. He also noted that left-turn restrictions could limit access to critical resources like fuel at the DPW and that Frying Pan Lane isn't a viable alternative during emergencies. The DOT members thanked Chief Denton for his input and agreed to collaborate with the Bureau of Traffic to ensure any changes enhance emergency access rather than hinder it.

Truck restrictions, likely due to weight limitations, on Frying Pan Lane were noted. Mr. Smith reiterated that any signalization at Frying Pan Lane would need to be paired with a left-turn restriction at Bunker Hill Avenue to be effective. Mr. Roache encouraged the Board to attend upcoming GACIT meetings to request additional funding and emphasized keeping Councilor Stevens informed, with Mr. Smith confirming she is already aware. Mr. Smith observed that focus may be shifting from a simple left-turn restriction to broader intersection improvements at either Bunker Hill Avenue or Frying Pan Lane; if confirmed, this direction will be conveyed to the Executive Office and Ten-Year Plan update team. In response to questions from Ms. Knab, it was clarified that the \$1 million allocation remains in the Plan, but its timing and the potential for added funding are uncertain. Ms. Knab also inquired about pedestrian improvements, and Mr. Smith confirmed those elements are usually included and could be further evaluated. The Board expressed openness to continuing the conversation, with Mr. Smith stressing the importance of timely feedback to help shape a DOT strategy and community outreach. He cautioned that depending on developments, the project might be delayed. Mr. Houghton concluded the session, noting that the Board would follow up.

Mr. Houghton asked for a motion on the draft minutes. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the minutes from 6/16/25. Ms. Knab noted she wasn't in attendance at that meeting. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. Ms. Knab asked if the \$5,000 for Underwood Engineers referred to in the draft would be coming from a specific fund. Mr. Houghton and Mr. Anderson thought it would come from a consulting fund. Motion passed.

Chief Denton reported strong progress in staffing and training initiatives. With improved shift coverage among paramedics and firefighter/EMTs, the department has been able to execute key training programs previously constrained by manpower limitations. Paramedics are contributing

not only to medical response—with nearly all daytime calls covered—but also to internal training efforts, raising overall capability.

Training has expanded across the department. A hands-on vehicle extrication training is scheduled for August. Beginning in September, the department will host a combined Firefighter I and II certification course. Five members have recently trained as State instructors, enhancing the department's capacity to conduct in-house training and certification going forward.

Chief Denton, along with Josh Crow and John Dardani, is enrolled in a grant-funded command-level training program (Blue Card), which includes online modules and a three-day practical. This training aims to strengthen interoperability with neighboring departments by establishing a unified command approach.

Pump operator certification is planned for October. The department's Fire Inspector, Matt Newton, continues to provide valuable support on town planning and project coordination.

Department morale remains high. However, staffing continues to face minor challenges: one member is deployed through October, and another has relocated. A new per diem member was recently hired to assist with weekend coverage. Chief Denton noted that many new hires are traditional part-time personnel with other full-time jobs, yet they have proven effective. He proposed posting for one or two additional per diem roles to address weekend gaps, especially in light of recent high-profile incidents. Chief Denton noted that our medic, Emily, led a successful life-saving effort. He expressed pride in the team's coordination and quick action.

Night shift coverage remains inconsistent. While key personnel are filling gaps when available, absences expose vulnerabilities. Discussions are underway with the Finance Administrator to clarify per diem hour limits and their implications for employment status. A committee is being formed to address staffing concerns, with an emphasis on collaborative solutions. The existing Recruitment and Retention Committee continues to perform effectively, with positive results in recruitment efforts.

The compensation structure for firefighters and EMTs is under review as neighboring communities raise rates. For example, Newmarket is offering FF/AEMTs \$30/hour and FF/paramedics \$35. We are offering \$23 for dual certs. This disparity affects competitiveness and recruitment, despite the department's strong reputation. Continued lag in compensation may further impact staffing.

Engine 1 is expected to arrive by September/October. Planning is underway for Engine 3 acquisition, targeted for 2028. Specification development is in progress and aligned with the upcoming budget cycle.

Base station radios have been successfully ordered. Defibrillator replacements are necessary due to lifecycle limits (7–10 years), with estimated costs ranging between \$30,000 and \$50,000 each.

PFAS-free gear is becoming available, but lacks durability compared to existing options. Current gear contains PFAS, prompting efforts to reduce exposure. Fire gear is considered essential

safety equipment—not standard uniforms—and costs over \$6,000 per set (coat and pants). Supply delays necessitate temporary leasing, and gear should be replaced on a 10-year rotation. There's an ongoing discussion about whether gear funding belongs in the CIP or operating budget. Discussions will continue as we enter the budget process.

Chief Denton requested that any decommissioned police cruisers be reassigned for use by the Fire Inspector, noting that the department has been relying on a utility vehicle for this purpose. The Board discussed the broader use and management of town vehicles.

Chief Denton reported that during the budget planning phase, the warrant article for EMS funding did not anticipate the equipment needs required to support the newly implemented paramedic program. Because the budgeting process had concluded before those needs were identified, the EMS Supplies line—entirely funded by the warrant article—is now approximately 70% expended as of June. Once this allocation is fully spent, operations will be impacted due to the absence of an EMS equipment line item.

Chief Denton recommended reevaluating future budgeting practices for EMS, suggesting either reintegrating the line item into the general budget with realistic funding levels or transitioning from a warrant article to a more flexible funding mechanism such as a revolving fund. He also proposed that the town explore the possibility of authorizing supplemental funds in response to emerging needs, within limits approved by taxpayers.

Mr. Roy and the Board were asked for input, and Mr. Houghton questioned whether this was a long-term concern or specific to the current fiscal year. Chief Denton responded that the issue arose this year due to the paramedic program launch and acknowledged the lack of foresight regarding this funding gap. Aside from this concern, he reported that the overall budget is performing well.

The department is making great strides and moving in a good direction.

Mr. Houghton asked Mr. Roy for an update on the auditors. Mr. Roy reported that the audit is going well.

Mr. Houghton introduced the agenda item regarding the Employee Handbook. Mr. Anderson indicated he had thoroughly reviewed the document and had several comments. The Board agreed to postpone the discussion to later in the meeting.

Mr. Houghton raised concerns about building access, citing that the allocation of library keys has been fully utilized. In light of the upcoming budget season, he suggested considering a transition to a card key access system. Mr. Stevens has been asked to conduct preliminary research into this potential upgrade. Although the initiative represents a significant expenditure, the board believes the timing is appropriate for implementation.

Mr. Houghton acknowledged Mr. Hickey for presenting the revised Sewall Room Policy, which incorporates additional feedback from staff. The policy has also undergone review by Town Counsel. The Board will formally adopt the policy at the next scheduled meeting.

RESERVATIONS

Mr. Anderson said he talked to Mr. Stevens about cost impacts of non-profits using the park. Mr. Stevens said there is not a cost impact. Ms. Knab motioned to allow the Southern District YMCA to use the Front Pavilion on 8/8 and waive the fee as they are a non-profit. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Anderson motioned to allow the Active Retirement Association to use the Front Pavilion on 9/ and waive the fee as they are a non-profit. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned support for the NH SPCA's July 7th – 20th raffle in support of their organization. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the Summerfest Raffle Permit application. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Houghton read Donna Onacki for consideration to the Recreation Commission for a three year term.

Mr. Houghton motioned to appoint Michele McCann-Corti to the Wiggin Memorial Library Board of Trustees as an alternate. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Houghton motioned to appoint Kathy Bower to the Wiggin Memorial Library Board of Trustees as an alternate. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 8:49pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, (a) and (e) Personnel and Legal Matters. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 9:47pm Mr. Houghton motion to come out of the non-public session and seal the minutes noting failure to do so may render a proposed action invalid. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. At 9:47pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary