

MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 2, 2025 SELECT BOARD MEETING

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

ALSO PRESENT: Assistant Town Administrator and Parks & Recreation Director Seth Hickey, Wiggin Memorial Library Director Steve Butzel, Director of Public Works Tim Stevens

At 7:00 p.m., Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and asked for a motion on the minutes. Mr. Anderson motioned approval of the August 11 and August 22, 2025 minutes. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton began the meeting by recognizing resident Scott Poteet and saying it was an honor to have him attend the meeting this evening. He noted he is also a retired Air Force Lt. Col, and a member of the Polaris Dawn team, which achieved a remarkable historic event. Ms. Knab read the proclamation, gave him a plaque and said one would also hang in the Town Hall. Mr. Poteet thanked them.

Mr. Houghton recognized Mr. Butzel, who reported that in-person circulation at the library has increased by 8% compared to the same period last summer. Usage of downloadable and streaming services, as well as museum passes, has also risen.

In response to a question from Mr. Anderson regarding the cause of the increase, Mr. Butzel attributed the growth to improved marketing efforts and greater public awareness. He noted that as more residents participate in both online and in-person programs, they recognize the library's ongoing offerings and continue to engage with its services.

Mr. Butzel thanked DPW for the work on the bathroom renovation. He stated that the library purchased new computers and monitors for some of its staff. He is working with Block 5 on some networking infrastructure issues.

Mr. Butzel continued, reporting that the summer reading programs were very successful. They held an adult murder mystery with approximately 40 attendees and a very popular Taylor Swift trivia night for teens. Staff is putting together terrific programs for adults, families, teens and children. When asked where the programs are publicized, Mr. Butzel said primarily in the library newsletter.

Mr. Houghton raised the topic of library parking. Mr. Butzel proposed painting designated parking spaces to ensure accessible parking for library patrons, including those attending events in the community room. Ms. Knab noted that the system would operate on an honor basis.

Mr. Houghton then recognized Mr. Hickey, who reported that summer programming has concluded with increased participation compared to the previous year, largely attributed to youth soccer enrollment, which officially begins this weekend. Senior programming, which had paused briefly, is resuming, and recent events such as the Isle of Shoals trip were well received.

Additionally, a new painting class launched with 10 participants. Unlike previous offerings, this program included a participation fee. While not fully covering program costs, the new model has led to increased contributions, enabling broader support and expansion of future programming.

Mr. Hickey reported that a recent community-wide postcard mailing generated positive feedback and led to increased attendance at coffee socials and other programs. The department noted a rise in new participants and expects continued growth as colder weather encourages indoor activity. Marketing efforts will resume following the holiday.

Mr. Hickey reported that the Recreation Commission welcomes the appointment of Donna Onacki, who is expected to bring valuable insight into programming for older residents and help strengthen engagement with that demographic. As a new practice, the Recreation Commission is trying to formalize appointment of the fall soccer committee.

Mr. Hickey continued, reporting that at its meeting tomorrow, TMAC is attempting to finalize guidance for the Select Board concerning e-bike usage, particularly in town parks. There is a growing concern over the increased presence of electric motorcycles and dirt bikes—often referred to broadly as e-bikes—being operated at high speeds on roads and trails, causing damage to park infrastructure. The proposed guidance will clarify permitted use, specifically allowing only Class 1 pedal-assist e-bikes in Town parks. Higher-speed electric vehicles will be prohibited. This is a more restrictive approach to e-bike usage than current State park regulations, which permit up to Class 3 e-bikes.

The existing ordinance is outdated and limits enforcement capabilities. Currently, Officer Guerette monitors activity at the park but can only document violations and request compliance. Adoption of the updated ordinance will provide the Police Department with the necessary authority to enforce regulations and ensure public safety.

Mr. Hickey reported that he will be reviewing the newly developed trail signage with the Trail Management Advisory Committee (TMAC), which is currently in the process of scheduling fall work dates. TMAC will also revisit the dog ordinance seeking clarification to the ordinance.

Additionally, Mr. Hickey shared that the Stratham Hill Park Association has expressed interest in conducting a cleanup of the natural skating area. In response to Ms. Knab's inquiry about flooding the area for winter use, Mr. Hickey noted that water has not been added in previous years and, given current drought conditions, any decision will be deferred. Ms. Knab also stated her general opposition to cutting within the park.

Mr. Hickey reported that he will be reviewing the Department of Public Works' (DPW) 10-year plan for Stratham Hill Park with the Stratham Hill Park Association, focusing on advancing key infrastructure projects. Ms. Knab requested clarification on the scope of the plan; Mr. Hickey indicated that Mr. Stevens is leading the effort and would be best positioned to provide detailed information. He noted that the plan includes a cataloging of trails and broadly addresses park infrastructure, though jurisdiction over specific areas varies.

Mr. Hickey emphasized that the plan is in its early stages and primarily intended to support next year's budget planning, with particular attention to improvements such as bathrooms and the fire tower. Mr. Houghton stressed the importance of identifying which entities have jurisdiction over various areas of the park, given the number of stakeholders involved.

Mr. Hickey also reported that the Conservation Commission recently conducted a site walk at the fire tower area and expressed appreciation to DPW for their support. He noted the presence of a police building in that area and referenced an existing agreement. Mr. Hickey will research the Town's obligations and follow up with the group.

Mr. Hickey referenced his memo regarding grant funds that were awarded for ADA playground mats. The check has already been received. He will order the equipment and coordinate installation with DPW.

Mr. Hickey reported that the Recreation Commission has raised concerns about the condition of the baseball and softball fields. He and Brent Scott met with Mr. Stevens to discuss the issue, and the Commission plans to submit a formal letter to the Board outlining their concerns.

Mr. Hickey also noted that the Gordon Barker Summer Bike Race Series has concluded and that Summer Camp has ended for the season. Due to upcoming renovations at Stratham Memorial School (SMS), the camp may need to be relocated next year.

Moving to his Assistant Town Administrator role, Mr. Hickey reported that he is awaiting town counsel's review of the rental documents he had submitted to him.

Mr. Hickey reminded the Board that a Computer Allocation Policy has been submitted for review and is available for action when appropriate; no immediate action is required.

He also met with Heidi Morrison from Block 5 and requested their assistance in organizing the Town's IT closet, aiming to improve accessibility and inventory management of equipment such as keyboards and mice.

Additionally, Mr. Hickey is working with the Finance Department to gain a clearer understanding of the Town's budgeting structure.

Mr. Hickey reported an ongoing issue with the Fire Department receiving faxes from Rockingham dispatch. Ms. Fowle has been working diligently on the matter, and he believes they are close to a solution. These faxes are important for reporting purposes.

Mr. Hickey reported continued progress on the Town's computer inventory and replacement allocation, expressing confidence in meeting the deadline.

He is collaborating with Ms. Price on the Open Space project, noting significant progress. Ms. Price will provide a detailed update during her department presentation.

Mr. Hickey also presented updates on the new Town website, including feedback-driven improvements and retention of select legacy content. He consulted with a contact recommended by Ms. Knab, whose input was helpful.

Lastly, Mr. Hickey followed up on his request for a formal job description for his new role to ensure clarity and alignment moving forward.

Mr. Houghton opened the public hearing on the proposed modification to Transfer Station fees. The motion was seconded by Ms. Knab and approved unanimously.

Mr. Stevens presented the proposed changes, which include increasing the cost of resident stickers from \$5 to \$10. Stickers will now be issued exclusively through the Clerk's Office and will transition from an annual calendar renewal to a renewal schedule based on vehicle registration. Ms. Bakie expressed support for the proposed changes.

Mr. Stevens presented the proposed Transfer Station fee modifications, noting that disposal costs have increased and the goal is to cover expenses without generating profit. Fees will be based on

estimated cubic yardage, as the facility does not have a scale. Staff will continue to assess loads by truck size, with consistent practices already in place.

Mr. Anderson commented on the large volume of brush being brought to the Transfer Station, and Mr. Stevens confirmed that processing brush requires significant crew time. Glenn Wass of Gifford Farm Road expressed concern about managing sticker colors and opposed the proposed brush fee, suggesting that doubling the sticker fee should cover labor costs. Mr. Stevens responded that the increased sticker fee alone would not offset the workload. Grass clippings and compostable items will remain free of charge.

Sticker distribution will transition from an annual calendar to a vehicle registration-based renewal, with new stickers rolling out later this year. Mr. Stevens also noted rising costs for recycling items and emphasized the impact of hauling fees.

Negotiations with Casella for future waste disposal services are planned for 2026, with implementation in 2027. The proposed fee changes are scheduled to take effect on January 1. The Board confirmed that a second public hearing will be held on September 15.

Mr. Houghton asked for comments from the Board. Hearing none, Ms. Knab motioned to close public hearing. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton moved to Correspondence. They discussed the request from Bright Horizons to place a book donation box in the municipal center lobby until Sept. 22. The Board approved the book donation box.

Mr. Houghton noted that the Stratham Memorial School District is seeking a board member to serve on its Financial Advisory Committee. Ms. Knab volunteered to represent the Board on the committee. Formation of the committee is currently underway.

Mr. Houghton highlighted several budget items requiring attention, including concerns from the Fire Chief regarding the EMS supply line needed to support the paramedic program. Both the Fire and Police Departments have identified building maintenance issues. The Board discussed the possibility of funding these routine repairs through the Building and Grounds budget.

The group also considered establishing a financial threshold to determine whether maintenance expenses should be covered by the operating budget or the respective department's budget.

Additionally, Mr. Houghton revisited the topic of building access, which has been under discussion in recent years. After reviewing the current system, he expressed strong support for transitioning to a digital key card system in the near future.

Mr. Houghton noted that employee benefits and healthcare represent a significant budget consideration. The financial impact for the upcoming fiscal year remains uncertain and will require further review as more information becomes available.

Mr. Houghton said the Board will need to spend time with Ms. McAllister to engage with the budget process. He believes department heads were instructed to get their budgets back to the Board by end of Sept.

Mr. Houghton recognized Mr. Wass, who inquired whether the Town is investing bond funds in interest-bearing accounts, similar to the approach initiated by concerned residents for the school, which has earned 4.3% interest through such investments. Mr. Anderson confirmed that, while

subject to different regulations, the Town is following a similar practice. Mr. Houghton added that the Town took a significant step in this direction two years ago. Mr. Wass noted that the school has already benefited substantially from interest earnings, thanks to the efforts of those engaged citizens.

Mr. Houghton invited Mr. Anderson to lead a discussion on current drought conditions. Mr. Anderson noted that weekly updates from the drought monitor confirm Stratham is experiencing drought, and recommended the Town follow other municipalities in declaring a formal restriction.

Mr. Wass questioned the reliance on data from Kingston and Epping wells, which are only slightly below normal and not geographically close to Stratham. He asked what additional criteria are used and emphasized that many residents view their lawns and gardens as investments. Mr. Anderson proposed implementing a Level 1 drought restriction, limiting lawn watering to every other day.

Mr. Wass requested consistency in enforcement, citing past frustrations with business irrigation practices. Mr. Stevens confirmed that Town sprinkler systems can be regulated. Mr. Houghton assured the Board that messaging will be managed carefully, and the situation will be reviewed regularly.

The Board agreed to implement the minimum restriction. Mr. Anderson motioned, under RSA 41:11-d, to declare a Level 1 drought restriction: lawn watering by odd-numbered addresses is permitted only on odd-numbered days, and even-numbered addresses on even-numbered days. Watering is prohibited between 8:00 am. and 7:00 pm. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. The Executive Assistant will follow up on implementation requirements.

Mr. Houghton moved to the agenda item on Trick or Treat Night. Ms. Knab motioned to hold Trick or Treat night on Friday, October 31 from 5:00pm to 7:30pm. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

RESERVATIONS

Mr. Houghton called attention to a request from Portsmouth High School to hold a bike race on Sept. 24 at SHP. Mr. Hickey said they have done this historically for the past 6–8 years. They will have Stratham EMS on site. The team travels by bus, so there will not be a lot of cars in the parking lot. Ms. Knab motioned support for PHS using the park for a bike race on Sept. 24 and arranging for EMTs. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to authorize Stratham Troop 185 to use the top of the hill at Stratham Hill Park on October 3 for an overnight campout and request they coordinate with Fire Dept for the possible use of fire pits. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the Stratham Community Garden request to hold a raffle on Sept. 14 at the garden ribbon-cutting celebration. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to appoint Donna Onacki to the Recreation Commission to a full member position for a three year term to expire at town meeting 2027. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson motioned to appoint Tim Copeland to fill an Alternate position on Conservation Commission for a two year position to end at town meeting 2027. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept the terms of the Highway Safety Grant as presented in the amount of \$15,800 and the amended grant terms as presented in the Grant Agreement Amendment Notice for an adjusted total grant limitation of \$15,800. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson approved the donation box for field of flags with a deadline of Oct. 14 to be placed in the municipal center lobby. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton reviewed the Genesys Alert System documentation. Mr. Anderson noted that the new Town Administrator should be listed on the document, and Mr. Houghton recommended Mr. Hickey be the designated contact. Ms. Knab motioned to authorize Mr. Houghton to sign the documentation; Mr. Anderson seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

At 8:50 pm 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 9:45 pm Ms. Knab motioned to come out of the non-public session and adjourn. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary