

## **MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 20, 2026 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, Planning and Building Director Vanessa Price. Lt. David Pierce

At 7:00pm Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and asked for a motion on the draft minutes. Mr. Anderson noted an edit to the minutes. With that amendment, Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the January 5, 2026 minutes. Ms. Knab wasn't at the January 5<sup>th</sup> meeting and therefore abstained. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. Motion passed.

Mr. Houghton recognized Ms. Price for her department report. Ms. Price provided updates on Planning projects at 301 and 217 Portsmouth Avenue and noted that she anticipates seven proposed zoning amendments for the Warrant. She reported that the Building Department fee structure took effect on January 1 and that staff are currently reviewing the land use board fee schedule. In 2025, a total of 917 building permits were issued; permit activity has been trending downward or remaining flat in recent years. She added that last year's building permit fees were sufficient to cover the Building Department's budget, with a small surplus.

Mr. Houghton asked about activity at the school. Ms. Price stated that the Building Inspector had been on site. When Mr. Houghton clarified he was referring to the old vocational school, Ms. Price indicated she had no new information. Regarding Stoney Brook, she reported that the applicant still needs to file a formal application. A request for a variance extension related to the single-family home project was recently granted by the ZBA for one year. Mr. Houghton noted that a prior settlement requires a mixed-use component.

Ms. Price revisited the matter of Winnicutt Road naming. She recalled that Copley Properties did not agree with the names proposed by the Heritage and Conservation Commission. Gallant Place had been recommended and, although a proper name, was considered acceptable by the Board. Ms. Knab expressed a preference for the names originally proposed by the Heritage Commission. Ms. Ruest emphasized how a road name is pronounced is important for emergency response purposes. Ms. Price noted that the names have not yet been reviewed by E911. The Board directed her to submit the list of twelve native soil and grass names to E911 for review, after which the Board will make its selection. Ms. Price confirmed that the Board has approved Gallant Place and Wildflower Place, and Mr. Houghton affirmed this.

Ms. Price then presented the Aberdeen West Decommissioning Landscaping Agreement which was part of the requirement of the Notice of Decision and also the Landscape Agreement. These have been reviewed by legal counsel and agreed to by all parties. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the landscape surety agreement and the decommissioning agreement for Aberdeen West Cooperative as outlined in the January 14, 2026 memo from the Director of Planning and Building. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Price next called attention to 217 Portsmouth Avenue and reviewed the Cistern Agreement and the Stormwater Management Agreement. She explained that the access and joint-use easement for the on-site cistern provides the Fire Department with the necessary rights to access and utilize the cistern. Both documents are required as part of the Planning Board process. She further noted that the Stormwater Management Infrastructure easement specifies that the grantor must retain ownership of the stormwater facilities and ensure their proper maintenance. Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the stormwater management infrastructure easement and the access and joint use easement agreement for the on-site cistern for 217 Portsmouth Avenue, Tax Map 21, Lot 88 in the Route 33 Legacy Highway Heritage Zoning district as outlined in the January 14, 2026 memo from the Director of Planning and Building. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Lt. Pierce, who reported that Chief King is requesting approval to purchase a new cruiser using Detail Funds. The cost of the vehicle is \$54,045, with an additional approximately \$4,000 for a five-year, 100,000-mile warranty. New equipment for the cruiser, totaling \$13,956, would also be funded through the Detail Fund. Lt. Pierce noted that the 2014 detectives' vehicle will be auctioned due to significant body deterioration. Under the proposed vehicle rotation, the Chief's current car will be reassigned to the detectives, and the Chief will receive the new cruiser. He also requested the release of \$2,000 from the Detail Fund to cover car wash expenses, which had previously been paid from the maintenance budget. Ms. Knab motioned to authorize the Police Chief to expend a total of \$70,001 out of the Detail Fund of which \$54,045 will go to the new vehicle, \$13,956 will go to equip the cruiser and \$2,000 will go towards car washes and to auction the vehicle that is coming out of service. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Lt. Pierce then requested on behalf of the Police Chief the release of \$6,171.78 in the traffic control CIP to purchase new equipment for the Police Department. Ms. Knab authorized the Police Chief to move forward with funds out of the traffic control CIP and the amount of \$6,171.78 toward traffic control. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

The Board then discussed when to have the snow date for the Public Hearing on the Warrant. They wanted to avoid having it on the same date as the SAU16 meeting. They decided on the 9<sup>th</sup> at 7:00pm as the snow date.

Mr. Anderson motioned to accept the \$5,902 donation from the Stratham Volunteer Fire Department Association for the purchase of a cordless DeWalt fan. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned support for Stratham Memorial School to move forward with its Wellness Walk on Friday, May 15 at 1:15pm and approve the road closure. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Roache said the Energy Commission is requesting to come before the Board in February to discuss the electric rates.

The group questioned the terms for the Office of Emergency Management positions. They will revisit those appointments at a later date. Mr. Houghton motioned to re-appoint Nate Merrill to the Local River Management Advisory Committee for a three year term ending in 2029. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton called attention to the School Board flier on the anticipated tax increase. Ms. Knab recalled that much of the increase was due to the bond and that the contract negotiation was reasonable. They have mandatory out of district tuition for students with disabilities that is very expensive.

Mr. Roache said he's been made aware by the State's Attorney General that state law now requires us to review all town contracts for DEI requirements. Mr. Houghton suggested examining the grants. He will review and bring back to the Board with his findings.

Going forward, Mr. Roach will include in his Administration Report highlights from each of the departments. From Fire Dept, Paramedic Emily Yelle just did a training on how to transport a service dog with the person that's having an issue. Parks and Rec decided to keep camp at Stratham Memorial School. Graham Emanuel contacted the Town Clerk to recreate an old style ballot box and present that at Town Meeting. Mr. Houghton said Mr. Emanuel should present his project to the Board prior to that.

Mr. Roache briefly discussed the Lane property repairs. He would like to schedule a walk-through of the property, including Nate Merrill and Drew Bedard. Mr. Houghton suggested mid-February. The tenant who lost access to water for nine days had requested rent relief for those days. We did not own the property at that time, therefore it was not our responsibility. Mr. Houghton observed that he was inconvenienced for nine days. He declined to have us put him up in a hotel, which would have cost us close to \$700. They agreed to rent relief of approximately \$500 - \$700.

Mr. Roache reported that he has been in communication with Underwood Engineering regarding potential water interconnections related to ongoing PFAS concerns. He noted growing interest and collaboration among neighboring communities. He plans to meet with Underwood and representatives from surrounding towns once the budget process is complete.

The Board expressed interest in meeting with the legislative delegation some time in the coming months.

Mr. Anderson wants to meet with the Police Chief and Mr. Roache in late February to discuss the annual review process.

After discussion, the Board agreed to discontinue the monthly department reports. Moving forward, Mr. Roache will provide department heads with high-level highlights from Select Board meetings and encourage a more interactive exchange. Ms. Knab noted the value of the statistical information previously provided by departments and expressed a desire not to lose that insight. Mr. Roache stated that while his summaries will remain high level, departments can continue to provide detailed information during their appearances before the Board. Ms. Knab also

cautioned against departments becoming siloed. Mr. Roache added that the information will be maintained as a SharePoint document, allowing all departments to view one another's updates and promote transparency and collaboration.

Mr. Houghton opened the discussion on the budget. The Board noted that the current draft reflects an approximate 3.5% increase, and their goal is to reduce it to 3%, which would require identifying \$50,000–\$60,000 in reductions. Ms. Ruest reminded the Board that the fund balance could be used to help achieve this target, and the group discussed appropriate levels of fund balance usage. Mr. Anderson expressed support for establishing a formal fund balance policy.

Mr. Roache reported that the CIP figure had decreased based on recommendations from the Budget Advisory Committee. The Board reviewed potential areas for expense reductions, including past practices regarding fund balance use. They also discussed the Casella proposal and agreed that additional research and further discussion are needed.

The Board reviewed departmental budget requests and committee submissions to identify possible cuts. They agreed to allocate \$15,000 for Patriotic Purposes to support the America 250/Summerfest celebration. Mr. Houghton requested a non-public session later in the meeting to discuss a Heritage Commission project. After making adjustments, the Board believed they were close to the target.

The discussion then turned to road paving and opportunities to reduce costs in that area. Mr. Anderson commented on revenue projections, noting they are conservative. After speaking with the Town Clerk regarding motor vehicle fees, he suggested the estimates may be able to be adjusted upward. The Board continued discussing ways to reach their budget target. Mr. Houghton concluded by noting that they will follow up on the Casella proposal and revisit DPW matters at a later time.

Ms. Ruest requested that the Board review the draft warrant, noting that it had been prepared using the DRA form. She highlighted several articles and asked the Board for clarification or confirmation as needed. Mr. Houghton asked Mr. Roache to provide an updated spreadsheet that includes the CIP and CRF figures.

Ms. Ruest reported that she will follow up with the DRA and the Trustees of the Trust Funds, and will also contact the Assessor regarding a recently identified change to the veterans' credits. Information for the Public Hearing will be posted on the Town website.

At 9:03pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II(c) and (e). Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 9:21pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard, Recording Secretary