MINUTES OF THE OCTOBER 19, 2026 SELECT BOARD MEETING

MEMBERS PRESENT: Board Members Chair Allison Knab, Vice Chair Joe Anderson, participating remotely Tedd Tramaloni

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator Tim Roache, Fire Chief Jeff Denton, Police Chief Anthony King

At 7:00pm Ms. Knab opened the meeting and noted that member Ted Tramiloni would be participating remotely because he is away from Stratham attending urgent family matters.

Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the minutes of October 5, 2026. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes

Ms. Knab invited Chief Denton for his budget presentation. Chief Denton reported strong progress across fire department initiatives. Paramedics have begun rapid sequence intubation (RSI) training, supported by donations from the Chief Maloney Foundation and the Stratham Volunteer Fire Department Association, with the goal of having all medics trained by mid- to late spring and department certification targeted for mid-year next year. Call volume is approximately 760 to date and is on track to reach 900 to 1,000 by year-end, representing about a 15 percent increase over last year, with mutual aid responses also rising.

The Fire Prevention Pancake Breakfast and Open House drew between 300 and 400 attendees, showing strong engagement from families and children. Big water training was successfully completed with participation from eight departments, achieving 750 gallons per minute and earning positive feedback.

The ISO retrogression process will conclude on November 14, with training improvements already submitted. The department has limited ability to improve its water supply score due to uncertified cisterns and ponds.

The Chief also noted that the fire gear budget can be reduced because of an anonymous $180,000 donation from the Boston Foundation, which will fund thirty sets of PFAS-free gear for firefighters, improving safety and reducing carcinogen exposure. The Chief and Board expressed gratitude for the anonymous donor who, through the Boston Foundation, contributed funding for new firefighting gear. Although the donor's identity is unknown, it is believed they may have a local connection, and the Chief intends to issue a public thank you.

The Chief reviewed key budget considerations. Vehicle maintenance costs are rising due to unexpected repairs, including tire replacements caused by dry rot on older trucks. Building maintenance expenses also exceeded projections after unplanned replacements to the sprinkler system control panel, the heating system's circulating pump, and several rooftop units. These overruns will require increased budget allocations.

In response to public concerns about ambulance coverage, the Chief outlined the proposed staffing model: an ambulance crew in-station 24 hours a day, preferably with a paramedic and an

EMT, three staff on the engine during the day and add a stipend position at night to cover the engine and backup ambulance. He noted that while this will increase costs, the goal is to meet community expectations and improve service. The proposed 24-hour shift model would allow paramedics to work one day per week, which is expected to help with recruitment and retention. If the department cannot fill the schedule through this model, they will explore hiring additional staff and adding advanced EMTs. Plaistow ALS would continue to serve as backup, as it does now. Chief reminded them that joining the Plaistow ALS program needs to be a warrant article.

The Board discussed the estimated cost to the town of approximately $15,000 and the required timeline for continuing participation in the ALS program. If the town remains enrolled, it must provide a one-year notice to withdraw, meaning it would participate for at least one more year and could fully exit after the second year if the town's own program becomes sufficiently robust. Mr. Anderson asked whether other towns joining or opting out would affect Stratham's costs. Chief Denton explained that the 2027 program year is currently funded through donations, and the financial model assumes participation by at least four towns. If more than four towns opt out, the cost burden for remaining towns will increase. All participating towns are currently evaluating their options. Chief Denton reaffirmed that by placing the warrant article before voters they can decide whether to continue with the program. He feels continuing with the program is a wise choice. Maintaining the service for the next few years provides valuable backup support while the town works to strengthen its own paramedic program, which will take time to develop. The Chief emphasized that the service already benefits the community—for example, assisting Stratham's EMTs during a current call—and serves as an important third layer of paramedic coverage alongside mutual aid. The Board agreed that the additional protection is worthwhile in the near term.

He also recommended that the town move toward hiring a full-time fire chief. He announced that he will not continue in the role after his current term ends in March 2028, citing workload demands. He noted the department has been informed, supports the transition, and that the goal is to begin the hiring process upon approval, ideally bringing a new chief on by September to participate in building the next budget. He expressed commitment to ensuring a smooth transition over the coming year.

Mr. Anderson noted that hiring a full-time fire chief would require a warrant article because it represents a change in the department's organizational model. The Chief added that the items he presented represent the major budget impacts for the coming year. He explained that preliminary figures and supporting materials have been provided for the Board's review and that further discussion can take place as the budget process continues.

Ms. Knab recognized Chief King who reported that his update was primarily budget-related, as his full quarterly report had been given recently. He noted that the new Community Service Officer has begun work, is in uniform, and has already completed several shifts. He also referenced the ordinance spreadsheet he previously shared and suggested it may be time for the Board to review some items.

He reported that the live scan system has been installed and will be in regular use once staff training is complete. His CIP materials have been submitted, and his first draft budget is largely

level-funded aside from payroll adjustments tied to COLA. The planned internal promotion will be offset by reductions in overtime, and no major increases are anticipated in operations or building lines.

Mr. Anderson asked whether additional Community Service Officer hours should be considered for the busier April–October period. Chief King responded that hours fluctuate, decreasing in winter (10–12 hours per week) and increasing in summer (up to 18–20 hours). Ms. Knab agreed this warrants future discussion.

On building maintenance, he noted that the department will exceed its line item due to two emergency repairs: replacement of the water heater, which failed again sooner than expected, and replacement of a heater in the sally port that was improperly vented and developed a hole releasing CO2. He has been coordinating with Mr. Roache on these issues. Despite these overruns, the department expects to remain within its overall budget.

Ms. Knab moved to informational and correspondence items, including a Lovell Road request, an email regarding the dog ordinance amendment at the park, and developer agreements. Mr. Roache explained that developer agreements originate from the Planning Board and are reviewed with legal counsel to outline project requirements. Three agreements were presented: 89–91 Portsmouth Avenue, Lindt's additional work requiring a full fire access road, and 60 Portsmouth Avenue for the Porsche dealership's expansion. All have been approved by the Planning Board, which holds statutory authority, and require Select Board signatures.

Ms. Knab and Mr. Anderson did not recall handling these agreements in the past, though Ms. Knab believed the process should have occurred. Mr. Roache suggested treating them as informational items and including them routinely in the signature packet going forward, with the option for Board members to raise questions as needed. Ms. Knab agreed, noting Planning has already completed its review. Mr. Roache confirmed all agreements have gone through the appropriate process.

Mr. Roache explained that Parks and Recreation is transitioning from its current credit card and online payment vendor to RecDesk, the platform already used for program registrations. RecDesk will now handle all payment processing, creating a single integrated system. He noted that when attempting to sign the agreement, he saw it required authorization to act on behalf of the town, which he does not have without Select Board approval. The fee structure remains essentially the same, with the only difference being a small monthly cost for in-person payments, which will be covered through the Rec Revolving Fund. The change is otherwise a straightforward vendor switch. Mr. Anderson authorized the Town Administator to sign on behalf of the Town for the transition to RecDesk payments and the card reader implementation. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes

Ms. Knab moved to the DOT sidewalk agreement for Portsmouth Avenue. Mr. Roache explained that two agreements were included in the packet, prompted by the proposed Kia dealership at 41 Portsmouth Avenue. He emphasized the need to move the project forward while also addressing pedestrian safety, noting DOT does not assume responsibility for pedestrian amenities on state roads. The Board discussed whether to continue approving sidewalk agreements piecemeal for

each development or adopt a corridor-wide agreement for the full Route 108 corridor. Mr. Anderson supported a corridor-wide agreement. Mr. Roache would like to send a letter encouraging DOT to take a more active role in pedestrian infrastructure. Mr. Anderson raised a Planning Board consideration, noting that if the town is responsible for sidewalk maintenance under the DOT agreement, abutting property owners should likewise be required to maintain sidewalks as part of their project approvals. Mr. Tramaloni asked where the sidewalk requirement originated. Ms. Knab cited Gateway zoning, and Mr. Roache added that it is also included in the Master Plan. Responsibility for current sidewalk maintenance remains unclear.

Mr. Anderson motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to sign on behalf of the board the corridor-wide sidewalk agreement with DOT. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll Call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes. Mr. Tramaloni asked how the town would go about requiring businesses to maintain the sidewalk. Mr. Anderson responded that such a requirement would need to be included as a condition of the Planning Board.

Ms. Knab moved to the drought item. Mr. Anderson reported that according to the Drought Monitor, as of today Stratham is no longer in a level 1 drought. Mr. Anderson motioned to remove the Level 1 drought requirement in Stratham. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes

Ms. Knab then moved to the Curbside Collection agenda item. Mr. Roache provided a recap: The town issued a request for proposals on August 28 seeking qualified firms to provide curbside collection services. On October 5, three responses were received: one proposal from ELM Services, one from Casella, and a no-bid letter from Waste Management. The proposals were opened at the October 5 Select Board meeting, and the costs were read into the record. Staff were then directed to evaluate the proposals, score them, and make a recommendation.

The proposals were reviewed by DPW staff, a Select Board member, and Mr. Roache. Casella's proposal scored higher across most categories except cost. ELM's proposal was significantly lower in cost but represented a very different firm with different levels of experience, which was reflected in the scoring.

As permitted under the RFP, staff contacted both proposers. They were not focused solely on lowest cost, but on determining the best overall fit for the town. ELM was asked several questions regarding capacity for additional work, vehicle availability, and their ability to supply two trucks four days per week—a departure from what they typically provide in other towns. ELM responded promptly with solid answers that largely satisfied the committee.

Casella was contacted primarily due to the significant cost difference. Casella explained that their higher price resulted from an internal corporate error that added new capital and carts to the proposal. They were given the opportunity to correct the mistake, which brought their cost closer to ELM's. However, ELM remained the lower-cost option. Over five years, the difference amounts to approximately $294,000. A key factor is the escalator: ELM proposed a 4 percent annual increase, while Casella proposed 6 percent, starting from a slightly higher base cost.

After considering all factors, the review group concluded that, despite ELM's lower cost, uncertainties remained regarding ELM's readiness to take on both this contract and the Town of Kingston concurrently. Given the limited time available to implement the new service, the group felt it was safer to recommend entering negotiations with Casella. This recommendation is now before the Board.

Mr. Anderson asked why Casella's proposal included a 6% escalator. Mr. Belanger of Casella explained that it functions as a floor-ceiling provision. He noted that 5% has been typical in recent years, but prior years saw increases up to 7%, largely due to rising labor costs. Casella's standard contract language uses the greater of 5% or the CPI "garbage index." In this case, however, they offered a floor-ceiling structure. In response to Mr. Anderson's follow-up question, Mr. Belanger stated that the garbage index is currently at 5% and has been fairly stable. Mr. Ziolkowski of ELM expressed concern that after proposals were opened, Casella adjusted its pricing, which he felt was inconsistent with the spirit of competitive bidding. Ms. Knab noted that the RFP allows the town to negotiate with multiple proposers. Mr. Ziolkowski maintained that he felt the adjustment still conflicted with competitive-bid principles. Mr. Roache stated that the RFP had been reviewed by legal counsel. Ms. Knab acknowledged the comments and invited additional questions.

Mr. Tramaloni stated that the Board should continue to discuss the value received in the recycling portion of the contract and wanted that noted for the record. Ms. Knab said they have discussed arranging presentations or gathering more factual information, as there is considerable misinformation about recycling.

Mr. Anderson addressed Mr. Ziolkowski, noting that the primary concern with ELM's proposal was capacity. ELM currently serves fewer than 10,000 residents across its existing towns, while Stratham alone has approximately 7,700 residents. Taking on Stratham would represent roughly an 80% increase in workload. He said these concerns centered on staffing, carts, and trucks, and thanked Mr. Ziolkowski for responding to those questions.

Mr. Ziolkowski replied that if the original pricing figures had remained unchanged, this would likely be a different discussion. He suggested that ELM could have addressed the concerns if the original cost difference had remained as bid.

Ms. Knab acknowledged that may be true, noting that no one wants to see major increases in budget items. She added that the DPW Director is new and the town has had staffing transitions, which limited the lead time for this process. Waste Management had already stated they did not have enough time to prepare a bid. She thanked both firms for submitting proposals and said that in the future it would be helpful to have more time to understand how a rollout with a new company would work. Given the timeframe and the town's experience with Casella over the past few years, Ms. Knab stated she was comfortable with the recommendation to proceed with negotiations with Casella.

Ms. Knab moved to the Administrator's Report. Mr. Roache reported that preliminary budget figures, prior to adding personnel administration and retirement costs, reflect an approximate 2.3% increase. Payroll remains flat, but health insurance costs rose significantly: one plan

increased 11.7% and the other 17.1%. He noted there is limited time to consider any changes, and such changes are generally not desirable unless necessary.

Ms. Knab recalled that several years ago the town formed a healthcare working group and shifted from 100% coverage to plans with a deductible amount, which was not well-received. She noted that the town is too far along in the current budgeting process to make changes now, but it remains something to monitor in the future.

Mr. Roache moved to the elections update, noting that a Select Board meeting is scheduled for the evening prior. Ms. Knab stated she would not be able to attend. Mr. Roache added that budget presentations were scheduled for that same evening, likely the Library and Planning budgets. Because she could not attend, Ms. Knab noted that a quorum must still be physically present and asked Mr. Tramaloni if he could attend; he confirmed that he would.

Mr. Roache then raised the topic of election pro tems. Ms. Knab said she preferred not to work the election to avoid any appearance of conflict. She had spoken with Mr. Canada, Mr. Houghton, and Mr. Lovejoy, all of whom expressed interest in serving as pro tems. The Board briefly discussed their availability for election coverage.

Mr. Roache suggested a suggested a special edition newsletter for the work at the fire tower.

Mr. Roache received a resignation letter. Mr. Anderson moved to accept the resignation, with regret, of Jason Pond effective October 30, 2026. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes

Mr. Roache stated he will meet with Lt. Pierce tomorrow regarding the Director of Emergency Management position to review what he would like the role to provide for him.

Mr. Roache reported that there is a party interested in renting the Tannery House. He noted that the building's electrical service is not separately metered, and heating is provided via mini-splits. Because installing a separate meter would be costly, he plans to research rental options that include electricity and determine a rate that would keep the town whole. The house is otherwise ready for occupancy. He confirmed that the intended use would be residential, not commercial.

Mr. Roache reported receiving a request from Hall & Parlor to rent a portion of the Gifford Barn for storage of woodworking equipment. Ms. Knab expressed discomfort with the idea, noting that the town has no policies governing rental or use of such space, and raised concerns about liability, security, and precedent. She questioned how the town would respond if a different business made a similar request. Mr. Tramaloni agreed with her concerns.

Mr. Anderson noted that they would be paying rent, and Mr. Roache said a lease could specify that the town is not responsible for loss or damage. Ms. Knab pointed out that the town had just discussed visioning for the park, and now was being asked to authorize storage rentals without any broader discussion or process.

Mr. Tramaloni asked whether the proposal constituted a commercial use, which he believed might be prohibited. Mr. Anderson asked which parcel the barn sits on. Ms. Knab believed it might be on Town Forest and possibly under Conservation Commission jurisdiction, though she was not certain. She stated she was not comfortable making a decision on renting park buildings without a larger conversation.

Mr. Anderson requested that the Board schedule a time to review the revised Employee Manual. The Board agreed to meet on Friday, November 13 at 9:00 a.m. and asked that Mr. Hickey attend.

Conversation turned to the Budget Advisory Committee. Ms. Knab noted that at minimum they will need someone to replace Mr. Tramaloni. Mr. Roache reported that he will be meeting with Dave Emanuel on Friday to discuss the committee.

Mr. Anderson then asked about formatting the budget spreadsheets. Mr. Roache praised Ms. Fowle's work on the CIP, noting it is thorough, well-organized, and provides helpful background for each project. Mr. Anderson added that as the budget process progresses, he would like to understand how different COLA percentages would affect the overall budget—particularly given the fire department items, of which only baseline costs are currently included. He noted he was trying not to state specific figures but emphasized that each 1% COLA increase has a measurable impact.

Ms. Knab motioned to approve the raffle permit application from the SMS fifth grade committee to be held on October 23 to raise money for the fifth grade committee. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Mr. Tramaloni's screen froze. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 8:05pm Ms. Knab motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary