

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 2, 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

At 7:00pm Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and asked for a motion on the draft minutes. Mr. Anderson motioned to approved the minutes from January 26, 2026. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Ms. Ruest and thanked her for the detailed spreadsheet she prepared. Ms. Ruest noted that some balances appear overstated because certain expenses are being reimbursed by the Trustees. She also explained that the DPW loader is listed below its full cost due to an anticipated \$53,000 grant.

Ms. Ruest expressed interest in reviewing several accounts to clarify their purpose and intent, and to determine whether any could be closed. She added that understanding available funding sources may reduce the need to raise and appropriate funds. Mr. Houghton agreed that this review is worthwhile and suggested that some funds may be underutilized. Mr. Anderson concurred, emphasizing the importance of either using the funds or having a clear plan for them.

Ms. Ruest also noted that funds created by warrant article should have clearly defined purposes. She has been working with Ms. Price to review land use accounts that may fall into this category.

Mr. Houghton motioned to open the Public Hearing to discuss ordinances and town budgets to advance to the town warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Roache reported that the operating budget stands at \$9,042,142, representing a 3.86% increase. Using \$550,000 from the fund balance would reduce the tax impact to \$2.20 per \$1,000, or a 3.1% increase. He then briefly reviewed the operating budget, CIP, capital reserves, and special articles.

Given the current winter conditions and increased salt usage, the Board discussed the need to adjust the salt budget. Mr. Anderson noted his conversation with Mr. Batchelder and recommended using funds from unfilled DPW positions and making a budget adjustment to allow for an additional salt purchase. They acknowledged the difficulty of predicting needs for the remainder of the season and for next November and December, and agreed that purchasing salt now would ensure availability when needed. The Board concurred. Mr. Roache stated that with the adjustments, the budget reflects a 2.9% increase, totaling \$9,032,662, and a 3.75% increase with a tax rate impact of 2.9%.

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

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 9 to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 10, the Capital Improvements Program, in the amount of \$666,000 to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 11, the Capital Reserve Fund, in the amount of \$400,000 to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 12, the EMS Special Revenue Fund, in the amount of \$108,500 to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 13, funding for the municipal buildings keyless access system in the amount of \$175,000 to come out of the fund balance to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 14, maintenance and improvements to the fire tower, in the amount of \$250,000 to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 15, the distribution of funds received from the sale of cemetery lots to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 16, to discontinue the right of way on State Route 101 from the intersection of Blue Ridge Circle to the Greenland town line to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move Article 17, which will modify the optional veterans tax credit to come into compliance with state law to the Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

The Board began discussion of a proposed revision to the Stratham Hill Park ordinances regarding dogs. Ms. Knab asked for clarification, noting this was her first time seeing the revised version. Mr. Roache explained that he, Mr. Houghton, Mr. Hickey, and Chief King had met and recommended designating the entire park as an on-leash zone to avoid confusion created by a piecemeal approach.

Mr. Anderson expressed concern that the Town does not currently enforce existing ordinances and emphasized the need for a Community Service Officer at the park. Ms. Knab agreed that the CSO's presence had previously improved compliance. She also noted that the proposed ordinance differed from TMAC's recommendations and from what had been discussed at public hearings, and she felt the Board needed to be more transparent. She added that the Conservation Commission has authority over the Town Forest and should be included in the discussion. She also pointed out that the ordinance contained incorrect references and could not support it as written.

The Board discussed the history of public input on the issue. Ms. Knab supported allowing off-leash use in the fields, while Mr. Houghton recalled that Chief King did not support that approach. Mr. Anderson agreed that the public would likely push back against a full on-leash requirement. Both he and Ms. Knab felt that change should be gradual and accompanied by a clear enforcement and communication plan.

Mr. Houghton asked Ms. Knab for suggestions on how to move forward. She felt the matter should go to Town Meeting for a vote and reiterated concerns about transparency. Resident Tedd Tramaloni referenced TMAC's earlier public meeting, noting that their proposal included

designated off-leash areas and, at one point, time-based restrictions. Ms. Knab responded that TMAC had later eliminated the time restrictions.

The Board discussed the difficulty of enforcement and the need for a clear rollout strategy. Ms. Ruest suggested an educational approach, such as distributing information through the Town Clerk's office. The Board continued to consider how best to proceed, acknowledging differing public perceptions of the issue and the need for a thoughtful, workable path forward.

The Board briefly discussed the use of e-bikes at Stratham Hill Park. Mr. Anderson asked about the current position on the issue. Mr. Roache noted that TMAC had initially proposed banning all e-bikes. Ms. Knab added that the Conservation Commission, nearby abutters with parcels connected to the park, and SHPA are all strongly opposed to allowing any class of e-bike. Mr. Roache clarified that the primary concern is with e-dirt bikes, rather than pedal-assist e-bikes with speed limitations, but distinguishing between types and determining where they may be used remains challenging.

Mr. Houghton then moved to the Terra Star truck condition memo. Mr. Roache reviewed the mechanical issues with the vehicle, noting that the estimated repair cost exceeds the truck's value. The Board asked for specific cost figures. Mr. Batchelder had previously reported ongoing maintenance problems with the truck. Mr. Houghton expressed concern that the vehicle, expected to last 20 years, is only in year 14 and began experiencing significant issues around year 11. He questioned whether maintenance had been performed adequately and asked about the Town's process for ensuring timely maintenance and communication regarding potential failures. Mr. Roache will obtain maintenance records and repair estimates and report back to the Board.

Mr. Roache noted a letter from the Fire Inspector recommending that the Town hire an engineer to evaluate issues at the Lane property that fall outside the Inspector's expertise.

Mr. Roache then provided departmental updates. The Fire Department has acquired a new ventilation unit for the ambulance, enabling medics to operate at a higher level. Chief King is posting for a full-time police officer position. The Library Director has requested guidance regarding immigration-related inquiries and enforcement issues that have arisen in other libraries. Ms. Knab asked what guidance other communities, including Portsmouth, have provided. Mr. Roache said questions have included matters such as videotaping in public spaces. Before seeking legal counsel, he wished to raise the issue with the Board. Mr. Houghton noted that the library is a public space and suggested that Chief King may be able to offer guidance. The Board agreed that the Library Director should consult with Chief King.

In Parks & Recreation, Summer Camp registration is slightly behind typical levels. The Building Inspector reported that the building permit for the Stratham Memorial School construction project has been issued, and an increase in activity is expected. An Eagle Scout will present his project proposal to the Board on February 17. The Town Clerk reported that vehicle registration revenue was approximately \$30,000 below expectations in January, with several possible explanations under consideration.

Mr. Roache also reported on his responses to several House bills, including legislation affecting taxpayer funds and nonprofits, and proposed reductions to the rooms and meals tax, which could reduce Town revenue by \$200,000–\$250,000. Ms. Knab expressed concern and appreciated his engagement. Mr. Roache noted a newly identified bill, House Bill 1583, relating to special assessments for infrastructure; the Board did not identify any immediate concerns. Ms. Knab requested NHMA’s position on House Bill 1604.

The Board discussed inviting the legislative delegation to attend a future meeting.

Mr. Roache reported that he is working with Mr. Hickey on developing an internal plan for the collaborative efforts at Stratham Hill Park, after which they will engage with additional stakeholder groups.

He noted further issues with frozen pipes at the Lane property, which were repaired earlier in the day. Collectors Eye has signed the lease, and he will confirm the current recipient of the electric bill so it can be properly reassigned.

Mr. Anderson raised a finance matter regarding investment of Town funds. The Treasurer and Finance Administrator have been reviewing the General Fund and Conservation Fund balances and the interest earned at TD Bank, and are exploring safe, conservative alternatives such as NH PDIP, which is currently yielding approximately 1.8% more. This difference represents a meaningful revenue opportunity. The Board agreed that Ms. Tremblay should meet with them to explain the details, and Ms. Ruest provided additional context on the potential benefits. The Board expressed support for continuing this review.

RESERVATIONS

Ms. Knab motioned to approve the Acorn School’s request to use the Scamman Pavilion on April 24 and waive the fee. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to allow the Stratham Community Church to use the top of the hill at Stratham Hill Park on the morning of Sunday, April 5 for a sunrise service. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Houghton noted Kim Williams is being considered for a position on the Heritage Commission.

Mr. Anderson motioned to appoint Mike Lamb as Emergency Management Director for a 3 year term expiring March 2029. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Anderson motioned to appoint June Sawyer as Deputy Emergency Management Director for a 3 year term expiring March 2029. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Roache referenced the mosquito contract. Mr. Houghton motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to sign the 2026 Town of Stratham Dragon Mosquito Control Contract. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Roache referenced the Tax Map contract. Mr. Houghton motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to sign the Tax map maintenance contract for the Town of Stratham and Cartographics Associates. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton thanked Mr. Tramaloni for attending. Mr. Tramaloni said it was very informative and most interesting.

At 8:20pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II (a) personnel and (e) negotiation matters. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 8:58pm Mr. Houghton motioned to come out of the non-public session and seal the minutes noting failure to do so may adversely affect the reputation of another or render the proposed action ineffective. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Seeing nothing further, at 8:58pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary