

## **MINUTES OF THE MARCH 2, 2026 SELECT BOARD MEETING**

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

**ALSO PRESENT:** Town Administrator Tim Roache, Assistant Town Administrator and Parks and Recreation Director Seth Hickey, Planning and Building Director Vanessa Price, Wiggin Memorial Library Director Steve Butzel

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 February 17, 2026. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson noted that this meeting marked Mr. Houghton's final regular meeting as a Board member. He thanked Mr. Houghton for his many years of service on this and other committees, acknowledging the professional expertise he brought to the Town and the lasting impact of his contributions. Ms. Knab echoed these sentiments, expressing that it had been a pleasure to work with him. Mr. Houghton thanked the Board for their kind words and stated that it had been a privilege to work alongside them and Town staff in service to the community. He shared that the work had been meaningful and personally rewarding.

Mr. Houghton introduced the discussion on land use fee structures and recognized Ms. Price to present. Ms. Price explained that since her arrival, both the Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Planning Board have updated their Rules of Procedure. The ZBA chose not to increase its application fees, with the only change being an updated abutter notification fee. The Planning Board, however, approved a revised fee structure for its applications.

She presented the proposed Notice of Land Use Board Fees under RSA 673:16 III, noting that it reflects both the updated fees and several existing charges that had not previously been consolidated in one document. She emphasized that many projects require significant staff time and that consistent treatment of all applicants is essential, which supports the need for the fee adjustments.

Mr. Anderson stated that he had reviewed the proposed fees and found them reasonable. He asked for clarification on the definition of an abutter. Ms. Price explained that the definition is set in statute, and while the Town sometimes notifies beyond the minimum radius, it also includes any professional engineers or architects associated with the project, as well as property owners. Mr. Houghton motioned to approve the Land Use Board Fees as submitted. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab asked whether there was anything in the updated Rules of Procedure that the Board should be aware of. Ms. Price explained that the revisions primarily clarify and better codify existing practices, providing applicants with a clearer understanding of what to expect. She noted that the updated Rules of Procedure are also posted on the Town's website.

Mr. Houghton recognized Library Director Mr. Butzel for his report. He highlighted four primary areas: performance measures, programming and events, technology, and strategic planning.

- **Performance Measures** — In-person circulation has increased 15% in the first few months of the year, including a 12% rise in fiction, 17% in nonfiction, and 18% in new book checkouts. Digital circulation is also up 3% over last year. He noted that patrons are using the library broadly across collections and services.
- **Programming and Events** — Youth Services continues to perform strongly, offering four weekly story hours. Attendance has grown to 35–40 children and caregivers, prompting consideration of moving one session to the main meeting room. He commended the Youth Services team for their professional and engaging programming. The library is also hosting Voter Information Night this week, and will be broadcast with support from Exeter TV. Mr. Butzel emphasized the library's commitment to supporting civic dialogue.
- **Technology** — The new library website is receiving positive feedback, and staff are gathering additional user-experience input. The library is evaluating whether to continue maintaining its mobile app, given the improved functionality and mobile responsiveness of the new website. Ms. Knab asked whether the library pays for the app; Mr. Butzel confirmed there is an annual fee and noted that many patrons still use it. He said any transition would require communication with users. Mr. Anderson commented that he uses the app but would have no issue transitioning to the website. Mr. Butzel added that, within the library field, standalone apps have become less essential as mobile-friendly websites have improved. He noted that funds currently used for the app might potentially be redirected toward expanding collections or other priorities, though no decision has been made.

He also reported that the library plans to implement a new wireless and remote printing service. This will allow patrons to print wirelessly within the building or send print jobs from home for later pickup. Staff will manage print releases through an administrative module, with patrons paying upon pickup. He noted that while the library currently operates printing on an honor system, the new service is intended to expand functionality rather than address concerns about patron integrity.

- **Strategic Planning** — The library's strategic planning process formally begins this month, with completion expected by September or October. The effort will include multiple focus groups, a community-wide survey, and outreach to a broad range of stakeholders, including the Select Board. A small steering committee will guide the project, with additional working groups branching out as needed. The goal is to publish the final strategic plan by mid-October.

Ms. Knab asked whether the library is fully staffed. Mr. Butzel confirmed that it is.

Mr. Houghton recognized Mr. Hickey for his department report. Mr. Hickey began by echoing Mr. Anderson's earlier remarks, expressing his appreciation for having worked with Mr. Houghton over many years and thanking him for his professionalism and service to the community. Mr. Houghton thanked him for the kind words.

Mr. Hickey reported that the Recreation Department is doing very well. Senior programming is thriving, and Diane Smith continues to do an excellent job coordinating a wide range of offerings. He noted that registration for the March 1 Mystery Lunch opened at 6:00 a.m. and sold out within minutes, with a waitlist as long as the enrollment list—an indication of strong engagement and enthusiasm among participants.

Most programs are filling quickly, and the department is often seeking additional space within the building to accommodate demand. He anticipates approaching the library soon about using space there for satellite programming.

Mr. Hickey also noted ongoing collaboration with other Town committees. The department will be working with the Energy Commission to host the New Hampshire Saves “Button Up” presentation at the end of March. He emphasized that these partnerships strengthen community programming and reflect a positive, collaborative spirit across Town departments.

Mr. Hickey reported that the Recreation Commission is anticipating approval of the Town budget at Town Meeting. The budget includes funding for a part-time Teen Coordinator position. A community survey will be distributed the following morning to program users to gather feedback on pricing, program structure, preferred days of the week, and other factors that will help shape the new position and related offerings.

He noted that the Commission is in need of a new Chairperson. Kate Dardinski has stepped down after many years of service and will be focusing her efforts on the Trail Management Advisory Committee (TMAC), where she also serves as Chair, as well as on the soccer board. Recruitment efforts are ongoing, and the Commission has had success bringing on three new members in the past six months.

Mr. Hickey reported that TMAC will be preparing an updated committee charge for Select Board approval after Town Meeting, consistent with past practice. TMAC recently reviewed an updated trail map, and all kiosks at Stratham Hill Park will be updated this spring. This project, developed over several years by Ms. Dardinski and Mr. Hickey, is nearing completion. TMAC has also finalized its 2026 trail work plan. Cole Emanuel anticipates completing his Eagle Scout bridge project. He referenced the annual large-group trail use plan, included in the Board’s packet, which is required under the Barker easement. This plan keeps the Barker family informed of anticipated trail activity and also serves as a tool for notifying Stratham Fire, Stratham Police, and DPW when their support may be needed. Mr. Houghton commented that the plan was very informative.

Turning to Stratham Hill Park, Mr. Hickey reported that winter activities have gone well. The second year of the ice-skating rink has been very successful, with strong public use and positive feedback. The rink in the 4-H barn has become the primary skating location, while the former basketball-court rink has been discontinued. He commended Dan Crow and Greg Blood from the Park Association for their work in making the rink a success. With warmer weather approaching, the season is expected to wind down soon.

Planning is underway for SummerFest, scheduled for July 16. The committee will reconvene once John Cushing returns from an extended trip. Work is progressing well to create a strong community event.

Regarding Stevens Park, Mr. Hickey reported that Emanuel Engineering has provided preliminary plans. A staff meeting with DPW and Mr. Roache is scheduled for Wednesday to review the materials and determine next steps.

He noted that programming is transitioning from winter to spring, with youth sports running smoothly. A new Youth Ultimate Frisbee program is being added this year in response to resident interest and the sport's popularity in surrounding communities. The program will run through eighth grade and requires a large field, so it cannot be held at Smyk Park. Disc golf could be offered at Smyk, but the Cooperative Middle School recently installed a course that meets current demand.

Ms. Knab asked about summer camp enrollment. Mr. Hickey said that while some programs filled quickly, others still have openings. He noted that recent changes in how registration information is displayed in the system may be confusing to some families, though he cannot attribute the slower sign-ups to any single factor. Staffing decisions will be adjusted as needed once enrollment patterns become clearer. He confirmed that interviews for a camp director have taken place.

Mr. Hickey reported that the Town has been asked to renew its contract with the Exeter Area Chamber of Commerce for the Great Bay Food Truck Festival. He noted that Stratham continues to be the festival's largest participant, with approximately 30% of last year's attendees coming from Stratham, followed by Exeter, Newmarket, and Portsmouth. He highlighted the strong partnership with the Chamber, the nearly \$100,000 raised over the years, and the value of the event as an early-spring community activity that showcases the park.

In response to Mr. Houghton's question about any major changes this year, Mr. Hickey stated there are none. Staff recently met with Planning and the Fire Department to review permitting and internal processes, and the existing event model remains effective. He added that last year's rain was disruption enough and that the goal is to return to a more typical year. Mr. Houghton motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to execute the agreement for the Great Bay Food Truck Festival with the Exeter Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Hickey provided an update on the SPCA PAWS Walk planned for early June, noting that the event has grown significantly over the years. To ensure the Board is fully informed, he asked organizers to document their anticipated activities, as the program has expanded largely through word of mouth without a consolidated overview.

Mr. Anderson stated the SPCA is a nonprofit and asked whether fees should apply. Mr. Hickey confirmed that the organization pays for police and fire details when required, though DPW does not typically provide a detail. Mr. Anderson noted that this year the SPCA plans to have a DPW

staff member onsite for support, based on his conversation with Mr. Batchelder. Mr. Hickey agreed that this is likely appropriate given the event's growth.

Ms. Knab asked whether the written summary differs from last year. Mr. Hickey said he is not fully aware of last year's operations but noted the event is generally self-sustaining, respectful, and has not caused issues. However, he acknowledged that its increasing size raises the question of whether a DPW service fee should be considered. Ms. Knab suggested evaluating a fee structure for next year. She also asked whether the event has already been approved; Mr. Hickey clarified that the date is being held but no formal approval has been granted, and this submission is informational rather than an application.

Mr. Anderson recommended discussing potential DPW detail rates with the DPW Director so the Town does not absorb costs. Mr. Hickey agreed that it may be time to formalize an approach. His intent was to ensure the Board understands the current scope of the program. The Board thanked him for the update.

Mr. Houghton recognized representatives from Wilcox & Barton. Mr. Roache introduced Madeline Arold and Russ Barton and explained that, during the budgeting process, the Town reviewed costs associated with the Fire Department's groundwater management permit related to PFAS contamination. He requested an update to help the Board understand the permit requirements, current status, and future expectations.

Ms. Arold provided an overview of the Stratham Fire Department's Groundwater Management Permit, which monitors PFAS levels in both overburden and bedrock aquifers surrounding and downgradient of the site. The permit, issued in October 2021 and revised four times as the investigation expanded, is set to expire this October. The Town will need to reapply, with the renewal proposed to be submitted alongside the annual summary report following the September 2026 sampling event.

She explained that the permit establishes a Groundwater Management Zone (GMZ) and requires a recorded notice on the deeds of all affected properties. When a supply well within the GMZ exceeds state PFAS standards, the Town must provide an alternate water supply—typically through a point-of-entry treatment (POET) system, which is the standard approach given the distance to municipal water lines.

Where POET systems are installed, the Town is responsible for ongoing monitoring and maintenance. Ms. Arold reviewed the current sampling requirements, which include:

- Quarterly sampling of four public water systems with POET systems
- Twice-annual sampling (April and September) of 22 private wells with POET systems
- Twice-annual sampling of seven private wells without POET systems
- Annual sampling of three additional wells
- Annual sampling of eight monitoring wells

She noted that several properties outside the GMZ have also been sampled due to their proximity.

Ms. Arold explained that PFAS sampling within the Groundwater Management Zone (GMZ) is a joint effort between Wilcox & Barton and Water Techs, the Town's treatment-system contractor. Water Techs monitors, samples, and maintains POET systems they installed, while Wilcox & Barton samples systems installed by property owners or DES. All data is compiled by Wilcox & Barton, who prepare results letters for property owners and complete the required permit reporting.

She reviewed the September 2025 sampling results. Most wells within the GMZ now have POET systems installed. She also reviewed recent results from the shallow overburden monitoring wells located at the Fire Department and 157 Portsmouth Avenue. In response to a question, she clarified that overburden groundwater refers to shallow groundwater in soil above the bedrock, whereas most supply wells draw from deep bedrock aquifers.

Looking ahead, she noted that as long as PFAS levels remain above state standards in supply wells or monitoring wells, DES will continue to require ongoing monitoring. Extending a municipal water line to the area could eliminate the need for POET system maintenance, though monitoring would still be required. She also highlighted two potential future requirements from DES: Soil sampling at the Fire Department, and additional downgradient monitoring wells. She concluded by inviting questions from the Board.

Mr. Houghton asked what determines the range of the sample data, and Ms. Arold explained that the data itself defines the sampling area. Clean extents or wells below PFAS standards set the boundaries, and any property found above standards is added to the Groundwater Management Zone, prompting permit revisions, which occurred four times in 2021. When asked whether testing occurs outside the mapped area, she said DES occasionally requires additional or confirmatory sampling, including one north of the GMZ in the most recent round. Newer permits often include off-cycle sampling every few years, but this older permit does not; future permits may include a list of additional properties to test.

The Board discussed PFAS migration and dilution. Mr. Houghton noted the likelihood of continued migration, and Mr. Roache asked whether concentrations would dilute if the source were corrected. Ms. Arold said dilution does occur as groundwater moves, but PFAS are measured at extremely small concentrations—parts per trillion. Mr. Barton added that PFAS are “forever chemicals” that do not degrade like petroleum compounds, and scientific understanding of their long-term behavior is still developing. When Ms. Knab asked whether concentrations decrease with distance from the fire station, Ms. Arold clarified that detections farther out reflect dilution rather than degradation. Mr. Barton emphasized that PFAS is now in bedrock and that no technology exists to remove it at scale; current mitigation—POET systems, water lines, and monitoring—remains the most effective way to reduce risk.

Mr. Roache reminded the Board that the CIP includes about \$175,000 annually for Wilcox & Barton and Aqua Techs. Ms. Knab asked about challenges with homeowner access, and Ms. Arold said routine participants are cooperative, though one-off sampling can be harder to coordinate. Mr. Barton noted that DES grant programs exist and may expand, and the state is considering a fund similar to the petroleum cleanup fund that could help municipalities offset

costs. Availability varies, so timely applications are important. The Board thanked the presenters and expressed appreciation for their work.

Mr. Houghton introduced the Highway Safety Grant request submitted by Police Chief King. Mr. Roache explained that this is an annual, recurring grant that is periodically amended by the grantor. In August 2025, the Board accepted the original grant amount of \$15,800. The State is now amending the grant to add \$15,907 for mobile data terminal (MDT) e-crash equipment, bringing the total grant to \$31,707.

The Police Department is seeking authorization to expend \$22,434 for the MDT e-crash equipment and to authorize the Town Administrator to execute the amended agreement. Mr. Anderson confirmed that the request involves two actions: (1) accepting the amended grant terms and (2) approving the MDT e-crash purchase. Ms. Knab confirmed that the Town's required match is \$6,526, and Mr. Roache noted that the match would come from golf donation funds.

Ms. Knab motioned to accept the terms of the fiscal year 26 MDT e-crash equipment grant, as presented, in the amount of \$22,434.72 and the match of 20% at \$6,526.94 to come from the Golf Donation funds. Select Board is to further authorize, the Town Administrator or Finance Director to sign all documents related to the grant on behalf of the Select Board. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson motioned that the Select Board, in a majority vote, had previously accepted terms of the Highway Safety Grant Agreement in the amount of \$11,000 and had previously accepted terms of the first grant agreement amendment notice in the amount of \$4,800 for an adjusted total grant limitation of \$15,800 and now the Select Board, in a majority vote, is accepting the amended terms of the MDTs only equipment, as presented in the second grant agreement, Amendment Notice in the amount of \$15,907.78 for an adjusted grant limitation of \$31,707.78 and to further authorize Tim Roache, the Town Administrator, to sign all documents related to this grant. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Roache reported that the Energy Commission is requesting authorization for the Town Administrator to execute an agreement with Energy Audits Unlimited to facilitate the sale of renewable energy credits generated by the Police Department's solar array. The annual cost for this service is \$38. He noted that the array produces approximately \$1,242 in solar generation value each year. A third-party auditor is required to "mint" the renewable energy credits before they can be sold by the broker, which is the purpose of entering into this agreement. Mr. Anderson motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to sign the agreement with Energy Audits Unlimited relating to the sale of renewable energy credits at the Stratham Police department. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton introduced the Plaistow ALS agreement. Mr. Roache explained that this is the annual agreement initiated last year when Exeter ceased ALS service. Chief Denton requested authorization to sign the agreement on behalf of the Town. The only change from last year is an increase in the ALS-1 rate from \$85 to \$115. Ms. Knab confirmed that the Town is not charged if Plaistow is called off. Mr. Anderson asked whether the ALS-2 rate—listed as \$327.18 in the new contract—had changed. Mr. Roache said Chief Denton reported only the ALS-1 change,

and he assumes the ALS-2 rate remains the same. Plaistow has asked to meet with the Select Board, and Board members expressed interest in doing so.

Mr. Anderson noted that last year's agreement replaced a previously planned five-year phase-in of costs and asked whether Chief Denton had discussed long-term expectations. Mr. Roache said he had not. Mr. Anderson suggested revisiting the topic with Plaistow during their fall input period.

Mr. Houghton asked whether there were any other changes; Mr. Roache confirmed there were none beyond the ALS-1 rate. Mr. Houghton questioned whether the Select Board may delegate signing authority to the Fire Chief and requested clarification from Town Counsel. He recommended delaying action until that guidance is received. Mr. Anderson suggested moving forward with conditional authorization. Mr. Roache summarized the intent: the Board could authorize Chief Denton or the Town Administrator to sign, subject to legal confirmation. Ms. Knab expressed a desire to respect Chief Denton's request. Mr. Anderson motioned to authorize the Fire Chief, subject to Town Council review, and if town counsel does not concur with that, then authorize the Town Administrator, to sign the inter-municipal agreement for intercept services, which is effective April 1, 2026, as a one year agreement. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton introduced the Local Emergency Operations Plan agreement. Mr. Roache reported that the Town received an unexpected \$4,500 grant to support the required update of the plan, which had not been budgeted because neither he nor Ms. Price was aware the update was due.

Mr. Anderson asked whether the cost could be covered within an existing budget. He thought there was an Emergency Management budget, which includes approximately \$8,000. Mr. Roache confirmed that funds could be drawn from an appropriate line either there or contracted services under Planning and Building. He noted that the grant requires a match, which can be met through staff time documented during meetings and related work.

Mr. Roache emphasized that completing the update is important, as failure to do so could jeopardize eligibility for future federal emergency-management funding. He also noted that the Town's last plan update occurred in 2008, despite the requirement for updates every five years. Mr. Anderson observed that the plan referenced during recent discussions—the Seabrook Plan—is separate from the Town's emergency management plan.

Mr. Anderson motioned the Select Board, in a majority vote, accepted the terms of the Emergency Management Performance Grant as presented in the amount of \$4,500 for the LEOP update. Further, the board acknowledges that the cost for this project will be \$9,000 which the town will be responsible for a 50% match. And further that Tim Roache, The Town Administrator is authorized to sign all documents related to the grant funding sources are either planning contracted services or emergency management. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton introduced the Lane Property agenda item. Mr. Anderson reported that, after visiting the property, several trees require removal, including one with significant structural decay. Mr. Roache noted that the Public Works Director would like the work completed before the ground thaws, and that timing is becoming critical.

Mr. Houghton confirmed that the trees identified match those noted during the Board's earlier site walk. Mr. Anderson moved to authorize the Public Works Director to proceed with tree removal at the Lane Property, as outlined in the February 12, 2026 proposal from Royal Green Landscaping in the amount of \$12,800, to be funded by the Lane Property Trust.

Mr. Houghton questioned whether the Lane Property Trust was the appropriate funding source, noting his understanding that the Trust was intended for building improvements rather than tree removal. Mr. Roache suggested the expense should instead be covered by rental income from the property. Ms. Knab expressed uncertainty that sufficient rental income had accrued to date. Mr. Houghton stated that enough revenue should be available by the time payment is due.

Board members asked where rental income is recorded in the budget. Mr. Roache will consult the Finance Administrator for clarification. Given the time-sensitive nature of the work, and with a special meeting scheduled for the following day, the Board agreed to revisit the motion after confirming the appropriate funding source. Mr. Anderson withdrew his motion.

Mr. Houghton asked Mr. Roache for his Town Administrator report. Mr. Roache reported that he has been working with Fire Chief Denton and EMS Captain Peggy Crosby on compliance with Senate Bill 245, the new balanced-billing law for ambulance services. The law requires the Town to enter into contracts with multiple insurance providers to ensure proper billing procedures. He noted that contracts from approximately six to nine insurers—including Harvard Pilgrim, Aetna, and UnitedHealthcare—have been submitted for legal review. Town Counsel has reviewed most of them and confirmed they meet statutory requirements. A few remaining contracts are still under review. Mr. Roache anticipates bringing the full set of agreements to the Board for authorization at an upcoming meeting.

Mr. Roache reported that he and Finance Administrator Ms. Ruest met with TD Bank to evaluate investing general funds in laddered Certificates of Deposit (CDs) rather than the New Hampshire Public Deposit Investment Pool (NHPDIP). They are inclined to proceed with CDs due to better current interest rates and reduced risk, noting that the pool is not fully collateralized and has experienced occasional instability.

Mr. Anderson confirmed that CD rates are presently higher than NHPDIP rates, though this was not the case two months ago. He also noted that the Town's investment policy, now three to four years old, specifically references NHPDIP but more broadly allows for bank-based investments. He requested that the Finance Administrator provide updated rate comparisons for the Board's review.

Mr. Houghton added that understanding the terms of the proposed CD ladder will be important. Mr. Roache agreed, noting that maintaining liquidity is a key consideration.

Mr. Roache reported that the Finance Administrator has begun preparations for the annual audit. DOT will hold a public information meeting at the end of April as part of the ongoing project design process; the exact date is forthcoming. Planning and Building continue work on updating tracking and inspection request systems. The Town Clerk successfully completed ballot machine testing, resolving minor issues related to vendor instructions. Town Reports are expected by Thursday.

Mr. Roache reviewed the revised employee performance review process, which he will present to department heads. He emphasized quarterly check-ins to ensure ongoing communication and avoid surprises during annual evaluations. The Board agreed with the approach. He noted that updating the Employee Manual will be a priority after Town Meeting. Mr. Anderson recommended involving the new Board member before significant staff time is committed. Mr. Houghton suggested updating the manual in sections.

Mr. Roache is preparing a congressional spending request through Senator Shaheen's office to support Stratham Hill Park facility improvements, including the 4-H barn. He is awaiting confirmation of the Town's eligibility and may request letters of support. The Board supported pursuing the grant.

He also recommended establishing a formal process for tracking grant applications, which the Board agreed would be beneficial.

The Board briefly discussed election-day attendance.

At 8:30pm 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. All voted in favor.

At 8:46pm Mr. Houghton motioned to close the non-public session. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Houghton then motioned to seal the minutes. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 8:46pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard  
Recording Secretary