

MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 21, 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, Police Chief Anthony King

At 7:02pm Ms. Knab opened the meeting and noted that Member Ted Tramaloni would be participating remotely because he is away from Stratham attending urgent family matters.

Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the minutes of September 9 with the addition of the time of exiting the non-public session as 9:02pm. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes

Chief King reported the Police Department is now fully staffed. A new Community Service Officer, David Newman, will begin tomorrow, and the volunteer chaplain position has been implemented. The Deputy Chief position has been posted internally and will follow a three-step process in coordination with the Town Administrator.

The department has received new Walthers pistols, with training and transition planned for October. The awarded \$30,000 live scan machine will be delivered on October 15. All officers have completed the State-required 24 hours of annual training, with most exceeding 40 hours.

The first phase of the budget is complete, and no issues are anticipated for the upcoming year. A broken water heater will require a \$6,000 replacement, slightly exceeding the building maintenance budget line, but overall the department's budget remains positive. An active threat tabletop exercise was completed at CMS, with SMS scenarios planned for November.

Mr. Tramaloni observed accidents were up 78%. Chief King noted that most occur in plaza parking lots. Distracted driving remains an issue. He submitted a grant application to assist with that issue. Recently, he made 22 stops in four hours, with 18 for hands-free violations.

Two new park ordinances will be publicized via the website, social media, and newsletter, with signage being created by Mr. Hickey. Enforcement will follow the educational approach used at Jack Rabbit parking. The new CSO will assist with outreach. Chief King is considering pursuing grants for a side-by-side vehicle to improve park coverage, though it would have limited trail access. Ms. Knab requested ongoing updates.

Ms. Knab recognized Matt O'Keefe and Paul Deschaine, Energy Commission members for their update. Mr. O'Keefe reported the solar array at the police station was fully bought out and now provides \$8-9k per year in savings. The Commission has developed a solar assessment calculator for use with future town building projects and continues to pursue grants to improve feasibility. Mr. Deschaine praised Roy Byrnes, who is not yet a committee member, for his work. They assisted the school district in securing funding for HVAC and thermal improvements. The school will not install solar but completed renovations under budget, allowing investment in windows and roof thermal upgrades.

Mr. O'Keefe provided an update on Community Power. Stratham has participated in the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire for three years; while the first year brought substantial savings, CPCNH has not outperformed Unitil's default rate in the past two years. The Commission recommended halting automatic enrollment of new meters unless CPCNH's rate is lower than Unitil's. New accounts currently get swept into CPCNH during quarterly refreshes. Opt-out notices are sent, but people rarely take action. Opt-out rates remain roughly equal to new enrollments, keeping participation steady. The Energy Commission is recommending the Board authorize the Town Administrator to inform CPCNH to stop including new residents and small businesses in the refresh, unless CPCNH's rate is below the utility default rate.

Mr. O'Keefe outlined the Commission's larger recommendation: if CPCNH's upcoming winter rates (released late December/early January) are not lower than Unitil's default rate, Stratham should begin the process of withdrawing from CPCNH. Three towns have already started this process, though withdrawal steps are not clearly defined and may take several months to ensure no outstanding supply or reserve costs remain.

Mr. Deschaine explained that reserve balances fluctuate seasonally, often going negative in winter, which can complicate withdrawal timing and may require bonds or escrow, as seen in Hudson's case. Epping is pursuing a more collaborative withdrawal process. The Commission noted alternative options exist, including contracting with a third-party supplier, which may still offer better pricing. Overall, they recommended preparing to move forward if CPCNH continues to underperform.

Mr. Anderson noted the new CPCNH rate should be available in January, allowing the Town to decide whether to withdraw. If notice were given on February 1 with six months' lead time, the withdrawal period would cover winter, with reserves likely positive again by spring or summer. Mr. Deschaine added that while reserve levels are one factor, additional costs such as hedging also affect timing. CPCNH needs a firm withdrawal date so they know when to stop planning for Stratham's electricity load. Because they purchase power in the futures market to hedge for that load, once Stratham's load is removed, those hedging arrangements must be unwound, and customers would need to transition either to a third-party supplier or back to Unitil. Mr. O'Keefe emphasized the goal is simply to begin the withdrawal process, with the final date depending on Stratham's reserve balance and any hedging already purchased on the Town's behalf.

Mr. Tramaloni asked about independent verification of CPCNH's figures. Mr. Deschaine explained that while CPCNH is auditable and relies on third-party data, there is often a reporting delay of several months, complicating timely decision-making. Withdrawal requires a minimum three-month period, often closer to six, and rejoining is not allowed for 12 months.

Ms. Knab expressed a loss of trust in CPCNH due to poor financial planning and decision-making. Mr. O'Keefe emphasized that Stratham joined CPCNH solely for cost savings. Mr. Deschaine noted CPCNH is aware of the Town's concerns and has shown some improvement, including returning to a positive financial position and increasing operating reserves. However, delays in data reporting and long-term reserve projections indicate ongoing challenges. He added that CPCNH may need to add surcharges for several years to reach its reserve goals.

Future competitiveness will also depend on forthcoming PUC policy changes that could raise default utility rates as utilities recover significant under-collected costs.

Mr. O'Keefe explained that CPCNH buys power for Stratham based on total meter load, including residential and small commercial accounts. Because future supply is purchased in advance, large changes in enrollment can create mismatches between purchased and actual load. Discussion followed on how residents can opt out and whether awareness is widespread. While outreach has been done, participation remains steady due to both new enrollments and limited resident action. Mr. Anderson confirmed that opting out is simple, while Mr. O'Keefe noted Unitil now places mid-period withdrawals on a fixed rate rather than a higher variable rate. Despite outreach, meter numbers remain fairly stable.

Mr. Deschaine clarified that CPCNH already understands member concerns; declining participation would not change their ability to respond due to financial constraints. The group agreed to revisit the issue once new rates are released in late December or early January. Mr. Anderson motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to immediately request CPCNH to stop automatically enrolling new meters in the quarterly account refresh mechanism unless the CPCNH rate is below the default rate of Unitil at the time of the refresh. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes. Mr. Deschaine noted this action avoids inclusion in the October refresh. The Board will re-evaluate withdrawal in December or January, acknowledging some legal costs may be involved. Ms. Knab thanked the presenters for their work.

Ms. Knab recognized Mr. Crow from the Stratham Volunteer Fire Department Association, which voted to donate \$5,000 to support rapid sequence intubation (RSI) training, including paramedic wages, classroom and clinical training hours, and instructor fees. The Association plans an additional \$3,000 donation next calendar year. Funds were raised through events and community contributions. The Board thanked the Association, noting the high level of the training. Mr. Anderson motioned to accept the Stratham Fire Department Association donation of \$5,000 for RSI training and associated wages. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

Ms. Knab moved to public comment. Ms. Saltonstall made comment regarding a personnel issue at the Fire Station. Mr. Choinere spoke, asking for clearer communication about ongoing changes in the department. He would like to see more support for volunteers. Mr. Almon stated that he felt that overall support for volunteers has declined. Mr. Blood stated that the Board should hear from others. Ms. McDonald also gave comment regarding a personnel issue at the fire station.

Ms. Knab opened the public hearing for the Squamscott Fields project with Southeast Land Trust (SELT). Ms. Sommers, SELT's project manager, reviewed the multi-year effort to conserve a 91-acre parcel surrounding an existing Merrill family easement. The property includes forest, wetlands, floodplain, high-priority water supply land, and river frontage. SELT began the project in 2018, secured \$500,000 in conservation funds in 2023, and signed a purchase-and-sale agreement with the Merrills in January 2024. SELT was awarded a \$2.1 million NOAA grant in

July 2025, requiring the Town and SELT to co-hold the conservation easement. SELT will handle monitoring and enforcement under a cooperative agreement.

All due-diligence items have been completed and are under NOAA review. SELT anticipates closing by late October and no later than December 30. Ms. Knab thanked SELT and the Merrills for their long-term commitment and celebrated the significant federal funding. Mr. Anderson expressed concern about public access being limited. Ms. Knab explained the restrictions relate to the property's history as a working farm, but passive public access is allowed and has been carefully considered throughout the process.

Ms. Knab motioned to authorize the expenditure of the \$500,000 in funds out of the Land Conservation Fund. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes. Ms. Knab motioned the Board authorize the Town Administrator to sign the cooperative agreement between Southeast Land Trust and the town. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes. Ms. Knab motioned that the Board authorize the Town Administrator to execute the conservation easement related to the Squamscott Fields property. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes. Ms. Knab motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to sign the documents related to the closing of the conservation easement on the Squamscott Fields property. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

Ms. Knab introduced the discussion on naming the road off Winnicutt Road between 119 and 122. E-911 advised that, due to the current numbering configuration, the driveway must be assigned an official road name. Mr. Tramaloni motioned to name the new private road off of Winnicutt Road, Whitetail Way, as recommended by the property owner. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

Ms. Knab introduced discussion on the 2004 John Deere loader previously replaced through a DES diesel grant. Mr. Roache explained the old loader had been rendered inoperable, with a hole punched through the engine block. A bid process was completed, but the sole bid of \$800 was rejected at the prior meeting. An unsolicited offer of \$4,100.10 has since been received. Mr. Anderson motioned to accept the bid of \$4,100.10 for the surplus John Deere loader from Rockingham Equipment sales. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

Ms. Knab moved to old business. Mr. Roache provided an update on the Lane property, noting the Board had previously agreed to use up to \$50,000 from the Heritage Preservation Fund—established in 2011 with the Select Board as agents to expend—to continue rehabilitation work. The Heritage Commission has already approved the use of these funds, and the Board may authorize the expenditure to move the project forward. Exterior work on the tannery building is underway, and septic approval is pending a state permit. With the additional \$50,000, the Town will be able to finish the exterior rehabilitation of the Lane house. Mr. Anderson motioned to expend up to \$50,000 from the Heritage Preservation Fund for the Lane property. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

Ms. Knab asked about the best way to inform the public of the new ordinance changes. Staff confirmed the information will be shared through the town newsletter, website, and social media, and Mr. Hickey is adding updated language to park kiosks and signage at park entry points.

Ms. Knab moved to the Town Administrator's report. Mr. Roache reported household hazardous waste collection day is scheduled for October 3. Department heads are preparing their budgets, due October 6. The local emergency operations plan grant approved in March is moving forward, and a consultant will be hired. The Union Road culvert repair will be far less costly than expected, at \$4,500 instead of \$30,000. Greenland is holding a charrette on its bridge project related to the Route 33 corridor study. He regrets he will be unable to attend. Preparations for the September 23 Seabrook Drill are complete. Keyless access installation at the municipal building is underway and expected to finish this week.

A draft procurement policy was included for review, with oversight to be handled by the Town Administrator and Finance Administrator. Mr. Anderson noted the Employee Manual update is nearly complete, with a workshop planned for mid- to late October.

RESERVATIONS

Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the use of the Sewall Room on October 1 from 6:00pm to 9:00pm by the Stratham Democrats at the request of Heidi Hanson and to waive the fee. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes. Ms. Knab noted that Ms. Richard informed her it has not been the Board's practice to waive fees for political groups. However, since the fee was recently waived for a Republican event, it will also be waived for the upcoming Democratic event. She added that the Board should decide going forward whether to discontinue waiving the fee or formally include a fee waiver in the policy.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Anderson motioned to appoint Greg Blood and John Cushing to the Stratham Hill Park Association Committee for a term of two years. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes. Mr. Anderson motioned to appoint Daniel Whittier and Paul Deschaine to the Stratham Hill Park Association Committee for a term of one year. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes. Mr. Anderson motioned to appoint Patrick Kelley to the Stratham Hill Park Association Committee as an alternate with a one year term. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

Ms. Knab motioned to appoint Anita Giulietti to the Zoning Board of Adjustment to a three year term to expire in 2028 to fill a vacant term. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

At 8:25pm Ms. Knab motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II(a) and II(c). Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

9:05pm Ms. Knab motioned to come out of the non-public session and seal the minutes noting failure to do so may render the proposed action ineffective. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

At 9:06pm Ms. Knab motioned to adjourn. Mr. Tramaloni seconded the motion. Roll call:
Knab-yes; Anderson-yes; Tramaloni-yes.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary