



Town of
Stratham
NEW HAMPSHIRE

TOWN MEETING
VOTER INFORMATION GUIDE
2021



VOTER INFORMATION GUIDE, March 2021

2021

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Town Meeting Voter Information Guide

This guide is presented to the residents of Stratham as a resource in preparing for the 2021 Town Meeting. The Town Meeting Warrant contains the articles to be voted on during Town meeting. This guide is intended to provide introductory information to the articles and explain their essence as well as inform residents where more information can be found.

Each section (where applicable) ends with where to find more information about each article.

The Town of Stratham operates under the “Traditional Town Meeting” form of government, the default form of government prescribed by law in New Hampshire Government. In this form, the legislative body is the Town Meeting and the governing body is the Select Board. The Town Meeting meets each year. In Stratham, the Town Meeting, at which the legislative body acts, takes place at both an election (this year, March 9th) and at a business session (this year, March 27th). In the Town Meeting form, the residents – Stratham’s registered voters – are the legislators.

This year, Articles 1-7 are to be acted upon at the Town election. Articles 8-15 are to be acted upon at the Town Meeting business session.



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Important Dates¹

Friday, March 5, Stratham School District Meeting²
6:00 p.m., Exeter High School

Tuesday, March 9, Town and School Districts Elections, Ballot Voting
Polls open: 7 a.m. – 7 p.m., Stratham Municipal Center

Saturday, March 27, Town Meeting
9:00 a.m., Exeter High School (1 Blue Hawk Drive, Exeter, NH 03833)

Town Meeting, Voting & Election Information

Town Clerk/Tax Collector's website
<https://www.strathamnh.gov/certified-town-clerk-tax-collector>
(603) 772-7741 ext. 140

Summary of Additional Resources Listed in this Guide

You can find the following documents and information pertaining to Town Meeting at the Town's 2021 Town Meeting page (see black tab at top of Town's homepage).

- This 2021 Voter Information Guide;
- 2020 Town Report;
- Town Warrant and NH DRA Form MS-636;
- 2021 Town of Stratham Budget Summary, line item detail and est. tax impact summary;
- 2021-2026 Capital Improvement Plan; and
- Links to sample ballots (for March 9th Election).

For more information about Warrant Articles pertaining to zoning, please consult this guide, pages 43-87 of the Town Report, or contact the Planning Department by calling (603) 772-7391 ext. 147.

Don't Forget

Voter Information Night hosted by the Wiggin Memorial Library
7:00 p.m., Tues. March 2nd at the Stratham Municipal Center. See Library for details on how to attend remotely via "Zoom" link.

² The Local Stratham School District is its own political subdivision and, like the Town, also operates under the Town Meeting form of government.



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2021 Town Warrant Articles 1 through 7

These articles are to be voted on at the Town Election to be held on Tuesday, March 9th from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., at the Stratham Municipal Center, 10 Bunker Hill Avenue.

ARTICLE 1: To choose all Town Officers for the year ensuing.

- Select Board - 1 position, three year term
- Library Trustee - 2 positions, (one) three year term, (one) one year term
- Trustee of the Trust Funds - 1 position, three year term
- Cemetery Trustee - 1 position, three year term
- Local district School Board – 2 positions, three year term
- Local district Clerk – 1 position, three year term
- Stratham Member on Cooperative School Board – 1 position, term ending 2024 election
- Stratham Member on Cooperative School District Budget Committee – 1 position, term ending 2024 election

For more information: See links to sample ballots on 2021 Town Meeting page and meet the candidates at the March 2nd Voter Information Night.

ARTICLE 2: Gateway Commercial Business District.

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section III, by deleting Subsection 3.8, Gateway Commercial Business District, in its entirety and replacing it with an amended Subsection 3.8, Gateway Commercial Business District, in order to eliminate site plan requirements that are dependent upon the existence of public water and sewer infrastructure.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this article is to remove standards in the Gateway Commercial Business District that are dependent on the provision of public water and sewer service. Without this infrastructure in place, the existing standards cannot be met and consistently require relief from the Planning Board. This articles also simplifies the Gateway Commercial Business District zoning by regulating the three Special Districts identified in the 2009 Regulating Plan for the Gateway District as a single district with the same set of zoning, dimensional and architectural standards and regulations. This article also consolidates reviews of development applications in the Gateway District within the Planning Board.



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ARTICLE 3: Town Center District.

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section III, by deleting Subsection 3.9 Town Center District in its entirety and replacing it with an amended Subsection 3.9 Town Center District, in order to eliminate site plan requirements that are dependent upon the existence of public water and sewer infrastructure.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this article is to remove standards in the Town Center District that are dependent on the provision of public water and sewer service. This article also consolidates reviews of development applications within the Planning Board. This article also includes several minor changes to the district zoning language, including to permit drive-through service uses by Conditional Use Permit, and to change the maximum height of accessory structures from 1.5 stories to 2 stories.

ARTICLE 4: Table of Uses.

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section III, Subsection 3.6 *Table of Uses* to clarify the nomenclature and permitting requirements and procedures for permitted land uses and to add Footnote Number 10, to clarify the permitting requirements and procedures for light manufacturing uses.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this article is to ensure consistency between uses outlined in the Table of Uses, and those described in other sections of the Zoning Ordinance, including the Gateway Commercial Business District and Town Center District. This amendment also clarifies the standards under which light manufacturing uses are permitted.

ARTICLE 5: Historic Demolition Review Procedure.

To amend the Zoning Ordinance, Section XVI, Section 16.5.3 *Historic Demolition Review Procedure*, by adding Subsection 16.5.3 d. to clarify the permitting requirements and procedures of the Demolition Review Committee.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.



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The purpose of this article is to clarify the process to be followed during the Town's consideration of Demolition Permits. The article specifies that in the event of a change of property ownership or the expiration of a demolition permit, full compliance with the permitting procedures for proposed demolitions of historic structures is required.

ARTICLE 6: Building Ordinance Statutory Reference.

To amend the Building Ordinance, *Preamble: Authority*, to correct a statutory reference by deleting Chapter 674:51 and replacing it with Chapter 675:3, VII.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this article is to correct a statutory reference in the Preamble of the Building Ordinance to cite the correct enabling legislation.

ARTICLE 7: Building Ordinance Third Party Reviews.

To amend the Building Ordinance, Article IV, Section 4.2 *Third Party Professionals* to clarify that the Town is not responsible for costs associated with necessary third-party reviews.

The Planning Board recommends this article by unanimous vote.

The purpose of this article is to clarify that the burden of paying for the costs associated with any necessary third-party reviews will be borne by the applicant and not the Town.

For more information about zoning-related articles: See pages 43-87 of the Town Report or contact the Planning Department by calling (603) 772-7391 ext. 147



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2021 Town Warrant Articles 8 through 15

As discussed in the introduction, these articles will be voted upon at the Town of Stratham Town Meeting (business session) to be held on Saturday March 27th at 9:00 a.m. at Exeter High School, 1 Blue Hawk Drive Exeter, NH 03833.

ARTICLE 8: 2021 Operating Budget

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Seven million eight hundred forty four thousand three hundred and twenty-five dollars (\$7,844,325) to defray general town charges for the ensuing year. This article does not include appropriations contained in special or individual articles addressed separately.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

The Town's operating budget includes all of the expenses and revenues associated with running the Town government on an annual basis. It includes the required level of investment to meet the needs and service-level expectations of our residents and business owners and addresses other factors that influence the budgeting process. These factors include the strategies and goals in the Master Plan, contractual and debt obligations, federal and state mandates, and other operational needs.

The proposed FY 2021 General Fund operating budget totals \$7,844,325, which represents an increase of approximately \$384,000 or 5.1% over FY 2020. This total brings the six year average operating budget increase to 2.5%.

The drivers in this year's budget include legislatively mandated increases in the Town's portion of state retirement contributions as well as municipal solid waste collection and disposal costs (impacted by COVID as well as new recycling market realities). In addition to these cost increases revenues have also decreased due to macroeconomic trends resulting from the ongoing pandemic. This year, the Town will realize a decrease in health insurance costs due to new plan offerings and other changes made effective for the 2020 open enrollment. For more information about these drivers, please see the Budget Summary. Overall, the estimate tax rate inclusive of all articles appropriating funds from general taxation is 5.2%.

For more information: Once again this year, the Town's budget information is presented in a **2021 Town of Stratham Budget Summary** located at the 2021 Town Meeting page. The summary explains factors affecting this year's budget, budget drivers, a description of where the Town spends the funds, and historical information and trends are presented in a document.



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ARTICLE 9: Capital Improvements Program

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Four hundred ninety-nine thousand dollars (\$499,000) to implement the Capital Improvements Program for 2021 as presented in the Town Report and recommended by the Planning Board. This is a special warrant article which will be non-lapsing until the specific items are completed or obtained but shall in no case be later than five (5) years from this appropriation per NH RSA 32:7 (VI).

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

The Town's Master Plan guides development and land use decisions for the Town. In addition, it identifies strategies, visions, and projects which often require long range capital investment. Long-term financial planning ensures the Town has the needed resources to maintain current services, replace equipment, and upgrade or rehabilitate facilities as needed. The Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) is the tool used to plan these investments, and this Article appropriates funding for the "year one" projects (2021).

This is the second year, the Select Board, Town Staff, and Planning Board have presented an expanded CIP document. The Plan includes information about the Town's current and future capital needs to support its rolling stock, buildings, recreational facilities, and information technology over a six-year time horizon.

Notably, this year's CIP includes funding for the Town's response to the Town Center PFAS contamination and restores funding to previous years' levels for our roadways, including reconstruction. Last year, the Town decreased funding in this area in order to ensure a level budget in response to the uncertainty surrounding the pandemic.

A summary of the projects is included on page 101 and 102 of the Town Report.

For more information: Please see the **2021-2026 Capital Improvement Plan** at the 2021 Town Meeting page.



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ARTICLE 10: Appropriate Funds to Several Capital Reserve Funds

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Four hundred thousand dollars and (\$400,000) to be added to the following capital reserve funds previously established with One hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to come from the unassigned fund balance and Two hundred thousand fifty dollars (\$250,000) to be raised through general taxation.

Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund	\$110,000
Radio Communications Capital Reserve Fund	\$15,000
Historic Preservation Capital Reserve Fund	\$50,000
Highway Vehicle/Equipment Capital Reserve Fund	\$125,000
Town Buildings and Grounds Maintenance Trust	<u>\$100,000</u>
Total	\$400,000

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

The Town has a number of financial tools used to plan for large purchases. These tools represent a “best practice” in municipal finance. If funded appropriately, these tools can ensure the Town can fund large purchases for capital items when they are needed and avoid “spikes” in a tax rate in any given year.

For example, the Town projects future costs for replacing ambulances and fire trucks as well as heavy equipment and trucks in the Public Works department. These projections are based on replacement schedules informed by life cycle expectations and condition of the assets. Annual funding is set aside through this article in order to meet the needs of future replacements. Generally, money is set aside each year even if expenditures are not required in that year. These funds are also used to establish repositories to be used to respond to opportunities for conservation and historic preservation projects.

For more information: Please see the reserve fund descriptions and more on pages 31-36 of the **2021-2026 Capital Improvement Plan** at the 2021 Town Meeting page.



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ARTICLE 11: Appropriate Funds for an Additional Police Officer

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Forty-four thousand seven hundred ninety-five dollars (\$44,795) for the purpose of hiring an additional full-time police officer for the Town of Stratham. Said sum includes pay and benefits for six (6) months of 2021 (the 12-month total annualized cost is \$89,590). If approved, the amount raised will be incorporated into the police department pay and personnel administration budgets for accounting purposes.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

The recommended staffing level for the Stratham Police Department to adequately provide patrol, administrative and community services necessary to maintain a safe town for our residents, and to provide a safer working environment for our police officers currently stands at thirteen (13) sworn officers. We are presently staffed at eleven (11) officers. In order to maintain this level of service to an acceptable and efficient level, the police department will continue to evaluate its staffing allocations on a yearly basis. Approval and funding of one (1) full-time police officer at the Annual Town meeting will have an immediate impact on addressing the staff shortages of patrol officers.

Each week, there are a total of 76 hours where there is a lone officer on duty in Stratham. Ensuring two-person coverage for every shift is an important safety goal for the agency. For additional detail associated with this recommendation, please see the 2021 Stratham Police Department Staffing Allocation Report.

For more information: Please see the [2021 Stratham Police Department Staffing Allocation Report](#) at the 2021 Town Meeting page.



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ARTICLE 12: Appropriation for the Accrued Benefits Liability Expendable Trust

To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate Fifteen thousand dollars (\$15,000) to be deposited into the Accrued Benefits Liability Expendable Trust.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

This Article raises funds for the purposes of capitalizing the Accrued Benefits Liability Expendable Trust. Expendable Trusts operate the same as Capital Reserve Funds. The purpose of this Trust is to ensure that costs (i.e. payout for accrued sick and vacation leaves) can be provided for without impacting operating budgets. A 2021 review of our workforce characteristics warrant additional investment in this Trust.

ARTICLE 13: Raise and appropriate from the EMS Special Revenue Fund

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) for the following purposes:

2021 EMS/EMT/First Responder Training	\$10,000
2021 ALS Services Contract	\$10,000

and to further authorize the withdrawal of Twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000) from the Stratham Fire Department EMS Special Revenue Fund created for these purposes during the March 17, 2000 Annual Town Meeting and as amended during the March 11, 2005 Town Meeting. No additional funds from general taxation are to be used.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

The NH Municipal Budget Act requires the Town's legislative body (in Stratham, this is the Town Meeting) to appropriate from Special Revenue Funds. Special Revenue Funds are repositories for dedicated funding sources; in this case, Town's Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Special Revenue Fund funded from proceeds stemming from the Town's ambulance billing. In turn, these funds are available to support the needs of the Fire Department including the Town's EMS service function. This year, as for several years past, the Town has voted to appropriate funds for EMS Training (\$10,000).



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This fund is also used to pay Exeter Advanced Life Services (ALS) who provides EMS services on an as needed basis. Since, Medicare/Medicaid only permit the transporting agency (Stratham FD) to bill patients, the Town collects all EMS payments and in turn pays Exeter ALS for its services (\$10,000). Because of the “pass-through” nature of this transaction, it is “net neutral” to the fund.

ARTICLE 14: Raise and Appropriate from the EMS Special Revenue Fund: Equip.

To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of One hundred twelve thousand five-hundred dollars (\$112,500) for the following purposes:

Thermal Imaging Cameras	\$12,500
2021 Radio Replacements	\$100,000

and to further authorize the withdrawal of One hundred twelve thousand five-hundred dollars (\$112,500) from the Stratham Fire Department EMS Special Revenue Fund created for these purposes during the March 17, 2000 Annual Town Meeting and as amended during the March 11, 2005 Town Meeting. No additional funds from general taxation are to be used.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

This article is the second of two articles appropriating funds from the Fire Department EMS Fund (see explanation in Article 13). The Fire Department’s current Thermal Imaging Camera is in need of replacement. In addition, the Fire Department will be moving forward with a portable radio replacement project. This project will total approximately \$180,000; funding from the SRF (\$100,000) will be combined with the Fire Department Capital Reserve Fund (\$80,000). These radios are over 19 years old, are a primary communication method for the department and parts are no longer made by the manufacturer (Motorola).



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ARTICLE 15: Lapse of Automated Curbside Collection Funding

To see if the Town shall vote to lapse the 2019 appropriation of \$365,000 (Warrant Article #14) intended to fund a transition to a curbside collection program. Lapsed funds become part of the Town's unassigned fund balance.

The Select Board recommends this Article by unanimous vote.

In 2020, the Town entered into a new six-year municipal solid waste collection and disposal contract following extensive review and consideration in recent years. A summary of the process and eventual program is included in the Town Report on page 197. The 2019 Warrant Article mentioned above allowed the Town to consider its own purchase of carts to support an automated curbside collection program as the expiration of the previous contract expired. Through a competitive proposal process the Town was able to secure the acquisition (and delivery, storage, and overall management of carts) of automation compliant trash and recycling carts through our vendor.

As a result, the appropriated amount from 2019 is no longer required to be used and the Select Board recommends the Town vote to lapse the appropriation. These funds will become part of the Town's unassigned fund balance. One use of the Town's unassigned balance is to help offset the amount of the annual budget appropriation that would otherwise come from general taxation.

For more information about the municipal solid waste collection see page 197 of the Town Report and the ***2021 Town of Stratham Budget Summary*** at the 2021 Town Meeting page.