

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 18, 2023 SELECT BOARD MEETING

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

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator David Moore

At 7:00 pm Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and asked for a motion on the minutes. Ms. Knab motioned approval of the minutes of Dec. 4th as written. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton asked for comments on the Correspondence and Informational items. Hearing none, he motioned to open the public hearing. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Moore reminded the Board that a donation check was presented at the last meeting. A memo that explains the intent of the donor was included in the packet. He then described the Board's role in how the funds are used. Mr. Houghton asked for comments. The Board members supported the continued use of the funds as they'd been proposed in the past. Mr. Houghton motioned to close the public hearing. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Houghton motioned to accept the funds donated from the Stratham Volunteer Fire Dept. Association. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton recognized Keith Pratt, President of Underwood Engineers. Mr. Moore stated that the town has received a second phase grant from DES in the amount of \$50,000. It is 100% funded (no local match). These funds were accepted by the Board earlier in the year. Mr. Pratt informed the Board about how our project fits into the State's bigger picture. He gave background on Stratham's PFAS issues. The State is using ARPA funds to do a regional water study to find connections and solutions. Underwood was chosen as the state's contractors. Stratham has the biggest population that is without municipal water. Underwood will be talking to community leaders, giving them an opportunity to be engaged in finding solutions. Willingness, cost, distance, feasibility and governance will all play a role in with whom we partner. They discussed our history with exploring, researching, and designing an Exeter connection. Mr. Moore discussed public outreach. Much of the time will be spent on municipal agreement discussion and effort; engineering is the easier part. The State's primary concern was emergency supply, but it is also making an effort to reduce community water systems which have lower quality and are unreliable. Mr. Pratt will pace our project behind the State project. He will see how that's developing and help Stratham fit into one of their solutions. The seacoast, ironically, doesn't have a lot of water. The group discussed the conversations taking place re: water supply sources 50 years in the future.

Mr. Pratt requested the Board sign the contract soon so that they could start in January. He recommends asking the State for an extension with the grant agreement to allow Underwood to do their work at a pace to coincide with the State study. The Board decided to sign the contract with Underwood at the next meeting in January. Mr. Pratt will send along the State contract with Underwood when it is signed. The Board thanked him for the update and for coming in.

Mr. Houghton moved to the Parks & Recreation request under New Business for a van. Ms. Knab motioned to authorize the Parks & Recreation Director to move forward with his purchase of the van as outlined in his Dec 15, 2023 memo for an amount up to \$67,553.00 with the source funding coming from the Transportation Fund, the Rec Revolving Fund and the proceeds of the Great Bay Food Truck Festival. The vote included a release of \$15,000 from the Municipal Transportation Improvement Fund, of which the Select Board are the agents to expend. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Next Mr. Houghton called attention to the encumbrances. Mr. Moore reported that Ms. McAllister had prepared a group of encumbrances which she recommends you vote to approve. They had been discussed at a previous Select Board meeting. They discussed the balances. Mr. Moore reported that Ms. McAllister is suggesting they encumber \$14,000 for the Gifford Barn preservation project; \$23,155 for FB Environmental Associates for the MS4 professional services; \$623 for fire gear; and \$47,900 from the donation for other fire gear; [later in the meeting the Board approved encumbering \$10,000 in CIP funds for library carpeting]. Ms. Knab motioned to encumber the four items listed: Gifford Barn preservation project, FB Environmental Associates for the open space project and the two amounts for fire gear. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Houghton turned to the Town Administrator report. Mr. Moore compiled a report for the Town's rental units. He has contacted each of the tenants to let them know who to contact in an emergency and non-emergency situations.

Financial Advisory Committee update. Mr. Anderson reported that the School's budget has an increase over last year. Much of the increase is due to the proposal of a new position with a salary of \$90,000 plus benefits, the FAC and Committee's work is not yet completed.

Mr. Moore reported that a resident reached out regarding the Purple Heart signs contending that one of the signs is not on its own post as it should be. Mr. Moore is looking into it.

New employee event will be moved to January 10. The Budget Advisory Committee meeting will be on Monday, January 8th at 7:00 pm.

Community Power Coalition of NH communications will go out towards the end of January. On January 30th there will be a public forum on the program. Mr. Anderson is the authorized representative. They discussed the rates.

Ms. Knab noted from the Police Department monthly report the Animal Control Officer has resigned

INFORMATIONAL

Mr. Houghton noted that the draft warrant articles were mostly housekeeping around zoning. Mr. Moore highlighted the article regarding installation of solar panels. The Planning Board is recommending that free standing solar projects that meet certain criteria be allowed to move forward without appearing before them. Mr. Moore reminded the Board of a broader discussion

about a general approach to solar projects in Stratham that the Planning Board would have with interested parties. Mr. Connors will ensure the Energy Commission is aware that this is moving forward. There will be two Public Hearings in January on it.

RESERVATIONS

Ms. Knab motioned approval for Jay Flagg to use Room A on January 25th for a pickle ball pot luck and to waive the alcohol prohibition. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned approval for the Fireworks permit for the Lights 4 Lives Committee. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton moved to the budget workshop discussion. Mr. Moore noted this is a starting point for the budget. He gave a top level review of our current status explaining the increases. They discussed items that could be removed or lowered to reduce the CIP. Noticing the decrease in solid waste, they wondered if Casella might be able to provide insight on the trends they are seeing. They discussed the ballot machines. Mr. Moore noted the State is looking into new machines and Deborah Bakie, Town Clerk / Tax Collector is recommending them. He will remove them from the CIP. In reviewing the Fire Dept. vehicle budget, they noted Chief Denton had referred to the age of the fleet. Mr. Moore observed that the Fire Dept. always has funds left at the end of the year. There is also funds in the Capital Reserve Funds for Fire. They questioned the increase in the DPW budget for salaries. They discussed the use of the ARPA funds. They agreed the remaining ARPA funds should be used on non-recurring expenses. Town buildings have needs that are to be addressed. The proposed library renovations would be a good use of the funds. Mr. Moore reminded them that this is a reval year and we have new assessors starting in January. Because of that, it will be more difficult to project a tax rate.

At 8:35 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II (a) to discuss compensation. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 9:40 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to exit the non-public session and seal the minutes noting failure to do so may render a proposed action invalid. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor. At 9:41 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary