

MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 20, 2021 SELECT BOARD MEETING

Meeting held in the Hutton Room at the Stratham Municipal Center

MEMBERS PRESENT: Board Members Vice Chair Joe Lovejoy and Allison Knab. Chair Mike Houghton was absent.

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator David Moore, Finance Administrator Christiane McAllister, Fire Chief Matt Larrabee, Code Enforcement/Building Inspector/Health Officer Jim Marchese

At 7:00 pm Mr. Lovejoy opened the regular meeting.

Ms. Knab motioned to accept the minutes from the December 6 Select Board meeting. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

FIRE DEPT.

Fire Chief Matt Larrabee reported that calls are up 30% over this time last year; a record increase; he noted this represents a significant increase over the last pre-Covid year of 2019. The current staffing model has been working. The department will be making its annual Capital Reserve request at Town Meeting. This year's request will be to purchase a new ambulance to replace the A-2. It is preferable to choose a matching ambulance to the A-1 to maintain continuity of location of equipment. To better plan for the future, Chief Larrabee is including large ticket items in to the Capital Reserve – a SCBA air compressor, which fills up the air bottles, and a gear washer. Both are working fine now, but we should set aside the money if and when we need to make these big purchases. Currently, Chief Larrabee is involved in working with the Lindt Safety Manager, our Police Dept. and Town staff on compliance with life safety features of the Lindt building. Chief Larrabee reported that we have EMTs participating in the State's booster blitz vaccination clinic. DHHS reimburses us for this work. Chief Larrabee noted the Lights 4 Lives event was last night, the golf tournament in October was successful and they are making plans for the 2022 tournament. Next, Chief Larrabee described some changes to the AV system in the Emergency Operations Center that would make it more user friendly. He would like to see these changes implemented soon. He reported that Collette Poisson has been promoted to EMS Lieutenant and Chris Heal has been promoted to Fire Lieutenant. The group briefly discussed the timing of the CIP and Capital Reserve purchases. The ambulance is out of the ambulance account so it will not affect taxes. Ms. McAllister requested an updated staffing roster from him.

CODE ENFORCEMENT/BUILDING INSPECTION

Mr. Lovejoy recognized Code Enforcement/Building Inspector/Health Officer Jim Marchese to give his department report. Mr. Marchese praised the work of prior inspector, Shanti Wolph, and the Building Coordinator Denise Lemire. He is working on getting his DHHS Health Inspector approval. There was discussion about getting a medical doctor as an additional deputy health officer. He will work on this. Mr. Marchese reported that 275 Portsmouth Ave. has occupants which has been approved by the Planning Board. He attended the Emergency Operation drill on the 8th. There continues to be ongoing commercial projects: Lindt, Stony Brook, ATM at 20 Portsmouth Ave. Larger scale projects are winding down. There are 7 homes waiting for

Occupancy Permits. He reported a decline in what the department has brought in but feels that is probably Covid related. Improving public awareness is a goal of his. He plans to post building permits monthly in a public place. He is looking forward to working with the new permitting software

Mr. Lovejoy noted the automobile registrations have increased this year.

ACTION ITEMS

Mr. Lovejoy called attention to the Dec. 15 memo from Town Planner Mark Connors requesting a partial bond release for the 104 Portsmouth Ave project (NHSPCA). Mr. Lovejoy motioned to release \$56,566 as requested, leaving a \$35,746 balance. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Lovejoy turned to the agenda item regarding Emergency Planning. Mr. Moore explained that we put out a request for volunteers in the newsletter and five people responded. In January we hope to do an orientation presentation. Another matter that needs attention, we need to train staff on the web EOC, which is a web based software utilized by the state to keep the local EOCs informed. We added Jim Marchese, Deb Bakie and Nate Mears to the Emergency Management team. It is recommended to have Select Board members at the next two drills on Feb. 9 and April 6.

Next, Mr. Lovejoy called attention to PFAS long term planning. Mr. Moore said we are working with DES on PFAS mitigation grant funds. The other part of PFAS planning is a contract with Wilcox & Barton to be our engineers that will collect monitoring samples, home samples and report on a quarterly and annual basis with the State of NH. We are also under contract with Underwood Engineers for a 100% funded grant study on PFAS alternatives. They discussed the merits of investigating water quality issues facing well owners and the possibility of the State becoming engaged to a greater extent. The group continued to talk about recommended tasks and other funding grants. Pursuing this matter would call attention to water quality issues that residents may have. Ms. Knab expressed concern about causing fear and undue stress on private well owners who may not have the resources to install a filtration system. Mr. Lovejoy noted it might be worthwhile to establish a baseline. Mr. Moore believes the State will offer filtration systems if an affected resident can show financial need. Ms. Knab agreed to move forward with the study as long as there are options for people to address any issues that might arise. The consensus was to move forward.

Mr. Lovejoy requested an update on budget development. Mr. Moore reported that the Moderator is in the process of appointing a Budget Advisory Committee. Dept. heads are ready to present. Prior to the first BAC meeting, we will give them a draft CIP, draft preliminary budget and narrative. From an operating perspective, we are under 3%. We don't foresee much changing. Mr. Moore explained some of the changes from last year (assessing department changes, fuel, etc.). Guidance to the department heads was to keep budgets under 3%. There will be no new programs. Mr. Moore reported on the status of payroll adjustments. Compensation is budgeted for \$75,000, which is the value of applying a 3% merit-based cost of living adjustment (assuming all employees received the max). This number is based on the 5 year average of the CPI. Ms. McAllister explained why the format of the summary of estimated

tax impact is different than previous years. When you are dealing with a proposed budget, there are two times that those values can change before it turns into taxes. One reason is due to a vote at Town Meeting, the other is when DRA gives us our final numbers for Meals & Rooms and the Highway Block Grant. These factors can significantly change our revenue numbers. Revenues are being applied against appropriations. On the spreadsheet, she separated actual revenues from estimated revenues because the numbers are going to change. We don't get the final numbers until just before the tax rate is set. Mr. Moore said the budget continues to be refined.

ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Moore stated that Fire Chief Matt Larrabee has recommended that we formally invest in the Emergency Operations Center by encumbering \$5,000 of Fire Department Operating Funds from 2021. Mr. Moore added that the work will be done in early 2022. Ms. Knab motioned to allow the Fire Dept. to encumber \$5,000 in funds towards Emergency Operations Center improvements. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore called attention to the worksheet of Attendance for Board and Commission members. Performance appraisals are in and they will be ready for the Board's review soon. Preparations for the Town Report are underway.

They discussed the start time for the BAC meetings.

Mr. Moore referred to a memo he provided to the Board as an informational item, which addresses the timeline of setting the tax rate in relation to the finalization of the MS-1 DRA form (assessed value of the Town and utilities). Mr. Moore in consultation with the contract Assessor, Finance Administrator and Town Clerk/Tax Collector have agreed on an approach that will create more time at the end of the year to finalize the tax rate with the state.

Next, Mr. Moore gave an Assessing work update saying the new model is working well. He praised Jim Joseph's work as both Deputy Town Clerk/Tax Collector and Assessing Assistant.

RAFFLE PERMIT

Ms. Knab motioned to allow the CMS Music Boosters request to hold a raffle. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Lovejoy reported meeting with the Energy Commission. Because Stratham joined an energy aggregate, the Town realized approximately \$27,000 in savings. In the future, there is the possibility to extend the aggregate to encompass the Town. This will have to be voted on at a town meeting (not until 2023). Towns could band together to achieve greater savings on various things like solar arrays, wind power, etc.

At 8:06pm Mr. Lovejoy motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-a:3, II(a) Personnel. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. Roll Call: Lovejoy – yes; Knab – yes

At 9:30 p.m. Joe Lovejoy moved to seal the minutes noting that failure to do so may render a proposed action ineffective. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore and Ms. McAllister discussed, in general, the payroll system and the transitions in the Finance department and the cell phone reimbursement policy.

At 9:35pm Ms. Knab motioned to adjourn. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary