

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 6, 2023 SELECT BOARD MEETING

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

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator David Moore, Finance Administrator Christiane McAllister,

At 7:00 pm Mr. Houghton opened the meeting and requested motions on the minutes. Ms. Knab motioned to approve the minutes from January 17 and February 1 as written. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Houghton asked if there were any comments regarding correspondence. Ms. Knab felt the Unitil correspondence gave good information and requested it be in a future newsletter.

Mr. Moore asked for an action regarding the Zoning Board of Adjustment resignation. Mr. Anderson motioned to accept the resignation of Richard Goulet from the Zoning Board of Adjustment. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton opened the public hearing on the 2023 Town Budget and Warrant. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor. Mr. Moore gave a presentation on Warrant articles 11 – 19 after referring to Articles 1 and 2 through 10. He discussed Town Election (3/14), Town Meeting (3/18) and Voter Information Night (3/7). He reviewed the budget process, noting that the Board strives to make the information transparent and available to the public. The Town portion of residents' tax bills is 16% and includes library, public works functions, parks maintenance and programs, public safety, etc. He turned to the Operating Budget, noting that when developing it they were mindful of economic uncertainty and rising costs, and retention of quality staff. ARPA funds were strategically deployed to invest in the Town's capital program. Much effort has been put into managing costs and, as a result, there is only a 2.23% increase in the budget over last year.

Mr. Moore continued, explaining that Article 12 – Capital Improvement Program funds several projects that support programs and services, equipment, info systems, parks, infrastructure, buildings, and transportation improvements.

Article 13 appropriates funds to the Capital Reserve. We plan for the future by assessing what our vehicle and building needs will be in the coming years. Raising these funds ensures a smooth impact to the taxpayers.

Article 14 – Special Revenue Fund for ambulance. This authorizes expenditures to withdraw the money for the ambulance operation and training.

Article 15 – Fire Engine 1. The EMS Fund, CIP and a donation from the Stratham Fair Trust Fund will be enough to purchase the new engine.

Article 16 and 17 are housekeeping items. A recent legislative session changed the eligibility for veteran's tax credits. This caused the Dept. of Revenue to require towns to re-adopt veteran's

tax credits. The change makes those that are actively serving eligible for a tax credit; previously it was only for veterans that had served.

Article 18 is regarding adoption of an additional fee of \$5 on motor vehicle registrations. These funds would be set aside in Capital Reserve Fund and be used for public transportation, roadway improvements, signal upgrades and development of new bike and pedestrian paths.

Article 19 would allow the Select Board to amend fees. This would allow the Board to respond to economic trends more easily when it comes to pricing items such as fees for the transfer station.

Mr. Houghton opened the hearing to the public comments or questions from the public. Resident Paul Wolf asked if other towns had similar charges added to their motor vehicle registrations. Mr. Moore responded that, yes, Exeter, Portsmouth, among others including New Castle, North Hampton and Greenland, had adopted the fee. Mr. Houghton explained that there will soon be a kick off meeting for the Open Space & Connectivity Steering Committee which is aligned with finding better ways to utilize open space which is linked to our Master Plan as being desirable and growth focused to the community. These funds could also be used to support emerging needs, such as developing bike and pedestrian paths. Mr. Wolf stated he was in favor of the additional fee.

Hearing no further questions, Mr. Houghton closed the Public Hearing. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Moore turned to the agenda item Expenditure of Funds from the Accrued Liability Expendable Trust. In 2022, eligible expenses totaled \$39,271.50. This expense is related to paying sick leave and/or vacation leave to the two long-time employees who retired. Mr. Moore is suggesting the Board authorize reimbursement to the general fund from the Trust. Mr. Anderson motioned to request a reimbursement of \$39,271.50 from the Trustees of the Trust Funds. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore called attention to the memo from Seth Hickey, Parks & Recreation Director regarding the pump track renovation. Ms. Knab motioned to authorize the Town Administrator to execute the contract for the pump track renovation. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. The renovation will be funded by a donation from Seacoast Velo Kids with the balance coming from Recreation Revolving Fund.

ADMINISTRATION

Mr. Moore called attention to the proposed joint letter regarding Rt 33 corridor study. Town Planner Mark Connors is proposing that we draft a letter to reiterate and reemphasize the importance of this study to us, Greenland and Portsmouth. Ms. Knab motioned to authorize the Select Board Chair to sign a letter on Stratham's behalf toward encouraging the State to do a Rt. 33 corridor study. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore informed the Board that Public Works Director Nate Mears has created a Permit to Excavate in the Right of Way. Mr. Moore will have Town Counsel review it. All agreed it was a necessary form.

Mr. Moore updated the board on elected position filings. All positions have someone running. It is a full ballot for the Town offices.

Mr. Moore is meeting with Representative Manos tomorrow regarding HB 647 immunity bill. The Board's interest and concern over this bill is shared by fellow town officials, elected and appointed.

The group discussed whether or not to reschedule the March 20 Select Board meeting due to a member's planned absence. They will discuss again at the March 6th meeting. March 20th, the first meeting following Town meeting, usually includes the re-adoption of the SB Rules and Policies.

Mr. Moore received a request from Welfare Administrator Karen Richard for an additional \$400 to pay a funeral home for a deceased resident's cremation. Costs associated with cremations has risen. Compared to surrounding communities, Stratham's payout is low. Mr. Anderson motioned to revise the Welfare Burial reimbursement policy in the amount up to \$1,400. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton called attention to the Ratio Study from the DRA. Mr. Moore noted that it is worse than we hoped to have seen at 70.3.

Mr. Moore reminded the group that on Feb. 13 the library is hosting a small reception for the new Library Director.

Going back to the Ratio Study, Mr. Anderson confirmed we have that problem until we do the re-val. Mr. Moore said we would be at 100% in 2024. Mr. Anderson asked if we could move the re-val up and, if so, what would be the down-side. Mr. Moore recalled that in a previous conversation they acknowledged that people are unaware and not expecting a re-val. Also, some people think the market might be more stable in the future. Mr. Anderson thinks it would be a positive for most residents. The whole point of a re-val is to add balance to the tax system. Mr. Moore reflected how the impacts can vary depending on the market trends at the time. For residential properties, the value of homes with more accessible purchase prices may appreciate at a higher rate between five-year periods compared to homes at the higher end. Mr. Moore said that it would be a tight timeline to communicate with the public and do what is necessary for 2023, but said he would review and report back to the Board if there was interest. Mr. Moore reminded them that work for the reval is ongoing throughout the year, even though the value is set as of April 1st and the first years tax bill is always an estimate. After discussion, the Board felt it would be best to continue with the Town's long-held practice of doing re-valuations every five years.

RESERVATIONS

Ms. Knab motioned to approve the request from Port City Amateur Radio Club to use the top of the hill at Stratham Hill Park on June 23 through Sunday, June 25. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned approval of the CMS Music Boosters raffle permit request. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Anderson motioned to approve the request to use the Front Pavilion for the Great Bay 5K on Oct. 28, 2023 and to waive the fee. Ms. Knab abstained as she is involved with the Great Bay organization. Mr. Houghton seconded the motion. Motion passed.

APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Houghton motioned to appoint Jameson Paine to a regular member position on the Zoning Board of Adjustment for a three year term ending 2025. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned to appoint Frank MacMillan to a regular member position on the Zoning Board of Adjustment for a three year term ending 2023. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton asked for comments or questions from the public as part of public comment.

Hearing none, at 8:06 p.m. Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. Roll call: Houghton-yes; Knab-yes; Anderson-yes

At 10:06 p.m. the Select Board resumed the public session and Mr. Houghton motioned to seal the minutes noting failure to do so may render a proposed action ineffective. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore continued his report discussing the budget. He referred to the Tax Rate Impact sheet. He noted that he and Christiane have determined how the Board could get could get to a 2% Operating Budget decrease as the Board previously expressed an interest in. He further recommended reductions totaling \$90,000. With reductions, we get to \$3.18 estimated tax rate for 2023. This is .03 cents more than 2021; 12 cents more than 2022. This is an early, conservative projection that will likely change. Ms. McAllister noted that we haven't received revenue or State funds yet and have no way of projecting if we will receive them or what they might be. In keeping with the direction from the Board received previously: to use remaining ARPA funds for public facing projects that will improve the experience or residents accessing public services, Mr. Moore recommended using ARPA funds for a pavilion and improvements at Stevens Park and reported out on recent conversations with DPW and Public Works along these lines that confirmed for him appropriate investments were able to be completed prior to the expiration of the ARPA funds. Smaller projects at Stratham Hill Park could also be used with ARPA funds to improve drainage of parking areas and repair Shady Lane as well as reconfigure restrooms as well as utilize funds for engineering and surveying services to create an existing

conditions plan in Stratham Hill Park that would serve as a jumping off point for future master planning of the Park following the Open Space Plan & Connectivity Plan.

Mr. Anderson recalled the generator went out during a recent storm, causing the town office to shut down. He wondered if it should be replaced.

Mr. Moore briefly reviewed the CIP summary he had distributed and explained his recommended changes. He then referred to the draft warrant saying that if they agreed with the changes, only Articles 11 and 12 would need to be adjusted.

Ms. Knab motioned to move forward Article 11 Operating Budget to the Warrant with an operating budget adjusted to \$8,211,188 and to recommend it to the Town Meeting unanimously. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Ms. Knab motioned to move forward Article 12 Capital Improvements Program to the Warrant with a total of \$663,000 and to recommend it to the Town Meeting unanimously. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned to move forward Articles 13 through 20 as written to the Town Warrant and to recommend them unanimously. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore said he would make the changes and have it available for signature. Ms. McAllister reminded the group that the official Warrant comes from the DRA. Mr. Moore said the print deadline for the Town Report is Feb. 17th and he Karen and Christiane are all working to ensure the materials are ready.

At 10:24 Mr. Houghton motioned to adjourn. Mr. Anderson seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard
Recording Secretary