

MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 8, 2021 SELECT BOARD SPECIAL MEETING AND PUBLIC HEARING ON THE TOWN WARRANT

MEMBERS PARTICIPATING: Board Members Chair Mike Houghton, Vice Chair Joe Lovejoy, Board Member Allison Knab along with Town Administrator David Moore and Finance Administrator Dawna Duhamel.

The Board Chair opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

M. Houghton welcomed the attendees in the room, on the phone and on Facebook Live.

Mr. Houghton then moved to open the public hearing and recognized Town Administrator David Moore to provide a staff presentation on the draft warrant articles. Mr. Moore introduced Dawna Duhamel, Finance Administrator and Cantrece Forest who is assisting with the audio visual presentation. Town Election will be Tuesday, March 9 and Town Meeting will be Saturday, March 27 at Exeter High School. This public hearing is to focus on the Articles to be voted on at Town Meeting. The Budget Advisory Committee has reviewed the budget and made recommendations to the Select Board. Department Heads were asked to keep their budget requests level. Any items that were additional to their budget are referred to as “a la carte”. For materials in preparation of the election and Town Meeting, Mr. Moore directed the public to the website under the Town Meeting tab on the homepage. He reviewed the Operating Budget saying there is a 5.1% increase. The past three years have had level spending, a trend which is difficult to continue while maintaining level services going forward. Budget drivers are municipal solid waste, legislatively mandated NH Retirement System rates, increased coverage in Fire Dept. and pavement management. Recycling costs have increased as a result of worldwide disruption in recycling markets. In addition, there has been an 11% increase in tonnage of trash related to the pandemic due to people staying at home and working from home. Moving to an automated collection provided savings over manual collection – it will save the town a half a million dollars over the life of the new six-year contract. The Fire Dept. hopes to expand its stand by model to allow for coverage 7 days a week and day coverage on weekends. There were some decreases in expenses – health and dental went down. Rates increased, but the town offered two new deductible plans to its employees. Debt service decreased in accordance with our schedules. The summer program line item has been reduced. Wages and benefits are big drivers, including COLA adjustments and steps for the Police Department.

Capital Improvements Program has two drivers: Responding to PFAS in town center and restoring the paving reconstruction program.

Capital Reserve Funds saw a decrease as a result of looking at opportunities to tighten the money to be used to capitalize the Fire and Highway Capital Reserve Funds. A request to replace a vehicle has been put off.

The Board tries to maintain a conservative approach. In the area of revenues, we are preparing for impacts from the State regarding Covid. Other cost items include CIP, CRF, and a contribution to the Accrued Benefits Liability Trust. The result will be a 13 cent estimated tax impact increase which is 4.2% year over year.

Other warrant articles are as follows:

Special Revenue Fund (SRF) – to make an appropriation from the SRF, a vote must be taken to remove the funds. These expenses are for training and Advanced Life Support services that augment our services. EMS special revenue fund will allow for the purchase of thermal imaging cameras and a contribution towards a radio replacement project (that will be paired with funds from the Fire CRF). Both items are eligible under SRF. This SRF funded by ambulance revenues.

Contribution to Accrued Benefits Liability Trust. This allows us to fund costs associated with termination and retirement where there's accrued vacation and sick leave.

Lapse of Automated Curbside Collection Carts. In 2019, the Town voted to set aside \$365,000 for curbside collection carts which was raised to help fund a transition to automated curbside collection. These funds weren't needed. Through a competitive process, the vendor purchased the carts. It is recommended to lapse these monies, which would become unassigned fund balance. These funds are used to maintain stability in the tax rate from year to year

Police Body Worn Cameras. This initiative has been gaining steam throughout the country. Police Chief King recommends it move forward here in Stratham. The cameras are proposed to be funded thru Police Dept. Detail Fund. No money will be raised from general taxation for these cameras.

Mr. Moore reminded the Board it had discussed the hiring of an additional Police Officer during the budget development process. He noted the Board could amend the draft operating budget that evening or vote to add it as a warrant article to address the issue.

Mr. Houghton opened up the hearing to the public. No members sought recognition. Hearing none, the Board moved forward with recommending articles for the Warrant.

Mr. Houghton motioned to close the Public Hearing. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton directed attention to the Heritage Commission's budget.. Mr. Houghton requested the funds be restored. The new operating budget total would be \$7,844,325.

Mr. Houghton read and recommended the following Articles to the Warrant.

Article 9: 2021 Operating Budget. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$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.

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 9 to the Warrant. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Article 10 Capital Improvements Program. To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of Four hundred ninety-nine thousand dollars and no cents (\$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).

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 10 to the Warrant. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Article 11 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 no cents (\$400,000) to be added to the following capital reserve funds previously established with One hundred fifty thousand dollars and no cents (\$150,000) to come from the unassigned fund balance and Two hundred thousand fifty dollars and no cents (\$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

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 11 to the Warrant. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Article 12 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 and no cents (\$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 and no cents (\$20,000.00) 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.

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 12 to the Warrant. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

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 One hundred twelve thousand five hundred dollars and no cents (\$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 and no cents (\$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.

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 13 to the Warrant. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Article 14 Appropriation for the Accrued Benefits Liability Expendable Trust. To see if the Town shall vote to appropriate Fifteen thousand dollars and no cents (\$15,000) to be deposited into the Accrued Benefits Liability Expendable Trust.

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 14 to the Warrant. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Article 15 Lapse of Automated Curbside Collection Funding. To see if the Town shall vote to lapse the 2019 appropriation of \$365,000 to fund a transition to a curbside collection program.

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 15 to the Warrant. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Article 16 Use of Body Worn Cameras by Stratham Police Department. To see if the Town will approve the use of Body Worn Cameras by the Stratham Police Department, as regulated by New Hampshire RSA 105-D.

Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 16 to the Warrant. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Article 17 To transact any other business that may legally come before this meeting. Mr. Houghton motioned to accept Article 17 to the Warrant. Ms. Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Houghton motioned to add another warrant article to include another full-time police officer. Mr. Lovejoy seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore worked with DRA to create Warrant Article language regarding this article. The Article should read: To see if the Town will vote to raise and appropriate the sum of \$44,795 for the purpose of hiring a full time police officer for the Town of Stratham. Said sum includes pay and benefits for six months of 2021. If approved, the amount raised will be included in the Police Department pay and personnel administration budgets for accounting purposes. The number Mr. Houghton would like the position to be funded for half a year the first year, but should show the full amount for next year. Mr. Moore indicated he would work with Ms. Duhamel to insert the figures in the warrant article which reflect half-year funding and indicate the annualized cost.

Mr. Houghton noted that on Article 16, wording should say that cameras will be funded through the Police Detail Account and no funds will be raised through general taxation.

Mr. Lovejoy seconded the amendment to Article 16. All voted in favor.

Mr. Moore will assemble the Warrant for the Select Board's signature. Mr. Houghton thanked town staff, members of the Budget Advisory Committee and the residents across town to help guide us through this challenging process to put this budget in place. Mr. Houghton concluded the Public Hearing.

FIRE DEPT.

Mr. Houghton recognized Fire Chief Matt Larrabee. Chief Larrabee stated that DHHS contacted him to request that the Town provide EMS workers to administer vaccinations. The National Guard will be still be involved. If Towns don't comply, it is likely we will be required to. Chief Larrabee detailed the ways the Town will be reimbursed for this expense and discussed EMS wages for this service. He's talked to surrounding towns regarding their process. He recommends participating by requesting volunteers. Mr. Houghton acknowledged that it is an important initiative. The group discussed the impact of additional hours on part-time staff as it relates to employment status. The Board was supportive of Chief Larrabee moving forward with the DHHS contract.

Mr. Moore gave a brief introduction to correspondence he received regarding education funding. There is a push in the General Court to return to a state wide education property tax. A group of "similarly situated communities" is taking the lead on reorganizing the "coalition" communities. They would like a response by Feb 28th if we want to participate in the coalition or not. The coalition will advocate for "donor" communities and defend against a statewide education property tax. The Board wanted to read the materials and meet later in the month before making a decision.

At 8:33 pm Mr. Houghton motioned to go into a non-public session in accordance with RSA 91-A:3, II (c). Knab seconded the motion. All voted in favor.

At 10:00 p.m. the Board exited non-public session. Ms. Knab voted to seal the minutes noting that failure to do so would render a proposed motion ineffective. Ms. Lovejoy seconded all voted in favor.

At 10:01 p.m. Mr. Lovejoy moved to adjourn; Ms. Knab seconded and all voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Richard