

**Town of Chester
Selectboard’s Meeting
Thursday, December 21, 2023
Municipal Complex
Approved Minutes**

I. Preliminaries

Call the Meeting to Order
Roll Call
Pledge of Allegiance
Chairman’s Additions or Deletions
Public Comment (10 minutes)
Engineering RFP Submissions
Wage Matrix – Cola Adjustment
Department Plans
Consent Agenda
Chairman’s Announcements
Roundtable
TA Report
Action Items
Potential Non-Public Sessions
Adjournment

1.1 Call to Order

Chairman Myette called the meeting of the Chester Selectboard to order at 6:00pm.

1.2 Roll Call

Selectboard Present:

Chuck Myette
Steve Couture
Stephen Landau
Dick Trask
Dana Theokas

Town Administrator Debra Doda

Members of the Public Present at various times:

Aaron Berube, Police Chief
Phil Gladu, Fire Chief
Andrew Hadik, Town Planner
Dave Mercier, Underwood Engineers
James Piper, Supervisor of Roads
Liz Richter, Planning Board Member
Robert Saunders, Underwood Engineers
Eric Swanson

and other persons unknown to the Recording Secretary.

1.3 Pledge of Allegiance

Chairman Myette led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance.

1.4 Chairman’s Additions or Deletions

Chairman Myette added an appointment to the Planning Board to the agenda.

Public Comment

As no Members of the Public wished to be heard, Public Comment was closed at 6:02pm.

II. Appointments

2.1 Planning Board Appointment

Town Planner Hadik mentioned it can be hard at times to achieve a quorum. Mr. Swanson has attended some meetings and Mr. Hadik feels he would be an asset to the Planning Board.

Ms. Richter stated Mr. Swanson has the temperament and the professional background it takes to be a member of the Planning Board.

Mr. Swanson gave his background information to the Board. He is going to start as an alternate just to get his feet wet.

Vice Chairman Couture thanked Mr. Swanson for volunteering.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to appoint Mr. Swanson as an alternate on the Planning Board with an expiration date of May 31st, 2026. Selectwoman Theokas seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

There is still one more opening an alternate position on the Planning Board if anyone is interested.

2.2 Engineering RFP Submission

Chairman Myette mentioned an RFP was put out looking for a firm that can provide engineering services to all departments in town.

Mr. Mercier and Mr. Saunders from Underwood Engineers gave a brief background on the company and also their backgrounds. Mr. Saunders mentioned they only work with municipalities so there are no conflicts in the town. Chairman Myette asked about how they handle different areas in Town that need engineering services such as Planning Board, roads, bridges, culverts, electrical, fields, and building designs. Underwood Engineers is a small company and will be able to handle most things utilizing either their employees or subcontracting the job out.

Town Planner Hadik asked if they do in-house hydrologic modeling for storm water. The Portsmouth location does something very similar.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to go into non-public session pursuant to 91-A:3(II) (c) reputation. Selectman Trask seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The meeting was closed to the public at 6:44PM.

Selectman Landau motioned to come out of non-public session. Vice Chairman Couture seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The meeting was reopened to the public at 6:57 PM.

Selectwoman Theokas motioned to seal the minutes of the first non-public session, on Reputation. Selectman Landau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

III. New Business

3.1 Wage Matrix – Cola Adjustment

Chairman Myette explained the background of the wage matrix. The Selectboard should be looking at it periodically for any adjustments. Chairman Myette pointed out that based on the summary provided by Town Administrator Doda the matrix is still in the ballpark with other surrounding towns. Town Administrator Doda advised those numbers were from two years ago.

Selectman Trask would like to see an education incentive added. Chairman Myette mentioned the Fire Department already has an incentive for education.

Chairman Myette pointed out the increase is not based off performance like other industries. Vice Chairman Couture feels the step increase should not be automatic and asked for something be added to the evaluations for the Department Heads to recommend if the employee should receive a step increase or not. If the Department Head recommends no step increase based on performance, they need to provide an explanation. This will be added to the reviews.

The question about whether to keep longevity or take it out was brought up. The board members decided to keep it in the rules. The rules indicate that is based on hire date and not position. Selectman Trask asked if a part time employee changes to a full-time position does the part time years count towards longevity. Vice Chairman Couture and Town Administrator Doda stated that this is only for full time status.

Selectwoman Theokas motioned to maintain the longevity incentive in 2.6 and 3.3 of the matrix procedures. Selectman Landau seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask – aye, Theokas – aye, Couture – aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The date for the longevity increase was discussed. The policy states it will be awarded on the 3rd year on July 1st. Some members felt this should happen on the actual anniversary date. Chief Berube explained that the July 1st date was implemented to simplify the process. He stated the Police Department has always used the beginning of the fiscal year for increases and promotions. Town Administrator Doda presented the plan for phasing in the longevity bumps.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to phase in the longevity increases for employees. Selectwoman Theokas seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

Vice Chairman Couture requested a chain of command be added to the document in regard to the employee reclassification process. Everyone was in agreement for the addition. An evaluation deadline of December 31st was added to the procedures. The verbiage for the step increases changed to state the increase is at the discretion of the Department Head and final approval for the increase by the Selectboard.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to approve the matrix procedures with the changes discussed. Selectwoman Theokas seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The COLA adjustment was discussed. Selectwoman Theokas mentioned the matrix went into effect in 2019 and since then the Selectboard has only adjusted the COLA once. This increase would help make up for some lost time.

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to approve a 4% COLA increase. Selectman Trask seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – nay. With four in favor, the motion passed.

Selectman Landau felt it should be more.

3.1 Department Plans

Town Administrator Doda stated all the department plans have been turned in. Chairman Myette thanked all the departments for the work they put into the plans. Vice Chairman Couture feels these plans would be a great supplement to the budget books. They will be added to the budget books.

IV. Consent Agenda

4.1 Minutes 11-30-23 and 12-7-23

Vice Chairman Couture motioned to accept the minutes of November 30, 2023 and December 7, 2023 as presented. Selectman Trask seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – abstained. With four in favor, the motion passed with Landau abstaining.

Town Administrator Doda mentioned the second half warrant submitted to DRA had mismatching dates and the corrected form is in the signature folder.

V. Selectmen’s Business

5.1 Chairman’s Announcements

Chairman Myette announced the following meetings:

Wednesday January 3, 2024 Planning Board Meeting at 7:00pm

Thursday January 4, 2024 Selectboard Meeting at 6:00pm

Chairman Myette announced the following events:

All Town offices will be closed on Monday December 25th for Christmas and Monday January 1st for New Year’s Day. The Town Clerk’s Office will also be closed on December 26, 2023.

The Building Department will be closed from December 28th to January 19th.

During that time:

- Plans review (e.g. new building permits) and Certificates of Occupancy WILL NOT be available.
- Availability of trade permits has yet to be determined.
- There will be coverage for most types of inspections, please contact Carrie Rouleau-Cote, Auburn Building Inspector, directly to schedule:
bldginsp@townofauburnnh.com or (603) 483-5052 ext. 3

With the unknown availability of trade permits, Town Administrator Doda was asked to contact other towns to see if they are willing to help during the Building Inspectors vacation. Ms. Wilson’s position has been posted and there have been eight applications received so far.

5.2 Roundtable

Selectman Landau thanked the Fire, Police, and Highway Department for all their work during the flooding on Monday due to all the rain.

Chairman Myette mentioned Ms. Wilson’s last day is next week. The Board wishes her well in her new position with the Town of Derry.

Selectman Landau presented the information for the steel and aluminum can baler. Selectman Landau is requesting this be added to the CIP if the Board approves. He will also apply for a grant for up to \$5K. Selectman Trask inquired what the cost for maintenance on the baler would be per year. Selectman Landau is unsure of the maintenance cost but did explain the company comes out every year for preventive maintenance unless called out for an issue.

Selectman Landau mentioned the skid steer is in the shop and it is unknown what the problem is. The company is going to give the town a trade in value.

Selectwoman Theokas stated Chester Academy is having work done to their gym floor and students will be utilizing the MPR for their practices. The MPR is fully booked for vacation week but if anything changes to the schedule an open gym announcement will be made.

SOR Piper mentioned the new truck arrived today. The department is still working on the clean-up from the floods.

Selectman Trask
Nothing to report.

Vice Chairman Couture mentioned the Solar Working Group will be giving the Selectboard their recommendations soon.

5.3 Town Administrator’s Report

Town Administrator Doda pointed out a liaison was never established for the elections. Selectman Trask feels it is the chairman’s responsibility. Chairman Myette is ok with taking it on.

Selectman Landau has requested two non-public sessions.

5.4 Action Items

A request for an increase to the dog licenses was requested to help with some of the costs.

Selectwoman Theokas motioned to increase the dog licensing fee as proposed. Vice Chairman Couture seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– nay, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – abstained. With three in favor, the motion passed.

Chairman Myette inquired about the letter informing the Town of an increase to rates from Pennichuck Water. Town Administrator Doda advised it is only an FYI since some residents in town have Pennichuck Water.

5.5 Non-Public Session(s)

Chairman Myette announced non-public sessions on reputation and security.

Selectman Landau motioned to go into non-public session pursuant to 91-A:3(II) (c) reputation and (i) security. Vice Chairman Couture seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The meeting was closed to the public at 8:28PM.

Selectman Landau motioned to come out of non-public session Vice Chairman Couture seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The meeting was reopened to the public at 9:15 PM.

Selectman Landau motioned to seal the minutes of the second non-public session, on Security. Vice Chairman Couture seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

VI. Adjournment

Selectman Landau moved to adjourn the meeting. Vice Chairman Couture seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken Myette – aye, Trask– aye, Theokas –aye, Couture –aye, Landau – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:17 PM.

301 Respectfully submitted,
302
303 Janis A. Jalbert
304 Recording Secretary