

MINUTES OF THE SELECT BOARD

Monday August 2, 2021, 7:00 PM

Macomber Room

Present: Tom Maher-Chair, Dave McGuckin-Selectman, William Stewart-Selectman, Dr. Kathy Hollister-Health Officer and Jennifer Smith- Administrative Assistant to the Select Board and Recording Secretary.

Public Participants: Jane Finn, 169 Portsmouth Ave.

Chairman Maher opened the public session meeting at 7:00PM.

1. Approve Select Board minutes of July 6, July 7 and July 19, 2021

Selectman McGuckin made a motion to approve the Select Board minutes of July 6, July 7 and July 19, 2021. Selectman Stewart seconded and the motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

2. Public Questions and Answers.

Jane Finn, 169 Portsmouth Ave, requested the Select Board amend the minutes from their July 6, 2021 meeting to add that she refuted the statement that she can see the Portsmouth prison from her property. Ms. Finn stated that she is still struggling to understand how the Select Board came to their decision to amend what the assessor from Avitar based his abatement on.

Chairman Maher stated that the current minutes will incorporate Ms. Finn's statements from tonight. Chairman Maher further stated that one of the reasons the Select Board put this abatement on pause in June was due to the nature of both the size and scope, as well as the type of the views that were being discussed. The Select Board followed up with Avitar to determine how they go about constructing their appraisals of views. Chairman Maher expressed his belief that the Select Board acted responsibly in reducing Ms. Finn's abatement by allowing that her view had been reduced but not completely obstructed. Chairman Maher stated that 2016 was the first-time views were instituted in New Castle's property assessments and this process will continue to be fine-tuned for greater clarity. Re-evaluations will be done again this fall.

Ms. Finn said she will speak with the appraisers at that time.

3. New Business

a. Covid Update- Dr. Kathy Hollister

Dr. Kathy Hollister, New Castle Health Officer, stated that the country is now experiencing a fourth wave of Covid. Nationally, we have reached the status of 70% of adults having received at least one dose of the vaccine. The pandemic of the variant we are currently seeing is primarily among the unvaccinated. Vaccinated individuals have an 8-fold lower risk of being severely affected and a 25-fold lower risk of hospitalization. 99.99% of vaccinated people will not be hospitalized or die.

It is anticipated that the vaccination will not be available for younger people under the age of 12 until late 2021, early 2022.

Nationally, 80% of the counties in the country have substantial or high transmission rates. Rockingham County has moderate transmission. One county in NH, Belknap County, has substantial. The CDC is recommending that once you hit substantial rates of transmission you should wear masks indoors.

There is currently one case of Covid in New Castle and one diagnosed a couple of weeks ago, bringing the total to 39.

72% of adults in New Castle are vaccinated.

82% of US cases are the Delta variant.

Chairman Maher pointed out that it is encouraging that while cases have gone back up, hospitalizations have not increased dramatically.

Dr. Hollister stated that because the town is not at substantial or high risk, she is not officially recommending masks be worn indoors.

Chairman Maher suggested the town put in place reminder posters regarding the variant and the importance of vaccines.

b. Acceptance of Safe Path Committee Donations

Chairman Maher read for the record 4 donations to the Safe Path Committee that require acceptance by the Select Board. The donors and amounts were Sally Smyser for \$1,000, Joe Morone and Lindsay Evans for \$200, John and Paula Phaneuf for \$1,000 and Jeanne and Derek Stern for \$200.

Selectman Stewart offered a motion to accept the 4 aforementioned donations to the Safe Path Committee. Selectman McGuckin seconded and said motion carried unanimously, 3-0.

c. Town Projects Update

Chairman Maher stated that over the next few weeks he will be sharing information regarding the 11 private area lights that will be transitioning to street lights. It will take approximately two years for the town to see a return on its investment, but from an energy perspective, the town will be saving a lot of money. The IT Audit RFP has been distributed and the town will be accepting responses until August 13th. It is anticipated that a decision will be made by the end of August and a company in place by September. Chairman Maher closed by stating that Andrew Cushing, NH State Parks, will be appearing before the Select Board at its August 16th meeting to present information regarding the State's plan to invest \$600,000 in the Fort Stark location.

The Board agreed that residents of Wildrose Lane should be alerted by the town that this presentation will be taking place on August 16th.

Selectman McGuckin stated that the two new DPW employees, Chris Robillard and Aaron White, are doing a great job, as are the 8 staff members at the Common. The Town Clerk/Tax Collector, Jennifer Rumph, is still transitioning into the position and is doing a fantastic job as well.

Selectman Stewart stated that the credit card system is close to being implemented at the Common.

d. Neighborhood Water Improvement Program Update

Selectman Stewart stated that while the Wildrose Lane pipe project is progressing, Portsmouth DPW did have to bring in an outside vendor to address the ledge. There is currently no definitive end date for this project. There is temporary water to the area. This new 12" pipe will greatly help with water flow down to the end of the street.

Ms. Finn, asked if this pipe will help with fighting a potential fire at the end of the street.

Selectman Stewart stated that it will. The pipe that is being replaced is quite old and much smaller.

Selectman Stewart further stated that the Pierce Island transition main will be replaced with a 12" pipe next spring or summer. This is the only remaining pipe section of the bridge needing to be replaced. With regards to the Spring Hill Rd/Lavenger Lane Water Project, a letter has been sent to the City of Portsmouth asking if it will be accepting this private water line. The city has already indicated verbally that it will accept the line and the expectation is that a letter confirming this will be received by the Town of New Castle within the next week or so. Additionally, two ESRs have been executed for the engineering of Spring Hill/Lavenger Lane and the public water loop at the Main Mast connection. There is a tentative bid opening date of September 8, 2021 and construction on the Neighborhood Water Improvement Program is to begin on or before October 1, 2021. The town has received the petition to establish the Special Assessment District for the payment of the betterment fees associated with this project and the town can begin moving forward with the public hearings. Eighteen of the nineteen home owners have signed the petition, well exceeding the 50% requirement. The ninetieth resident did sign off on the original information saying he was on board with the project, but the home is currently under construction and this owner has been unreachable.

4. Committee Reports

Selectman Stewart stated that the monthly Police Report will be attached to the filed minutes.

5. Adjourn

Selectman McGuckin offered a motion to adjourn at 7:53pm. Selectman Stewart seconded and said motion passed unanimously, 3-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Smith
Recording Secretary