

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN
TOWN OF HAMPTON FALLS**

**SEPTEMBER 27, 2023 – 8:00 AM
TOWN HALL**

FINAL

PRESENT: Ed B. Beattie, Chairman; Lou Gargiulo, Vice Chairman; Mark R. Lane, Selectman (by Zoom); Karen Anderson, Town Administrator; Rachel D. Webb, Assistant Administrator

GUEST: Ryan Venio, Police Chief; Jay Lord, Fire Chief; Mark Sikorski, Building Inspector

Chairman Beattie called the Board of Selectmen's meeting to order at 8:00 AM.

Police Department / Animal Control - Monthly Report – Police Chief Ryan Venio:

Chief Venio presented his monthly report for August 2023. Chief Venio stated that the Police Department lost one officer, John DeFrancesco, a couple months ago, and hired Zachary Vatcher from the Rochester Police Department. Officer Vatcher has completed field training and has been on solo status since the beginning of September. Officer Vatcher has been an Officer for a couple of years and does well tracking down criminals.

Chief Venio reported that the Police Dept assisted with Family Field Day in August, and their part went well with the Dunk Tank (except for the quality of the water in the Dunk Tank was colorful).

Chief Venio reported that the Police Dept received a grant they applied for last year, for new portable radios, and chose the newest model from Motorola. The grant paid 100% of the cost, and the last time a portable radio was replaced was in 2020. There were no questions from the Selectmen for Chief Venio.

Highways / Road Agent – Monthly Report – Russ Hilliard: K. Anderson stated that R. Hilliard did not attend the meeting because he attended the last Selectmen's meeting, and he had no new updates. E. Beattie questioned why the State won't mow the road shoulders on Rt 84, but the State is installing cold patch on the State roads. K. Anderson said that she would follow-up with Division 6 of NH DOT.

Fire / Ambulance / Emergency Management Report – Fire Chief Jay Lord: Fire Chief Lord distributed the Fire Dept activity reports for the months of July and August and stated that it has been a relatively normal Summer. He reported that there were a few major motor vehicle accidents and other medical events. He said that staffing is decent, and the Fire Dept is doing a moratorium on hiring, in order to work with current staff on board at present.

Emergency Management: Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP): Chief Lord reported that, with the assistance of Jane Hubbard, the Local Emergency Operations Plan (LEOP) has been updated and he has the final version for the signature of the Chairman of the Selectmen today. He described the next steps are that the LEOP gets submitted to NH Homeland Security, and they approve it on behalf of FEMA. Chief Lord further described the LEOP plan as clearly defining roles in an emergency regarding Police and Fire Departments. He continued that the LEOP is the first step to get in place, together with the Hazard Mitigation Plan (currently close to completion), to make the Town eligible to apply for Federal grants.

MOTION: To approve the LEOP (Local Emergency Operations Plan) update, and to authorize the Chairman of the Selectmen to sign the LEOP Plan.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

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**SECOND: E. BEATTIE
UNANIMOUS**

Chief Lord reported that there was an Emergency Management tabletop exercise at Seabrook Station last week with State and local partners discussing what is happening at the Seabrook Plant and how the State is making decisions about what happens to the local towns. The next one is scheduled for October 18, 2023 (the same date as an 8:00AM Selectmen's meeting) from 9:00AM to 2:00PM when the Selectmen's and Department Head's phones will ring at 9:00AM and all are to report to the Public Safety Building, Emergency Operations Center to go through the first of three drills (CF#1) for the Emergency Procedures for the power plant. The next exercise after October 2023 will be in February 2024 (CF#2) followed by the Graded Exercise with FEMA in April. There were no questions from the Selectmen for Chief Lord.

Building Inspector, Code Compliance, Health Officer Monthly Report – Mark Sikorski:

M. Sikorski reported that he had submitted his monthly report for August 2023 earlier in the month, and that there were no updates. There were no questions from the Selectmen for Building Inspector M. Sikorski.

OLD BUSINESS

Financial Reports: General Fund Balance: \$2,062,882.91

K. Anderson reported the General Fund balance at \$2,062,882.91

Executive: Payroll Warrant, Accounts Payable, and Escrow Warrant: K. Anderson presented the Payroll Warrant 611 dated September 13, 2023, in the amount of \$31,291.05; Accounts Payable Warrant 849 dated September 13, 2023, in the amount of 73,826.68; and Escrow Warrant 37 dated September 13, 2023, in the amount of 7,792.79.

MOTION: To approve Payroll Warrant 611 dated September 13, 2023, in the amount of \$31,291.05; Accounts Payable Warrant 849 dated September 13, 2023, in the amount of 73,826.68; and Escrow Warrant 37 dated September 13, 2023, in the amount of 7,792.79.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: M. LANE

UNANIMOUS

Executive: Large Groundwater Withdrawal Update: K. Anderson reported that the NHDES Groundwater Bureau has not approved the application from Seabrook for a Large Groundwater Withdrawal. There are several requirements that NHDES has listed for Seabrook to submit to NHDES in order for the application to be reviewed. The State NHDES received written testimony from approximately thirty (30) residents in response to the proposed permit application. The items needing to be addressed by Seabrook, as listed in the NHDES letter of September 15, 2023, include the following:

- 1) Seabrook needs to have control of the Sanitary Protective Area (SPA), (which is the smallest area of protection around the well), and K. Anderson explained that most of that SPA area is located in Seabrook, but there is a small portion located in Hampton Falls. An easement needs to be obtained by Seabrook to show control of that SPA by the water system.

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- 2) Water quality testing is being required to test for at least twenty-five (25) of the PFAS compounds.
- 3) In terms of the Water User Inventory, Seabrook is being required to update the names and addresses list, which was one of the concerns that people had. K. Anderson stated that notifications from the State's well database were going to the builders, the well drillers, or to the person who owned the property when the well was initially installed.
- 4) A revised Well Monitoring Plan is required by Seabrook to submit to NHDES showing which wells will be monitored, which will be in conjunction with getting the monitoring requests to the right people.

Once the mailing is done, then Seabrook will inform NHDES that the revised well plan can be reviewed for which properties are proposed to be tested, and NHDES can review that revision to determine if it is sufficient, before proceeding to the next step.

L. Gargiulo asked how long K. Anderson anticipated that review process to take? K. Anderson responded that she received a call on 09/19/2023 from the Town of Seabrook's engineering firm, Geosphere, asking about Hampton Falls' property database and how to get the current addresses for notifications, so Geosphere and/or the Town of Seabrook are working on that immediately.

M. Lane asked if Seabrook has any other options for water, other than Hampton Falls? K. Anderson responded that she is not aware of any, and added that she recalled several years ago Seabrook looking at sites closer to The Brook, but they were not viable. M. Lane asked if this is the only option for Seabrook? K. Anderson responded that she could not say that for certain.

Chairman Beattie issued a *"Thank You"* to all residents who sent him a copy of their letters they sent to NHDES regarding Seabrook's groundwater permit request. He said that the letters were very intelligent replies and questions posed to NHDES. He continued that so many people showed up to the Public Hearing held, and followed up with written questions. Chairman Beattie stated that it was his belief that the Town needs to remain eternally vigilant about this process and keep the public informed with any new information.

L. Gargiulo stated that he was glad that NHDES is taking a second, hard look at the application, and that that was important to do. He added that he thought that all of the concerns that he has been hearing about are being addressed in the revised request for additional information for Geosphere/Town of Seabrook to be submitted to NHDES, so that it is a step in the right direction.

Other Selectmen's Old Business

Windows at Town Hall: L. Gargiulo asked if there is an update on when the restored windows will be returned to Town Hall? K. Anderson said that she would follow-up with the vendor for an update, as there are four (4) more windows remaining to be done.

Fencing at the Brush Dump: M. Lane asked for an update on the wooden fencing at the Brush Dump, and K. Anderson responded that the deposit was paid for the wood fence to be custom made based on the height, and that the vendor was anxious to get the project completed.

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Permission for the “Welcome to Hampton Falls” signage: M. Lane asked for an update on the permission for the “Welcome to Hampton Falls” signage on Route 88, and K. Anderson responded that yes, approval was granted for locating a sign on Route 88. Yesterday a contract was signed with the sign vendor to construct three (3) signs. Approval for one of the signs on Lafayette Road has been obtained, and Chairman Beattie is going to work on getting approval for the second location on Lafayette Road.

Chairman Beattie reported that he met with the Head of School at Heronfield Academy who was very responsive and supportive of the idea of locating a “Welcome to Hampton Falls” sign on their property. He continued that there is a great place to put the sign, and Chairman Beattie said that he would make himself available to meet with the sign vendor on site to identify the specific location to enable specific pricing for installation by the vendor.

Chairman Beattie will be working on getting approval for the location of the third sign in Business District North, entering Hampton Falls traveling southbound on Route 1.

OLD BUSINESS PUBLIC COMMENT There was no Public Comment.

NEW BUSINESS

Executive: Audit Representation Letter: K. Anderson reported that the audit team completed their work and the Audit Representation Letter indicates that the Town was cooperative, provided the auditors with all the information needed and that the audit team fulfilled their contractual obligations. This letter confirms to the auditors that there has been no suspected fraud activity since the time they completed their field work. This letter is signed by the Town Administrator and the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen.

MOTION: To approve and authorize the signing of the Audit Representation Letter for the 2022 audit.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: E. BEATTIE

UNANIMOUS

Executive: Audit Request for Proposals: K. Anderson reported that the Town has just completed year 3 of a 3-year contract with Plodzick and Sanderson for the annual financial audit. Requests for Proposals were sent out and two (2) proposals were received.

<u>Audit RFPs</u>	<u>2023</u>	<u>2024</u>	<u>2025</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>
Plodzick & Sanderson	\$17,500	\$18,000	\$18,500	\$54,000
Vachon & Clukay	\$16,800	\$17,750	\$18,800	\$53,350

The two responding audit firms audit the majority of towns in New Hampshire. Hampton Falls has contracted with Plodzick and Sanderson for many years and has been very satisfied with their service. Both firms are highly reputable and there is a \$650 difference in cost over the three years. There is no requirement to change audit firms for municipalities, although it can be considered a best practice.

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Chairman Beattie stated that his opinion was that a second set of eyes may be a good thing, and L. Gargiulo agreed with him. L. Gargiulo asked how long the town's auditor has been Plodzik & Sanderson, and K. Anderson responded many, many years. K. Anderson said that in other towns in which she has worked, they would alternate their Auditor every three to six years. L. Gargiulo said that he supported the idea to switch auditor companies in terms of the reduction of cost, and of improving the potential audit by having a new set of eyes. M. Lane agreed with L. Gargiulo, that there was no other reason to change other than that reason. Upon further thought, L. Gargiulo stated that he does have a reluctance to change contractors who do a good job, and that is his reluctance, but given that they have been with the Town for so long, it is probably not a bad thing to do. Chairman Beattie said that the Town would not be afraid to go back to the current Auditor in the future.

MOTION: To award the financial audit contract to Vachon & Clukay.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: E. BEATTIE

UNANIMOUS

Executive: Assessing Request for Proposals: The Town has just completed year 3 of a 3-year contract with Avitar for the General Assessing services for the town. Requests for Proposals were sent out and two (2) proposals were received, both from very good firms. One proposal was from the Town's current vendor, Avitar, and the second proposal was from Whitney. Whitney is a fairly new firm that has been in business for five (5) years, and headed by Steve Hamilton who was the former Director of NH DRA (Dept of Revenue). K. Anderson stated that she thought it may be appropriate to invite a representative from each company to a Selectmen's meeting. She continued, stating that Avitar did not follow the bid specifications, as the Town asked that the proposal be bid per parcel and per hour, and Avitar submitted a Flat Rate fee. K. Anderson stated that Avitar responded that they know the town and what is needed, and that they were not going to propose an hourly fee. She said that Avitar is the Town's current contractor, and they do a good job. Avitar bid a rate of \$36,420 for an annual basis, for the next three (3) years, paid monthly. M. Lane asked if that amount was up from their current rate, and K. Anderson responded yes, but it is difficult to compare because the current year is a Revaluation year. The Town could not afford to do both the regular cyclical work, and also the revaluation work in the same year. Chairman Beattie asked if there is a way to calculate the total number of hours, for comparison. K. Anderson said that 2021 was the first year of the current 3-year contract and the costs were \$36,000 as it was a transition year and the records were not in the best condition. In 2022, Avitar's second year of the 3-year contract, the total paid was \$22,000; for 2023, outside of the revaluation, assessing costs have been under \$20,000. If the cyclical work had been done this current year costs would have included approximately \$9,000 for the cyclical work.

L. Gargiulo asked K. Anderson if overall the Town was satisfied with Avitar, and K. Anderson responded yes. L. Gargiulo asked what is the learning curve for a new company coming into the town to do Assessing, and K. Anderson responded that Hampton Falls has the unique property of Wakeda Campground, with 200 units. Additionally, a new Assessing company would need to learn the nuances of the values of the neighborhoods. L. Gargiulo confirmed that this is Avitar's first cycle with the Town, and asked K. Anderson if there is a compelling reason to change companies, and she responded no, there is not. L. Gargiulo stated that the Town knows what it's costs are with Avitar because they provided a fixed cost, as opposed to an hourly rate by

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Whitney who will have a learning curve. He stated that he was willing to stay with Avitar for three more years. M. Lane agreed and he was not sure why the Town would change vendors, and the price is not unreasonably high. He also stated that he liked the flat rate with no increase from year to year, and K. Anderson responded that it makes it easier for budgeting purposes. K. Anderson stated that an advantage to staying with Avitar is that having just completed the Revaluation, that the first year after a revaluation the Town is likely to see a higher rate of abatements, and Avitar will have the best knowledge of why a particular neighborhood increased or didn't increase. L. Gargiulo asked if the Town could go back to Avitar and ask them if they could discount their price? Chairman Beattie stated that Avitar did not follow the RFP, and the Town is trying to figure out how to address it to compare the bids, so could Avitar discount their price? The Board agreed to stay with Avitar and to table the vote to the next Selectmen's meeting. K. Anderson would follow-up with Avitar to ask for a price reduction.

Use of Town Hall: Red Cross Blood Drives: Fire Chief Lord has requested use of the Town Hall for three blood drives sponsored by the Red Cross.

November 25, 2023 9:00-2:00

December 16, 2023 10:00-2:30

February 17, 2024 9:00-2:00

MOTION: To approve the use of the Town Hall for the Red Cross Blood Drives.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: E. BEATTIE

UNANIMOUS

Use of Town Common: Historical Society: Bicentennial of Farewell Tour of Lafayette:

Chairman Beattie stated that on September 1, 2024 the American Friends of Lafayette will have programming across the United States and will be recreating Lafayette's Farewell Tour. General Lafayette stopped in Hampton Falls in 1824 and was met here by the "Committee of Arrangements" and escorted to Portsmouth. The Historical Society would like to work with the Board of Selectmen to host some sort of welcoming on the Town Common that day. In addition, the Historical Society would like the approval to accept a donated Lafayette marker (bronze plaque) to be installed on the Town Common that could be dedicated during the Bicentennial Lafayette Tour. Chairman Beattie said that the Selectmen need to determine where to locate the plaque. K. Anderson stated that once the plaque is installed that they want to have a dedication of the sign with the militia present. She continued that the tour is coming from Newburyport to Hampton Falls to Greenland to Portsmouth where there will be a large event at 2:00 PM. L. Gargiulo asked the date of the event, and K. Anderson responded that it is going to be Sunday morning September 01, 2024, of Labor Day weekend. L. Gargiulo said that there may be a potential scheduling conflict with the Canterbury Fair that typically is on the Town Common on Labor Day weekend, and K. Anderson agreed to double-check the dates.

MOTION: To authorize the use of the Town Common for the Lafayette Tour visit and authorize the acceptance and installation of a Lafayette Tour Historical marker.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: M. LANE

UNANIMOUS

Appointments: Electric Aggregation Committee: K. Anderson stated that the Electric Aggregation Committee was established at the most recent Selectmen's meeting, and

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Carol Schutte has requested to be appointed to the newly formed Electric Aggregation Committee. Chairman Beattie said that he could think of no better appointment to the Electric Aggregation Committee, as she is already on the Energy Committee.

MOTION: To appoint Carol Schutte to the Electric Aggregation Committee.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: E. BEATTIE

UNANIMOUS

K. Anderson updated the Selectmen that the remaining active RFP for which the Town is awaiting proposals is for IT Services, with bids due back October 30, 2023, at 2:00PM.

Highway: Salt Bid: K. Anderson reported that two (2) bids were received for highway salt for winter road maintenance for the 2023-2024 Winter. Eastern Minerals at \$71.00 per ton and Morton Salt at \$69.00 per ton. The Town has been using Morton Salt for the past several years and considers it a better product because it does not clump as much, and Morton's bid was a delivered cost.

MOTION: To approve the bid from Morton Salt for an estimated 600 tons of road salt at \$69.00 per ton delivered.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: E. BEATTIE

UNANIMOUS

2024 Budget: Budget Review: Chairman Beattie said that the 2024 Budget books were made available to the Selectmen from the Town Administrator. K. Anderson said that the Selectmen will get into much greater detail at their meeting next week with Department Heads, but she wanted to provide them with a brief overview today. She stated that the goal of the Budget is to accommodate whatever needs the Town has while being fiscally conservative with rising costs. K. Anderson continued stating that this proposed budget for 2024 is an overall increase of 3.9% or \$129,000.

K. Anderson reported that a large part of the higher budget cost for 2024 is health insurance, as reflected in preliminary health insurance rates (from Health Trust) that increased 15.6%, and Dental increased 4.5-4.6%. Short and long-term disability increased by pennies with no impact, and Life Insurance decreased, but it is only a \$2,000 expense. The big impact is the health insurance increase. M. Lane asked if the increase was because of more people or the cost/rate? K. Anderson responded that when she spoke with Health Trust last week, they said that due to COVID people could not do elective procedures, so that health usage was delayed over the past few years. Additionally, she continued that last year the Town's increase was 11% and Health Trust determined that last year's increase was not enough to replenish their reserves, and they need more to build their reserve back up. M. Lane asked if it was like the school budget where a certain amount gets budgeted at the beginning of the year, and then dependent on use during the year, there is the potential for a rebate at the end of the year if actual use is less than budgeted, and K. Anderson responded yes. She said that last year there was no refund, but the year before there was one. Chairman Beattie said that he was interested in understanding how many staff were using the health care last year, and projected for next year, because if there are additional staff using health care, then there may not be as much of an issue with the increase. K. Anderson

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responded that it was anticipated that the Police Dept would be fully staffed for next year, so that is some of the increase, and the person who left was on a buy-out so if that replacement officer is on the town plan there will be that impact as well. She continued that the new full-time Fire Dept staff person will be doing a buy-out and not going on the Town's health insurance, so, overall, it is not a big plan difference. Last year the Town had budgeted for the Police Dept position that increased to 35-hours to be a family plan health insurance and ended up being a buy-out so the Town saved some money on that line item.

In terms of NH Retirement, K. Anderson continued, that this will be the first year with the decreased rate of approximately 2%; there was only half a year of that benefit last year, so 2024 will be a full year at the lower rates, so that will be a savings.

K. Anderson stated that there was one additional new service agreement for financial software (that takes effect January 1st, 2024), changing from Quickbooks to the MTS software, that is an annual cost of \$3,750.

Under Highway / Solid Waste the salt prices decreased as discussed earlier.

Under Elections / Registrations the budget increased because there will be four (4) elections in 2024 (Presidential election) compared to no elections this year, so those are fixed costs in terms of staffing.

K. Anderson said that the Selectmen's meeting next Wednesday is when the Board will start their detailed look at the Budget, and can set up specific times for each department, and go through the first review.

Other Selectmen's New Business

Town Report Printing – Review of Bids: K. Anderson reported that the Town received a total of five (5) bids for printing the annual Town Report 2023, and she recommended that the Town award the contract to the same vendor, R.C. Brayshaw, that the Town used last year for the 2022 Town Report. R. Webb presented the comparisons of the five bids. The lowest bidder was Country Press at \$566, but that bid did not include shipping, and we do not know what the shipping cost would be. The next lowest bid was R. C. Brayshaw (whom the Town used last year) at \$707.00 and that company delivers the books to Town Hall. The other three bids were all over \$1000. Chairman Beattie asked how many Town Reports will be printed, and R. Webb responded one hundred (100) Town Reports. She continued that the quantity of 100 seemed the perfect amount last year, as no one asked for one after the supply was depleted, and if that were to happen, the document is available electronically on the town's website. L. Gargiulo noted that R. C. Brayshaw is a New Hampshire company, and the fact that they included delivery in their price was responsive, and that the Town was happy with their product last year.

MOTION: To select and approve the bid for the Town Report 2023 printing by R. C. Brayshaw, in the amount of \$707.00, to include delivery.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: E. BEATTIE

Chairman Beattie noted that the price for the Town Report recently, with this change in vendor to R. C. Brayshaw, is significantly less than what the Town had paid in prior years. K. Anderson

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added that the bid specifications for 2023 included the same parameters, and format with the “perfect bound” binding as was utilized for the 2022 Town Report last year.

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REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES: September 13, 2023

MOTION: To approve the minutes of September 13, 2023, as written.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: E. BEATTIE

UNANIMOUS

PUBLIC COMMENT: There was no public comment.

ADJOURNMENT:

MOTION: To adjourn the Selectmen’s Meeting at 8:55 AM.

MOTION: L. GARGIULO

SECOND: E. BEATTIE

UNANIMOUS

The next two (2) Selectmen’s Meetings are:

- Wednesday, October 4, 2023, at 8:00 AM – Budget Review and
- Wednesday, October 4, 2023, at 6:00 PM - Regular meeting

These Minutes prepared by Rachel D. Webb, Assistant Administrator.