



Town of Amherst, NH

BOARD OF SELECTMEN MEETING MINUTES

Barbara Landry Meeting Room
2 Main Street
Monday, August 19, 2022, 2:00PM

1 **Call to Order**

2 Chairman Peter Lyon called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

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4 Attendees: Chairman Peter Lyon, Selectman Bill Stoughton, Selectman John D'Angelo,
5 Selectman Tom Grella, and Selectman Danielle Pray

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7 Other persons present during Workshop: Town Administrator Dean Shankle, Executive
8 Assistant Jennifer Stover, and facilitator Mike Akillian.

9 **Workshop**

10 Chairman Peter Lyon reviewed his cumulative notes from the Monday August 15th workshop
11 meeting with the board and set out the plan for today's process to include reviewing each
12 comment, elicit comments and questions from members and get a sense of those items on
13 which three or more Selectmen agree. It was also discussed that there would be an
14 identification of those priorities for this budget year and those to be included in the plan for
15 the future.

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17 **Public Safety**

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19 Concern regarding enforcement of zoning issues:

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21 Selectmen Pray commented that this issue may not need attention this year, as ordinances
22 need to be rewritten, but be listed as a future need. Selectman Stoughton agreed that this is not
23 an immediate need but should encompass stormwater and sign ordinances also. Selectman
24 Grella noted that there is only one employee managing code enforcement and building
25 inspections and that we are still seeking a Town Planner. Selectman D'Angelo said that code
26 enforcement has been on the "honor system" and that perhaps the Town Planner could be used
27 for this task. Selectman D'Angelo asked if this task could fall under a consulting engineer.
28 Selectman Stoughton informed the members that developers can be required to fund
29 inspections.

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31 Chairman Lyon summed up the discussion on code enforcement as something needing focus,
32 but as far as staffing, at a future point. Mike Akillian noted that the risk of not addressing code
33 enforcement should be considered.

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35 Staffing concerns:

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37 Mike Akillian noted that Department Heads should be asked to share personnel concerns and
38 issues as part of their Strategic Plan.

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40 Single point of failure:
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42 Mike Akillian stated that the risk of interrupted services should be assessed by each
43 department. Chairman Lyon stated that Department Heads would be asked to include this in
44 their Strategic Plan.
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46 **Infrastructure**
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48 Digitization of records:
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50 Selectman Pray commented that the digitization of records has been an ongoing concern. The
51 question of funding, legal retention requirements and useable filing systems postpone the
52 process. Chairman Lyon asked Town Administrator (TA) Shankle to speak with the
53 Department Heads to determine what is needed. Mike Akillian suggesting stressing what
54 would improve the quality of service to residents and enhance employee productivity.
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56 Chairman Lyon summarized that the board is in agreement that this process is important.
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58 Technology concerns:
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60 Selectman D'Angelo expressed a desire for an asset report from our IT vendor Microtime.
61 This was added to the Administration's Strategic Plan.
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63 Water and sewer issues:
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65 Selectman D'Angelo spoke to a concern about the lack of economic development and the
66 resulting loss of tax revenue. Selectman Stoughton observed that residents don't seem to have
67 an interest in economic development and there has not been any inclusion in strategic
68 planning. Mike Akillian wondered if there was any interest in water and sewer for residents
69 rather than industry and commented that this has not been presented to the public for their
70 consideration. Selectman Stoughton summarized that the focus should be on what the Town
71 will be able to do for residents in the next five years.
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73 Aging roads and bridges concerns:
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75 Chairman Lyon said that a plan exists with DPW to address aging and red-listed roads and
76 bridges in Amherst. TA Shankle noted that many bridges in the State of New Hampshire are
77 red-listed, and that in order to receive grant money there is a wait unless a bridge fails. At that
78 point, the bridge is moved to the top of the list. Mike Akillian remembered that there was a
79 detailed chart presented to the board years ago and would work with Eric Slosek to update
80 that information in this year's strategic plan.
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82 Financial condition:
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84 Selectman Stoughton commented that while not necessarily a strategic plan piece, awareness
85 of the overall tax rate is important, as managing inflation will drive property taxes and

constrain our ability to do what we want to do. Chairman Lyon said the struggle is always between taxes and services. He also said that retirement housing is a concern and should be given a close look when the Master Plan comes out. TA Shankle added that additional help in the Finance office is being requested and should relieve burdens.

Community Services

State mandates, sign ordinances:

Selectman Stoughton stated that there were new state mandates that would place a burden on Community Development and that new sign ordinances are being proposed in Zoning currently. Selectman Grella noted that consistency was important.

Lack of community center:

Selectman D'Angelo commented that it might take five years to get the community center done, but that Recreation should continue to place the project on their strategic plan so that questions may be asked. Mike Akillian noted that dollars need to be attached to all projects. Selectman D'Angelo suggested that a community group might begin to fundraise for this project. Chairman Lyon said that if this is something the Town wants, we should move forward with it, but it is not a priority for this year. Mike Akillian agreed that it might be helpful to lay out what future priorities are publicly.

Staffing:

Chairman Lyon summarized for the board the request that all departments answer the question "Are we staffed at the level we need?" in their respective strategic plan.

Communication:

Chairman Lyon noted the loss of a physical paper in town and noted that a lack of staffing is a drawback to a focused communication strategy. Selectman D'Angelo asked who determines what gets posted on a Facebook page and how do we do this without adding staff? It was suggested that a survey be created to ask the public what they want to know. Selectman Pray suggested a physical newsletter could be included in tax notices twice a year and that a sign be used for something "big". She also pointed out that accurate information is a priority. TA Shankle observed that there is information to be found but people need to know where to go to find it. It was agreed that a recap of meetings was a good idea. Chairman Lyon concluded that this is the Selectmen's project to put together.

Town Character/ Heritage

Challenges:

Selectman Grella stated that we have lost valuable, knowledge members with the two recent resignations, leaving the Historic District Committee with just four members. Selectman D'Angelo believes we are struggling with outcomes and a common definition is needed.

133 Supporting volunteers and employees:

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135 Selectman Stoughton stated that we need to support our volunteers and employees. TA
136 Shankle said that we are losing volunteers and referenced the struggle Moderator Coughlan is
137 having finding members for the Ways & Means Committee. He also noted that many are being
138 asked to do more than can be done well. Mike Akillian referenced past strategic plans that did
139 not include a request for additional staffing and noted that if Department Heads do not ask for
140 what they need, they are sure to not receive it. He also stated that employees/jobseekers have
141 many currencies that could be explored including work-from-home, retirement benefits, etc.

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143 TA Shankle noted the lack of offering NH Retirement System as an employee benefit and
144 thinks that a wage comparison would be beneficial.

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146 Chairman Lyon said that Department Heads should ask for what they need. Mike Akillian said
147 there is a high risk with turnover and echoed Chairman Lyon's statement that we should take
148 care of our current staff. Mike Akillian acknowledged that as a resident he has been
149 appreciative of the tight budgets that the Selectmen have put forth to allow the school to
150 request what they needed, and that it is time to consider the services that are running the Town
151 and if they are adequate for fulfilling the Town's needs.

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153 **Environment**

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155 PFAS issues, Souhegan River testing:

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157 Mike Akillian suggested dividing this into Prevention and Response. Chairman Lyon said that
158 thus far, prevention falls under Community Development and response under Administration.
159 Selectman Stoughton mentioned that there are new proposed ordinances that speak to
160 requirements for testing wells for PFAS for new development. Chairman Lyon asked how we
161 monitor businesses and questioned if this is the Town's responsibility and how this would be
162 managed. Mike Akillian suggested that there might be a group already in existence doing this
163 work. Selectman D'Angelo stated that George May, who managing water testing of the
164 Souhegan River, is getting close to retirement and that more help is needed with that process.
165 He also said there is a lack of publicity and traction on this subject.

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167 Chairman Lyon summarized that environment and water quality is a priority.

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169 **Housing**

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171 School taxation and affordability:

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173 Selectman D'Angelo stated that this is our problem to solve and that the school continues to
174 take more and more of our tax dollars. He urges the Planning Board to look at the issue of
175 lack of housing for "empty nesters" within the context of a five-year plan. Selectman
176 Stoughton said there is no clear consensus from the public. Selectman Pray noted that there
177 are zoning supports for adding different building types, but that there are no tax incentives,
178 and we could look at that. Selectman Stoughton agreed. Selectman D'Angelo added that
179 mixed residential use is appealing and that this is the Planning Board's job to manage.

Recreation

Chairman Lyon stated that if Recreation is short fields, the Department Head will let us know.

Chairman Lyon asked Mike Akillian how to conclude the meeting. Mike replied that a list of priorities and to which departments would these priorities assigned needed to be created.

Chairman Lyon reviewed his notes and the identified categories, and summarized that while Code Enforcement is important, it is not important for this year and should be included in the SWOT for Community Development. He stated that staffing and personnel needs along with plans for roads and bridges were a priority. He said that digitization of records and records management and solidifying our Finance Department were priorities. He said that there was a clear consensus around communication, and a need for vocal support of volunteers. He agreed that Environmental concerns are a priority, and that the Conservation Commission should spearhead water while Community Development should spearhead PFAS in consideration of prevention, while Administration should continue to manage the response. He directed Selectman Stoughton to share the Board's messages regarding housing to the Planning Board, including affordability, different types of housing, and to answer the question "what does our community actually wants in regard to housing".

Administration will incorporate into its strategic plan IT, staffing and a possible compensation study. This identified the priorities as the Environment, Infrastructure and Administration.

Mike Akillian then asked what the Town could cut in order to divert that funding to the identified needs.

Selectman Pray stated that she needed to see numbers in order to consider this, and all Selectmen agreed.

Mike then asked what outcomes were wanted from these priorities, and that creating action lists or to-do lists with the associated costs should be the next step. He added that the Selectmen should begin to crystalize how we will know this process has been successful.

Chair Peter Lyon thanked Mike for his time and support with this process.

A MOTION was made by Selectman Stoughton and SECONDED by Selectman Pray to adjourn the meeting at 4:58pm.

Voting: 5-0-0; motion carried unanimously.

NEXT MEETING: Monday, August 22, 2022

Selectman Danielle Pray

Date