

# TOWN OF NEWPORT, NEW HAMPSHIRE

## Board of Selectmen REVISED Minutes of November 6, 2023 - Regular Business Meeting

Municipal Building, 15 Sunapee Street, Newport, NH 03773

Meeting ID: 829 5291 9637

Passcode: 900805

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82952919637?pwd=V3FCaEJaZkp1ZG5EL3ZFbHN0Y3FSdz09>

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**SELECTMEN PRESENT:** Barry Connell, Chairman; James Burroughs, Vice Chairman; Jeffrey Kessler, and Jeffrey North, Keith Sayer

**SELECTMAN ABSENT:** None

**STAFF PRESENT:** Paul Brown, Interim Town Manager & Finance Director, Police Chief Alex Lee

**COMMUNITY MEMBERS PRESENT:** Bert Spaulding Sr., Doug Ring, Wayne Boardman, Larry Schissel, Richard Wentzel

**NCTV:** NCTV

**CALL TO ORDER:** Barry Connell called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m., followed by the Pledge of Allegiance. (Full meeting can be found on [www.nctv-nh.org](http://www.nctv-nh.org))

**AGENDA REVIEW:** Selectman Kessler requests to add Opera House Rear Entrance under Action Item, d. Selectman Burroughs requests to move Action Item, a. before the Informational to accommodate the town staff that are present. Interim Town Manager, Brown, requests to add Action Item, e. to Approve the Current and Active Town Manager to Sign Easements with Eversource for the Community Center. Chairman Connell requests to add Conservation Commission under Informational e.

*Chairman Connell states there will be no elections held in Newport tomorrow as it is a city-wide election.*

**INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR:** Interim Town Manager Brown introduces Chris Pelletier. He states today was his first day as the new Public Works Director. Pelletier has most recently run the Water Department in Keene, and prior to that, he was Public Works Director in Colorado for eight years. The Town Manager and the Board welcome Pelletier to the town. Pelletier expresses his excitement by saying he is happy to be with the town and a part of the community.

**PUBLIC HEARING:** The Board of Selectman of the Town of Newport, New Hampshire will hold a Public Hearing on Monday, November 6, 2023, at 6:30 p.m. to discuss the following proposed increases to the Town's sewer rates which may become effective in November 2023 and utilized for the April 2024 bill.

**Rates per 1000 Gallons – Current = 12.85; Proposed = 16.07.** Interim Town Manager Brown starts by giving a brief overview of the Wastewater Treatment Plant project. The completion deadline is 2026, set by the executive order of consent established with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES). Brown shows a graph showing the impact of not raising sewer rates. He states the Town will be in substantial debt. Rates would need to increase 175% to meet The American Water Works Association recommendation to generate working capital. Interim Town Manager Brown states the Town is proposing a 25% increase in 2024, which is billed in April, additionally another 30%, 30%, and 25% in years to come. The rate changes are subject to change with new potential grants and other factors. Bert Spaulding Sr. asks what caused the town to be in a situation with such larger rate increases. Brown responds, they needed to be compliant with the National Pollutant

Discharge Elimination regulations. Additionally, Spaulding asks what the review process is that will ensure this project will not result in a failure such as the same project in 2012. Brown states they are using a local engineering firm, along with using a system that is used throughout NH for plants that need to address nitrogen as well as other metals with proven technology. Selectman Kessler asks when the last time the town experienced sewer rate increases. Interim Town Manager says 2018 there was a 10% increase. Doug Ring questions how many gallons of water the Town uses per year. Brown states he believes it is 76 million. Selectman North shows his sympathy for those being impacted by the increases. Selectman Sayer suggests the town look into differing payment increments to help make it easier for some people to pay their bills. Brown responds, there has been discussion about more frequent billing however the town does not have enough staff to make this possible. Selectman North states he would like to form a committee to look at this project and rates over a period of time. The Public Hearing closed at 7:04 p.m.

**MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING(S):** Minutes from October 16, 2023, Regular Business meeting were accepted by the board. Selectman Kessler asked to make a correction to a mistaken word. ***On a motion made by Selectman Kessler, seconded by Selectman Burroughs. The Board voted 4-0-1, with Selectman Keith Sayer abstaining.*** Minutes from October 16, 2023, Non-Public session minutes were accepted by the board ***on motion made by Selectman Kessler, seconded by Selectman Burroughs. The Board voted 4-0-1, with Selectman Keith Sayer abstaining.***

**CONSENT AGENDA:** *Selectman Kessler made a motion to accept the Consent Agenda, seconded by Selectman North, the board voted unanimously. 5-0-0.*

**ACTION ITEM: Vote to Accept and Expend 2023 ILO Home Security Grant in the amount of \$40,000.00:** Police Chief Lee informs the board this is the sixth grant the department has received since he started in January. He states this homeland security grant is specific to the Intelligence Liaison Officer, Detective Tom Anderson. This grant helps with the costs associated with his position. The Intelligence Liaison Officer works part-time at the NPD and part-time at the Intel and Analysis Center in Concord. Detective Anderson collects information on surrounding towns and reports back to the Intel and Analysis Center. Detective Anderson is a vital piece to the Newport Police Department. Police Chief Lee is asking the board to accept this grant. ***On a motion made by Selectman Burroughs to accept and expend the 2023 ILO Home Security Grant in the amount of \$40,000.00 and authorize the current and active Town Manager to sign all related documents, seconded by Selectman Kessler. The board voted unanimously, 5-0-0.***

**INFORMATIONAL: Moderator Resignation/New Appointment:** Chairman Connell reads Virginia Irwin's resignation letter for the Moderator for the Town of Newport. She writes this with the effective date of October 31, 2023, as she is moving out of Newport, making her ineligible to serve as the moderator. Mrs. Irwin will continue to serve as Chair of the Town Manager Search Committee until the position is filled, as well as Chair of the Heritage Commission until the next meeting. Chairman Connell, along with the rest of the board, recognizes Mrs. Irwin for all she has given this town throughout the years. Selectman Burroughs suggests the board write her a thank you letter. Chairman Connell presents RSA Title 63, Elections; Section 669:62, and appoint Kenneth Dufort as Moderator, effective immediately. This appointment is effective until the Town Election in May 2024. The board thanks Mrs. Irwin, "Bitty", for the time she has given to the town.

**Community Center Update:** Interim Town Manager Brown informs the board the construction trailer is on site, with fencing subject to come next week. The ambulance garage and the building/maintenance garage have been used for training for the Fire Department. Brown anticipates the buildings will be gone by Thanksgiving, following, the dirt work will start. There needs to be more telephone poles added to Meadow Road to accommodate the electricity being used. The Economic Development Coordinator,

Allison Browning, is diligently working on the application for the state grant due on November 23, 2023. Selectman North is asking about the status for the existing Recreation Center being reconstructed to accommodate the ambulances. Interim Town Manager Brown responds, he has not had a chance to reach out to architects for that project yet, but he has a list of potential contractors. He states this will be a project for June 2025.

**Main Street Paving/Fire Hydrant Relocation:** Interim Town Manager Brown states there is nothing new with this project. They are in the process of getting a cost estimate for the relocation. Brown says he will reach out to NHDOT for confirmation they are going to stripe the crosswalks by the lights. Additionally, the town needs to come forward with a final drawing of the striping as well. There is concern about the crosswalks not being painted.

**Winter Plowing:** Selectman North addresses the parking problem on Main Street in the winter. He states when the snow is plowed, it covers the parking spots, creating a safety issue for the drivers. North also states that the businesses on Main Street are suffering from the snow not being removed. Interim Town Manager Brown believes the crew for plowing is fully staffed, with back-up people if needed, so staffing should not be an issue. Police Chief Lee reminds the public about the overnight parking ban on Main Street in preparation for snowstorms.

**Conservation Commission:** Larry Schissel informs the board about the Commission's involvement with zoning regarding wetlands. The Commission is exploring whether to change the terminology in town documents to add "buffer zone" when talking about wetlands being protected. He adds they are going to formulate a sub-committee to explore further. Schissel adds there are no ordinances for the excavation happening on North Main Street. There has been a lot of erosion from the site down into the wetlands.

**ACTION ITEMS: Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC) Letter of Support:** Interim Town Manager states the Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission are in partnership with Two Rivers Ottauquechee Regional Commission have proposed a pilot program to the United States Department of Transportation titled, "*Flood Resilient and Equitable Transportation Infrastructure for New Hampshire and Vermont*". They are asking the town to send a letter of support for a grant. ***On a motion made by Selectman Burroughs to sign and send a letter of support to Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission (UVLSRPC), seconded by Selectman Kessler. The board voted unanimously, 5-0-0.***

**Approve New Sewer Rates:** ***On a motion made by Selectman Kessler to approve the recommended sewer rates of \$16.07 per 1000 gallons, effective following the November reading, with the first bill April 2024, seconded by Selectman North. The board voted unanimously, 5-0-0.***

**Opera House Rear Entrance:** Selectman Kessler states the work at the back of the Opera House is close to being done. He adds \$470,000.000 was funded by the state, which was most of the costs. Kessler goes on to say there was a ceremony where the town was presented with a check. He suggests the town follow up with a letter of thanks and send it to the Governor and Executive Council to show the town's appreciation. Brown says he will write a letter of thanks.

**Authorize the Current and Active Town Manager to Sign Easements with Eversource for the Community Center:** ***On a motion made by Selectman Kessler to authorize the current and active Town Manager to sign all related documents to permit Eversource to put polls on town property, seconded by Selectman Burroughs. The board voted unanimously, 5-0-0.***

**OPEN FORUM:** Dick Wentzel asked the board of the exact salary of the previous Town Manager was. Additionally, Wentzel claims he is suing each of the Selectman for abuse of power and prejudice for \$300,000.00. Bert Spaulding Sr. states one of the reasons he stepped down from his position within the town was because he believes the Planning and Zoning Boards are not following the law due to lack of education regarding the Ruger Mill building. Spaulding has put forth an appeal to the Zoning Board about the jury. Additionally, Spaulding addresses the Chandlers Mills Road bridge. He states there is an island under the bridge that is the main cause to the flooding of Chandlers Mills Road. Spaulding is asking since the equipment is already there, the island be taken out to maximize waterflow. Interim Town Manager agrees with Spaulding's idea, however unless the town has special permits to take vegetation out, it is illegal. Brown says he will call NHDES to see what the protocol. Wayne Boardman asks Interim Town Manager Brown why the town didn't repurpose or sell the materials from the old ambulance/maintenance garages for a profit instead of cutting holes in the roof for the firefighters to practice. Brown responds, there was lots of preliminary discussion, and the plan was demolition for the building. Following, Boardman asks if the town has looked into flood insurance for the new Community Center. Interim Town Manager Brown says the buildings already there are insured, and the cost will be relatively the same. They are raising the Community Center a couple feet as a precautionary measure.

**COMMUNICATIONS:** Selectman Keith Sayer addresses fence at Meadow Park is leaning and tipping over. he states this may be a safety hazard. Additionally, he brings up the recent vandalism and hate offenses in Newport, and Claremont, Springfield, and Croydon have had similar offenses lately. Sayer asks people to keep a lookout for suspicious activity. Police Chief Lee gives an update on the investigation. He states there are unmarked vehicles out at night, search warrants have been sent to internet service providers to call cell phone data. The NPD has worked with the attorney general's office about the hate crime component to the vandalism, as well as the State Police. Chief Lee is optimistic they will identify a suspect but could take a few weeks. Selectman Burroughs, and the rest of the board, want to give thanks to the Newport Police Department for their hard work and diligence in cases like these. Chairman Connell addresses the potholes, specifically on Cross Street. Selectman North adds the bottom of Elm Street has a large pothole as well. Brown says town employees spent a couple days last week patching potholes but is unsure if Cross Street was on their list. Town Manager states Chandlers Mills Road bridge project has started, and the road is maintaining one lane. The competition will be three to four weeks. He also adds the masterplan is approaching and the survey is on the town's website.

**NON-PUBLIC SESSION:** RSA 91-A:3, II (d) Real Estate and RSA 91-A:3, II (b) Hire public employee - *On a motion made by Selectman Kessler, seconded by Selectman Burroughs to exit the non-public session at 9:46 p.m., 5-0-0.*

**ADJOURNMENT:** *On a motion made by Selectman Burroughs, seconded by Selectman Kessler, the board voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:47 p.m., 5-0-0.*

Respectfully submitted,



Riely Skarin, Recording Secretary

The next regular meeting of the Board of Selectman is scheduled for **November 20, 2023, at 6:30 p.m.**