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Town of Grantham Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes April 17, 2025

The meeting of the Board of Selectmen was called to order at 3:33 PM on Thursday, April 17, 2025, by Chair Kimball. The Board met in the Grantham Town Building, Jerry Whitney Memorial Conference Room, 300 Route 10 South, Grantham, NH.

Present: Chair Warren Kimball, Selectman Peter Garland, Selectman Jeremy Walla, Town Administrator Melissa White, Police Chief John Parsons

The Board acknowledged Chief Parsons for the work he's done as Police Chief and his continued collaboration with department heads. Chief Parsons thanked the Board and informed that the grant review by the state had been completed, with the Police Department passing with "flying colors." He also recognized the instrumental role of Administrative Assistant Ann Jasper in the review process and thanked her for her efforts. Administrator White asked Chief Parsons if he would be willing to serve as interim Emergency Management Director, to which he agreed, noting that it's a role that he and Administrator White have been doing for some time, and he would do what it takes to help in the transition of the new Town Administrator.

The Board had previously reviewed the 2025 Town Meeting minutes and identified some areas where next year the Town Meeting presentation could be improved:

Article 3 - General Government: Selectman Walla stated that voters had focused on the 10% increase in this article, despite the overall budget increase being less than 5%. Walla noted he had discussed with White and suggested that having one article for the operating budget, as proposed by resident Robert Meyer, could provide a clearer understanding of the budget increase and overall strategy. Selectman Garland recommended examining core components of this article, such as health insurance, staffing, etc. Walla said he thought the presentation next year could be done differently by looking at the "big picture" and explaining what has happened over the last year and what the Board looked at, instead of listing each line minor item that has changed. Walla also suggested explaining the targeted increase and what was changed to achieve that, such as the change in health insurance plan and associated savings. Garland said he appreciated Mr. Meyer's comments at the end of the meeting; Kimball and Walla agreed. There was discussion about getting the word out to voters about the budget meetings. White will add a link to the meeting minutes in the e-news; that way, it's there in every issue.

Article 5 - Public Works: Selectman Walla said there was a question about the need for full-time and part-time positions at the Highway Department. He said that he didn't think much more could be done to explain this further; that the Town doesn't know exactly when an employee will resign or retire, but we know a change is coming in the near future as employees age.

White said there was a comment made about the purchase of cameras for the Transfer Station. She said that most businesses, schools, and other Towns now have more robust security cameras than home cameras. The cameras the town is purchasing are the same technology as the ones at Town Hall and are connected to the Police Department, the Police Cruisers, and Hanover Dispatch. They will have a full-service maintenance policy, so if something breaks, Tasco will replace it. In addition, home security cameras will not work consistently in cold weather, and having the same

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technology is crucial. Some of the specifications are an image sensor of 8 MP progressive scan, auto/manual shutter speed of 1 ~ 1/100000s, 12 mm motorized autofocus lens, 3840x2160 resolution, field of view of 105 degrees ~ 31", remote auto/manual focus and zoom, day/night viewing, wide dynamic range, and various video control options. The audio will be suppressed.

White also said that last year was difficult with the office being down one full-time person while onboarding another. White said the Capital Improvements Project Committee (CIPC) created a new spreadsheet to use in July, and the timeline to outline projects was fairly short, which is why these did not make the early presentation to the CIPC. Garland said that explaining how the system would work and how it will record the data compared to home security systems would be ideal. He said that further explaining the costs associated with theft and property damage, compared to the cost of the cameras, would be helpful to the town residents. White said that the undesignated fund balance will be used for this purchase. Walla said the presentation for next year could have a slide explaining what the CIPC recommended. He went on to say that if something is added to the budget that didn't make it on the Capital Improvement Plan, the board could have a meeting with the CIPC and explain the items added to the budget and why. White noted they increased the capital purchase threshold to \$10,000. The Board reiterated that the format provided to them from the CIPC was confusing and that they hope the recent communication with the CIPC will help in clarifying things for both parties in the next annual cycle. Garland said that sometimes things can come up that are beyond the Board's control. Walla suggested explaining why funding is needed for the different Capital Reserve Funds (CRF).

Article 8 - Debt Principal, Debt Interest, and Tax Anticipation Note Interest: White said that there was a comment suggesting that the town bring down its UFB to the 5% threshold to offset the increase in the tax rate. As White stated at the town meeting, it is important to maintain adequate levels of UFB due to unforeseen revenue shortfalls, natural disasters, welfare assistance (state law to provide assistance to qualified residents), and other expenses that may emerge. In addition, having a low UFB, such as 5%, could affect the town's bond rating or ability to obtain a loan for capital projects. The Board reviewed ways to explain UFB at the Town Meeting next year. Walla said a way to explain it would be to compare it to personal savings; one wouldn't use their savings account to pay current bills – you keep it there for emergencies. Walla suggested two or three slides to explain UFB; one for what the UFB was at the beginning of the year, what was used to steady the tax rate, and what the balance is after preparing the new budget. Explaining how the percentage of the UFB is arrived at (the operating budgets of the town, school, and county). White clarified that the town's UFB is only for the town, but the percentage the town should maintain is calculated by using the operating budgets of the town, school, and county. Walla said the second slide could explain that UFB is equivalent to a savings account and include a couple of examples of how a personal savings account would be used, such as a special trip, but you wouldn't use it to cover your monthly rent (unless you lost your job). The third slide could explain the Town equivalent; a fire truck burns down, we know insurance will pay some, but a new one would cost XYZ. White suggested using a natural disaster, like a whole road being destroyed by a catastrophic rain event. Walla said the slide would then explain that if we don't have the money in UFB, then we would have to go through the process of obtaining a bond, which would affect the tax rate. White said when it comes to the operating budget and the money returned to the UFB, there could be questions about that as well. She said that it is hard to have that "crystal ball" of how much money will be needed when the budget is prepared. She said we have to predict 18 months out. Walla said that for expenses, it could be explained that for some, the maximum has to be budgeted for, knowing it won't all be spent. Garland said the alternative is to go into debt or cut services.

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Walla and Kimball agreed.

White said that due to the waste disposal rate increase for July 1, 2025, that she has asked Transfer Station Supervisor Dana Ramspott to look at the fee schedule soon, and potentially restructure it. This could provide support on the revenue side of the budget.

There was also discussion about collaborating with the school district during budget-setting time to see what they are doing to control spending.

Walla asked about the State bridge aid funding that was sent to the Town in March regarding the bridge on Olde Farms Road over Sawyer Brook 083/108. He expressed concern that the funding would disappear like FEMA funding has. White said she signed the letter stating that Grantham wants to participate. She said that saying yes does not legally bind the Town. Walla suggested that the town get the process started by having Road Agent Jeff Hastings assess the bridge and determine if a full replacement is needed or not. White said Hastings has wanted to have engineering done to straighten the road somewhat; however, a survey would also be needed to determine the town's right-of-way. White said that Hastings had mentioned to her that there might be cheaper options available. Garland asked if there was an option to get a volunteer who is a retired engineer or someone who would be willing to serve as clerk of the works. White said they would have to be licensed in NH. Walla was concerned about losing state aid.

Article 22 - Capital Reserve and Expendable Trust Funds: Walla asked how many changes to the naming of CRF's would be on the Town Meeting Warrant for next year. He said that in speaking with Trustee Shemanske, they suggested more changes. Garland and Kimball said the Board pared it back because they felt in some cases it was better to keep them separate, such as police and fire equipment, CRFs, highway and transfer station equipment, and the town clerk/tax collector's CRF separate from the town office equipment. Walla said there were other comments that were made regarding the establishment of the recruitment CRF. White said the idea of keeping expenses in the operating budget versus a CRF has gone back and forth over the years. Some residents have said (over the years) that if it's not going to be spent, then why keep the money in the operating budget. White said the recruitment CRF was a good choice because it's not known in advance when that expense might arise. The Board agreed. Walla suggested a short explanation on a similar situation, for example, on the police uniforms.

Garland said that if residents attended the budget work meetings to see how the budget was developed, it would answer a lot of the questions asked at the town meeting. The problem is no one attends, and they are unfortunately upset when they finally come to town meeting, even when we have received little feedback prior to that. However, voters have the power at the town meeting to change the budget. The Board requested that the budget presentation slides be prepared and sent to them before the first budget hearing so that they have an opportunity to review it and provide additional edits/feedback.

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The Board issued a memo to full-time, benefit-eligible employees regarding the health insurance plan change. This change is expected to yield some savings. Garland suggested holding a meeting for employees to come and talk with the Board about these changes. Administrative Assistant Ann Jasper will have the benefit summary information for employees. The Board will hold this meeting on May 1 from 1 PM – 2 PM.

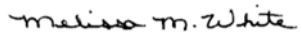
The Town Administrator search details will be provided in the e-news and on the town's website as soon as Municipal Resources Inc. has finished their preparation.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Selectman Walla moved to adjourn, seconded by Selectman Garland. By unanimous vote, the Board adjourned at 5:13 PM.

The next regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen will be held on **Wednesday, April 23, 2025, at 5:00 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,



Melissa M. White
Town Administrator