



**Board of Selectmen's Meeting**

**Conference Room at Rindge Town Offices**

**Date: Wednesday, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

**Time: 6:00 pm**

**MEETING MINUTES**

**Present:** Chairman, Bob Hamilton, Vice Chair, Tom Coneys, Selectboard Member, Larry Cleveland, Town Administrator, Max Vandervliet, Finance Director, Helene Rogers, Executive Secretary, Victoria Stenersen, and members of the public.

The meeting was opened by the chair at 5:42 p.m. Bob Hamilton motioned to enter non-public session per RSA 91-A:3 II (b). Seconded by Tom Coneys, the motion passed by roll call vote: Bob – aye, Tom – aye, Larry – aye (3-0).

The meeting returned to the public at 6:02 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Bob. Bob motioned to seal the non-public minutes until December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025, because disclosure could render a proposed action ineffective. Seconded by Tom, the motion passed by roll call vote; Bob – aye, Tom – aye, Larry – aye (3-0).

**Selectmen's Announcements:** Tom thanked employees for preparing the tax bills on Friday, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Those who assisted were Andrea Lavache, Shana Eichner, Jenn Helsel, and Deb Douglas. Bob announced that the tax rate was set at \$13.79 per \$1,000.

**Payroll & Accounts Payable:** Bob motioned to approve payroll and accounts payable for 11.20.2025. Seconded by Larry, the motion passed 2-0-0.

**Minutes:** Tom motioned to approve the minutes from 11.05.2025. Seconded by Larry, the motion passed 3-0.

**Citizens' Forum:** Bob opened the forum at 6:06 pm by reading the rules of order and closed it at 6:19 pm.

Debbie Qualey, Meadow View Road, announced on behalf of the Women's Club that Operation Santa had begun. The trees would be placed at Verizon and the Ingalls Memorial Library by Thanksgiving, and at Walmart the Saturday after Thanksgiving. Participants are asked to purchase only items listed on the tag and return the wrapped gifts to the same tree. This program ends Friday, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025. Anyone who knows of a family needing assistance is encouraged to call the number posted on the trees. Bob noted that Marilyn Griska has led this program for about 10 years, and she is the contact person.

Simon Moseley, Pine Eden Road, asked how a citizen obtains answers from the Board of Selectmen. Bob advised him to call the Town Secretary or the Town Administrator to be added to the agenda. Simon expressed that Pool Pond's value is incorrect because it was based on a single sale, and the furnishings included in the sale had not been factored out. He asked whether correcting one property's value would correct all Pool Pond assessments; if the changes would carry forward in future years; and whether he could receive answers before the March 1 abatement deadline. Max recommended that Simon contact him or Victoria to be added to a future agenda. Larry added that Max may be able to address some questions directly.

John Bonell, US Route 202, expressed his frustration with Avitar's staffing, experience, and responsiveness. His property assessment increased by approximately 180%, which he felt was unreasonable. He stated he wants to pay his fair share but believes the valuations are inconsistent and overly burdensome. Simon added that lakefront property is

disproportionately assessed.

#### **New Business:**

Solar Exemption Announcement: Bob announced that 22 Solar Exemptions submitted earlier in the year had been filed and accepted by the Board. These exemptions are reflected in the December tax bill. Roberta Oeser, Main Street, said the bills went out for the properties that have solar exemptions, suggested that the Board reissue tax bills and conduct abatements for those exemptions. Max answered that abatements are already underway.

Approval of the Road Name "Narrow Way": Victoria explained that "Narrow Way" was the proposed name for a planned subdivision created from Map 2 Lot 41A and Map 2 Lot 41A-3 submitted by Andre Aho. Fire Chief Rick Donovan, selected the name from a list of options. Rick explained that proposed road names need to be reviewed by the Fire Department E-911 Liaisons, Historical Society, and Roadway Committee to avoid conflicts with current road names and maintain historical relevance. He noted that the Town should review the road naming policy. Bob responded that town policy should be followed and asked if there was a conflict with the Historical Society. Karla MacLeod, Historical Society Chair, answered no. Bob motioned to approve the road name "Narrow Way" for the subdivision created from Map 2 Lot 41A & Map 2 Lot 41A3 as recommended by Fire Chief, Rick Donovan. Seconded by Tom, the motion passed 3-0. Larry asked if this process would be followed moving forward. The consensus was yes. Rick requested that only the position title and not individual names be used in the written policy.

Approval of Transitional Consulting, Training, and Specialized Admin Support: Max presented a short-term professional services agreement between the Town of Rindge and the outgoing Fire Chief, Rick Donovan, pursuant to RSA 31:39. The agreement provides transitional consulting, training, and specialized administrative services for the Fire Department and incoming Fire Chief. Rick will be paid monthly, not to exceed an annual total of \$18,701.85 for services from January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026, through December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026. The total amount is about equal to what the health insurance payment would have been, and there are no additional payments or benefits attached. The outgoing Chief will not receive health insurance through the town after retirement. In the past, retired employees carried health insurance through the retirement system. The Town does not participate in that program, and the impact on retirees was not addressed. Both Max and Bob stated that the personnel policy will be updated to clarify that health care is not provided to retiring or retired employees.

Tom stated he does not support the agreement because it sets a precedent of taxpayers funding retired employees' health benefits through the façade of consulting work. He said the Town could manage with only the new Chief. Larry responded that hiring a 26-year veteran of the Fire Department for continuity is a bargain for the Town to ensure safety from an EMS and Fire standpoint. David Drouin, Old New Ipswich Road, expressed that the overlap of the Chiefs is critical for communication of the subtleties of the Town's functions and would be money well spent. Tina Sbrega, Sandback Circle, echoed that overlap is critical. Karl Pruter, Jowders Cove Road, asked if the new chief would have the right to request termination of the training after some time. Max responded that they could. Dan Whitney, Butterfield Road, stated that they currently do not have an agreement with a new fire chief, so there is a potential for it to fall apart. It is a cheap insurance policy for the Town. Tom stated he does not have a problem with the overlap, but they cannot employ him in any way for 28 days, and that first month is a critical period. To pay him retroactively violates it. Larry stated he views it as a consultation fee and not a health insurance payment. Tom again expressed that it would set a precedent.

Bob motioned for the expense of \$18,701.85, to begin on January 28<sup>th</sup>, 2026, through December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2026, to use the professional services of our previous fire chief at that point to work for the Town. Seconded by Larry, the motion passed 2-1-0.

Discharge of Mortgage: The Town of Rindge holds the mortgage on a manufactured home on Map 2 Lot 59-T0001 that has now been paid in full. Tom motioned to authorize the discharge of the mortgage for Map 2 Lot 59-T001. Seconded by Bob, the motion passed 3-0.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> 2026 Joint Session of the Board of Selectmen and Budget Advisory Committee**

Bob opened the joint session at 6:55 pm. Present from the Budget Advisory Committee (BAC) were Daniel Whitney, Mark Hower, Casey Burrage, James Burger, Tina Sbrega, and Roberta Oeser. Max read a report on the status of the budget process and how they will move forward. See Attachment A. Thanked Dan and Tom for their time. Roberta stated that after the election, a new amended default budget was filed with the DRA, now reflected in column D, 2025 Amended Budget. Dan advised the BAC and Selectmen to work with Max as he works with the Department Heads to be better prepared for the Deliberative Session on January 31st, 2026. He stated that they want to clearly explain the numbers to residents and the reasons they support them.

**Town Clerk's Proposed 2026 Budget:** From Attachment B on pages 1 & 2. Tina asked what they budgeted for a health insurance increase because the Town Clerk's line increased by about 15%. Roberta answered that it varied but averaged about 14.76%. Dan asked what the last thing was to fall off the budget. Town Clerk, Shana Eichner, explained that the former lease payment for the copy machine is now a maintenance fee, which is a variable expense charged per printed page. Bob requested that Victoria find out what the base maintenance agreement is and the fee per page.

**Elections and Supervisors of the Checklist Proposed 2026 Budget:** From Attachment B on page 2. The budgeted increase in cost directly correlated with the increase in the number of elections, from one in 2025 to three in 2026. The coding of the voting machines and One4all, and the ballot printing for the state and federal elections, was paid by the state, not the town. The town only paid for the town election ballots and coding of all machines. Last year, the cost of the coding and printing for the town elections was \$4,050.49. This cost may not be the same for 2026 because of the two new voting machines mandated by the state. Due to the increase in the number of elections for 2026, the salary for the supervisors of the checklist increased to \$2,700, the postage line increased to \$1,500, and the miscellaneous line increased to \$9,000. The increase in the miscellaneous line is for the supplies and food for the three elections. There was a discussion about the school district paying its portion for the coding of the One4all machine in March 2025. It was requested that this be confirmed.

**Trustees of the Trust Funds Proposed 2026 Budget:** From Attachment B on page 4. Trustee Craig Clark stated that the only major expense would be for training, as Dwight Schenk is not running for re-election. There are two capable alternates, but Claudia Stewart has limited time due to her commitment to the county. Vern Young may run for the position, but he is still considering it. It was a flat budget.

**Patriotic Purposes Proposed 2026 Budget:** From Attachment B on page 12. There was a large increase in the flags budget. Craig Clark explained that the flags budget now includes both the Veterans' graves flags and the Town Building flags. The Town flags used to be taken out of the Buildings budget. He estimated that the cost for the American-made flags for the cemetery will be about \$750. He requested an increase in the Memorial Day line to \$500 for any unforeseen increase in costs. Victoria stated that the cost for the American-made flags for the town buildings is about \$1,000 and does not anticipate a large increase in cost. Bob requested that Victoria find a lower cost, if possible, for all the flags.

There was a discussion about the 250<sup>th</sup> celebration and forming a committee to plan it. Victoria volunteered to pull the committee together. There were suggestions on dates for the celebration, joint fireworks with Jaffrey, and involving corporate sponsors, banks, private funding, the Chamber of Commerce, Historical Society, the Jaffrey-Rindge Rotary, and the Recreation Department. Bob requested that Victoria put a request on the website for volunteers.

**Zoning Board of Adjustment Proposed 2026 Budget:** From Attachment B on page 5. There was a requested increase of \$6,500 in wages, and the general expense lines remained flat. The increase in wages was due to the higher pay rate and projection of an increase in hours. Dan requested a three-to-five-year history of hours worked and the number of cases. Roberta explained that there is a need for more hours because a system for the files needs to be reestablished, and the boxes of papers need to be organized. Bob questioned the increase from 16 hours per month to 32 hours per month. Dan

expressed that the files need to be organized so they are accessible to the public. David Drouin, Conservation Commission Chair, explained that many of the previous letters of decision need to be filed with the Cheshire County Registry of Deeds as the files are organized. There were no edits made to the requested budget.

Conservation Commission Proposed 2026 Budget: From Attachment B on page 13. David Drouin stated they have spent \$2,800 to date from the property maintenance line, and there is still potential for snowstorms in December. They have underspent on the wages, but they expect to be \$350 to \$450 over budget. The dues and subscriptions line increased because the dues for CNBRLAC were raised. The unspent wage money from 2025 will be needed to balance the operating side. They are keeping their 2026 request flat at \$6,380.00. The vendor for mowing and plowing has held the same price for years. Dan asked if the budgeted funds for property maintenance do not cover the entire expense for the year, and if \$4,400 to \$5,000 is a better budget. There are labor costs that are not shown due to commission members volunteering their time and personal funds, and he would like to reduce that burden where possible. He also asked if the expenses for Tetrault Park are not being fully covered. David answered yes, the budget is not covering everything for all properties. Dan would like to put in a more realistic number for the maintenance line.

Roberta stated that the commission does have funds available other than taxpayer money, are under their control and can be allocated to property maintenance. David stated that the Land Use Change Tax is a form of tax and is used for property maintenance, improvement, and storm damage, but it is not used for general operating expenses. Larry expressed that he is concerned that they have put up structures that the taxpayers did not vote to purchase and maintain. David stated that they do not own those structures; they only maintain trails. Richard Mellor, Conservation Commission member, stated that the recreation department approved of it, and the conservation commission worked with them to get it built. It became the recreation department's after it was built. David further explained that it should have been addressed during the funding for the project, either through volunteer labor, the revolving fund, or the recreation's operating budget. He stated that the Commission averages \$700 to \$900 a year in volunteer labor.

Police Department/Animal Control Proposed 2026 Budget: From Attachments C & D. Attachment C & D have the correct numbers and lower requests for 2026 than what is listed in Attachment B. Tina explained that it is not feasible for the Police Department's budget to only increase by 3% predominantly because of the cost of turnover and training to replace two officers. There is an associated cost to the resignations, and she thinks that is where the majority of the year-to-year increase comes from. In Attachment D, Police Chief Rachel Malynowski revised the 2026 requested budget for health insurance to \$193,663.40 and dental insurance to \$12,094.43. She explained that they are not getting applicants for the two open officer positions because the Rindge Police Department has one of the lowest starting wages in the area. Her goal is to bring the starting wage up to the average, at \$63,000. This is the current rate, so it will be below average next year. There is a contractual increase of 5% for the prosecutor's wage. Roberta stated that this cannot go in the default because it needs to be voted on by the voters.

In Attachment D, there are calculations for current wages and benefits, new insurance rates, and projections for wages of current staff. For the two open positions, one is budgeted as a family plan because it is unknown. They are working towards hiring an applicant to fill one of the vacant positions, and it would be a single plan for health and dental insurance, which would reduce the overall 2026 request. If the budget is passed in March 2026 and wages are increased across the board, there is a higher probability that the department will maintain its current staff. In 2026, she plans to pay to train two new officers for the open positions. The current year's average cost to replace a single officer is a minimum of \$111,000 to train them through the academy to get them to their first day in a patrol car with no experience. The total requested increase for the 2026 police budget is less than training a new officer, at a little over \$93,000. Her goal is to maintain current staff and incentivize qualified candidates to join the Rindge Police Department so the cost to the Town is minimized. The increases in operating costs and in wages and benefits revolve exclusively around staffing and retention. She would like to avoid hiring and sending four new officers to the academy, which is why the ask is more substantial.

There is a \$7,100 increase across all positions to get the starting wage up to \$63,000. The 2% COLA or wage increase was removed from her original request, which is reflected in Attachment D.

Rachel explained that the overtime has been consistent at \$60,000 for many years. Based on calculations from a predictable overtime costs spreadsheet and the average rate excluding the Chief position, the line should be \$89,922.66 for 2026. The request she is budgeting for is \$75,000, which is a \$15,000 increase and does not cover unanticipated overtime. Rachel requested that the part-time line be reduced to \$1 because the program will likely phase itself out. The shift differential was approved by the voters in 2024. It has been paid for since 2004, but it has never been budgeted. The board voted to budget \$7,500 for shift differential for the second half of 2025. The cost for shift differential will be about \$15,000 in 2026; this reflects what is currently budgeted. It was taken out of wages for the past 20 years, which is one reason why wages were always overspent in the Police Department.

Roberta asked about reimplementing at least \$7,000 being taken out of the detail revolving fund to keep the cruiser maintenance line lower. Rachel responded that they are not currently working details, and this is the first she has heard of the revolving fund being used for that purpose. She also has a request to spend from the detail revolving fund because they need to replace a cruiser; she will bring quotes to the board and put together a warrant article. Roberta stated that she only needs approval from the board to expend from that fund.

Dan asked the group at what point they would decide that moving up to the average wage is a priority for public safety in a town of 6,500 people to retain their officers. They had many discussions over the years about being tired of the town being every other town's training ground. Dan asked them to consider that having only six officers to cover a town of over 6,000 people does mean that Rindge will likely not have 24/7 protection. He explained that Rindge is a bigger town that is steadily growing, and this may be the most crucial decision they make in the budget this year.

Larry asked how many applicants the police department had for the open positions. Rachel answered that there have only been two viable applicants, and one of them washed out. The final applicant looks promising, but they are still a couple of months away from presenting them to the board. Larry asked when the prosecutor's contract was signed and what changes were made. Rachel responded that it was in August, and they removed the 53<sup>rd</sup> pay period, changing the language from "shall" to "may" be subject to all other raises afforded to other town employees. The 5% increase remained unchanged, and they agreed to pay the NH Bar Association Fee and the training costs for certification. This will be \$1,300 in 2026 and is under dues and subscriptions. There was a brief discussion about the high cost of turnover in the Police Department, the movement of officers among towns, and the reasons why officers left the town. Bob requested that the numbers from the two spreadsheets be incorporated into the format that is used.

**Informational Items, Communications, & Updates:** Bob announced that there is a Town and Gown meeting on December 2<sup>nd</sup> at Franklin Pierce University.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 8:39 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

*Victoria Stenersen*

Victoria Stenersen  
Executive Secretary