TOWN of ANDOVER
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Incorporated 1779

SELECT BOARD
Special Meeting Minutes
May 15, 2026 @ 2:00 PM
Andover Town Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT
Dana Swenson, Chairman
Les Fenton, Vice Chairman
Jim Delaney, Member
Mark Cowdrey, Member

MEMBERS ABSENT
Charlie Stewart, Member

STAFF PRESENT
Don Sieburg, Town Administrator (recorded minutes)

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
Donna Duclos

I. CALL TO ORDER
Chairman Swenson called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM. Roll call confirmed four members present: Swenson, Fenton, Delaney, and Cowdrey. Selectman Stewart was absent.

Chairman Swenson noted that the purpose of the meeting was to conduct a preliminary discussion on the development of a Select Board Strategic Plan and that the session was intended to be free-form and exploratory in nature.

II. STRATEGIC PLANNING DISCUSSION
a. Purpose and Background
The Board convened to discuss the development of a Select Board Strategic Plan. Vice Chairman Fenton had previously circulated a draft framework document that included a comparison between a Master Plan and a Strategic Plan, as well as a proposed organizational structure built around four or five focus areas.

Selectman Fenton opened the discussion by noting his observation, drawn in part from attending Planning Board sessions, that the Town's existing Master Plan functions as a visionary document without a corresponding implementation framework. While the Master Plan articulates a broad direction for the community, it lacks the structural underpinning needed to translate that vision into operational reality. He suggested that a Select Board Strategic Plan could serve as the bridge between the Master Plan's aspirations and the day-to-day decisions of Town government, giving departments and boards a shared direction to work toward, rather than operating in a reactive, issue-by-issue fashion.

b. Proposed Focus Areas

Discussion centered on the appropriate organizational structure for the Strategic Plan. The Board generally agreed that a functional rather than departmental structure would be preferable, recognizing that most strategic priorities cut across multiple departments and offices.

Four broad focus areas emerged from the discussion as a working framework:

1. **Fiscal Responsibility and Financial Oversight –** including tax collection timeliness, maintenance of an adequate fund balance, budget transparency, and proactive financial reporting from department heads to the Board on a regular basis.

2. **Infrastructure and Public Services –** including road maintenance and capital planning, bridge projects, Transfer Station operations, and other core public infrastructure, with a goal of moving from reactive to proactive management of long-term infrastructure needs.

3. **Community Engagement and Communications –** including public transparency, accessible meeting formats, potential quarterly town hall meetings, use of the Town website and other communication channels, and efforts to rebuild trust and encourage broader participation in town government.

4. **Organizational Effectiveness and Governance –** including personnel policies, onboarding processes, job descriptions, employee evaluations, and the Board's longer-term transition from a hybrid managerial model toward a governance model in which the Town Administrator operates with greater day-to-day authority and the Board focuses on policy direction and oversight.

c. Community Engagement and Public Trust

A substantial portion of the discussion focused on community engagement and public trust. Vice Chairman Fenton expressed the view that there exists a meaningful undercurrent of dissatisfaction within the community that is not fully visible to elected officials who primarily interact with those residents who are already engaged. He noted that many residents feel disenfranchised, not because they are uninterested in their local government, but because practical barriers to participation (meeting times on school nights, limited accessibility, and a perceived lack of responsiveness historically) have led them to give up trying. He suggested that this group is distinct from the small number of vocal, chronic complainants, and that the strategic plan should take seriously the goal of re-engaging residents who have stepped back from participation.

Other Board members acknowledged the concerns raised and offered a counterpoint: that the relative absence of public engagement may also reflect a general satisfaction with how the Town is being run, rather than disenfranchisement alone. Several Board members noted that residents do tend to show up when issues affect them directly, and that the Town has made meaningful strides in accessibility, including reliable phone coverage at Town Hall, an improved website, and an active presence monitoring community social media. The Board acknowledged that the vocal minority should not be mistaken for a representative sample, while also recognizing that the concerns Selectman Fenton described are real and worth addressing through the strategic planning process.

The Board discussed several possible structural changes and practical ideas for improving engagement: quarterly town hall meetings open to public questions and comment; resuming online meeting streaming; participation options for regular meetings; adjusting meeting start times seasonally or on a rotating basis; and ensuring that the strategic plan itself, once developed, is publicly posted and communicated. No decisions were made on any specific format changes. The consensus was that communications and engagement should be among the first areas tackled in the strategic planning process, given that it is also the most visible to the public and the most likely to build goodwill quickly.

d. Governance Model and Organizational Structure

The Town Administrator offered perspective on the question of governance versus management, noting that the Board currently operates in a ‘hybrid’ mode, necessarily managerial given the number of open gaps in policy, procedure, and staffing. He suggested that clearly articulating the transition toward a governance model in which the Board sets direction, and the Town Administrator executes day-to-day operations with appropriate autonomy as part of the strategic plan. This would be valuable both as a framework for how the Board wants to operate and as a signal to staff and the public about the direction of Town government. He noted that under New Hampshire RSAs, the Select Board is charged with managing the “prudential affairs” of the Town, a broad mandate that currently accommodates both approaches, but that the governance model becomes increasingly practical as policies, procedures, and staffing structures are normalized.

e. Financial Oversight and Reporting

The Board discussed the current state of financial reporting and expressed frustration with the reactive nature of budget oversight. They noted that reviewing budget figures after the fact without accompanying projections or context provides limited ability to anticipate problems or make informed decisions. The group discussed what a more useful reporting structure might look like: quarterly presentations that include not just current expenditure figures but also end-of-year projections and forward-looking context from each department.

The discussion also touched on maintaining a target unassigned fund balance of approximately 10%, and using that benchmark as a strategic reference point when setting budgets and managing year-end surpluses or deficits.

The concept of developing a modest multi-year capital plan was also raised as a way to move infrastructure spending from reactive to planned.

f. Vision Statement

The Board briefly discussed whether the Strategic Plan should include a formal vision statement. Some expressed skepticism about vision statements as a genre, noting a tendency toward language so broad as to be uninspiring. However, it was acknowledged that a vision statement could be an opportunity to address the community trust and engagement concerns raised during the meeting, and that it should be grounded in and clearly linked to the existing Master Plan rather than treated as a standalone aspiration. No language was drafted or agreed upon.

III. NEXT STEPS

No formal decisions were made, and no votes were taken during this meeting. The session served as a preliminary exchange of ideas intended to inform the development of a draft strategic planning document.

Chairman Swenson agreed to revise the draft strategic plan framework based on the discussion and circulate it to the full Board. A brief follow-up discussion is anticipated at the next regular Select Board meeting, with a further work session to be scheduled if needed.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made by Selectman Cowdrey and seconded by Chairman Swenson to adjourn. The motion carried and the meeting was adjourned at 3:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Don Sieburg, Town Administrator