



Town of Hopkinton

Office of Select Board

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**SELECT BOARD
PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES
Hopkinton Town Hall – 330 Main Street
Monday, June 30, 2025
APPROVED**

I. CALL TO ORDER:

Mr. Whitley called this Public Meeting of the Select Board to order at 5:41 p.m. on Monday, June 30, 2025, and introduced the members of the Board.

Select Board

Members Present: Sabrina Dunlap (remote), Steven Whitley, Victoria Bram, Alyssa McKeon, and Jeffrey Donohoe

Staff Present: Karen Hambleton, Town Administrator

Mr. Whitley made a motion to allow the remote participation of Sabrina Dunlap. Mr. Donohoe seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously by a roll call vote, with Ms. Dunlap abstaining.

II. NEW BUSINESS

Community Power Rate Update

Mr. Ken Traum and Mr. Stephen Eckberg addressed the Select Board. Mr. Traum stated that he wanted to present information about recent rate hikes adopted by the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire (CPCNH). He indicated that the new rates would take effect beginning August 1, 2025, and remain in effect through the end of January. Mr. Traum explained that the new CPCNH default rates are two cents higher per kilowatt hour than the default rates for Eversource. He further explained that this represents an average monthly increase of \$13 per customer. Mr. Traum asked if the Select Board would like to proactively inform the Hopkinton community who are CPCNH about the rate increase and make them aware that they can switch back to Eversource. This change, he stated, could be made through the customer portal. He believed that the rate changes are a result of new procedures for power acquisition and anticipated weather for the upcoming months.

Ms. Bram asked if the rates were likely to change again and how often they are changed. Mr. Traum indicated that they were set for the next period, which will begin in August and end in January. After that, new default rates will be set. Mr. Eckberg indicated that the rates will be reviewed again in December and will take effect in February. Those rates, he explained, would be in effect until July. Mr. Traum indicated that the rates could decrease again, but this is uncertain.

Mr. Whitley asked if there was another method for customers wishing to change in addition to the customer portal. Mr. Traum indicated that there was also a phone number that customers could call. Ms. McKeon asked if the only way to alert customers was through the coalition portal, or was there another way, such as a mail-out. Mr. Whitley indicated that this was part of what the Select Board needed to decide.

Ms. McKeon asked to be reminded about the program history, and Mr. Traum explained that the participation was approved two Town meetings ago. Mr. Eckberg indicated that initially, the rates were lower. Mr. Traum noted that the base default rates do not cover energy usage. Mr. Eckberg indicated that they recommend proactive outreach to the community. Mr. Donohoe stated that it should be posted on the

front page of the Town website, added to Sue Covert's email distribution list, and provided to anyone else who might be willing to distribute the information. Mr. Traum indicated that there is a one-month delay in switching, so the earlier participants initiate the switch, the better.

Mr. Eckberg recommended that the Town post information on the Town website about how to switch accounts, including the portal link and the phone number to call. Ms. McKeon asked Mr. Traum and Mr. Eckberg to draft some specific language for posting on the Town webpage. Ms. McKeon asked about the feasibility of mailing or emailing. Mr. Traum responded that mailing is expensive and labor-intensive. Mr. Donohoe indicated that emails may be available, and Mr. Eckberg responded that he would see if this was possible. Ms. Bram requested that a note be included to notify participants that the rates change every six months. Mr. Donohoe expressed concern that coalition participants who were automatically switched may feel that the program was misrepresented. Mr. Whitley indicated that improved communication is needed regarding the Community Power program. Ms. McKeon noted that rapid notification of coalition participants could be a valuable exercise for distributing important announcements in the future.

Mr. Whitley made a motion that the Town advertise information on the Town website about rate changes and how Community Power Coalition users can switch to Eversource's default rate. This notice should be posted on the Town's website, shared on the Town's social media, and distributed as widely as possible. The language of the notice should be drafted by Mr. Traum and Mr. Eckberg and approved by the Town Administrator. Ms. Bram seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

NEW BUSINESS (cont.)

Review Abatement Recommendations

Mr. Whitley provided an overview of this item and stated that the Town recently switched the contract assessors. He explained that the outgoing Assessor was responsible for the most recent revaluation and for preparing the Uniform Standards of Professional Appraisal Practice (USPAP) report that accompanies the revaluation. He continued with his explanation, stating that the current Assessor needs the USPAP manual to process abatement requests and make recommendations to the Select Board. He indicated that the Town has not received that report, slowing the work of the new Assessor significantly. He noted that under state law, if the Town does not respond to an abatement request by July 1, the request is considered denied. He explained that there are three pending abatement requests, which the Select Board will need to take action on at the meeting. He stated that the Select Board must also approve the correspondence letter that will be sent to other applicants with pending abatement requests. Mr. Whitley asked the Select Board to consider the correspondence letter first and directed the Select Board's attention to the meeting packet, which contained a draft of the correspondence letter.

Mr. Whitley asked for an update from the Town Administrator on the status of the USPAP report. Ms. Hambleton indicated that she had spoken to the previous Assessor, who assured her that the USPAP report would be done by the end of the week. Ms. Hambleton added that the current Assessor indicated that he would have the abatements done by the end of July. Ms. Hambleton stated that she intended to ask that they be completed sooner, and Mr. Donohoe commented that he would like them in advance of the final meeting in July, which would be on July 28th. Mr. Donohoe remarked that he understood the correspondence letters with the other applicants would be sent out immediately, but he asked for clarification about when taxes were due. Ms. Hambleton indicated that taxes are due on July 3rd but clarified that the letter refers to taxes for the 2024 tax year.

Discussion continued about the ordering and paragraph structure of the letter. Ms. Bram indicated that applicants should be notified that, due to circumstances beyond the Town's control, the Town is compelled to issue a procedural denial under State law. Mr. Whitley indicated that the letter could explain that the applicant could continue with an appeal to the procedural denial. Mr. McKeon inquired whether the abatement applications could still be approved after the procedural denial, and Ms. Hambleton confirmed that they could. A discussion was held in which the Select Board members expressed a desire that applicants be informed that approval could still be granted. Mr. Whitley stated that he would like to see two things clarified: that the letter affects the 2024 taxes; and that the letter constitutes a procedural denial under State law, which requires a response by July 1. Mr. Whitley asked if the state law could be specifically cited. He further added that the applicants should be made aware that the final decision about the abatement will be forthcoming before July 31st but that the applicant could appeal the denial under State law.

Mr. Whitley made a motion that the correspondence letter be prepared and mailed with the aforementioned changes. Mr. Donohoe seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved by a roll-call vote.

Pending Applications

Mr. Whitley then moved on to discuss the three pending applications. He noted that if any of the abatement requests were seeking relief due to an inability to pay, he would prefer to discuss those in a non-public session.

The Select Board reviewed the following abatement requests.

- Morgan- Map-Lot – 240-12-2
- Sorrell
- Sandy Beach

Morgan. Mr. Donohoe noted the discrepancy between the acreage on the request and stated that the Select Board had the 2025 tax card but was considering a request for the 2024 taxes. He asked that the Select Board set that item aside until the information could be updated with the 2024 tax card.

Sorrell. Mr. Whitley commented that if they have an appraisal that values the property as less than the assessed value, then this seems to be a good basis for granting the abatement. He noted that the Assessor was not recommending the granting of a total abatement and inquired about the equalization ratio. Ms. McKeon asked about why Mr. Whitley was inquiring about the ratio. Mr. Whitley explained that the ratio is used to determine how to adjust the assessed value relative to the fair market value. He explained that all towns attempt to align assessments with fair market value, but typically either overassess or underassess. He further explained that the ratio is used to reconcile appraisals, which can vary considerably, with a fair assessment value. He noted that in this case, the Assessor did not totally accept the appraised value and subsequently recommended a partial abatement.

Mr. Whitley made a motion to accept the recommendation of the Assessor and approve the abatement request. Ms. McKeon seconded the motion, and it was approved unanimously by a roll-call vote.

Morgan. Mr. Donohoe again raised questions about the timing of the property subdivision and the information provided on the tax card.

Mr. Whitley indicated that the information was incomplete on this item and moved to deny this application, consistent with the Assessor's recommendation. Mr. Donohoe

seconded the motion, and it was approved by a 4-1 roll-call vote, with Ms. McKeon voting against the motion.

Sandy Beach

Ms. Bram noted that, under the "extra features" box, 185 campsites were valued at \$18,000. Ms. Bram questioned how that number was determined. Mr. Whitley indicated that it was probably a method utilized by the assessors. Ms. McKeon asked how the number of campsites was determined. Mr. Donohoe indicated that the Assessor likely physically counted the sites. Mr. Donohoe noted that it seemed like the campsites were double-counted. Ms. Bram stated that, given the number of questions raised, it seems that this item could be set aside for further consideration. Mr. Whitley agreed that this request was sizeable, and it seems appropriate that more information would be needed to make a final determination. Mr. Whitley agreed that no action should be taken on this application at this time, noting that the applicant should receive the letter being mailed to other pending applicants.

Mr. Whitley moved that they take no action on this request pending the receipt of additional information. Ms. McKeon seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously by a roll-call vote. Ms. Dunlap was unavailable for the vote due to technical difficulties.

III. ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Donohoe made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Whitley seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Beverly Mesa-Zendt
Executive Assistant/Grant Coordinator