

**TOWN OF NEWFIELDS SELECT BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY AUGUST 11, 2026**

Select Board Present: Chairman Hoby Harmon, Mark Kasper & Catherine (Cat) Tarnowski
Others Include: Police Chief Young, Bob Elliott, Dave Luchsinger, Michael Sununu & Louise Williams

The Select Board reviewed and approved the following items:

School Tax Payment	08/11/26:		\$529,745.00
Checks Dated	08/14/26:	Accounts Payable Manifest	\$ 3,327.05
Checks Dated	08/14/26:	Payroll Manifest	\$ 59,223.12

Hoby called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

Bob Elliott

Bob Elliott read the attached email. **Attach Statement 1**

7/28/26 Select Board Meeting Clarification/Follow up

Hoby asked Mark if he spoke with counsel on RSA 91A

Mark responded that he'd like to address Bob Elliott's statement. He read the following:

"I draw the Board's attention directly to the New Hampshire Department of Justice Memorandum on New Hampshire's Right-to-Know Law (NH RSA 91-A), issued by Attorney General John M. Formella on March 14, 2024.

On Pages 13 and 14, the Attorney General's Office provides explicit instructions regarding quorum compliance and notice requirements:

1. Mandatory Statutory Notice (RSA 91-A:2-a, I): The State Memorandum explicitly directs that public bodies must deliberate on matters over which they have supervision, control, or advisory power only in public meetings held in strict compliance with the Right-to-Know Law.
2. Posting Requirements for Board Quorums: Under NH RSA 91-A:2, whenever a quorum—which is two members of a three-member Select Board—convenes in a public room, engaging in discussions or providing comments on town oversight without that session being publicly posted at least 24 hours in advance as a Select Board meeting directly violates state law.

Attending another board's meeting and offering input or participating in discussions without proper advance public notice converts that attendance into an un-noticed, illegal meeting of a Select Board quorum under RSA 91-A:2-a, I. Strict adherence to these published Department of Justice guidelines is essential to protect this Town from procedural defects and court invalidation under RSA 91-A:8."

Hoby addressed the positions Mark concluded at the last meeting and the issues that arose.

Hoby then spoke on allegations that were made against him at the last meeting. Before speaking he noted Attorney Boldt's.... He read the attached statement. He listed 1, Attach statements number them. 14 minutes to 23:36 minutes

Then attach Hoby's second statement (regarding recusal and 'false without merit ones)

Hoby asked whether Cat had anything to add. Cat responded that she was glad the matter had been followed up on promptly and that clarification was taking place. She emphasized the importance of ensuring that people feel comfortable asking questions, interacting openly, and holding one another accountable for the things they should or should not be doing. She noted that clear flows of communication and timely access to information are important to supporting transparency.

Cat suggested that the Board consider reviewing certain procedures it believes has been following to determine whether they are actually Town procedures or whether they should be formally documented as such. She stated that having clear, written procedures would help ensure that everyone is on the same page and that individuals can be held accountable to the standards to which they are accountable.

Cat also believed there are additional best-practice matters the Board should discuss, particularly in determining what should be established as formal policy and what may simply be considered good practice or meeting etiquette. She noted that the Board takes seriously the importance of not creating a quorum when one should not exist in the absence of a publicly noticed meeting. She also emphasized the need to remain careful about how information is shared while ensuring that information continues to be shared through the proper channels and in a timely manner.

From her perspective, after reviewing the meeting minutes, Cat felt that more timely communication would have been helpful and could have contributed to a greater sense of transparency and a better flow of information. She added that, personally, there are matters she may want to raise regarding how the Board can work more effectively together, as she believes there is room for improvement.

Louise Williams said the previous Conservation Commission meeting highlighted a need for greater consistency and understanding of New Hampshire's Right-to-Know Law, RSA 91-A.

She encouraged the town to use the situation as an opportunity for education rather than continued debate.

She recommended that all board and commission chairs and elected officials review the law and relevant Attorney General guidance, that boards and commissions receive formal training on meeting and communication requirements, and that the town provide training for newly elected officials. She also suggested developing a clear protocol to help officials understand their responsibilities under the law.

Hoby responded that Cordell Johnson is the Town Attorney and is compensated for his skill and expertise. He noted that one of the reasons the Town engaged him was because of his professional background and experience. Hoby stated that it would be in the Board's best interest to rely on the legal advice he provides to the Town.

Hoby then addressed the emails from Chris Griffith that were read at the previous meeting. See attached....Find transcripts for 31 mins with the allegations 1-5 and hoby's responses about Griffith and Conservation /Rettberg

Louise Williams said she viewed the situation less as an ethical breach by members of the community who serve the Town and more as a failure of the Town's system to clearly communicate the rules and expectations to them in advance.

She referenced a 2024 memorandum from John Fernelius and acknowledged that the guidance can be difficult to follow consistently and emphasized that the rules governing these communications are not always clear. She noted that emails and side conversations occur and encouraged the Board to move forward by developing a clear protocol, training, or other guidance to help ensure that everyone understands the expectations.

Hoby said as far as being cognizant of responsibilities, when someone becomes a member of a Board, they read, sign, and swear to the oath of office. He stated that impartiality and following the laws of the State of New Hampshire and the community are fairly black and white and, in his view, do not demonstrate great confusion. He added that impartiality is a fairly common concept and stated that this would be his rebuttal to Louise.

Michael Sununu, 184 Exeter Rd., raised two points. First, regarding Louise's comments, he stated that during his several years on the Board, he regularly encouraged Board members to use the resources available through the New Hampshire Municipal Association and to understand the requirements of RSA 91-A and meeting laws. He stated that, in his view, the responsibilities of elected and appointed officials have been made clear over the years. While he acknowledged that criticism is appropriate, he believed that when an official does not follow the rules or improperly communicates by email, the issue is with that individual's approach to fulfilling their responsibilities rather than with the Town or its overall environment.

Second, Michael addressed concerns regarding the appointment of Chris Shanellaris to the Conservation Commission. He stated that the position had been vacant for several months and that, during that time, the Conservation Commission had numerous open issues and responsibilities. He noted that the Select Board determined it was necessary to fill the vacancy. Under the applicable state statute, he stated, the Conservation Commission has no role in making the appointment, as the appointment authority rests entirely with the Select Board.

Michael explained that while boards have traditionally taken it upon themselves to identify, solicit, and recommend candidates to the Select Board, no recommendation had been made after several months. The Select Board therefore sought individuals interested in serving, discussed the candidates, and unanimously selected Chris Shanellaris after he applied. Michael stated that the Select Board acted within its authority and followed the proper process.

Michael expressed concern that the accusations regarding the appointment were improper and unfair to the Board and the way the Town conducts its business. He stated that such accusations can weaken the credibility of the Board and create division within the community. He noted that the Town has historically worked in a less confrontational manner and expressed concern that recent decisions have increasingly been characterized as ethical, moral, or legal issues.

Michael emphasized that there are established rules and laws governing these matters and suggested that members of the public should become familiar with those requirements before speaking about them at meetings. He also encouraged people to raise concerns directly at public meetings rather than posting anonymously and to engage in discussion with the officials involved.

Michael stated that he wanted to address the issue because the criticism of the appointment reflected on his service as Chair of the Select Board. He reiterated that the Select Board properly exercised its authority to fill the vacancy after the position had remained open for several months.

Hoby then referred to Phyllis Mackey's email, which had been read at the previous Select Board meeting. Hoby stated that Phyllis Mackey's email was addressed to Select Board member Tarnowski and that he received it on Tuesday, July 28, 2026, at 6:09 p.m., shortly before that evening's Select Board meeting.

He characterized Phyllis' email as scurrilous and not factual, stating that it was based on rumor and innuendo and repeated previously dismissed, false, and factually inaccurate allegations. He suggested that the email appeared to be part of a coordinated effort to deflect from the underlying issues. He noted that similar talking points appeared in another email, specifically Chris Griffith's email sent at 12:07 p.m. to Select Board member Tarnowski.

Hoby stated that while individuals are entitled to their own opinions, they are not entitled to their own facts. He said the facts concerning the issues raised in the Mackey and Griffith emails are readily accessible in the Town's records. He reiterated that he had addressed the matter concerning Mr. Shanelaris's appointment in detail and stated that appropriate due diligence and research should have been completed before either email was written and sent. He added that he believed Newfields was better than this.

Hoby stated that the issue being overlooked was the alleged conduct of the former Chair of the Conservation Commission, both as a member and as Chair. He referred to approximately three documented events in which he believed bias and a lack of impartiality were demonstrated and stated that those actions affected Conservation Commission deliberations and decisions. He emphasized that, in his view, the issue was not the repetition of allegations that he considered false, but rather the conduct that was at the center of the matter.

Hoby referenced Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis's well-known statement regarding the importance of transparency in preventing corruption and promoting accountability. He stated that the actual transparency issue was not whether the Select Board's Conservation Commission representative was copied on the Rettberg email, but rather the conduct of the former member and Chair.

Hoby stated that when he ran for the Select Board, he campaigned on public safety and fiscal responsibility. He said he had not expected an integrity issue to become a significant concern in Newfields public service and found the evidence of potential breaches of the oath of office discouraging.

Hoby acknowledged that disagreement, debate, and the give-and-take of political discourse are a normal part of public service. However, he stated that the alleged use of public power and authority by a member of Town government to benefit a private interest was not acceptable. He reiterated that this was, in his view, the central issue and concluded that Newfields should expect better.

Hoby referred to Alison Watts' email sent on July 28 at 8:43 a.m. Hoby addressed the question of why Tom was not notified before the meeting that there were concerns regarding his emails. He stated that this was an internal matter for the Conservation Commission and not the Select Board.

Hoby explained that, when there is a general desire to understand why an action occurred, it can be more helpful to allow time to formulate a coherent response and, if necessary, provide additional information. He stated that when decisions are made, the individuals making them know the facts and the reasons for their actions. He reiterated that, in his view, the issue involved a pattern of bias and obfuscation.

Hoby also addressed the reference to the emails and questions being copied to the general Conservation Commission inbox, which all Commissioners had access to. He stated that this was not consistent with how the matter had been presented and represented during multiple hearings.

Hoby concluded that this addressed both the allegations made against him in his capacity as Select Board Chair at the previous meeting and the concerns raised in the emails.

Hoby then asked Cat and Mark if they had any comments.

Cat responded that it was time to determine the next steps and move forward.

Mark said he wanted to make two points. First, he explained that he had requested that information be directed through him as the liaison between the Select Board and the Conservation Commission. He clarified that he was not stating that information was legally required to go through him.

Second, Mark stated that his concern was that the information and conversations between Hoby and Tom had bypassed him. He said that, while he agreed with Hoby's concerns regarding Tom's conduct and believed that comments about giving someone a "win" were inappropriate, his primary concern was what it looked like when the liaison was not included in those communications. He noted that, as the designated liaison and communication point between the Select Board and the Conservation Commission, he had not been aware of the discussions taking place.

Mark stated that there had been back-and-forth emails and other conversations between Hoby and Chris Shanelaris of which he had no knowledge and questioned why he had been bypassed. He said that if the communications had been completely transparent, he would have been the first to tell Tom that such conduct was inappropriate. He also agreed that Mr. Rettberg should not have sent an email to the Vernon's attorney without first consulting the Town Attorney.

Mark stated that he was entitled to his opinion that the circumstances appeared underhanded and asked that the Board move forward by including him in relevant communications. He said that it was not appropriate for him, as the liaison, to be the last person to learn what was taking place. Mark also disagreed with Hoby's characterization of his remarks as false, stating that he believed they were valid points. Mark stated that in his opinion, the situation appeared underhanded and could potentially expose the Town to a lawsuit.

Mark added that he would refer matters to Chair Harmon when members of the audience called out during meetings. He added that audience members should not yell out during meetings.

Continue minutes at 1 hr mark..

At 8:23pm, Cat motioned, seconded by Mark, to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Kisha Therrien