

**TOWN OF NEWFIELDS SELECT BOARD
MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY AUGUST 25, 2026**

Select Board Present: Chairman Hoby Harmon, Mark Kasper & Catherine (Cat) Tarnowski
Others Include: Police Chief Young, John Hayden, Tom Grella, Kent Lawrence, Bill Meserve, Lynn Sweet & Louise Williams

The Select Board reviewed and approved the following items:

Checks Dated 06/19/26: Payroll Manifest \$63,016.91

Hoby called the meeting to order at 7:05pm.

Cemetery Trustees – Green Burials

Lynn Sweet presented the Library and Cemetery Trustees' proposal to investigate establishing hybrid green-burial spaces within the existing Route 108 cemetery. The proposed model would dedicate a portion of the cemetery to green burials rather than creating a separate cemetery, with eligibility limited to Newfields residents. Sweet explained that green burials would generally prohibit embalming, permanent outer burial containers, and conventional modern caskets, and would instead use biodegradable containers with minimal non-degradable materials. Families would still be required to work with a funeral service.

The Select Board and members of the audience discussed burial space, capacity, containers, cremated remains, maintenance, and eligibility. Sweet noted that a green burial would generally require one casket-sized burial space and therefore would not necessarily increase cemetery capacity, as a conventional casket space may accommodate multiple cremations. The Trustees have reviewed applicable state statutes and consulted with the Kensington Cemetery Trustees regarding rules and regulations. They will continue researching allowable containers, wooden urns, cremated remains, maintenance requirements, and operating restrictions. No firm timeline was established, but Sweet indicated that the research would take more than a month before the Trustees return to the Select Board with additional information.

Cemetery Mowing

Lynn and the Board discussed ongoing concerns regarding the condition and frequency of mowing at the cemeteries. Lynn acknowledged that the mowing schedule was inadequate and apologized, explaining that the contractor has experienced ongoing issues and has been unable to maintain the desired mowing frequency despite repeated requests to do so.

She reported that the mowing services will be put out to bid this fall. Hoby emphasized the importance of ensuring that the contractor meets the required mowing schedule and noted that future contract terms should state that payment is contingent upon the required work being completed.

Personnel Policy

Chief Young requested that the Select Board update the personnel manual to formally document previously approved employee benefits, including life insurance, short-term disability, long-term disability, and deferred compensation. Young explained that these benefits had been approved by prior Select Boards, including in early 2022 for the four full-time police officers and the full-time Town Clerk. The proposed language would clarify the benefits available to employees. Life and disability insurance are funded through the Police Department and Town Clerk budgets, while deferred compensation is voluntary and funded through employee payroll deductions.

Chief Young also presented a proposed bereavement-leave policy, noting that the current personnel manual did not address bereavement leave. The policy was developed using examples from other municipalities. Hoby motioned, seconded by Mark, to approve a three-day bereavement leave effective immediately and directed that the policy be incorporated into the personnel manual.

Louise Williams – Newfields Community Church

Louise Williams, Co-Moderator of the Newfields Community Church, introduced herself and explained the church's leadership structure and its independence from the Town. She informed the Board that the church will hold a bake sale during the September 8, 2026, Primary Election, with proceeds supporting the church's preservation and sustainability. She also reported that a Department of Homeland Security grant funded window replacements and security improvements.

Louise stated that the church is seeking additional historical preservation opportunities and welcomed community assistance with facilities, historical preservation, grant writing, and accounting. She noted that assistance with QuickBooks would be particularly helpful in preparing for future preservation grants. She invited community members to visit the church, attend Sunday services, or attend the September 13 open house.

Ex-Officio Report

8/13/26 Planning Board Meeting

Cat reported that the August 13 Planning Board meeting was productive. The Board discussed a proposed residential project that may require Zoning Board relief, concerns about truck traffic and activity at the Home Fashions/self-storage site, and proposed subdivision and site plan regulation changes.

Cat also updated the Select Board on the need to update the Town's comprehensive plan. The Planning Board would like to conduct a community survey, estimated at \$5,000, using

available funds. Hobby asked Cat to bring the request back to the Planning Board and report on the proposed next steps.

Conservation Commission

Mark reported that the Conservation Commission nominated Christine McDade as chair and is confirming whether she can also serve as treasurer. The commission continues to review the Vernon Family Farm matter, including concerns about conflicts of interest and requests for recusals, with further action on hold pending legal review. Easements, monitoring reports, and daily site monitoring are also ongoing. Mark also noted upcoming work on Bald Hill Road parking and the commission's participation in the Newfields Farmers Market and Craft Fair on September 19th from 9am – 12pm at the Newfields Elementary School.

Public Safety Building Meeting

Hobby Harmon reported that SNP Architecture was selected to lead planning for a new public safety facility on approximately 14 acres of town-owned land near Route 87 and Meadow Road, with about four to five acres potentially suitable for the project. The site was identified as the most viable option after other property owners declined to sell. The project will move forward with a needs assessment, site evaluation, programming, and community engagement, while wetland and perimeter surveys are underway. The Town plans to minimize wetland impacts and the facility's overall footprint.

D. Partikian and B. Johnson Correspondence

Hobby reported that the Select Board received two letters from Mr. Partikian and Mr. Brian Johnson regarding allegations and requests for the removal and/or recusal of members of the Conservation Commission. He stated that the matter had been referred to Attorney Cordell Johnson for review and disposition.

Hobby explained that the letters would be included as attachments to the meeting minutes and would be available through a standard Article 91 public records request submitted to the Town Clerk. Because the Select Board could not respond to the allegations at the meeting without potential legal consequences, the letters would not be read aloud. Hobby noted that Town Counsel had been consulted and supported the decision to refer the matter to counsel, with the goal of protecting the Town's interests and ensuring compliance with applicable statutes and case law.

Home Fashion Trailers

Hobby Harmon said he would contact Home Fashions and the property owner to discuss increased truck traffic, overnight trailer parking, and routing concerns. The Select Board noted that the 2016 site plan did not appear to authorize overnight trailer storage, making the activity a potential site-plan violation. Tom Grella, Police Chief Young and Board members also raised concerns about trucks using incorrect routes and inadequate signage. The Board will explore improved signage, traffic-management measures, and other mitigation options.

September Meeting Dates

September 15th & 29th

Prior Meeting Minutes

Hoby motioned, seconded by Cat to accept the 7/28 & 8/11 minutes. All in favor and the motion carried.

Miscellaneous

Hoby announced that Bill Meserve has resigned from the Public Safety Building Committee due to other commitments.

Hoby reported that the audio/video issues experienced during the past few meetings are being addressed.

Hoby advised that acceptance of the proposed Webb property donation will require a Town Warrant in March for Town approval. The Town will be responsible for the expenses associated with the title search, quitclaim deed, and recording fee. The Town is exempt from the transfer tax.

John Hayden reported that Fowler's Way had been accepted by E911 and just needs signage. Hoby agreed to follow up with the Fire Chief regarding a standardized town sign and installation.

Hoby explained that seven formal complaints were received from Jeremiah Vernon in June, covering issues such as neighborhood activity, lawn mower noise, and vehicles accessing Route 87. One complaint concerned the Girards having two signs on their property, including one illuminated sign, which Vernon claimed violated town zoning.

Hoby noted that the same signage issue had been raised in 2024 and reviewed by the Select Board's legal counsel. At that time, counsel determined that the zoning restriction applied only to commercial businesses, professionals, or service providers—not private residences. Vernon submitted essentially the same complaint again in June, despite that prior determination.

Hoby also described the Town's process of notifying the person against whom a complaint is made so they can respond. When the Girards were given paperwork concerning the complaint, one of them delivered documentation to Hoby's home. Hoby said Nicole Vernon then drove by, recorded the Gerard vehicle in the driveway, and sent an email documenting the observation.

Hoby stated that the email was initially not treated as a formal complaint or read into the public record. At a later meeting, it was clarified that the email was being submitted as a

formal complaint. Hoby rejected the underlying allegation, explaining that a resident was simply dropping off paperwork in response to a complaint and that Select Board members are permitted to meet with residents and have them park in their driveway. Hoby characterized the matter as without merit and indicated that it had been addressed and would be considered resolved.

Hoby made a motion, seconded by Mark, to waive the Town Hall rental fee for Kent Lawrence for the canceled contra dance. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Tom Grella asked the Board for a status on the Pleasant St/Summer St project. Bill Meserve, who has been handling this matter, reported that the Town has completed the basis-of-design process with the Department of Environmental Services (DES). The construction is now planned for April due to the delayed DES approval. He noted that the project will also support EPA stormwater nutrient-removal permitting and may generate environmental credits for the Town by reducing automobile-related contaminants.

At 7:58pm, Cat motioned, seconded by Mark, to adjourn the meeting. All were in favor and the motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,
Kisha Therrien