Govably

CUSTOMER STORY · TOWN OF PELHAM, NEW HAMPSHIRE

Four and a half hours back, from one meeting

How one town is saving hours on boards across its community.

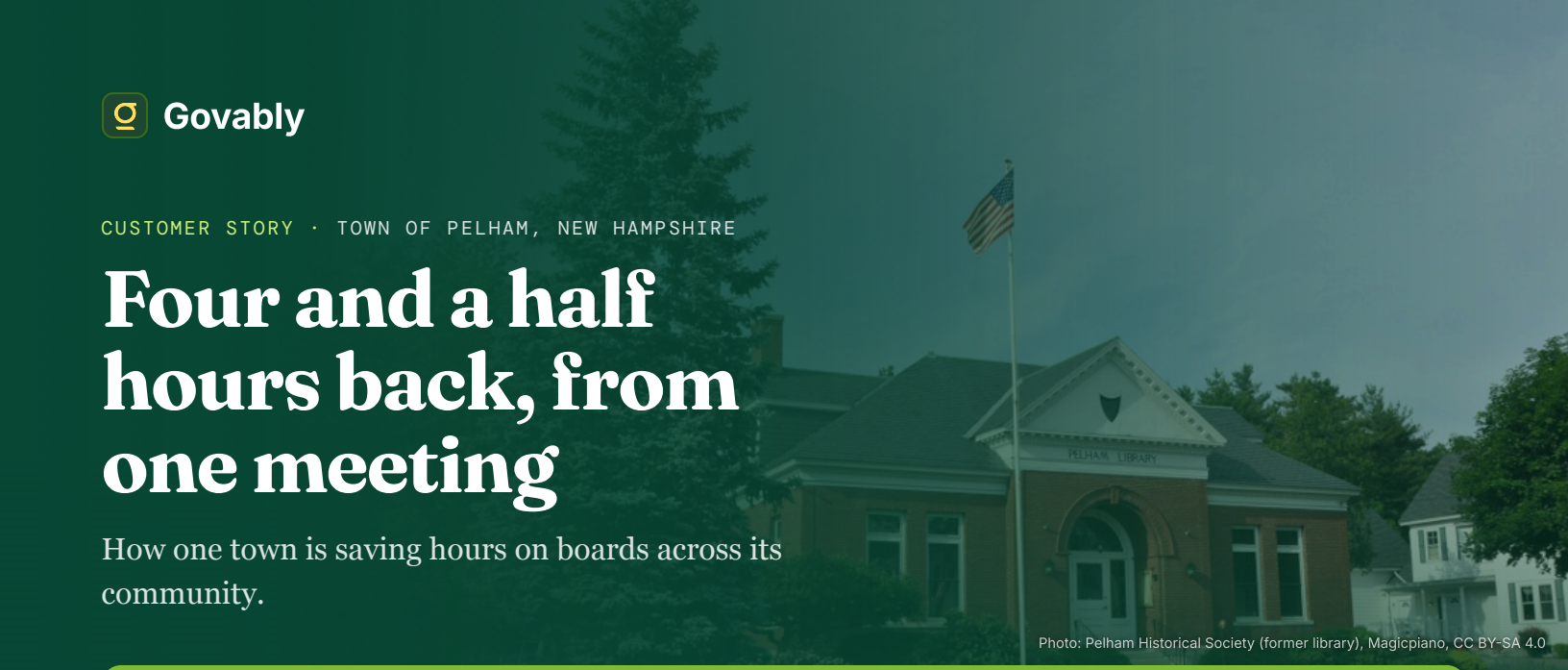


Photo: Pelham Historical Society (former library), Magicpiano, CC BY-SA 4.0

Town of Pelham
Hillsborough County, NH

Population
15,019

Department
Town Administrator, IT, and the Board of Selectmen office

Product
Govably AI Minutes

Keys to project
Time savings, accuracy, and working with the tools the town already had

Already using
CivicPlus for agendas
Viebit for meeting video

The challenge

Minutes took longer than the meetings themselves, and the hours came out of staff and volunteers who were needed elsewhere.

The solution

Govably's AI turns the agenda and the recording the town already produces into an accurate set of minutes.

The result

Minutes finished in about twenty-five minutes, and a public record residents can search.

OVERVIEW

Pelham, New Hampshire holds public meetings across a full slate of boards, and every one of them produces minutes somebody has to write. The work took longer than the meetings themselves. The town had tried to solve it by bringing in part-time help, found few takers for the job, and watched it land back on volunteers and on staff who were needed elsewhere.

After a search for a better answer, Pelham's staff brought in Govably. The first minutes produced in the new system took Administrative Assistant Danielle Pilato about twenty-five minutes on a two-hour meeting, the same job that used to take about five hours.

> "A two-hour board meeting used to mean about five hours of work for me. We had those minutes finished in twenty-five minutes, and that was the first set I ever built in the tool."
>
> **Danielle Pilato**
> Administrative Assistant to the Board of Selectmen, Town of Pelham, NH

25 min
To build minutes for a two-hour meeting

5 hrs
What the same minutes used to take

20+
Meetings in a peak month of the year

CHALLENGE

The work had to get done, and nobody had the hours to do it

Minutes are a legal record, and every board that meets has to produce one. Doing it by hand means sitting through the meeting or listening to the whole recording afterward, stopping and restarting to write as you go, then formatting the result and checking it against the agenda. For the Zoning Board of Adjustment, where stipulations are read into the record and the minutes run close to transcription, it takes longer still.

Pelham looked for part-time help to carry it. The job is a tedious one with short, scattered hours, and the town found few people who wanted it. So the work fell where it usually falls. It went to volunteers, some of whom sit on several committees and spend hours a week taking notes by hand and then matching them against the recording afterward, without being paid for any of it. And it went to town staff, whose hours then were not going to the work the town actually needed from them.

SOLUTION

It worked with what the town already had

Pelham did not change how it runs meetings. Agendas are already published through CivicPlus. Televised meetings are already recorded and posted through Viebit. Govably takes a link to each and does the rest: it pulls in the agenda, pulls in the recording, matches the discussion to the item it belongs to, and identifies who was speaking. Within minutes there is a draft. No new equipment, no new process, nothing for the town to buy or learn around it.

Speakers are identified by VoicePrint, Govably's cross-meeting speaker recognition. It learns a voice once and then recognizes that person at every future meeting, on every board. A member who sits on the agricultural committee and the Board of Selectmen is identified correctly in both without anyone setting them up twice.

The guardrails are what set it apart

What stood out to Pelham was Govably's proprietary guardrail system. Govably does not quietly guess at the parts of a meeting that carry legal weight. It writes the motions from an accurate transcription of what was actually said, and where it cannot place something with confidence, an item taken out of order or a vote where the mover is unclear, it surfaces that for a person to settle rather than burying it in the document. Staff confirm who moved, who seconded, and how each member voted, so the record that goes out is right.

As a result, Pelham has complete confidence in the minutes that go out.

RESULTS

Accurate minutes, hours returned, and a record residents can use

Accuracy was the first thing Pelham tested. The town put the minutes Govably produced side by side with the minutes it had written by hand.

> "I looked at the comparisons that you had, based on actual minutes and the AI minutes, and they are right on."
>
> **Charlene Takesian**
> Vice Chair, Board of Selectmen, Town of Pelham, NH

With that settled, the hours came back. Four and a half hours returned from a single meeting is most of a working day, and it repeats every time a board meets. Staff get that time for the work that actually needs a person, and volunteers get their evenings back.

The minutes themselves also became more useful to the people they are written for. Each topic in the record links to the moment it was discussed in the video, so a resident can go straight to the part of the meeting they care about.

> "If you are following along on your computer or your phone, you can click on the time associated with that particular period and watch just that part of the meeting instead of having to scrub through it to find where they are speaking. The searchability is important. The reliability is important."
>
> **Joseph Roark**
> Town Administrator, Town of Pelham, NH

WHAT COMES NEXT

Every board in town

Pelham started on its busiest boards and is bringing the rest in behind them, including committees that have never had anyone assigned to write their minutes at all. In a peak month the town holds more than twenty meetings, and Pelham expects the savings to run into the hundreds of hours a year. A problem the town could not hire its way out of is now answered on every board it has, and the hours it gives back go straight into the work residents actually see.

See it on one of your own meetings

Send us a recent agenda and recording. We will build your minutes in Govably and walk you through the result on a 20-minute call. No cost, no commitment.

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