

Minutes

Town of Norwich Finance Committee Meeting Tuesday, March 15, 2011 Tracy Hall, Norwich, Vermont

Members present: Cheryl Lindberg (Chair), Jim Mackall, Keith Moran (Vice Chair), Evan Pierce, Chris Rhim

Members absent: James Dwinell, Vacant Seat

Also Present: Henry Scheier

Chair Lindberg called the meeting to order at 5:00 PM.

Agenda Items Discussed

1. Review/Amendment of Agenda:

Chair Lindberg Went over the Items on the Agenda. All members approved

2. Review/Approval of February Minutes

Moran made a motion to approve the minutes (second Rhim). *The motion passed unanimously*

3. Election of Officers: Lindberg opened the Discussion asking for input to the election of officers for the coming year. Mackall moved (Pierce second) Moran to be Chairman.

The motion passed unanimously

Lindberg asked for input as to a vice-chair. Mackall moved (Moran second) to elect Pierce vice-chair.

The motion passed unanimously

Lindberg asked who might be interested in the secretary position. At present, no one was particularly interested, and it was agreed to take the minutes on a rotating basis for the time being.

At this time Lindberg ceded control of the meeting to Moran

4. Public Comments: Scheier was introduced and had 3 points to make:

1. He felt that the School Board missed an opportunity at town eating day to thank Wayne Gersen for his service as Superintendent.
2. He wanted the School Board to examine the possibility of keeping separate accounts for Hanover and Norwich for special education. This past year Norwich was hit unusually hard for special education, and he felt it would be more equitable to have separate accounts. Moran commented on a seemingly widespread lack of understanding of how special education costs/reimbursements are calculated, citing specifically a meeting between the Finance Committee and John Aubin that further seemed to cloud the issue. Lindberg felt that we really

need to get clarification on this, perhaps at a meeting with John Aubin. Scheier acknowledged that in some years this may help Norwich, and other years hurt the town, again asking for greater understanding.

3. Scheier expressed concern over how the School Board is handling the deficit, asking specifically if the committee knew exactly how we were supposed to operate at a deficit. Citing research he had done on his own, he felt that the board was required to come up with a specific plan to address the deficit, or to put it into the next budget. He also felt that the board had a responsibility to let voters know what the plan is. Lindberg felt that there needs to be specific documentation as to how and why the special education reserve fund is used. Scheier felt that operating this way without a specific plan was a dangerous precedent to set

5. Town of Norwich- replacement grader

Moran briefed the committee on the review of the grader situation from the most recent Selectboard meeting. Moran felt that the committee had issued a recommendation on the issue and that things hadn't changed much. Lindberg noted that the Selectboard asked for more information from Webster and Hodgdon, and that the Finance Committee should be granted time to review any new information before reaffirming or changing our recommendation. Pierce felt that the Selectboard should be challenging the public works department to think creatively, to find ways to maintain service without the expense of a new piece of equipment. Scheier noted that this boiled down to a "level of service" issue, and that while voters do vote on the budget, they don't vote specifically on such purchases. Mackall wondered if there could be some sort of compromise. All members seemed to agree that this shouldn't be a rushed purchase, and that more information was necessary before the committee acted further.

6. Norwich School District:

Rhim brought up the idea originally floated by Dwinell regarding joint meetings between the Finance Committee and the Norwich School Board. Discussion on the idea surrounded the thought that such a meeting might bring better understanding between the two entities, but scheduling has been a problem in the past as both attend a lot of meetings already.

7. **Items 6 and 7 on the agenda were combined at this point: "Effectiveness of Finance Committee":** Mackall began the discussion by describing how the School Board was furious with the Finance Committee two years ago, after they met NFC guidance on the school budget but the NFC still did not endorse the budget. Pierce commented that the committee is being tuned out, and perhaps the way in which recommendations are made should be examined. Moran wondered if, in general, the committee is micromanaging too much, citing the grader as a hot-button issue that has dramatically expanded. Rhim and Moran noted that "drilling down" into a particular issue tends to lead to a loss of "bigger picture perspective". Rhim wondered if the NFC was, in fact, antagonizing people. The common theme came back to a mission statement. Moran wondered why we should be composing a mission statement and whether we should, instead, be asking the Selectboard for one. Lindberg felt that it was, in fact, the committee's job to comment on teacher hires, school spending, and the like. Moran felt that all committees and boards need to work together, and that the committee should put the onus on the Selectboard, to wit: how can we best serve you?

8. Conflict of Interest

Lindberg began by explaining to the committee that she had brought up to Rhim in an e-mail the possibility of a conflict of interest, as Rhim's wife has recently joined the School Board. Discussion ensued surrounding the town's conflict of interest policy. Mackall had to leave the meeting but stated that he did not believe there was a conflict. (Mackall left at 6:15) Pierce felt that there was no conflict, as it is not necessarily the job of the Finance Committee to disagree at all times with the School Board. It was agreed that this issue needed to be discussed by the Selectboard and not the NFC.

Lindberg moved and Pierce seconded that the meeting be adjourned.

The motion passed unanimously

Tentative future meeting date (5 PM in Tracy Hall):

Tuesday, April 12, 2011

