
MEMORANDUM

TO: NORWICH SELECTBOARD
FROM: MARY DRAKE LAYTON
SUBJECT: CONDUCT OF SELECT BOARD MEETINGS
DATE: OCTOBER 18. 2015
CC: TOWN MANAGER

Prior to our October 14, 2015 meeting Stephen Flanders proposed as an agenda item discussion of Select Board meeting conduct as reflected in the enclosed email. I opposed the discussion as I thought it unnecessary. The Select Board agreed to a code of conduct at the organizational meeting in March, with simple, clear guidelines. Although new to the role of Select Board Chair, in my judgment Linda Cook has been fair and reasonable. A roundtable discussion of how to run a meeting did not seem a worthwhile use of our time with so many pressing issues at hand, so I did not support the inclusion of this agenda item.

Our rules of conduct say that Select Board Members may submit ideas and materials for the agenda, and that acceptance may be contingent upon a vote. It appears that the request for this item was outvoted by a majority of the Board.

I was surprised and shocked to notice that Stephen Flanders and Christopher Ashley chose not to abide by this vote of the Board, but instead left their seats to make statements about how the Chair conducts meetings during the Public Comments section of the October 14th meeting. In my mind this action was inappropriate, destructive, divisive, disrespectful to the Chair, and a waste of time. A private discussion with the Board Chair would have been appropriate and seemly.

I also disagree with Flanders statement **“the main role of the chair is to help the board succeed in its deliberations-sometimes difficult when opinions differ and emotions rise. In doing so, the chair must subordinate her role as a member of the board to assure impartiality in guiding the board’s deliberations”**. It is my understanding that each Board member engages in discussion, and is free to make motions for suggested action. The democratic process then calls for a vote of each member. At times in order to establish a

direction a majority vote, not vote by consensus, is the result. This is sometimes frustrating to the minority, but it is the reality of the governing structure. The chair needs to ensure that all five members are heard. The chair is entitled to her personal opinion, and in no way is she required to subordinate her role as a member of the Board. Each of us was elected to do our best to set a wise course of action on behalf of the Town of Norwich. For any of us to do any less than that, or to take divisive and offensive action, is not going to produce a good result for the Town.

Mary Drake Layton

Stephen Flanders

Sep 28

to Ashley, Cook, Goulet, me, Fulton, Kramer

Hello Fellow Board Members,

I would like to request an agenda item for our next meeting, as follows:

"Clarifying guidance for conducting selectboard meetings (possible action item—10 minutes)"

I offer as resources:

- http://www.vlct.org/assets/Resource/Handbooks/VLCT_Selectboard_Handbook.pdf
VLCT SB Handbook (P. 35-6)
 - <https://www.sec.state.vt.us/media/711286/municipal-law-basics-2014.pdf> Municipal Law Basics (P. 18)
- <https://www.uvm.edu/crs/resources/citizens/chair.pdf> "Born to Chair" by Paul Gillies for the The Vermont Institute for Government

I feel that such a discussion could help get us on the same page.

Sincerely, Steve F.

Stephen Flanders, Member of the Norwich Selectboard
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Norwich, Vermont 05055

[802-649-1134](tel:802-649-1134) (Home)

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