

TOWN OF NORWICH
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Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of Tuesday, January 28, 2003 at 6:30

Members Present: Liz Blum; Linda Cook; Neil Fulton; Douglas Hoffman, Chair; Nancy Hoggson; Dennis Pavlicek, Town Manager; Tina Moses, Secretary.
Also Participating: Phil Dechert, Matt Freeman, Dennis Kaufman, Cheryl Lindberg, Jeff Mathias, Alison May, Henry Scheier, Suzanne Stofflet, Gordon Thomas. There were approximately 15 members in the audience at this meeting.

Hoffman opened the meeting at 6:30pm.

- 1) Approval of Agenda – Blum **moved** to approve with changes (second Cook). **Motion passed**
- 2) Public Comments –Blum said she attended an interesting meeting held by Vital Communities about setting up additional Farmers Markets. These would be on times and dates other than that of the Norwich Market which is held on Saturday.
- 3) Town Manager’s Report – Pavlicek said the Highway Department has had a well deserved break, thanks to some good, but cold weather. He said they thanked the Selectboard for giving them the gift cards. As expected most of Pavlicek’s time has been taken up finalizing the budget. He hopes it will be approved tonight. He said that Hodgdon has provided information about a future sidewalk maintenance plan and asked the Board to review it in detail. He noted that Frank Olmstead has reviewed the Affordable Housing Memorandum of Understanding and made some minor editorial changes. It has been forwarded to Bitteringer for signature and once returned will be signed here. The Corridor Committee will hold its Public Forum to discuss the upcoming steps for construction and what the project will entail on February 26, 2003 at 7:00pm. The Finance Committee has given tentative approval of the budget at hand. He has spoken with Hartford Town Manager, Hunter Rieseberg, about the proposed legislative meeting with our Windsor County delegation. They would like to put this off until after Town Meeting.
- 4) Finance
 - a) Orders on the General Fund – No warrants tonight
 - b) Legal bills – Callahan and Brady in the amount of \$1,575.00 for professional services related to the Clem appeal. Desmeules, Olmstead and Ostler in the amount of \$974 for attendance at a BCA hearing. Desmeules, Olmstead and Ostler in the amount of \$540 for professional services related to the Melendy Property. Lindberg asked if the separate check would be included in the next warrant. Pavlicek said yes.
- 5) Second Public Hearing on the budget (7:00pm) – Fulton **moved** to convene the public hearing on the budget (second Blum). **Motion passed.** Pavlicek reviewed the minor changes that had been made to the budget which was recently approved by the Finance Committee. May voiced her concern about the reserve amount being \$165,000. Pavlicek explained he utilized this number considering a 10% buffer in the numbers. Hoffman reminded this is similar to the amount reserved in previous years. Gordon said the Finance Committee voted unanimously to support the budget as presented by the Town Manager. Scheier said there is no “norm” when considering the reserve amount. He said the Town shouldn’t expect that this dollar amount will be available in future years. He said people need to understand that this number isn’t a guarantee from year to year. Fulton **moved** to close the public hearing (second

Blum). **Motion passed.**

a) Vermont Coalition of Municipalities – Freeman said if Norwich was looking for ways to enhance its impact with the Legislature then joining the Coalition is a way to do that. Fulton asked what it would cost to join. Freeman said the charge is based on the amount a town sends to the Education Fund, which would be about \$2,300. Hoffman asked how Freeman would characterize their legislative agenda. Freeman said the Coalition is looking for ways to resolve the inequities with Act 60, and they hold open discussions of alternatives with legislators and other towns. The Coalition would like to see changes basing the taxes on income and not on property taxes. Blum asked if the Coalition favored private fundraising. Freeman said he didn't know if they have a formal policy on that but some towns who are members do private funding so there is a mix of members who do and those who do not. Hoggson said she thinks it has pluses and minuses. She said maybe signing on to the Coalition in order to help work on the Killington decision is something the Board might consider. Kaufman said this is a group he has wanted the town to join for some time. He would urge the Board to seriously consider joining this time. Hoffman said he believes that Hartford voted at their last meeting to join the Coalition. He asked Freeman if he had any timeframe for the scheduling of the Killington appeal. Kaufman said when we do the reappraisal we will come up with a grand list value of approximately \$600 million. Fulton asked if there are any other organizations other than the Coalition which we might be able to join. Freeman said he was unaware of any. Fulton **moved** to join the Vermont Coalition of Municipalities. **Motion died for lack of second.** Cook felt she could not second the motion at this time due to a lack of information. She asked that we invite a member of the Coalition to come and speak to the Board and thanked Matt Freeman for bringing forth the information presented tonight. Fulton said it is clear that Norwich cannot continue to not take action on this issue and he doesn't understand why this Board wouldn't join with other towns to try and work on changing Act 60. He said it is a shame for Norwich to refuse to try to work with 55 other towns who are all working on the same goal. Hoffman said not moving forward does not indicate this is not the right way to go. He said we should wait until after our meeting with legislators so as not to close our options. Blum said she doesn't have enough information about the Coalition to make a decision at this time about joining. She said she is not convinced that they will be able to "lead us to freedom". Hoggson said she agrees with Fulton that we must begin to take action but not necessarily join the Coalition of Municipalities. She said initially it was for private fund raising. She said she can't support private fundraising but believes there might be some merit to joining them on other issues such as the work they are doing on the Killington decision vs. PV&R. She thinks it is something we should get more information on. Kaufman said the board should invite the Coalition to speak at the next meeting. Freeman said there is a wide diversity of communities who have joined for a variety of reasons. Mathias said he would urge the board to be cautious about joining any coalition. He said he hasn't seen any legislative agenda for the Coalition. Stofflet suggested the Board develop a list of what questions need to be answered so that we will be able to make the most of the meeting with them. She said she believes it would help to move this further into action. Lindberg asked what the Board is doing to get the information or are they just waiting for it to be delivered. She said it is time to get beyond sitting and talking. Hoffman said he is equally frustrated and believes the Board is trying to move forward by meeting with our legislators and attending the VLCT Legislative Day on February 12th. He said part of the problem the Board is having is that the past history of the

Coalition makes them out to be a very conservative private fundraising group. He said he believes we should invite the Coalition to speak at the next meeting and develop a number of questions which we want answered. Freeman urged the Board to move with a great deal more speed than they have. He feels the Board needs to put its stake in the ground and figure out where it wants to go in order to help the community. Fulton said the numbers are reflecting that Norwich is losing its middle class. Freeman said the average homestead value in the state is \$90,000. In Norwich it is \$171,000. He said it is of great concern as it is becoming more and more difficult for the middle class to move into town and also to stay here. Freeman said the website for this group is act60.org. Blum would like to know their position on vouchers. Cook reviewed the following questions to be added to the list for the meeting with the Coalition; a list of all towns participating, a list of the officers, a copy of their bylaws and how their monies are spent. Stofflet suggested that someone from the Selectboard should attend the scheduled meeting in the law offices of Wilson and White in Montpelier scheduled with members of the Coalition and key legislators.

- 6) Selectboard budget Recommendation to Town Meeting – Fulton **moved** to recommend the budget to Town Meeting (second Blum). **Motion passed.**
- 7) Review and Approve Town Meeting Warning Articles – Fulton **moved** to approve the warning articles as provided for the Town (second Cook). **Motion passed.** Fulton **moved** the following article - To see if the Town will vote in favor of the following resolution: “Be it resolved that the citizens of the Town of Norwich call upon the Governor and the members of the Vermont Legislature to increase the General Fund contribution to the Education Fund and to increase the education block grant or to reduce the statewide property tax rate in order to reverse the trend of increasing school property taxes.”(second Hoggson). Discussion continued on proposed verbiage for this resolution and Hoffman read the VLCT resolution aloud. **Motion passed** to pass the resolution. **Motion passed** to approve the amended warning articles.
- 8) Planning
 - a) Private Highway Specifications – Hoffman said we have never updated the specifications. They were sent to the Planning Commission and sent back to us. Fulton explained he took the Planning Commissions notes from the past and put them into a format similar to our ordinance format. Dechert said he cannot find any case where the Town is authorized to create an ordinance such as this. He said format was prepared as it was so that it would be easier for the Selectboard to modify if necessary. He wonders why it would be an independent ordinance and what advantage it would have. Cook **moved** to accept the substantive part of the proposed ordinance and that the Chair or Town Manager will speak with VLCT or Olmstead to see if it can be an ordinance and if not a policy (second Fulton). **Motion passed.**
- 9) Correspondence - none
- 10) Selectboard
- 11) VLCT Resolution related to Act 60 – Fulton **moved** to adopt the VLCT Resolution as presented (second Cook). Fulton **moved** to amend the resolution changing the Now, Therefore, be it resolved to read NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Norwich Selectboard calls upon the Governor and the members of the Vermont Legislature to increase the State General Fund contribution to the Education Fund and to increase the education block grant or to reduce the statewide property tax rate in order to reverse the trend of increasing school property taxes. (second Cook). Scheier suggested the Board work to adopt two resolutions. One to show support of VLCT’s resolution and one to handle Blum's desire

to reflect our support of the Brigham Decision. **Motion to amend** the VLCT Resolution passed. Hoffman **moved** to amend the Whereas to read – Whereas, the Norwich Selectboard supports the principles and spirit of the Vermont Supreme Court Brigham Decision; (second Blum). **Motion passed.** The **motion passed** to amend the resolution.

- a) VLCT Legislative Day – Hoffman said February 12, 2003 is VLCT Legislative Day and Hoffman urged as many board members as possible to attend.
- b) Appointments
 - i) Advance Transit – Blum **moved** to appoint Sharon Racusin as an alternate to the Advance Transit Board (second Hoggson). **Motion passed.**
- c) Article for Happenings and Town Report – Hoggson said it was odd that the Town Report had to reflect the fiscal year versus the actual year timeframe. May said the auditors put together the annual report each year and it is their request to follow the fiscal year. Blum **moved** to authorize Hoggson to revise the annual Selectboard submission to the Town Report so that it can be approved and submitted into the Town Report as long as it passes inspection by each Board member (second Hoggson). **Motion passed.**
- d) Minutes of Selectboard Meeting
 - i) December 10, 2002 – Fulton **moved** to postpone (second Hoggson). **Motion passed.**
 - ii) January 14, 2003 – Fulton **moved** to postpone (second Cook). **Motion passed.**
- e) Fulton **moved** to approve the letter to Liz Russell thanking her for the easement on the former Sise property and authorize the Chair to sign (second Blum). **Motion passed.** Fulton **moved** to adjourn (second Blum). **Motion passed.**

Next Regular Meeting – February 11, 2003 at 6:30 PM

Approved by the Selectboard on February 11, 2003

By, Kristina Moses
Selectboard Secretary

Douglas W. Hoffman
Selectboard Chair