

Minutes of the Special Selectboard Meeting of Wednesday, August 15, 2012 at 6:30 PM

Members present: Christopher Ashley, Chair; Ed Childs; Linda Cook; Stephen Flanders; Keith Moran; Neil Fulton, Town Manager; Nancy Kramer, Assistant to the Town Manager.

There were about 33 people in the audience.

Also participating: Roberta Alexander, Watt Alexander, Carey Callaghan, Phil Dechert, Matt Herbert, Karen Jackson, Jim Masland, Norm Miller, Doug Robinson, Nate Stearns, Jim Tobin, Steve Voigt, Graham Wallace, Suzanne Wallace.

Ashley opened the meeting at 6:30 pm.

1. Public Comments. Miller spoke briefly about the article on Cell Tower Health Risks already submitted to the Selectboard by Byrd.
2. Finance – Board to Sign Accounts Payable/Warrants (Action Item). Fulton mentioned that the General Fund warrant included 1.5 million dollars to the Norwich School District. After some discussion, Childs **moved** (2nd Flanders) to approve Check Warrant Report #13-5 for General Fund in the amount of \$1,583,800.49, for Town Reappraisal Fund in the amount of \$9,368.64, for Recreation Fund – Tennis Court in the amount of \$23,000 and for DPW Grant Match Fund in the amount of \$112,788 for the period from 8/9/12 to 8/15/12. **Motion passed.** Flanders **moved** (2nd Childs) to approve Accounts Payable Warrant #13-4 dated August 15, 2012 in the amount of \$1,634.05. **Motion passed.**
3. Radio Communications System and Tower (Discussion/Possible Action Item). Fulton reviewed the discussion information on the Norwich communications tower including the 7 plus 1 tower simulcast system and tower information. The tower location would be 26 New Boston Road at a height of 180 feet. Fulton also discussed the antennas and panels that might be on the tower. The plan is to have a small building on a concrete pad to house equipment. VTel will provide the backup generator if the Town goes with that option. Fulton also reviewed the three funding options. Option 1 is the \$275,000 bond vote. Option 1a shows some costs being covered by a Homeland Security grant as well as the bond. Option 2 has VTel obtaining all permits, except FCC licenses for Norwich equipment, as well as building, owning and maintaining the tower. Fulton's memo to the Selectboard includes a table showing the potential bond impacts of the three options. The bond authorization language being presented to the voters provides flexibility to the Board on the bond amount and term. Fulton recommended that if the VTel option is chosen and a grant is received for the police equipment that the financing period be 5 years or less. A draft letter of intent for the communication tower agreement with VTel was attached to the memo. Cook asked some questions regarding lease costs and revenue from rental of the tower space. Afterwards Ashley said that the Board had made a decision on the location and to build a tower at their July 11th meeting. The decision tonight is on VTel. After some questions regarding the time frame, the public use exception in the zoning regulations and public input, Stearns, speaking as Chair of the Finance Committee, said the Committee encourages the Selectboard to accept the VTel offer. Masland, speaking on behalf of ECFiber, said he believes the problem could be handled using the ECFiber network and small antennas on telephone poles. Fulton said he had met with Thomae and technicians Thomae brought in to discuss. The cost of the transmitters/receivers with antennas is high and would run at least 2.5 million dollars and will not efficiently meet the needs of public safety. Herbert spoke briefly about the need for public safety people to be able to communicate and said he thought the Town was lucky to have the VTel offer.

Herbert feels the health issues have been well vetted by Hitchcock. Alexander said he appreciates the time that has been put into the process, but believes the Zoning Regulations height restrictions should be considered. Flanders has reviewed the project as if it needed to be in accordance with the Norwich Zoning Regulations and he believes the Regulations do have an exemption for public good. Other residents present spoke about the location of the tower, concern with health risks and coverage issues. Cook asked if the Board would have to approve the final contract with VTel and Fulton said the Selectboard would need to authorize the Town Manager to sign the document. Cook said she is concerned about the visual impact of the tower and VTel's control over rental of unused space on the tower. At this time, Ashley read the bond article to be voted on August 28th and emphasized that the vote is not on the tower being built. Fulton briefly reviewed the Act 248a process for the tower. Afterwards, Ashley said he is going to vote against going with VTel because he believes new technologies will come and he prefers the Town have ownership of the tower even though it will cost more money. Ashley supports the tower being built.

Flanders **moved** (2nd Childs) to authorize the Town Manager to sign the Letter of Intent for Communications Tower Agreement with VTel. **Motion passed 3 to 2** (yes – Moran, Childs and Flanders; no – Cook and Ashley).

4. Preparation for the Informational Meeting of August 23, 2012 for the August 28, 2012 Special Town Meeting (Discussion/Possible Action Item). Fulton will prepare a short PowerPoint presentation that will lay out the process and costs. The Board also discussed fielding questions such as what happens if the article is defeated and whether or not the Town can back out of the Letter of Intent.

5. Review of Next Agenda (Discussion/Possible Action Item). Ashley said a preliminary draft had been sent out to the Selectboard for review and some revisions had been made. After some discussion, the agenda with minor changes was accepted.

Cook **moved** (2nd Flanders) to adjourn. **Motion passed**. Meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm.

Approved by the Selectboard on September 12, 2012.

By Nancy Kramer
Assistant to the Town Manager

Christopher Ashley
Selectboard Chair

Next Regular Meeting – August 22, 2012 at 6:30 PM

Pending Items:
None

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