

Minutes of the Special Selectboard Meeting of Wednesday, January 16, 2013 at 6:30 PM

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

There were about 46 people in the audience.

Also participating: Roberta Alexander, Watt Alexander, Ames Byrd, Carey Callaghan, Georgina Forbes, Mary Fowler, Joe Helble, Nancy Hoggson, Rebecca Holcombe, Dennis Kaufman, Bonnie Munday, Rick Otto, Sarah Poston, Sharon Racusin, Demo Sofronas, Warren Thayer, Irv Thomae, Priscilla Vincent.

Ashley opened the meeting at 6:30 pm.

1. Possible Bond Article for Tower and Communications System Improvements for Town Meeting Warning (Discussion/Possible Action Item). Fulton said VTel has retained a Project Coordinator and a legal firm to coordinate the 248a process. The site survey, soil borings, environmental analysis and wetlands delineation are completed. Site and access design and tower design are almost completed. Fulton then reviewed the grants received. There is a HSGP grant for \$92,370 which expires in June, 2013 that cannot be extended due to it being FY 2010 federal monies. The AFG grant has a performance period ending February 23, 2013 which extensions will be asked for. The next VMBB bond sale is scheduled for the end of July. The money would be available in late August. Fulton estimates that this would cause a 6 to 12 month delay in building the tower with the possible loss of some grant funds. Fulton then reviewed the costs. Under the lease/purchase arrangement with VTel, the Town would need to borrow \$115,000 and pay it back over a 5-year period. Fulton then reviewed the costs of doing a \$325,000 or \$420,000, if grant monies are lost, bond over a 10, 15 or 20-year period. Questions were asked regarding maintenance expenses, why a \$275,000 bond no longer applies and cost per taxpayer. People present pointed out the importance of the community having a chance to vote and dissatisfaction with the VTel choice. Fulton responded that he has had a number of conversations with VTel and they were very responsive and positive. Moran pointed out that the Selectboard does not want to nix the VTel deal without an alternative route. Afterwards, Ashley **moved** (2nd Cook) to warn a bond article for the tower stating: "Shall general obligation bonds or notes of the Town of Norwich in an amount not to exceed \$325,000, subject to reduction from available state and federal grants-in-aid and other financial assistance, be issued for the purpose of financing the construction of a radio communications system including a communications tower on terms acceptable to the Selectboard?" **Motion failed 2 to 3** (yes – Cook and Ashley; no – Flanders, Childs and Moran). Board members then spoke about the risk involved due to the need for the tower, the delays that a bond vote would create, possible grant losses and added expenses and Town support for the tower. Further questions were asked by townspeople regarding buying out VTel's costs to date, visual and health impacts of the tower and the number of signatures needed on the petition.

2. FY14 Budget (Discussion/Action Item). Fulton said he was contacted by three Selectboard members with suggested changes to the FY14 budget. After review, he is proposing a budget with a FY13 to FY14 increase of \$687 or 0.02%. The tax rate increase would be approximately 2.64%. After consulting with Jim Barlow of VLCT, Fulton is proposing that the Windsor County tax be removed from the budget and shown as a separate item on the tax bill. After some discussion of process, the Board asked for a page by page discussion of the proposed budget.

Page 1 - Town Manager's salary has changed to \$97,894, Admin. Assist. Wages and Strategic Planning have dropped to zero. Public comments were that they hoped the Town will stick with the original compensation plan as employees need to make a living wage.

Page 2 – Record Restoration changed to \$5,000 to fund a study. Assistant Clerk Wage changed to \$18,218, 20 hours, with an article to increase the hours to 40. There was discussion regarding: adding more money to restoration, the cost of the study, Assistant Town Clerk hours and Town Clerk's salary.

Page 3 – Finance Director wage changed to \$57,422. There was discussion regarding: Finance Director salary and Finance Assistant wages.

Page 4 – Planning Director wage changed to \$57,422. Assistant wage was questioned.

Page 5 – Recreation Director wage changed to \$57,422. There was discussion regarding: Recreation Assistant and revenues.

Page 8 – Cruiser Designated Fund was changed to \$10,000.

Public Works Department – Tree Warden budget has been moved to Buildings & Grounds. At this point, Sofronas spoke about and showed pictures of trees on Town property near his house that he believes need to be removed. Changed Class 3 Winter Purchased Services to \$5,000. Changed Designated Fund – Equipment to \$135,000. Changed Designated Fund – Sidewalk to \$0. Moran initiated a discussion of cutting \$47,000 from the Public Works budget that included reducing special projects, dust control, roadside mowing and purchased services. The majority of the Selectboard did not support those cuts.

After discussion, a majority of the Board supported the top 3 salary increases and the increases proposed in assistants' wages. The Board also agreed to increase the Town Clerk's salary to Grade 20, Step B on the Schedule C plus 2.04% chart.

Flanders **moved** (2nd Childs) to recommend that Town Meeting approve a gross spending General Town Budget of \$3,996,441. **Motion passed 3 to 2** (yes – Ashley, Childs and Flanders; no - Cook and Moran).

3. Selectboard

- a) Review of Next Agenda (Discussion/Possible Action Item). Approval of the Town portion of the Town Meeting Warning will be on the agenda for January 23rd.

Cook **moved** (2nd Childs) to adjourn. **Motion passed**. Meeting adjourned at 9:04 pm.

Approved by the Selectboard on February 27, 2013.

By Nancy Kramer
Assistant to the Town Manager

Christopher Ashley
Selectboard Chair

Next Regular Meeting – January 23, 2013 at 6:30 PM

Pending Items:

None

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