

Minutes of the Special Selectboard Meeting of Monday, August 25, 2014 at 5:00 PM

Members present: Christopher Ashley, Chair; Linda Cook; Stephen Flanders; Dan Goulet; Keith Moran; Neil Fulton, Town Manager.

There were five people in the audience.

Also participating: Mary Layton.

Ashley opened the meeting at 5:00 pm.

1. Ashley explained to the members of the public that the format of the meeting was a roundtable on the topic of the results of the Town Survey, so that input from the public would be limited to the topic and would be reserved for the end of the meeting.

2. Ashley invited members, who had prepared discussion points for the meeting, to summarize them briefly.

- Flanders referred to an analysis that he had circulated to Selectboard members and noted that the open-ended questions were informative, but difficult to compile in a statistical manner. He noted that the Department of Public Works (DPW) received a high positive response to the question, "What municipal services benefit you the most?" He explained that not all respondents answered the open-ended questions.
- Moran emphasized the strong public preference to locate the police and fire facilities at their current site; the amount of additional taxes that respondents would be willing to pay for facilities replacement or remodeling; that a majority felt that the level of taxation would be likely to cause them to leave town, someday; and that respondents would prefer no increase in the level of Town services.
- Ashley noted that: the survey appeared to adequately represent the range of opinions held by townspeople; residents are content with the current level of DPW and police services; a majority would support a tax increase to pay for needed facility improvements and to mitigate the Town's impact on global warming; there is a gap between the perceived state of the current police, fire and DPW facilities and the desired state that the respondents feel they should be at.
- Ashley also noted that a very large majority of our citizens report that they receive their information about municipal government activities from sources that are **not** Town sources - Norwich Listserv 78%, Valley News 73%, Word of Mouth 59%. If the Selectboard wants a better flow from Town sources, we need to create new vehicles to deliver it to the public.

3. Ashley received further input from Goulet and Cook, who emphasized the impact of taxation on those least able to pay and on the question, whether taxation is a cause for people to leave town. Other members spoke to these topics and noted that Norwich's municipal tax rates have remained lower than those of surrounding towns and its growth rate low, but its school tax rates and their rate of growth are significantly higher. The discussion addressed whether the school system attracts people who vote for those higher, increasing budgets and then leave after their children have enjoyed the benefits of the education provided. Cook also advocated improved communication of municipal affairs to the public, especially those without internet access.

4. Ashley invited public comment.

- Mary Layton suggested that the survey had yielded useful information. She requested a more informative Town website to better convey costs and time frames of Town projects. She noted that, since most people rely on word of mouth, the Listserve and the Valley News for information about Town affairs, the Town government would do well to use these media more effectively.

Ashley adjourned the meeting at 5:50 pm.

Approved by the Selectboard on September 10, 2014.

By Stephen Flanders
Selectboard Member

Christopher Ashley
Selectboard Chair

Next Regular Meeting – August 27, 2014 at 6:30 PM