

Minutes of the Meeting of the Norwich Board of Listers

29 September 2017, 10:00 am, Tracy Hall

Present: Cheryl A. Lindberg (Chair), Kris Clement (Listers); Herb Durfee (Town Manager); Jonathan Bynum (Clerk & Scribe)

Absent: Dennis Kaufman (Lister)

Lindberg opened the meeting at 10:08 am.

1. Review and Approval of Agenda

Lindberg suggested reordering the agenda and deferring discussion of item 4 to the next meeting. Clement **moved** (2nd Lindberg) to adopt the revised agenda as suggested. Motion **passed 2-0**.

2. Public Comments

None.

5. Contract Assessor

Lindberg and Clement expressed concern about the language contained in the Contract Assessor contract.

Durfee would like the trio of the Listers, the Contract Assessor and the Town Manager to put aside their differences, avoid saber-rattling and work together for the good of the Town in an attitude of mutual civility. All parties recognize that the Listers are ultimately responsible for the Grand List. The Contract Assessor must explain to the Listers all changes from the previous Grand List, and must provide written memos to the Listers on properties involved in the grievance/BCA process, explaining what is relevant to the assessment of that property.

Lindberg and Clement stressed their good intentions to act in the best interest of the Town, and their willingness to work cooperatively with the Contract Assessor towards the mutual goal of benefitting the community by providing the most equitable Grand List possible.

Lindberg asked whether the current contract with the Contract Assessor could be amended to reflect the reporting structure required by statute. Although Durfee expressed reservations about the structure of the contract as written, he said that it does conform to statute and prefers to let it sit until it expires, then improve the language in the next version to include scope of work, deliverables, and timetable. He said that the contract language should be no obstacle to the Listers and Contract Assessor working together productively.

Lindberg said that the Listers would in due course provide to the Selectboard suggested changes to bring a future contract in line with statute, and that the next contract should be put out to bid. She feels that the language of the contract has contributed to past problems between the Listers and Contract Assessor.

She would like to see the Listers return to the office as a presence, and for the Listers to have complete access to everything in the office, including computers and software. Additionally, the nomenclature adopted on the website, in the Town Report, and in the names “Assessor Department” and “Assessing Clerk” reflect a marginalization of the Listers that she feels needs to be corrected. Lindberg would also like to see the Listers be responsible for drafting the department’s budget.

Durfee recommended that the Listers take a gradual, conciliatory approach to this process, and begin with the low-hanging fruit.

Clement observed that dealing constructively with personality conflict is a necessary part of being in business. The tenor of the Selectboard meeting indicated that most of the Contract Assessor's supervision should be from the Listers, not the Town Manager. The Listers need to be updated on ongoing inspections. There was discussion of the importance of face-to-face meeting between the Listers and Contract Assessor, and the fact that the Listers were not consulted on the Contract Assessor's office hours, which do not allow a meeting time that Clement is available to attend. Clement noted that the Assessor job description is part of the contract and includes the requirement to attend evening meetings.

Lindberg said that the grievance schedule in June always seems to her to be very rushed, and to be arranged to accommodate the Contract Assessor's schedule, without much input from the Listers.

There was discussion of possibly setting up email accounts for the Listers on the Town server or through gmail. Currently emails to listers@norwich.vt.us are forwarded to the Assessing Clerk. It was agreed to postpone reaching a conclusion on this subject until Kaufman could be present.

Durfee said that he plans to have a meeting with Bill Krajeski to discuss various issues raised when Krajeski is next in Norwich.

Lindberg and Clement said that they were eager to hear the outcome of this meeting, and were keen to work with the Town Manager and the Contract Assessor to move forward.

Durfee left the meeting at 12:08 pm.

3. Approval of Minutes of Lister Meeting of 22 September 2017

Clement felt that the draft minutes did not adequately reflect the Listers' stated willingness to move ahead and work with the Contract Assessor cooperatively. There was discussion of the mechanics of Lister minutes under the open meeting law. Lindberg was to email the Secretary of State's Office for clarification of an issue to do with draft minutes. It was agreed to postpone further discussion of the draft minutes until Kaufman could be present. The Listers suggested items that should appear in the minutes of 29 September 2017.

In view of the length of the meeting, it was agreed to postpone discussion of the remaining agenda items to a later date.

12. Any Other Business

The next meeting was tentatively set for Friday, 29 September 2017 at 10:00 am, pending Kaufman's availability.

Clement **moved** (2nd Lindberg) to adjourn at 1:01 pm. Motion **passed 2-0**.

Approved by the Board of Listers on 20 October 2017.

Cheryl A. Lindberg
Chair, Norwich Board of Listers