

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, January 23, 2019 at 6:30 pm

Members present: John Pepper, Chair; Claudette Brochu, Vice Chair; Linda Cook; John Langhus; Mary Layton; Herb Durfee, Town Manager; Miranda Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

There were about 12 people in the audience.

Also participating: Linda Gray, Demo Sofronas, Omer Trajman, Cheryl Lindberg, Don McCabe, Lynnwood Andrews, Jack Cushman, Norman Levy, Bob Gere, and Roger Arnold.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to proceed with the agenda as drafted.
2. Public Comment. No public comments were offered.
3. Selectboard Annual Report. SB members viewed and discussed the draft report prepared by Pepper. SB members made various suggestion for edits and agreed that Pepper would type up the edits, provide the revised report to SB members, and then submit the report for inclusion in the FY18 Town Report. Cook **moved** (2nd Langhus) to accept the report prepared by John Pepper and authorize Pepper, if needed, to complete the report based on the Selectboard discussion at their 1/23/2019 meeting, and provide feedback by 1/25/2019. **Motion approved unanimously.**
4. Selectboard Financial Policy #1 – Approve Amendments. Layton summarized the suggested revisions of the SB Financial Policy #1, based on work done by Layton and Cook. Cook introduced to the meeting some handwritten notes of suggested edits (which will be included with SB correspondence for the next SB meeting). Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to approve Selectboard Financial Policy #1, as recommended for amendment. After some discussion, Layton withdrew the motion and Langhus seconded the withdrawal. SB members declined to act on this matter and instead will refer the policy draft to the Finance Committee for their input and they will report back to the SB.
5. FYE 2020 Budget. Durfee summarized the latest changes to the budget, as included in the SB packet for 1/23/2019. The budget total as proposed is \$4,226,793, which represents at 6.12% spending decrease from last year and will result in a 1.25% Town tax decrease. Langhus said that he proposes adding an administrative staff person to handle communications for the Town and grant writing. Cook expressed opposition to this idea because the department heads are already writing and obtaining grants. Also, the other functions can be done by existing staff members. Brochu agreed that she does not want to add a staff person at this time. Layton said she is not in favor of adding a staff person and that such a person would wear a lot of different “hats”. Pepper said that in the “regular” world, adding this kind of position makes sense. Pepper asked for Durfee’s input. Durfee said that the communications director positions he found listed in Vermont averaged \$80,000 salary and up. Durfee agrees that having someone to handle communications would be good, and that a grant writer would help capitalize on grant opportunities, but would not necessarily pay for the position salary. Langhus asked how much time the town manager spends in handling communications/outreach. Durfee said he usually does not have any time to do press releases. No action was taken on the Langhus proposal. Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to recommend to the voters a FYE 2020 Town budget of \$4,226,793 exclusive of outside appropriations and other monetary articles. During discussion, Durfee said that Colleen Hammond has resigned her position effective January 31, 2019 and also Roberta Robinson has announced her intention to retire no later than June 30, 2019. Durfee suggested that, instead of hiring a replacement for Hammond, he would hire a new

finance director and have that person overlap with Robinson for transition purposes. Durfee suggested that the Board of Listers would hire their own part-time assistant. At this point, Langhus amended (2nd Brochu) his motion to add \$45,000 in order to cover a potential increase in staff insurance costs resulting from hiring a new person, resulting in a revised Town budget amount of \$4, 271,793. **Motion passed 4 to 1 (no- Cook).**

6. a. Special Article Discussion/Approval. Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to include Articles 8, 9, and 10 in the 2019 Town Meeting Warning, as drafted in the SB packet with the exception of updating the number in Article 8 to \$4,271,793 and the number in Article 10 to \$3.5 million, and to change the work “authorize” in Article 10 to “reauthorize”. **Motion passed unanimously.**

b. Non-Binding Article Petitions. Langhus read aloud the proposed non-binding Articles 34 and 35, which call for the Town to reduce its use of fossil fuels by 5% per year, and for local climate protection and resilience strategies to be a principal theme of the next Town Plan. Langhus also read aloud a proposed Article 36, which would authorize the allocation of \$50,000 from the Conservation Commission Designated Fund for conservation easements to establish a trail network for public use. The following residents spoke in favor of Articles 34 & 35: Don McCabe, Lynnwood Andrews, Jack Cushman, Norman Levy, Bob Gere, Linda Gray, and Roger Arnold. Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to include in the Town Meeting Warning Articles 34 and 35, non-binding petitioned articles, and to include a new Article 36 regarding initial work to develop a commuter trail network in Norwich with \$50,000 from the Conservation Commission Designated Fund, and to renumber the subsequent articles in the 2019 Town Meeting Warning. **Motion passed unanimously.**

c. Approve Warning. Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the Town portion of the 2019 Town Meeting Warning, as amended, and to include the school district article information, when provided to the Town Clerk’s office. **Motion passed unanimously.**

7. Approve Additional Purchase of Winter Sand. Layton **moved** (2nd Brochu) to approve the purchase of additional winter sand from Twin State Sand & Gravel, per the purchase order dated 1/15/2019. **Motion passed unanimously.**

8. Consent Agenda. Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion passed unanimously.**

9. Sidewalk Plow Employee Request to Include VMERS. Durfee explained that the person we hired part-time to plow sidewalks has worked many hours for the Town. Durfee learned recently that the employee’s hours working for the Norwich Fire District had been reduced an equivalent amount when the employee temporarily moonlights for the Town. Because of this decrease in Fire District wages, the employee’s VMERS contribution by the Fire District had also been reduced. Durfee said the employee has been doing an excellent job on the sidewalks. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to authorize an increase in compensation to include contribution by the Town of Norwich to the sidewalk plow employee’s VMERS plan in an amount appropriate to said employee’s wage and VMERS plan parameters. After brief discussion, Langhus said he thought this was a reasonable request and the Town Manager has the authority to do this as part of his usual job duties, without the need for SB approval, which is why Langhus will not vote for the motion. **Motion passed 3 to 2 (no- Brochu and Langhus).**

10. Union Negotiations Update. Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to find that public discussion of a labor relations agreement with employees would clearly place the public body at a substantial disadvantage. **Motion passed unanimously.** Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to enter executive session under 1 VSA §§ 313(a)(1)(B) in order to discuss a labor relations agreement with employees

and to include the Town Manager. **Motion passed unanimously.**

The Selectboard moved into executive session at 9:39 pm.

Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to enter public session. **Motion passed unanimously.**

At 9:44 pm the Selectboard moved into public session.

11. Future Meeting Agenda Items. SB members agreed to the following as agenda items for the next meeting:

- Internal Controls
- Selectboard Goals
- Communications Committee
- Affordable Housing Fund Criteria
- Town Manager Performance Review
- Union Negotiations Update – possible executive session
- Marion Cross School 5th Grade Class Presentation re: Recycling

At 9:48 pm, Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to adjourn. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:48 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on February 13, 2019

John Pepper
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – February 13, 2018 – Meeting at 6:30 PM

PLEASE NOTE THAT CATV RECORDS ALL REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE NORWICH SELECTBOARD.