

Agenda for the Special Selectboard Meeting Thursday, March 28, 2019

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comment (Discussion)
3. Selectboard Goals Planning – John Carroll, Facilitator
4. End of Meeting Discussion
5. Adjournment

Next Regular Meeting – April 10, 2019 at 6:30 PM

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Memorandum

To: Norwich Selectboard

CC: Miranda Bergmeier, Herb Durfee

Date: March 17, 2019

Subject: Position Paper for 2019 SB Goals Meeting

I am writing this paper in order to share my thoughts on policy, process, and values before we go through the goals setting process at our March 28th meeting. I would like feedback about whether this is helpful to others and if it would be a good addition to our Select Board practice. It makes sense that feedback, if any should take place at the meeting. I do not pretend that this piece is particularly comprehensive, but more of a snapshot of how I am feeling and what I am thinking.

I think **collegiality is off to a great start**. I am very excited to work with this Select Board.

There are five policy areas I would like to work within. My first priority is to continue to work with **Financial Controls**, which includes a couple of unanswered questions on the VLCT checklist, and work on **Financial Policies** that cover areas of budget management, the undesignated fund, grants and special funds. From my point of view there is confusion and overlap between what Linda Cook and I had worked on, what Linda and John Langhus had worked on, the decision to have the Finance Committee review all Financial policies, that we may in one case be confusing a Town Manager procedure with a town policy, and we ignore the need to be clear about the Town Manager's statutory financial duties and obligations. These are **process concerns**.

Also in the financial area I would like to set up a framework for a **Town of Norwich Master Financial Policy** that includes in addition to Town financial policies, those specific to the Listers and the Town Treasurers offices. A second priority is to work on a **Capital Budget** to assess the current condition of town infrastructure and review how we are planning to maintain and improve it in the future.

I am also interested in **Affordable Housing, Sustainable practices**, and in **Improving internet and Cell phone service**. I think these are all vital for economic development and quality of life.

In our goal setting session last year Herb noted with amusement that we each brought our professional outlook to bear on the process of goal setting. I am concerned that we might have a situation such as in the parable of the three blind men and the elephant. One feels the trunk and says what is before us is a hose, the second one feels the leg and says that it is obviously a tree, and the third feels the tail and says, no, it is obviously a rope. **It would be great if our shared perspectives led to a greater "perception of the elephant."**

The **glacial feedback loop** of Select Board decision and process is sometimes very confusing. How to make sure **important topics** are revisited in a timely manner? How to give topics that we will vote on enough **due diligence and reflection** that we can be reasonably sure that we

are making good decisions? How to take advantage (from my professional experience) of **teachable moments**? How to have **balanced, fair, and efficient meetings that allow public input** and also allow us to complete our work? **How best to make difficult decisions** that we think are in the best interest of the town but may be unpopular?

In terms of values and perspective, I am informed by my undergraduate education at **Goddard College** in the natural sciences and art education, and graduate education in educational leadership at **Union Institute and University**. This may have resulted in the point of view that **life is a lesson plan**. My involvement in the **Unitarian Universalist Church** and being the **mother of two children who grew up in Norwich** also affects my outlook. As you may have noticed, I can tend to push back on issues that I do not yet understand or feel comfortable with. I hope the pushback will help the conversation. Now that I am older and perhaps wiser I hope not to make impulsive decisions or lose my temper. I think it is important to try to make decisions that will be best for the town as a whole, and to try to think through all relevant factors. I am concerned that as a Board, we do not make shallow or impulsive decisions in order to “get things done.”

In completing a master’s degree thesis I had to eliminate verbiage in order to end up with no more than fifty pages. I was given a book by my advisor that showed how at least two thirds of verbiage can be stripped out. I think this is a worthwhile goal for **Select Board communication**. It harkens back to the old Vermont saying, “Talk less, and say more.” Given our short bursts of time in meetings to make decisions perhaps it would be best to come prepared, then try to choose our thoughts and words to accomplish as much as possible.

I like to be part of a team, but if I think I am being treated disrespectfully, or if I do not feel comfortable supporting an issue, you can count on me to push back. I do not anticipate that this will be an issue.

In **framing an argument** I find it helpful to think about extreme positions because thinking of the unthinkable in both directions helps the middle path. Being the Devil’s Advocate sometimes helps my thinking. I do not like to support an idea unless it makes sense to me.

In three situations I think in terms of **parables**. For instance, a biblical parable has to do with **sowing seeds**. If the seeds land on rocks, or in the water, or in too dry an area, they will not grow. I see a direct analogy with the current fervor with the bag ordinance. The climate science has been clear for decades, and a few people have been acting on this information, trying to make a difference by changing their behavior. Now it seems that many more are rightfully concerned and may be willing to make sacrifices and personal life style changes to help out, as well as demanding that corporations or municipal government enact large scale reform. The fertile ground seems to be here to allow the seeds to grow.

Another **parable** concerns whether a **rich man** can truly have a religious outlook. The answer given is “Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven.” In this wealthy town, can we really care about those

who are struggling? Can we allow some affordable housing to give others a break? Can we notice that some citizens may be driven out due to gentrification? Given the voting record of the Town that supports many services with a corresponding high tax rate, how can we protect vulnerable citizens who are in the minority of voters?

A third **parable** is one I associate most with John Pepper, and his concern that citizens be heard. It is the **Mary and Martha** parable. Mary and Martha open their house to JC, a stranger. Martha fusses about how the house is dirty and there is not enough food to share with the stranger. Mary listens to the guest and what he has to say. In meetings, I am more like Martha. I can tend to be impatient with the public, especially if they take a lot of time to say their piece. Pepper always reminds us that listening to the public is our priority. I think he has a point and I will try to be more patient.

There is probably a parable about **extreme changes** but I do not know what it is. Climate change and income inequality are always on my mind. They are serious problems that affect us locally and globally. Although I am not anti-business I think there is plenty of need for sensible regulation. On a national scale I think Citizens United, where corporations are considered people, could well be balanced with a Constitutional Amendment that gives Nature legal standing. We are arrogant to think we can continue to degrade the environment, like Icarus flying too close to the sun. Our behaviors are leading us to ecological collapse and perhaps mass extinction that includes human beings and most other life forms.

Lastly, can there be “**economic dignity**” in our world? Here is food for thought from an article by Gene Sperling in Democracy, a Journal of Ideas, Spring 2019:
<https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/52/economic-dignity/>

Mary Layton

labor-force, and *'to improve the efficiency of Town equipment'*. Alternatively, any one of these tactical initiatives could be undertaken as a stand-alone project, unrelated to any larger strategic objective.

Operational improvements are usually even narrower in scope; they may be short-term, or they may continue indefinitely. Operational improvements can be stand-alone initiatives – or they can be in support of tactical initiatives and/or strategic objectives. So, for example, in support of the hypothetical tactical initiative above (to right-size the Town labor-force), specific operational improvements might be implemented -- such as *'bench-marking other towns' staffing levels*, *'updating employees' job descriptions*, and *'strengthening job-skills cross-training'*.

As you can see, strategic objectives, tactical initiatives, and operational improvements are often linked and hierarchical. Together they form a pyramid -- with the strategic objective at the top, tactical initiatives in the middle, and operational improvements as the foundation. Alternatively, tactical initiatives and operational improvements can be undertaken individually, unrelated to any strategic objective.

Goal-setting in connection with elective initiatives – whether strategic, tactical, or operational – works best when we give thought to how to describe the goal in terms that are clear and unambiguous.

Eventually, as Board consensus takes shape around specific goals, you'll want to turn them into "SMART goals", where:

S = specific
M = measurable
A = achievable
R = relevant
T = time-bound

By the end of your goal-setting process, for each goal, try to ...

- characterize the goal in specific language;
- list the measures you will use to document progress and success;
- be ambitious and realistic, so the goal has a good prospect of being achievable;
- target the initiative to be relevant to the larger purpose it is supposed to serve;
- force the project to be time-bound: identify key milestones and their deadlines.

Town of Norwich Selectboard: Setting Board Goals

John Carroll
March 2019
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In thinking about setting Selectboard goals, it's useful to distinguish between "*structural activities*" and "*elective initiatives*".

Structural activities are required by statute or shaped by norms of Board practice. Structural activities usually are routine, in the sense that they normally happen on a regular schedule – monthly, quarterly, semi-annually, annually, etc.

- procedural (e.g. annual Board-leadership elections, semi-annual evaluation of TM performance, etc.);
- statutory (e.g. preparation and approval of annual municipal budget, annual approval of Grand List, etc.).

(There's a saying, "*The routine drives out the non-routine*" – which means that procedural and statutory activities can become so time-consuming that there's little energy and time left for attending to the big ideas and the important questions – the strategic stuff. So, it's often worth questioning procedural activities (and even statutory obligations): "*Do we really need to be doing this? What value are we adding? How could we do this faster or more simply? What would happen if we stopped doing this?*")

Elective initiatives often arise from concerns of the Townspeople and/or from Board-members' interests, expertise, or concerns. Elective initiatives usually are non-routine, in the sense that they arise in response to circumstances or perceptions that change over time. Elective initiatives are of three general types:

- Strategic objectives;
- Tactical initiatives; and
- Operational improvements.

Strategic objectives are about the big ideas -- deep and lasting improvement, the long-range vision. For example, a Board plan to '*bring Town spending into alignment with similar communities in the Upper Valley*' would be a strategic objective. Strategic objectives are usually so large in scope that their implementation takes a long time -- a year or even two.

Tactical initiatives are usually narrower in scope and shorter in duration. Tactical initiatives are often undertaken as part of implementing a larger strategic objective. So, for example, in support of the hypothetical strategic objective above (to bring Town spending into alignment with similar communities), separate tactical initiatives might be '*to reduce energy consumption in Town buildings*', '*to right-size the Town*