

Minutes of the Special Selectboard Meeting of  
Monday, February 10, 2020 at 7:00 pm

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

There were about 14 people in the audience.

Also participating: Steve Flanders, Demo Sofronas, Gary DeGasta, Jim Maguire, Tracey Hayes, Robert Gere, Bob Haynes, Melissa Horwitz.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to proceed with the agenda as drafted.
  
2. Public Comment. Steve Flanders said the SB as a whole has a range of options for action as a supervisor. Flanders discussed a variety of options and said the SB has the responsibility to use progressive measures for managing the Town Manager (TM). Demo Sofronas voiced his support for the TM, saying that Sofronas has worked with the TM on various projects with the American Legion and the Lions. These projects include the veterans' memorial at Tracy Hall and the flagpole at the Public Safety Building. Sofronas suggested to the SB that they work with the TM to remedy any problems. Gary DeGasta said that Durfee has been a great help with projects. He has had an open door and has been great to work with. DeGasta said that Durfee has been more receptive than prior TMs. Jim Maguire said that he was the chair of the Veterans Memorial Committee, and Durfee was very good to work with, both receptive and responsive. Tracey Hayes also said that Durfee is good to work with. Hayes said that the Public Safety Building project was underway when Durfee came on board and Durfee was more open to working with the residents of the Norwich Senior Housing to address their concerns about the new building. Robert Gere said that Durfee has been very helpful in the work of the Energy Committee. Gere also said that the town employees he has spoken to have been positive about their dealings with the TM. Bob Haynes said that Durfee has been exceptional in his ability to communicate, and has been professional in his dealings with Haynes. Melissa Horwitz said that she serves on the Planning Commission and has found Durfee to be responsive and knowledgeable. Horwitz said she thinks keeping Durfee as TM will provide stability for the town, and the SB should continue to work with Durfee on any performance issues.
  
3. Correspondence. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Langhus) to accept the correspondence, as listed in tonight's agenda. **Motion passed unanimously.**
  
4. Herb Durfee Presentation. Durfee thanked those who spoke on his behalf. Durfee told the SB he did not solicit this input. Durfee said that people have said it would be good for Norwich to continue to work with him as TM for the sake of stability. Durfee said that he submitted another letter to the SB (included in this meeting packet) in order to express his desire to continue as Norwich TM. Durfee said he submitted to the SB a suggested framework listing deliverables in order to address performance issues. Durfee said he wants to work with the SB as collaborators to determine performance priorities. Durfee said he has taken Layton's suggestion of using resources for improving communication. Durfee said he wants to work on his communication with the SB and wants to stay in his position in Norwich.
  
5. Herb Durfee Contract. Pepper said he ran for the SB 3 years ago to improve the tone of discourse in government. Pepper said the SB is here to serve Norwich and does their best. Pepper said the conversations with the TM since the last meeting have been productive. Pepper said he has heard nothing but support for Durfee from people. Pepper then invited other SB members to

comment. Brochu said she has heard from townspeople who feel they have been spoken to by Durfee like no one wants to be spoken to. Brochu said some have been afraid to comment negatively about their interactions with Durfee. Brochu said the SB spent hours back and forth on their evaluation for Durfee. Brochu said she understands the implications of not renewing Durfee's contract. She thinks, however, that the SB can find the TM of our dreams and truly believes there is a perfect match out there. Brochu is afraid that if they extend the contract and things don't go well, the SB will be behind the 8 ball. Brochu has learned through supervisory experience about when it's time to part company with an employee. Arnold said the SB evaluation was a SB evaluation, agreed upon by all SB members. The SB's disagreement was in how to move forward. Arnold sees a way forward to work with Durfee in a contract. Arnold said that the SB may not have centered the community enough in its decision to not extend the TM contract. Arnold wants to improve relationships; he wants to reduce harm and recognizes that conflict is not always harm. Langhus said that Durfee should be very proud of the outpouring of support shown at this meeting. Langhus said that most people, but not all, who spoke to Langhus were in support of extending Durfee's contract. Langhus asked Durfee if he feels supported by the SB. Durfee said that mostly, he does. Durfee is hoping to work with the SB as a group of 6 to figure things out going forward. Having more contact with SB members – especially the chair – would be helpful. In general, Durfee feels adequately supported. Langhus asked if Durfee was surprised by any of the evaluation points. Durfee said not really, but he wants help from the SB in understanding their priorities and wants time to improve, following that additional clarity. Langhus said his perception of this situation has been difficult. Langhus thinks that balancing the TM's day-to-day getting things done with the big picture strategic things is difficult. Langhus feels that Durfee is very good at the day-to-day, but not good at strategic things. Langhus thinks there has not been good teamwork between the SB and the TM thus far. Pepper said his main concern is that Durfee has not been good at finding financial solutions. Pepper thinks that what happened this summer could have been avoided. Pepper said that no one will come out and say negative things about Durfee. Pepper said he is personally willing to enter into discussion about continuing Durfee's contract.

Arnold **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Layton) to enter into discussion with the Town Manager regarding a new contract for a period beyond the expiration of his current contract. **Motion passed 3 to 2 (yes- Arnold, Layton, Pepper; no- Brochu, Langhus).**

8. Adjournment. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Brochu) to adjourn. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 7:48 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on February 26, 2020

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Claudette Brochu  
Selectboard Chair – at time of signature

Next Meeting – February 12, 2020 – Meeting at 6:30

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