

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, March 17, 2020 at 6:30 pm

Members present: Claudette Brochu, Chair; Roger Arnold, Vice Chair; Robert Gere; John Langhus; Mary Layton (via videoconference); Miranda Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager; Jennifer Frank, Police Chief and Acting Town Manager. Absent: Herb Durfee, Town Manager.

There were about 3 people in the audience.

Also participating: Linda Cook, Fire Chief Alex Northern, John Pepper.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to proceed with the agenda as drafted.
2. Public Comment. No public comment was offered.
3. Selectboard Comment. Brochu said that for COVID-19 screening, people should go to their primary care provider for possible referral, if the provider deems it appropriate. As of this meeting, there are 10 cases of COVID-19 in Vermont.
4. Info from VT Emergency Management & VT Dept. of Health. Fire Chief Alex Northern spoke to the SB and said the Fire Dept (FD) has been gearing up for the last month. Plans are in place and necessary equipment has been acquired. Northern said he has no concerns about the FD doing food/grocery delivery from Dan & Whit's. Arnold commended the FD for that work; he is concerned whether FD has the capacity to continue the deliveries if the need increases. Arnold asked if there is a way to gather volunteers to increase the ranks of delivery drivers. Northern said he has gotten calls already from counters, and he is confident they will be able to handle the need. Brochu asked if Northern has shared his list of volunteers; Northern said that Deputy Chief Matthew Swett has access to the list, as well. Police Chief & Acting Town Manager Jennifer Frank said that the state of VT is working closely with NH to meet needs resulting from the virus. Frank said there is a new law passed that allows patients to get an additional 1 refill on their prescriptions without needing to see their physician. The Police Department (PD) has put in a request for personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff members. Arnold asked about the town's collaboration with area towns. Frank said that Norwich has been having multiple daily conversations with the neighboring towns. Also, there is a program under 211 to identify people who are vulnerable for whatever reason.
4. Open Meeting Law. Brochu said that, as of now, at least one member of the body must be present at a public meeting place and other members can conference in remotely, as long as they are identified.
5. Options for Conference Call Services & Accommodating for the Public's Use. The telephone conference call failed today, and the SB switched to using Zoom, which Layton is using for this meeting. Arnold said that the SB can provide means for the public to participate in meetings remotely. It would be helpful for CATV to post videos on YouTube, also. Langhus said the best options for video conferencing are Zoom and GoToMeeting because they have the highest capacity. GoToMeeting capacity is 150 seats; Zoom is 100 seats. John Pepper said he prefers Zoom over GoToMeeting. Langhus suggests going with Zoom. Gere said he has been spending the last 2 days setting up virtual high school offerings. Gere has been using Zoom; their business account is \$200/month because you have 10 hosts at \$20/month each. Each host has up to 300 seats. Arnold said the Pro account is \$15/month. Layton said Zoom was very user friendly. Gere said that dial-in capability costs extra. Arnold said that he doesn't see it as crucial to have dial-in capability; he

advises that the town enroll in the \$15/month program with Zoom. Langhus said the town should buy the dial-in capability for an additional \$100 to allow access for people who don't have wi-fi or other means to access an online meeting. Brochu asked if we should wait to add the \$100 cost, or do it right at the start. Layton said she sees this more from the standpoint of SB members not being able to attend. After brief further discussion, Langhus **moved** (2nd Arnold) to enroll the town for an initial trial of Zoom for \$14.99 per month, plus \$100 per month dial-in option, to be paid out of the general administration budget. **Motion passed unanimously.**

6. Briefing on Continuity of Operations Plan. Frank recounted recommendations to the SB [a document detailing these is attached to these minutes]. Among these recommendations were: Tracy Hall (TH) will be limited to business-only traffic and people should telephone town offices whenever possible, rather than visiting TH. All non-essential programs in TH have been cancelled through at least April 6, 2020; the building will be open, but please do not come unless it is absolutely unavoidable. The Town Manager's office will be open but only 2 visitors at once, and there is a limit of 15 minutes per visit. Town Clerk's office is also open, but the drop gate will remain down to allow for adequate social distancing. Per Frank's recommendation, Langhus **moved** (2nd Gere) to waive all late fees for dog licenses until May 1, 2020 and to allow registration of dogs by mailing updated rabies certificates to the town of Norwich. **Motion passed unanimously.** The land records will be open, but by appointment only and reviewers/searchers must wear gloves during their visit. Voting registration must be done online at the Vermont Secretary of State. Brochu asked about a possible petition to reconsider TH renovations. Langhus suggest the town look at possible alternative venues for voting. Frank said the FD office is closed and no burn permits are being issued. The PD encourages phone calls, not visits; visitors are limited to the lobby; non-essential services, such as VIN verifications, may be cancelled. DPW workers continue to perform their usual duties, but the garage is closed to the public. Recreation programs are cancelled through 4/6/2020; the Recreation Director's office is closed to visitors; the director will be available 7am-1pm for emails and phone calls. Planning & Zoning is closed to foot traffic; people can contact the office via phone or email; the director is working from home. Frank spoke to all employees and department heads to ask about successors and also to other employees about telecommuting. PD can give a PD laptop to the Town Manager to borrow, if necessary. Frank is working with the town's IT provider on remote access for employee computers; Frank is also talking to the school in the hopes of borrowing school laptops, if necessary. DPW Director has been out sick for a few days; the crew is managing in his absence. The Transfer Station will continue with normal hours but restrict the number of vehicles at a time; in order to maintain safe social distancing, staff cannot physically help visitors with trash or recycling items; ticket purchasing is an issue to limit exposure and possible transmission with money changing hands. Brochu asked if it's possible to eliminate cash at the transfer station and also expressed concern about traffic issues resulting from a 4-car limit. Frank said that there was room on the grounds for traffic to line up, if necessary. Brochu relayed information from Cheryl Lindberg regarding the Listers, saying that they will need to complete the Grand List by April 1st and must come into their office in Tracy Hall to work on their software. SB members discussed whether that software has a remote access capability. Frank said she has told department heads to put any activities or expenses that result from COVID-19 on a log in case of future FEMA reimbursement availability. Brochu asked if salary/wages for employees who must stay home might fit into this category. Frank said possibly yes; the PD employees are making note of all such information. Frank said she has been looking at essential and non-essential employees and how to pay them; Frank believes personally that the town should take care of its employees. SB members agreed. Brochu thinks that we should fully pay employees if they are at home because their workplace is closed. Langhus agrees with that instinct, and if an employee has been asked not to be at work, or if the employee is asked to self-quarantine. Gere said he agrees and said it might be possible for employees to use this as an opportunity for doing training such as online training while not at the office. Frank said we are collecting inventories of supplies in our locations. This situation is affecting our budgets – purchasing N95 masks, for instance. Some expenses are being avoided, as well. Frank has been in daily contact with the Town

Manager and has been collaborating with him extensively. Brochu wants to put out to town employees that if they must stay at home for whatever reason they will be paid. All SB members agreed with this. Linda Cook thanked all the department heads for their work on these plans to manage the situation. Cook said Frank is doing an excellent job as Acting Town Manager, juggling multiple additional duties; Cook suggested the SB consider giving Frank an additional stipend for this work. Frank said she declines that offer. Frank said she will distribute a written plan for public release ASAP, which will summarize her spoken comments to the SB. [This written plan is attached to these minutes.] SB members agreed that it would be best for all committees and boards not to meet in person. Langhus asked if the SB should direct employees to work at home if they can. Brochu said she wasn't sure if that's with the SB's power. Langhus said the SB should consider how they want to communicate to employees about working from home. Chief Northern said he is able to isolate in his office at the FD. Langhus said at his company they first offered to their employees to work at home, and then they moved to closing the office and telling people not to come to work. Brochu said she would like posters on the outside doors telling people not to enter if they have symptoms. Brochu said she thinks Frank's restrictions are sufficient. Gere asked if it's more appropriate to direct employees to determine what's time-critical and what can be shifted to working at home.

7. Town Plans To Support Residents In Significant Self-Isolation Cases. Brochu said she wants to discuss how we can coordinate efforts for help to citizens. Arnold talked about neighboring towns' methods of dividing the town and asked what Norwich is doing. Frank said there is a group that is working together to identify and meet community needs. Frank said she can reach out to that group to ask if someone from the group might want to lead as a coordinator. Frank said the town is divided into section, which correspond to population density and school bus routes. Frank suggested that we reach out to all involved service groups to ask if they would work together to form a COVID response team, for example. Arnold said he wants to be sure we have plans in place to avoid exhausting regular volunteers as this situation develops. SB members discussed how to proceed with next Wednesday's meeting. Brochu said she will be present in TH and Arnold will, as well.

9. Adjournment. Langhus **moved** (2nd Arnold) to adjourn. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:12 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on June 10, 2020

Claudette Brochu
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – March 25, 2020 – Meeting at 6:30

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