

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, May 13, 2020 at 6:30 pm

This meeting was conducted via teleconference using ZOOM, in order to maintain appropriate physical distance under COVID-19 precautions. Members present: Claudette Brochu, Chair; Roger Arnold, Vice Chair; Robert Gere; John Langhus; Mary Layton; Herb Durfee, Town Manager; Miranda Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

There were about 30 people in the audience.

Also participating: Gina des Cognets, Cheryl Lindberg, Craig Layne, Chris Rimmer, Stuart Richards, Mary Sellman, Linda Cook, Jaci Allen, Jeff Goodrich, David Hubbard, Susan Hardy, Erich Rentz, Jess Phelps, Andrew Scherer, Omer Trajman.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to alter the agenda by item #5 to just before the Planning Commission applicants appointment agenda item.
2. Public Comment. Gina des Cognets said that she needs to leave the meeting at 8:30 pm. Cheryl Lindberg said the Listers have decided to re1quieest an extension from the state to file the grand list abstract.
3. Consent Agenda. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion passed unanimously.**
4. Public Hearing on Woody Adams Conservation Tract Proposal. Craig Layne, of the Conservation Commission, gave a presentation regarding the Woody Adams Forest Conservation Project. Layne presented slides describing the project; these slides will be included as correspondence in the SB meeting packet for 5-27-2020. Brochu then opened the public hearing. Chris Rimmer spoke in favor of the conservation project, saying that it would be a great benefit to Norwich and the larger community. Stuart Richards asked what tax dollars will be spent and whether skiing and mountain biking activities will be permitted on the land. Layne said that no tax dollars will be spent, and skiing, snowshoeing, and biking will be permitted. Richards said he supports this project. Mary Sellman said she supports this project; it will help counteract global warming and be available to the public for recreational use. Brochu then closed the public hearing.
5. Planning Commission (PC) Membership Numbers. Layton said that Jaci Allen has said it is hard to get a quorum with 9 members and the Town Plan work is complete now; Layton said she supports the idea of contracting the PC to 7 members, its original number. Jaci Allen said she feels strongly that the PC can be more efficient with 7 members; the normal number among towns' PCs is 5 to 7 members. Jeff Goodrich said he doesn't have a strong preference for 7 or 9 members, but 7 seems more workable. Stuart Richards said he supports staying with 9 members because there is a lot of work to be done and that work can be spread out among more people. Also, there are some highly qualified applicants. Jaci Allen pointed out that the Affordable Housing Subcommittee needs members. Arnold said that he doesn't want to revisit the PC membership number question on a cyclical basis. Gere said he finds generally that smaller boards are more efficient. Langhus said he tends to support what current PC members prefer, and both Allen and Goodrich have said that 7 is a good number of members. Arnold said, also, that newer PC members have said they support having 9 members. Durfee said that there will be an opening on the Development Review Board, which is another opportunity to participate and serve Norwich in planning matters. Brochu said she doesn't support going down to 7 members. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to set the number of Planning Commission members at 7. **Motion passed 4 to 1 (no- Brochu).** Gina des Cognets said that she supports the work of the PC and thanked the SB members for their service to Norwich. Stuart Richards said he would have preferred the SB decide the number of PC members before they solicited applicants.

4. Selectboard Appointments. David Hubbard said he would like to serve another term on the Norwich Selectboard Minutes – 05/13/2020

Conservation Commission. Langhus **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint David Hubbard to the Conservation Commission for a 4-year term to expire on April 30, 2024. **Motion passed unanimously.** Susan Hardy said she would like to continue serving on the Energy Committee and is especially interested in continuing work on an Ebike lending program. Roger Arnold spoke in support of Hardy's work on the Ebike program. Gere **moved** (2nd Langhus) to appoint Susan Hardy to the Energy Committee for a 3-year term to expire on March 31, 2023. **Motion passed unanimously.** Erich Rentz said he is excited to become involved as a volunteer on the Energy Committee. Brochu asked what Rentz has been doing involving the Energy Committee. Rentz said he's been attending the Energy Committee meetings and has helped with some projects. Gere **moved** (2nd Layton) to appoint Erich Rentz to the Energy Committee for a 3-year term to expire on March 31, 2023. **Motion passed unanimously.** Jess Phelps said that he is eager to get involved in the Historic Preservation Commission's work. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to appoint Jess Phelps to the Historic Preservation Commission for a 3-year term to expire on April 30, 2023. **Motion passed unanimously.** Jeff Goodrich spoke in support of Deborah Brien's application to the Historic Preservation Commission. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to appoint Deborah Brien to the Historic Preservation Commission for a 3-year term to expire on April 30, 2023. **Motion passed unanimously.** Andrew Scherer said that he wants to serve on the Solid Waste Committee, and he sees solid waste issues as being a part of the climate issue. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint Andrew Scherer to the Solid Waste Committee for a term to be determined in the future. **Motion passed unanimously.**

6. FY21 Budget in Light of COVID-19 Revenue. Brochu said that she wants to talk about how the COVID crisis will affect the town's budget. Langhus said this would be a good subject for the Finance Committee to study. Arnold said that much of this topic will be something for the TM (Town Manager) to work on and some fiscal management will be for the TM and Finance Office. Arnold sees a possible need for extra town spending to support the town's citizens. Layton wondered how Norwich has been affected. Durfee said the latest available unemployment numbers show 1.3% unemployment in Norwich, but the new April numbers have yet to be released. Durfee said that at the next SB meeting he will present the latest financial information, also cash flow analysis of the 1st 6 months over the last 5 years. Brochu said she asked about income sensitivity property tax when she talked to Norwich's state legislative delegation. Arnold expressed concern about austerity motives and concerns overshadowing the needs of the town – infrastructure, technology, etc. Arnold said that he wants the SB to discuss capital planning before sending the Finance Committee any task. Langhus said we will need to have town departments look at actually cutting budgets to deal with lower tax income. Omer Trajman said the Finance Committee (FC) will be happy to do research on the questions about likely economic effects. Brochu wants to look at what appropriations the town can hold off on spending, to save money. Layton said that she is not suggesting the SB do nothing; she wants the SB to gather more information before acting. SB members agreed to ask the FC to address questions that the SB wants answered/researched and take up the topic at the next SB meeting.

7. Break. SB members suspended the meeting to take a 10-minute break.

8. Town Manager Report. Durfee's written report is in the SB meeting packet. After brief discussion, Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to reappoint DPW Director Larry Wiggins as representative and Town Manager Herb Durfee as alternate representative to the TRORC Transportation Advisory Council. **Motion passed unanimously.** Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint John Langhus as representative and Rod Francis as alternate representative to the steering committee regarding the Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator. **Motion approved 4 to 0 (abstained – Langhus).** Durfee said that the Rte. 132 box culvert is in dire need of repair and the town is looking to apply for a structures grant from the State of Vermont to address the serious safety issues resulting, based on the local VTrans contact's advice. Durfee explained that he is looking for the SB's approval to apply for the VTrans grant. Langhus suggested that the DPW Director and the TM put together a list of 10 priority projects. Brochu **moved** (2nd Arnold) to authorize the Town Manager to submit an application to VTrans by May 15, 2020 for a construction grant. Such authorization is given with the proviso that no local funding will be spent on the project without further approval from the Selectboard. **Motion passed unanimously.**

9. Article 7 Work (Climate Emergency Designated Fund). SB members agreed that Langhus and Gere will work together on the Article 7 fund use policy and report back to the rest of the SB.

10. Beaver Meadow Scoping Consultant. Durfee said the proposal review team recommends hiring DuBois & King to do the scoping study work because they submitted a proposal with lower cost, lower number of hours, and a robust public input process. Brochu asked if this grant will be delayed by the State, due to COVID budget constraints. Durfee said there is no indication of that. Brochu wants to make the town's spending contingent on an assurance from the state that they will be releasing the funds. Arnold asked how this project came about. Durfee said that the neighborhood residents approached the TM and police department about concerns regarding speeding motorists on Beaver Meadow Road and the lack of safe places for pedestrians. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to select the preferred firm of DuBois & King as recommended by the proposal review team to serve as consultant to complete the Beaver Meadow sidewalk Scoping Study in an amount not to exceed \$28,465.91 with up to 80% of that amount being reimbursed from the 2019 VTrans Bicycle & Pedestrian Grant Program, and this study will not be conducted until the town is sure it will receive the funds from VTrans. **Motion approved unanimously.**

11. COVID-19 Update. Durfee said he will be publishing a COVID-19 update in the next couple of days.

12. Policy Discussion. SB members agreed that Brochu and Layton will work on fund balance policy; Gere and Arnold will work on the Animal Control Ordinance; Arnold and Langhus will work on the Conservation Fund Policy; Brochu will work on the tax collection policy and town facilities fee schedule; TM will work with Brochu on the tax collection policy. SB members agreed to a timeline for reviewing the draft policies.

13. Dog Licensing Fines. Layton said she agrees with the Town Clerk's request to waive dog license late fees. Layton **moved** (2nd Brochu) to waive late fees for dog licenses through July 31, 2020. **Motion approved unanimously.**

14. Executive Session – Personnel Issue. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to make a finding that premature public knowledge of the Selectboard's position relative to civil litigation would place the town at a substantial disadvantage. **Motion approved unanimously.** Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to enter executive session under 1 VSA § 313(a)(1)(E) – "...pending or probably civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party..." – to discuss a personnel issue and to include the Town Manager and/or Town legal counsel. **Motion passed unanimously.** The SB entered executive session at 9:44 pm.

Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to enter public session. **Motion passed unanimously.** The SB returned to public session at 9:53 pm.

15. Executive Session – Union Contract Update. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to make a finding that premature public knowledge of the Selectboard's position relative to ongoing union contract negotiations would place the town at a substantial disadvantage. **Motion passed unanimously.** Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to enter executive session under 1 VSA § 313(a)(1)(B) – "...labor relations agreements with employees..." – to discuss union contract negotiations and to include the Town Manager. **Motion passed unanimously.** The SB entered executive session at 9:53 pm.

Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to enter public session. **Motion passed unanimously.** The SB returned to public session at 10:07 pm.

16. Adjournment. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to adjourn. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 10:10 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on May 27, 2020

Claudette Brochu
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – May 27, 2020 – Meeting at 6:30

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SELECTBOARD.