

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, December 11, 2019 at 6:30 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 8 people in the audience.

Also participating: Nick Clark, Linda Gray, Fire Chief Alex Northern, Police Chief Jennifer Frank.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to defer item #4h Dresden MOU to a future meeting.
2. Public Comment. Durfee said that \$1.799 million of the FEMA reimbursement for the July 2017 storm was received today. Brochu asked how it will be used. Durfee said roughly \$300,000 will go into the undesignated fund and to pay on the line of credit currently owed by the town. Another \$240,000 loan is outstanding for the Public Safety Building and the DPW garage. Durfee said the SB will have some discretion as to how to allocate the money.
3. Consent Agenda. Brochu asked a question about the line being used to pay contracted services in the Finance Office. Durfee said we are paying the temporary worker's wages through the Finance Assistant wage line. Langhus asked Durfee if he is concerned about any particular budget line. Durfee said he is watching the professional services expense line. SB member briefly discussed the correspondence submitted by Cynthia Stoddard regarding the town audit. Layton asked Durfee if the Cemetery Commission should have their accounts through the town's NEMRC system. Durfee said he thinks they should. Layton **moved** (2nd Arnold) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion passed unanimously.**
4. a. Regional Energy Coordinator. Nick Clark, Thetford Resident, spoke about this issue. Clark said the Hartford Energy Coordinator has told Clark that he has so far saved the town the equivalent of his salary. Clark asked the SB to pass a motion to put the Regional Energy Coordinator on the ballot for the 2020 Town Meeting as an article or as a line item in the budget. Layton said she thinks it is worth putting on the ballot and she is struggling with the notion of one person who is spread among 7 towns. Brochu said she shares some of the same concerns as Layton. Norwich is ahead of many other towns in its energy work. Brochu thinks Norwich will not get as much attention for its \$30,000 investment. Langhus said we are fortunate in Norwich to be ahead of things with energy. Langhus struggles with whether to have TRORC employ and supervise this position, rather than directly be supervised by the towns. Arnold asked if Clark thinks that the other towns would abandon the effort if Norwich doesn't participate. Clark said he thought they would. Clark said this is a 1-year pilot project and goes through TRORC because they can have access to other government agencies and services. Linda Gray said that the Norwich Energy Committee (NEC) likes the idea of an energy coordinator, but is not in favor of the proposal to split the position with 7 towns and house the position at TRORC. The NEC would prefer using an inter-local contract with 3-4 towns. The NEC is also concerned that we not ask too much of the Norwich voters or distract from bigger work to be done. Pepper thinks a regional energy coordinator is a very good idea and is fully in support of it. Gray said that NEC will not be advocating for this plan. Brochu said she thinks all of the participating towns would need to have identical language put before their voters. Layton said she supports putting this proposal on the 2020 Town Meeting ballot. Layton **moved** (2nd Arnold) to support a March 2020 Town Meeting article in the amount of \$30,669.51 for Norwich's share of a Regional Energy Coordinator position serving 7 municipalities and based at the TRORC. **Motion failed 2 to 3** (yes- Layton, Pepper; no- Arnold, Brochu, Langhus).

4. b. Budget – Public Safety. Fire Chief Alex Northern gave a brief overview of his budget proposal, including 2 line items under maintenance: safety testing and software. Northern also asked the SB to restore designated fund contributions to their FY2019 levels, because necessary purchases will empty the fund unless it is replenished this year (FY2021). Arnold asked what would Northern ask for if he could get additional funding. Langhus thanked Northern for submitting a restrained budget and asked about how much the Fire Department is looking to spend out the apparatus designated fund. Northern said they need to buy a new truck which could cost \$350,000 - \$650,000; they are working on getting bids now. SB members discussed various aspects of the Fire Dept. budget, including the ladder truck repair, dispatch services, ambulance services, and capital expenditures. Police Chief Jennifer Frank gave an overview of the Police Department (PD) proposed budget for FY2021. Frank said this town's PD is unique in some ways – 4 officers do all of the work and each work alone, with a single officer on duty at a time. The PD works very hard to save money. Frank gave an overview of the PD budget, including union contract items, such as wages. Frank highlighted animal control as an expense, of which stray cats are far and away the largest expense. SB members had questions about community policing expenses. Frank proposed an increase in equipment maintenance funding to build up funds for future repairs that will become necessary. SB members asked questions about dispatch services and about the number of officers; do we need 4? Frank said the NPD runs a 24 hour-a-day, 7-days-a-week force and that would be practically impossible without 4 officers. Frank said there is a need to build up the cruiser fund to plan for replacing the aging vehicles. SB members had questions about the police cruisers. Brochu would like the Public Safety Building to look at connecting to ECFiber.

4. c. Police computer funding source. Langhus **moved** (2nd Brochu) to reconsider the 11/20/19 motion authorizing use of Communication Study Designated Funds for the purchase of NPD computers. **Motion approved unanimously.** Langhus **moved** (2nd Brochu) to authorize the expenditure of up to \$16,300 for the purchase and installation of six computers (based on a pending buy three get three free offer, with at least four being mobile data communication terminals), and to authorize use of Police Special Equipment Designated Funds for four mobile data communication terminals and use of the General Administration Designated Fund for the remaining two computers related to administrative position computers in the Police Department. **Motion approved unanimously.**

4. d. Designated Fund – Communication Study fund spending/correction. Durfee explained that the Communication Study Fund was fully spent on the Tower Bond, per the voters' decision at town meeting. SB members agreed to defer items #4e, 4f, and 4h to a future meeting.

4. g. VLCT/PACIF response from Selectboard. Langhus **moved** (2nd Brochu) to approve the VLCT-PACIF Risk Management report, as presented by the Town Manager. **Motion approved unanimously.** Langhus **moved** (2nd Brochu) to conduct the 1st reading of the Whistleblower Protection Policy, as presented in the 12/11/19 Selectboard packet, with possible adoption at the 12/18/2019 Selectboard meeting. **Motion approved unanimously.**

5. Town Manager Contract – executive session. Layton **moved** (2nd Brochu) to enter executive session under VSA §313(a)(3) to discuss the Town Manager contract. **Motion approved unanimously.** The SB moved into executive session at 9:31 pm. Layton **moved** (2nd Pepper) to enter public session. The Selectboard moved into public session at 10:07 pm.

7. Future Agenda Items. SB members anticipate the following future agenda items:
December 18:

- FYE 2019 Audit Review (possible presentation by Batchelder Associates)
- Planning Commission - Town Plan Update
- FYE 2021 Budget – General Government, Remaining Line Items, & Capital Budget
- Whistleblower Policy

8. Adjournment. At 10:07 Layton **moved** (2nd Arnold) to adjourn. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 10:07 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on January 8, 2019

Claudette Brochu
Selectboard Chair – at time of signing

Next Meeting – December 18, 2019 – Meeting at 6:30

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