

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, July 8, 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 5 people in the audience.

Also participating: Omer Trajman, Linda Cook, Cheryl Lindberg, Bonnie Munday, Police Chief Jennifer Frank, Linda Gray.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to absorb agenda #11 (Tech Upgrade Report) into the Town Manager's report.
2. Public Comment. No public comments were offered.
3. Consent Agenda. Layton asked to pull the 6/25/2020 minutes out of the consent agenda. Gere **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the consent agenda, excluding the 6/25/2020 minutes. **Motion passed (4 yes, Brochu abstained)**. After brief discussion, SB members agreed to approve the minutes with corrections suggested by Brochu, except for her suggestion to delete language about the "possible emergency fund". Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to approve the 6/25/2020 minutes as discussed. **Motion passed unanimously**.
4. 1. Appointments – Finance Committee. SB members and Omer Trajman discussed the length of Finance Committee terms and agreed that terms are for 3 years, per the Finance Committee charge. Linda Cook said that she would like to join the Finance Committee and she has extensive experience working with town budgets. Cook said that she can bring historic knowledge to the committee. Cheryl Lindberg said that she thinks Cook will make an excellent addition to the Finance Committee. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to appoint Linda Cook to the Finance Committee for a 3-year term to expire on June 30, 2023. **Motion passed unanimously**.
5. Special Town Meeting. Layton said that she had attended the recent BCA meeting and provided information discussed at that meeting. Layton said there were about 415 absentee ballots requested thus far. The BCA developed a plan to do mobile voting at the Norwich transfer station. The workers will have PPE and there will be traffic control. After the voting, the locked ballot boxes will be returned to Tracy Hall for tabulation. Arnold asked about how we will handle the online informational meeting on August 10, 2020. Layton said that the BCA did not discuss that because it is not within their purview. The informational meeting is the SB's responsibility. Bonnie Munday said that people will vote in their cars, driving through and putting their ballots into boxes. Because people will be in their own cars, there will be no worry about extra cleaning or distancing. Police Chief Jennifer Frank asked if other locations were considered. Munday said they chose the Transfer Station because it allows for a one-directional traffic pattern. The BCA hopes that most people will get absentee ballots, and will not need to come to the drive-through voting. Munday said they are sending out absentee ballots as quickly as possible. Munday asked the SB to mention the new polling location as often as possible. SB members discussed options for the August 10th informational meeting via Zoom.
6. Regional Energy Coordinator (REC) Update. Langhus said that the steering committee to which he was appointed was supposed to consult and participate in the hiring decision for the REC.

Langhus said that this did not happen, however. Instead, TRORC took control of the process. Langhus is disappointed in this, but doesn't necessarily recommend rejecting the proposed agreement. Durfee said one good thing in the agreement is that Norwich gets a larger number of work hours from the REC, given the larger amount of money the town is contributing to the REC wages relative to the other communities involved, but Norwich doesn't need another energy audit. Arnold would like to see some revisions to the proposed contract. Layton said it doesn't seem like a good contract for Norwich. Brochu agreed. Arnold suggested that we have the Norwich representative on the steering committee (John Langhus) relay to TRORC the SB's suggestions and questions about the proposed contract. Linda Gray said that she isn't on the steering committee, but she was on the planning committee that worked to develop the REC concept. Gray said there are other things that an REC can do that would help Norwich, rather than another energy audit. SB members agree not to approve the contract as presented and to ask Langhus to bring the SB's questions and concerns to TRORC and the other steering committee members.

7. 1. Fund Balance Policy. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to adopt the Fund Balance Reserve Policy contained in the Town Master Financial Policy as amended. **Motion passed unanimously.**

7. 2. Tax Collection Policy. Brochu asked when a town decides to go to tax sale on a delinquent taxpayer. Durfee said it is at the discretion of the delinquent tax collector. Brochu said she wants the SB policy on delinquent taxes to spell out what needs to be done so that it will be clear; Durfee agreed. SB members discussed the need for a clear policy. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to hear as a 1st Reading to amend as a "strike all" the currently adopted Tax Collection Policy and Procedure as presented and amended, and to schedule the 2nd Reading with possible adoption on July 22, 2020. **Motion passed unanimously.**

7. 3. Policy on Posting of Police Standards. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to hear as a 1st Reading for the adoption of a Policy on Posting of Police Standards as presented and amended, and to schedule the 2nd Reading with possible adoption on July 22, 2020. Arnold said that the version of the policy in the packet is different from the last meeting. Arnold, Durfee, and Chief Frank met this afternoon to discuss the draft policy; specifically, what language to use. Arnold said he appreciated the conversation and found it very helpful. They still need to address the issue of training. Chief Frank said she agrees with Arnold's summary of the conversation. Arnold said he wants to make a change to the motion. Layton then withdrew the motion; Langhus concurred. After brief discussion, SB members agreed to make the same motion again. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to hear as a 1st Reading for the adoption of a Policy on Posting of Police Standards as presented and amended, and to schedule the 2nd Reading with possible adoption on July 22, 2020. **Motion passed unanimously.**

8. Penalty for Non-Compliance with Homestead Declaration. Langhus and Arnold agreed they are in favor of eliminating the penalty. Layton said she supports keeping it. Cheryl Lindberg said she supports keeping the penalty because there is substantial work for town staff when someone is late in filing. A new tax bill has to be generated and mailed, as one example. Another reason to keep the penalty is that, in Norwich, there is a built-in incentive not to file one's homestead declaration, because the non-residential tax rate is lower than the residential rate. The penalty helps to encourage people to comply with the filing requirement. Langhus said he sees this as overly punitive. Lindberg said there is an appeal process if someone is charged the penalty. Arnold said the SB can look at lowering the penalty rate. Durfee said the state statute lists particular circumstances that qualify as hardships for a successful appeal. Langhus suggested the SB cut the penalty in half to 4%. Layton **moved** (2nd Brochu) to re-affirm the current 8% penalty for non-compliance with the Homestead Declaration requirement. **Motion passed 3 to 2 (no- Arnold, Langhus).**

9. Town Manager Report. Layton suggested that the Blue Ribbon committee mentioned in the Norwich Selectboard Minutes – 07/08/2020 Mtg

TM report be a listening group so that citizens can come forward. Durfee said he wants to provide that opportunity. Arnold said that he believes the makeup of the group is inherently flawed; he suggested that it not include town employees. Brochu asked about the reference to the ladder truck in the Fire Chief's report. She would like to talk to the TM about that at another time. Brochu also asked TM to find out why we haven't done any culvert work and report back to the SB.

10. Pavement Marking. Durfee said that pavement marking will happen in high-priority areas only. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to authorize the expenditure of up to \$24,988.40 for pavement marking and to authorize the Town Manager to execute a contract with L&D Safety Marking to complete that work. **Motion approved unanimously.**

11. Tech Upgrade Report and Recommendations. Durfee said he and Gere have met and have decided to break the project into smaller projects, rather than try to do the upgrades all at once. This will need to be planned as part of the next fiscal year's budget. Durfee wants to have more discussion with the SB about plans for this issue.

12. Adjournment. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to adjourn. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:11 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on July 22, 2020

Claudette Brochu
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – July 22, 2020 – Meeting at 6:30

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