DRAFT Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, December 3, 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 11 people in the audience.

Also participating: Alex Northern, Neil Fulton, Matt Swett, Doug Wilberding, Larry Wiggins, Pam Smith, Emmanuel Tesone.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to proceed with the agenda as drafted.

2. Public Comment. No public comments were offered.

3. Departmental Budget & Capital Budget Presentations. Fire Chief Alex Northern said that there are modest increases in the Fire Department's (FD's) maintenance line and office supplies. There is a large increase in hydrant rental fees assessed by the Fire District. Northern would like the SB to reinstate prior years' levels of funding to designated funds. Northern said the equipment apparatus fund should be added to, in particular. Also there are big ticket apparatus items coming up for replacement in the future, and the town should allocate funds to plan for that. Engine 2 needs replacing very soon; the FD wants approval to issue an RFP for replacement of that engine. Northern said the FD has the appropriate amount of fire vehicles for the amount of structure and property value in the town. Arnold said our ISO rating is much higher than the vast majority of other towns in Vermont. Gere asked about vehicles and whether the FD is staffed sufficiently to run all the vehicles at once. Northern said that he thinks so. Langhus said that in the last couple of years, we consciously cut back on spending because of storm event spending, and now we're on better footing, so it's appropriate to consider returning funding to higher levels, as in the past. Langhus is personally not opposed to the FD proposal for funding. Neil Fulton said he joined the FD in 1995. In 1999, the ISO rating was improved because of increased access to water in town. Fulton gave a history of the FD's acquisition of fire equipment/vehicles. Fulton calculates that the resulting insurance savings to town property owners amounts to more than $200,000. If the FD were to get rid of the ladder truck, the ISO rating would drop from 4 to 5, resulting in increases in homeowners' insurance premiums. Matt Swett said it's a good question to ask whether Norwich has the appropriate apparatus and equipment. The FD has put off purchases as long as can be done; it is time to make those investments. Doug Wilberding said that there is nearly $1 billion worth of property in town. Wilberding urges the FD to consider replacing the engine with a biofuel truck, to help Norwich attain its climate goals. Northern said the FD has been looking closely at "green" trucks. Regarding the Emergency Management budget, Durfee said that we are gradually trying to build up necessary supplies for the EOC (Emergency Operations Center), such as office supplies.

DPW Director Larry Wiggins said that the DPW has not been able to complete all its customary tasks because they haven't been funded to hire seasonal worker, as in the past. DPW requests to hire a full-time laborer to fill in various tasks. Also, the Administrative Assistant should be full-time. Wiggins discussed various increases in the DPW budget, including garage tools, food waste lime for the Transfer Station. DPW wants to replace a 2010 dump truck and are looking for funding to replace the 1981 tank on the truck. Also, they need to replace a riding mower. On capital budget projects, there is a need to replace some paving on the Route 132 box culvert. The generator at Tracy Hall

needs replacing. DPW proposes to salvage the Public Safety Building generator and move it to the DPW building/garage. Wiggins would like to build storage bins for road materials to avoid mixing those materials and the resulting waste. The DPW garage staff/break room needs to be finished, and they need to build a Transfer Station storage shed. Brochu asked about 2 grant program expenditures; Wiggins and Durfee said they would double check the numbers to make sure there is no error in the budgeted amounts. Durfee said that the structures grant was not funded for FY21, the state is rolling that grant money into transportation aid for all VT towns. Layton asked about tree removal and future need. Brochu asked if DPW could hire 2 part-time laborers rather than 1 full-time year-round person. Wiggins said there's a year-round need for labor help, not just seasonal. Gere asked about the coast of the replacement mower. Wiggins said approximately $12,500, and Gere said that electric mowers are available. Wiggins said he will explore that option.

4. Budget Next Steps & Agenda for Dec. 9, 2020. SB members agreed to submit their budget comments and suggestions to the Town Manager's (TM's) office by Monday morning (12-7-2020), when the TM office will issue a revised meeting packet that includes those comments. Also, SB members will submit rank ordering of the capital budget. Durfee said that department heads will attend the Dec. 9th meeting, as well, to be available to answer questions. Pam Smith said the town budget group of the Finance Committee (FC) has put together questions and comments and are waiting to hear back with answers. Emmanuel Tesone said the FC will need more time than next Monday to offer input. Tesone said that as the town goes through discussions, we need to be aware of dollar amounts in the budget, not just the percentages, and be aware of the fact that the town needs to fill prior year's gaps in spending. Langhus suggest ways to focus the FC's work, such as questions for the FC to address and opine on. Tesone said the FC would benefit from having more time to do its work. SB members discussed their individual thoughts on budget increases. SB members agreed they want to stabilize the tax rate as much as possible while paying for necessary expenses, especially given the fact that spending was cut back in the last 2 years so there is a need to make up for those past cutbacks. SB members discussed possible borrowing to cover the shortfall from prior years. Pam Smith said she thought the budget process should start earlier, the SB needs to be careful about the town's debt load, and we need a green fleet policy. SB members agreed to meet on 12/16/2020 for budget discussions only. SB members will provide budget worksheets to the TM's office by Thursday, 12/10/2020. The 12/9 SB meeting will be for regular SB business.

5. Adjournment. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on _____ , 2020

_____
Claudette Brochu
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – December 9, 2020 – Meeting at 6:30

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

DRAFT