

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, January 13, 2021 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 9 people in the audience.

Also participating: Pam Smith, Demo Sofronas, Cheryl Lindberg, Linda Cook, Linda Gray.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to proceed with the agenda as drafted.
2. Public Comment. No public comment was offered.
3. Appointment to Recreation Council. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint Nina Sablan as Norwich Recreation Council Junior Member. **Motion approved unanimously.**
4. Consent Agenda. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion passed unanimously.**
5. Finance Office Proposal. Durfee said he had worked with Layton and Arnold on the Finance Director search process. After the latest failed search, Durfee said we are looking at 2 options – using a temp agency or outsourcing with the town’s auditor, who would step down as auditor and we would have to find a new auditor. Durfee said we have been given 2 possible candidates from the temp agency. One candidate is not local and would work exclusively remotely, and the other candidate is local and could work here in person. Either option would be a short-term solution through the end of this fiscal year. Durfee proposes spending no more than \$50,000 for buying a temporary worker’s hours. The temp could be present for ½ to 2/3 time, for example. Layton said she prefers a person who will physically be in the office rather than a temp person who would only be working remotely. Durfee said that Becky Grammer will continue to do the day-to-day work, such as accounts payable, and the temp would do higher-level work including policies and reports. We would continue to have the NEMRC bulk time agreement to act as consultant and trainer for the temp to learn the accounting software system. Gere asked about supervision of Becky. Durfee said he will continue to be her supervisor. Langhus said this is an opportunity to see if we can make it work with a part-time Finance Director. Arnold said he supports hiring a temp as an option. Gere asked if the “remote” temp person would ever be present in Norwich. Durfee said no, he will not. SB members agreed that Durfee will continue to work with Layton and Arnold to contract for the services of one of the possible temporary workers. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to authorize a contract with Robert Half Management Resources in an amount not to exceed \$50,000 for use in placing a temporary Finance Officer. **Motion passed unanimously.**
6. Budget and Capital Improvement Budget and Plan. SB members discussed options for revisions to the budget to reduce spending and lower the tax impact. They discussed budget numbers line by line to reach consensus on the budget amounts. Pam Smith said the Finance Committee has recommended not putting any money into the sidewalk designated fund. Brochu said she supports not putting money in to the sidewalk fund. Arnold said he could fund or not fund; Gere said he would like to put money into the sidewalk fund; Layton agreed that we should put money into

the sidewalk fund. Demo Sofronas said he is glad that SB members have agreed to fund sidewalks. Sofronas said he doesn't believe the SB should cut the community policing line item. Sofronas would like to see the SB restore the full amount of \$1,200. SB members declined to do so. Cheryl Lindberg said that it isn't about whether you support sidewalks or not, it is about not having a plan for the sidewalks at this time and therefore she recommended deferring any contribution until such a plan exists. Linda Cook said she wants the SB to cut the budget further, to put the budget down to closer to a 3% increase. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to recommend to the voters an FYE 2022 Town budget of \$4,780,866 (not inclusive of other monetary articles). **Motion passed unanimously.** For detailed information, see the attached draft proposed FYE 2022 budget containing those figures agreed to by the Selectboard.

7. Town Meeting Warning and Articles. SB members discussed three possible articles for the Town Meeting warning. One such possible article concerns the Regional Energy Coordinator position. Linda Gray said that the towns who are participating with the Regional Energy Coordinator (REC) are very happy with the work of that person. Gray said the Norwich Energy Committee could use the REC's help in analyzing data, especially. SB members discussed the possibility of an article that would provide tax incentives for solar installations. SB members discussed the possibility of including an article about the Beaver Meadow Sidewalk project. The warning will be finalized and approved by the SB at their meeting on January 18, 2021.

8. Land Management Council Request for Funding. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to approve the bond reimbursement expenditure of \$1,000 as approved by the Land Management Council for forestry services provided by Twin State Forestry LLC. **Motion passed unanimously.**

9. Town Manager Report. The Town Manager's written report was included in the meeting packet. Arnold asked about the air quality report included in the packet; specifically, what are the town's next steps on this matter? Durfee said the consultant said we don't have proper ventilation in the Tracy Hall gm to host events per usual, unless the windows are kept open. The consultant suggested testing for mold and radon in the downstairs of Tracy Hall. The only events we are allowing in Tracy Hall are the blood drive and essential business in the land records.

11. Executive Session – Open Meeting Law Compliance. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) 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 Gere) to enter executive session under 1 VSA §313(a)(1)(E) – "...pending or probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party..." – to discuss a litigation issue involving zoning fees and to include the Town Manager and the Town Zoning Administrator. **Motion approved unanimously.** The Selectboard moved into executive session at 9:46 pm. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to enter public session. **Motion approved unanimously.** At 9:54 pm the Selectboard moved into public session. No action was taken in public session.

10. Executive Session – Open Meeting Law Compliance. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) 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 probable civil litigation or a prosecution, to which the public body is or may be a party..." – to discuss a litigation issue involving Open Meeting Law and to include the Town Manager and/or Town legal counsel. **Motion approved unanimously.** The Selectboard moved into executive session at 9:56 pm. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to enter public session. **Motion approved unanimously.** At 10:28 pm the Selectboard moved into public session. No action was taken in public session, other than to adjourn.

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

Meeting adjourned at 10:29 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on January 27, 2020

Claudette Brochu
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – January 27, 2021 – Meeting at 6:30

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