

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, September 23, 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 10 people in the audience.

Also participating: Linda Cook, Cheryl Lindberg, Ernie Ciccotelli, Peter Orner, Planning Director Rod Francis, Linda Cook, Linda Gray, Emmanuel Tesone, Recreation Director Brie Swenson, Pam Smith.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to remove agenda item 5 and defer item 11 to a later meeting.
2. Public Comment. Linda Cook said the SB agenda template is very helpful and also she would like to have links to materials to be presented so attendees can see it ahead of time. Cook asked if Beaver Meadow sidewalk would be constructed before the Town Plan's overall plan for sidewalks has been completed. Cheryl Lindberg asked if there is a plan to reopen Tracy Hall (TH) and is there a blood drive happening in TH? Durfee said yes, there is a blood drive happening in TH on Sept. 28th, which will adhere to strict guidelines. The drive is being permitted due to the urgent need for blood donations. Durfee said there is no plan in the near future for reopening. Layton said that she was impressed with the Trails Committee's work in protecting the stream bank for the Brown Schoolhouse Road bridge construction project. Peter Orner thanked the Town Manager for his work on the sidewalk scoping project.
3. Consent Agenda. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to approve the consent agenda, minus the correspondence regarding the solar array project. **Motion passed unanimously.** Brochu expressed concern about the proposed solar array on a ridgeline, when the Town Plan (TP) discourages such development. Langhus said the project was properly denied preferred status by the Norwich Planning Director. Layton said she would consider issuing a SB letter stating opposition to the ridgeline project, per the TP. Langhus said he thinks it's significant that this project is a private family's proposed project, not a money-making enterprise. Layton said she agrees that the TP's goal of preserving ridgelines should be paid heed, while balancing with the TP's – and town's – goal of encouraging renewable energy. Rod Francis, Planning Director, explained the application process for a certificate of public good as it relates to this project. If the project is granted a certificate of public good, the next step would be to obtain zoning approval, including information about visual impact. Linda Cook said Francis's explanation is helpful and she hopes the SB will choose to issue a letter to the PUC about this project. Linda Gray asked for clarification about the application process. Ernie Ciccotelli said the SB has grounds for issuing a letter. Also, Ciccotelli said all proposed projects should be treated the same regardless of who is the own/developer. Brochu asked other SB members whether they want to issue a letter. Layton said no, she doesn't think it's necessary, because the town/s process regarding zoning will take care of it; Arnold, Langhus and Gere agreed. Layton **moved** (2nd Arnold) to accept correspondence related to the proposed solar project. **Motion passed unanimously.**
4. Appropriation Request – John Girard Fund. Layton **moved** (2nd Arnold) to authorize the expenditure of \$3,958.00 from the John Girard Fund for the purchase of chairs, in accordance with the request by the Girard family. **Motion passed unanimously.**

5. Mt. Ascutney grant request. Per earlier note, SB members agreed to delete this agenda item.

6. Finance Committee Charge. Langhus **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the draft Finance Committee (FC) Charge, as included in this meeting's packet. SB members agreed to table the motion because the MOU was not in the packet for SB consideration and review. Emmanuel Tesone said the FC members have not been consulted by the school about the MOU which underlies the proposed committee charge. Tesone said he would want the FC to be consulted in the matter. Cheryl Lindberg said she didn't think the workload for the past FC was a problem for recruitment. Langhus said he will attend the next FC meeting to discuss the MOU and charge; SB members and Tesone agreed. **Motion withdrawn (Langhus withdrew motion and Layton withdrew her second).**

7. Town of Norwich & Norwich School District MOU. Brochu said this item was included on the agenda for informational purposes only; SB members can ask any questions they may have. Brochu asked Durfee if the MOU takes the town's DPW out of the responsibility for mowing the town/school green. Brie Swenson said no, it does not.

8. Planning Commission request re: municipal planning grant. Planning Director Rod Francis explained the background for this grant application. This year, because Norwich has an approved TP, we are eligible to apply for a planning grant, which would pay for providing assistance on the TP. Langhus and Arnold asked for a revision on the application to name Claudette Brochu as the alternate on the grant application. Ernie Ciccotelli said he takes issue with some details of the grant application and he thinks the SB should not approve this request. Brochu pointed out that the Planning Commission has already discussed and approved the proposed resolution for applying for the grant. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to approve the FY21 Municipal Resolution for Municipal Planning Grant, as included in this meeting's packet, with an edit showing Claudette Brochu as the alternate signature, and to authorize the Town Manager to apply for an FY Municipal Planning Grant **Motion approved unanimously.**

9. Revenue/Expense Report for August 2020. Durfee said the town is generally on target for the current year spending, with 17% of the FY year passed, we are at 13% spending so far, but it's very early in the FY to make projections based on that information. Arnold asked what work allowed the town to be in as good fiscal condition as we are, given COVID and other unexpected expenses. Durfee said the quick FEMA turnaround on the last event and careful fiscal attention by the town's department heads. Brochu asked how much as the town collected in taxes so far. Durfee said he will have that number after working with Cynthia Stoddard of MERC. TM answered additional questions about the financial reports.

10. FY2022 Operational and Budget Guidance from SB. Brochu said she thinks the SB should give the town manager direction about how much tax increase they would bear. Langhus wants to see budgets from department heads (DHs) showing a 10% cut, per the customary practice from prior years, and also wants to see what the DHs need, and what they want. Arnold said he can't say a particular number, and wants to see investment in technology upgrades, including the website and automation, and he wants a working group to address the issue of a green fleet policy for the town. Arnold also wants more capacity in the Recreation Dept., including an increase in staffing, and he is OK with taking money from the Police Dept. Layton said she wants to be sure we are putting enough in the designated funds to plan for the future expenses, after having emptied those funds after the 2017 storm. Layton said the SB needs to make future maintenance funding be rational. Layton said the SB should be mindful of the tax rate effects but she is not able to arbitrarily set any particular number. Langhus would like the SB to generate a future projects list in the event the town receives stimulus spending. Brochu asked Durfee what guidance he has gotten from the SB thus far. Durfee

said he is hearing from the SB to be cognizant of tough times for people, to put forward a lean budget, but provide for improvement needs. Langhus agreed to work on the green fleet issue with members of the Energy Committee and members of the public at large. Gere said the Energy Committee has been talking about green fleet technology, and it's closer now than anticipated and will cost initially more. Layton wants to keep sidewalks in mind in the budget; they are important for green transportation, too. Arnold suggested that the town manager convene a capital budget planning group. Durfee said the Finance Committee would be a good group to do that work; Durfee agreed to convene a green fleet working group.

11. Town Plan Action Items. SB members agreed to defer this topic to a future meeting.

12. Bank Loan - Brown Schoolhouse Road bridge. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to authorize the Town Manager to execute loan paperwork with Northfield Savings Bank to procure a 5-year loan for \$65,700 at a fixed interest rate of 2.25% per annum, beginning July 2, 2021 and due each July 1st thereafter, for construction of the Brown Schoolhouse Road bridge. **Motion approved unanimously.**

13. Town Manager Update. Arnold asked Durfee about the red font in the town manager report (TM report). Durfee said that all the new information is in red; same or old information will be in black. Durfee asked for SB feedback on the report; Arnold suggested that Durfee highlight updates on the SB's previous actions. Arnold asked Durfee for an update on the grants in aid projects. Durfee explained that the project had been reduced in scope. Brochu said the spacing on the report made it hard for her to read. Brochu would like Durfee to indicate priority levels of the listed tasks in each section. Langhus asked about the Solaflect agreement amendments. Durfee said he is looking for SB input about having the town's attorney review that agreement. Pam Smith asked the SB to seek an independent third-party audit of the Solaflect agreement from Day One before any amendments are made to the existing contract with Solaflect to verify that the billing for electricity costs from Green Mountain Power and Solaflect are accurate.

14. Executive Session – Personnel. Brochu **moved** (2nd Langhus) to enter executive session under VSA §313(a)(3) to discuss the Town Manager evaluation and the evaluation tool and to potentially invite the Town Manager to join the session. **Motion approved unanimously.** The SB moved into executive session at 9:17 pm. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to enter into public session. **Motion approved unanimously.** The SB entered public session at 10:00 pm.

15. Adjournment. Layton **moved** (2nd Langhus) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 10:01 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on October 14, 2020

Claudette Brochu
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – October 14, 2020 – Meeting at 6:30

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