

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of  
Wednesday, October 14, 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: Stuart Richards, Tracey Hayes, Emmanuel Tesone, Linda Cook, Cheryl Lindberg, Melissa Horwitz, Planning Director Rod Francis, Jaci Allen, Robert Haynes, Pam Smith.

1. Approval of Agenda. Selectboard (SB) members agreed to proceed with the agenda as drafted.
2. Public Comment. Stuart Richards said he wants to comment on correspondence in the packet regarding the village designation request; Richards says he believes the Town Plan is flawed. Richards would like to see the SB address the Town Plan issues. Brochu said the SB will wait to see what the Planning Commission does in this regard, first. Tracey Hayes said the Norwich Youth Advisory council convened to host events for Norwich and one of the youth members had hoped to comments at this SB meeting, but couldn't because of technical difficulties. Hayes will try to have a council member comment at a future SB meeting.
3. Consent Agenda. Brochu asked about the generators purchase on the A/P warrants. Tracey Hayes said that these were purchased with a Mt. Ascutney grant to build capacity to host events for local youth, and the generators are solar-powered. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Langhus) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion passed unanimously.**
4. Finance Committee MOU. Langhus said that the Dresden Finance Committee hasn't been staffed with Norwich personnel for some time, but now that the Norwich Finance Committee exists and has gotten established, the Norwich School Board has asked Norwich to rejoin the Dresden Finance Committee, which request culminated in the proposed MOU. Emmanuel Tesone, Chair of the Norwich Finance Committee (FC), said that the FC met last night to discuss the MOU. The FC welcomes the opportunity to participate in the school budget and the town budget. Tesone said the FC will work in 2 groups: 3 people to look at the town budget and the other 3 people to look at the school budget. Tesone asked for direction from the SB about how to approach the FC's job. Layton suggested that the FC should look at the total tax impact from both budgets. Langhus said he likes the FC's planned approach. Tesone clarified that the FC will also meet as an entire group; they won't be split into 2 groups that never talk to each other. Layton asked about the expiration date of the MOU and how to look at renewal or not – to evaluate how the new FC is working. Arnold said this is the first year of the FC and there's not a lot of time to accomplish all of the FC's work. Tesone asked the SB to select a point person for contact with the SB to receive direction from the SB, which is important to FC members. SB members agreed that Brochu will be that point person. Langhus **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Gere) to approve the MOU between the Norwich Selectboard and the Norwich School Board – included in the Selectboard packet – with subsequent participation in the Dresden Finance Committee, such MOU to be revisited by the Selectboard prior to the end of the current fiscal year. **Motion passed unanimously.**

5. Town Plan Action Items. Brochu began the discussion and reviewed the proposed draft of the Childcare Committee charge and asked for SB comment. Layton said she and Arnold worked on this
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together. Layton said the committee should gather information about childcare access; there are 3 types of people to staff the committee and do that work, as outlined in the proposed charge. Arnold and Layton provided specific tasks for the committee to work on and a timeline of 6 months. Melissa Horwitz said that she fully supports this committee. Brochu **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Layton) to approve the Childcare Committee charge as drafted and included in the Selectboard packet with Layton as the Selectboard representative and to direct the Town Manager's office to advertise the openings on the committee and further direct Layton to contact the Planning Commission and the School Board to request representatives for the committee. **Motion approved unanimously.** Brochu then resumed review of other Town Plan (TP) action items, in particular the sewer/wastewater issue. Brochu said that, right now, the SB is waiting to hear more information from the School Board, who are working on the issue. Layton said the SB needs to know what the School Board will do – concerning school property – before the SB should proceed. Durfee said this is not just about the school; it also involves town businesses and residents. Rod Francis, Planning Director, said that the PC considers this issue a priority. Stuart Richards said that the Hartford, VT Selectboard has asked Norwich to pay for a study regarding connecting to Hartford's wastewater and there's been no action. Brochu said that conversations have been ongoing. Francis clarified that Hartford has asked the Norwich school to pay for the study, not Norwich Town in general. SB members agreed they will not take further action on the sewer/wastewater issue until the PC and/or School Board has taken further action. Brochu asked Durfee about sidewalks. Durfee said that the DPW is developing a plan and priorities for the town's sidewalks to be part of the capital budget program. A possible recommendation is to do a complete inventory of the sidewalks and their state of repair need. Layton said the sidewalk plan won't be coherent unless the town takes over the Fire District's sidewalks. Arnold said the sidewalks are important and the town should do more with bikeways, as well. Layton agreed that biking access should be improved and also look at park & ride possibilities. Richards said he agrees that biking is separate issue and the state needs to work on their portion to improve bike use of state roads. Richards also referenced Jack Candon's letter about sidewalks. Jaci Allen said these are important issues and other groups, like the Conservation Commission, can offer help.

6. Planning Commission Request re: Village Center Designation. Brochu said that she wants the SB to consider this topic over the next 2 meetings. Rod Francis said that tonight, the SB should consider the topic of the village center designation. Francis said that Norwich has been designated as a village center until 2018. When that designation expired, Norwich became ineligible for benefits such as tax breaks and loans to benefit businesses and property owners in the village. The required steps in a village designation are a walking tour and the submission of application materials, including the resolution included in the SB packet. Layton asked if there were any downsides to a village designation. Francis said the only downside is that you have to reapply for the designation periodically and the upside this time is that there is a major business in Norwich that needs help to complete necessary upgrades. Robert Haynes, Executive Director of Green Mountain Economic Development Corporation, spoke in favor of the village designation, stating that it has many benefits. The program serves to revitalize and maintain Vermont villages by supporting businesses and private property owners. Linda Cook said it's been a great program for the town and grants can be very helpful to towns. Brochu **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Layton) to authorize the Town Manager to begin the application process for village center designation for the Town of Norwich. **Motion approved unanimously.**

7. Town Manager Report. Durfee said he can answer any questions about his written report in the packet. Norwich staff are working on their department budgets. Union employees are voting on the proposed union contract tomorrow. There are changes to the tree warden statues regarding Emerald Ash Borer. Also Durfee has been attending seminars dealing with Durfee's improvement plan. Durfee will have more financial information at the next SB meeting. Arnold said he's thrilled about the expanded advertisement for Finance Director and asked if we have gotten applications. Durfee said yes, we have gotten about 10 applications so far. We will begin review next Monday of Norwich Selectboard Minutes – 10/14/2020 Mtg

those applications. Arnold asked about the Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Task Force convened by Durfee. Durfee said the DEI has met once and will meet again tomorrow to work further. Arnold asked how the committees are going. Durfee said his regular meetings with Tesone of the FC are very productive. The Green Fleet Working Group is still in formative stages and Durfee is gathering names for participants/members. Brochu asked about tax revenue to date. Durfee said he has talked to the NEMRC representative and we cannot run a simple report that shows the answer. Brochu asked if we have any more late payments than usual this year. Durfee said no, we're doing fine; we were able to meet our school payment on time without difficulty. Brochu would like the delinquent payers reports in the SB packet with the taxpayer names redacted. Layton asked if we can get the taxes paid/income info from the bank. Durfee said the Cheryl Lindberg, Treasurer, could work on that, and he will ask her.

8. Paving Contract Expenditure. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Gere) to approve the expenditure of \$132,790.09 from the Paving Designated Fund. **Motion approved unanimously.**

9. Winter Salt Bid. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Arnold) to approve the purchase of up to \$116,100 of winter salt from Eastern Minerals, Inc., per the winter salt bid tabulation results contained in the Selectboard's meeting packet. Layton said she noted that the Eastern Minerals salt comes from Peru and is the lowest price. Durfee said that usually Morton Salt is the lowest bid and their quality is good. Durfee does not know where Morton sources its salt. Langhus said we should consider the total carbon footprint and also salt quality. Durfee said the SB can table this motion for now until they have more information about where the salt is coming from. **SB members agreed to table the motion until the next meeting.**

10. Better Roads Grant Application. Durfee said we applied for a Better roads Grant program last year and just found out that we were awarded some money under the program. Layton asked if \$5,000 was the town's portion under the grant. Durfee said yes; the total grant is \$20,000. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Gere) to include as part of the FY21-22 budget \$5,000, which is the Town's portion of the Better Roads Category B project, per the terms of a Better Roads grant award, and further to request a minimum 3-month extension to the contract to complete the scope of work. **Motion approved unanimously.**

11. Executive Session – Union Contract. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Brochu) to find that premature general public knowledge about a pending labor relations agreement would clearly place the Selectboard at a substantial disadvantage. **Motion approved unanimously.** Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Gere) to enter executive session under VSA §313(a)(1)(B) "labor relations agreements with employees" to discuss the labor relations agreement and to invite the Town Manager into the executive session. **Motion approved unanimously.**

The SB moved into executive session at 9:08 pm.

Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Gere) to enter into public session. **Motion approved unanimously.** The SB entered public session at 9:22 pm.

No action was taken in public session resulting from discussions in executive session.

12. Adjournment. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Gere) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:22 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on October 28, 2020

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Claudette Brochu  
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – October 28, 2020 – Meeting at 6:30

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NORWICH SELECTBOARD.