

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, May 12, 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: Roger Arnold, Chair; Mary Layton, Vice Chair; Claudette Brochu; Marcia Calloway; Robert Gere; Herb Durfee, Town Manager; Miranda Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

There were about 15 people in the audience.

Also participating: Stuart Richards, Brie Swenson, Linda Cook, Matt Swett, Cheryl Lindberg, Jaan Laaspere, Sharon Racusin, Robyn Mosher, Bob Stevens, Amy Stringer, Charlotte Metcalf, Zay Gamez.

1. Approval of Agenda. SB members agreed to defer agenda item #10 (Fit-up Costs for F550 Purchase) to a future meeting. Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the agenda, as amended. **Motion approved unanimously.**

2. Public Comment. Stuart Richards asked about the timing of the #9 agenda item (re: Policing). Arnold said he would strictly adhere to time limits on agenda items, as posted, and will ask the SB to reorder agenda items if necessary to address #9 at the posted 8:00 pm timeframe.

3. Consent Agenda. Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion approved unanimously.**

4. Town Manager's Report. Durfee said the DPW Equipment Operator position has been filled with a promising hire. We have advertised for the Finance Director opening and Durfee is working with Robert Half employment agency to potentially bring on an additional person into the Finance Office. We are in discussions with the police union to finalize the interim police position. We have received 10 proposals to the IT Services FRP, which will be reviewed by a team, including Rob Gere and possibly Rod Francis. Brie Swenson, Recreation Director, joined the meeting to provide information about the Recreation Department. Swenson talked about the needs of the Rec Dept. as they relate to the DPW's work. DPW maintains the rec fields, distributes picnic tables in parks, installs grills at Ballard, mows rec fields, sets up and tears down the ice rink, maintains Tracy Hall gym, among other activities. Swenson said she relies on DPW help a great deal. Swenson said the tennis courts' projected life span is 40 years; we are at the end of that time and cracks have appeared that need maintenance. The River Valley Club rents tennis courts and that provides revenue to help with the expenses of upkeep. Swenson said she works really well with the current finance office; she has applied to grant funding to pay for day camp and after care and also a natural playground at Barrett. Swenson said that hiring for summer camps is going very well. She said we have benefitted greatly from private donations (over \$100,000 in donations for Huntley, in particular) over the years. Swenson agrees that a structured approach to donations is necessary. Linda Cook asked about maintenance costs resulting from increased use of structures. Swenson said there have been no increases in costs for programs. Brochu asked how waitlists for Rec programs work. Swenson said she sets aside approximately 20% of the available slots for families in some sort of need. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGoHO_TXK4 to view complete discussion.

5. Follow-up from Capital Budget Work Plan and '21-22 Goal Setting. Arnold shared his computer screen to show the SB's Trello board with a plan for the SB's work over the upcoming meetings. SB members discussed the schedule for upcoming work. Matt Swett said the Fire Department has received a bid that will expire on June 2, 2021 if not acted on before that. If the bid

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expires, then the price would likely go up significantly. Swett requested that the SB take up the issue of the Fire Department purchase at the SB's May 26, 2021 meeting. The majority of the SB agreed to add the Fire Department truck purchase to the next agenda.

6. Presentation of Purchasing Policy Revisions. SB members discussed draft revisions to the town's purchasing policy. Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to accept the first reading of the Purchasing Policy, as revised and included in the Selectboard meeting packet. **Motion approved unanimously.**

7. Presentation of Gift Policy Revisions and Issues. SB members discussed work thus far toward developing a gift policy. SB members discussed relative merits of unrestricted, versus restricted, gifts and also the possibility of barring gifts to certain town functions where a gift could pose possible conflicts of interest. Calloway stated she found multiple statues related to gifts. She will share the relevant statues with the SB. SB members agreed to re-order the agenda to move to the policing discussion next, after a 10-minute break. Cheryl Lindberg reminded the SB about the role of the Trustees of Public Funds.

8. [Moved to later time in meeting]

9. Discussion of Policing Plan and Community Discussions. Arnold said that on April 28, 2021 the SB voted to affirm the appointment of Keeling as Interim Police Chief and take 6 months to conduct public discussions about policing. Durfee said he is working on ironing out the details of elevating Keeling to the Interim Chief position; he has a meeting tomorrow toward that end. Durfee is also working on a way to provide coverage for 4 officers, but he also needs to work with the police union to arrange for that. Stuart Richards said he feels it's important to have full police department (PD) coverage and wonders how long it will be before we have full coverage. Durfee said all normal shifts are currently covered. Jaan Laaspere said we had a very satisfactory chief before Chief Frank left. We wondered why we are seeking to fix something that wasn't broken. Sharon Racusin said she thought Frank's resignation was the perfect time to figure out what our policing needs are. Robyn Mosher said she thinks we should go forward with restoring full police staffing. Bob Stevens said the town as a whole needs to speak on this policing issue, not only a small group of residents. He'd like to see a town-wide vote and wonders how soon a town vote can happen. Amy Stringer asked if Chief Frank said, upon leaving, there were any problems with the PD or with the police union. Arnold asked fellow SB members what the SB wants to do next on this issue and when. Brochu said she'd like to conduct a repeat of the 2007 process, including facilitated discussions and community conversations and interviews with peer departments in other towns. Layton agreed and said we need to consider equity "font and center" and consider the needs and concerns of communities of color. Brochu said we need to acknowledge our unconscious biases. Gere talked about the 2007 process and said it was a year-long process where we only have 6 months. Calloway said she thinks we need to honor the town's advisory vote regarding a 4-officer PD. Brochu said we need more analysis and understanding of police calls data. Robyn Mosher suggested that we be sure to include members of the community who are people of color and LGBTQ so we will have the benefit of their experiences. SB members agreed to submit memos for the next SB packet explaining their ideas on how to proceed with this process. Charlotte Metcalf said this conversation has become richer because more people have become involved. Stuart Richards referenced police statistics in the Annual Town Report. Zay Gamez spoke against community policing and in favor of the upcoming process to examine policing in Norwich.

8. SB members discussed proposed revisions to the Fund Balance Reserve Policy. SB members agreed to talk more in the future about establishing a transportation fund.

10. [Deferred to a later meeting]

11. Equipment Safety Grant for Norwich Fire Dept. Durfee said this is an annual grant opportunity. Matt Swett explained that this grant is to help purchase PPE for the Fire Department. Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the expenditure of up to \$3,999.50 from the Fire Department Equipment designated fund for the town's share, under the terms of an anticipated VLCT PACIF grant, for the cost for PPE jackets and pants and to authorize the Town Manager to apply for said grant. **Motion withdrawn by Brochu and Layton** after discussion about confusion regarding the amount of money actually needed in order to make the purchase. SB members agreed to take up the issue again at a future meeting, after the proper amount has been determined.

12. Town Manager Improvement Plan (Executive Session). SB members agreed to take up re-order agenda item #12 and take up agenda #13 first.

13. Response to Katucki Complaint. Durfee explained that the town's attorney will prepare a response to Katucki's complaint/lawsuit. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to authorize the Selectboard chair to work with the town manager and town's attorney on a response to the complaint filed by Chris Katucki and to effect a cure, as appropriate. **Motion approved unanimously.**

12. Executive Session to Discuss Town Manager Improvement Plan. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to enter executive session under 1 VSA §313(a)(3) to discuss the Town Manager performance improvement plan, and to invite the Town Manager to join said executive session. **Motion approved unanimously.** The SB moved into executive session at 9:48 pm.

Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to enter public session. **Motion approved unanimously.** The SB moved into public session at 10:26 pm.

14. Adjourn. Brochu **moved** (2nd Gere) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 10:26 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on May 26, 2021

Roger Arnold
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – May 26, 2021 – Meeting at 6:30

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