

Minutes of the Special Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, January 12, 2022, at 6:30 pm

This meeting was conducted via teleconference using ZOOM and in person in Tracy Hall, in order to comply with Open Meeting Law requirements while providing remote access for attendees. Members present: Roger Arnold, Chair; Mary Layton, Vice Chair; Claudette Brochu; Marcia Calloway; Robert Gere; Rod Francis, Interim Town Manager; Miranda Harris Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

Also participating: Stuart Richards, Dennis Kaufman, Peter Orner, Liz Blum, Cheryl Lindberg, Andy Scherer, Elliot Harik, Linda Cook, Stephen Flanders, Doug Wilberding, Fielding Essensa.

1. Approval of Agenda. Gere **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the agenda. **Motion approved unanimously.**
2. Public Comment. Stuart Richards said there is COVID treatment available at APD. Richards referenced 2 past surveys in the town asking the question about growth in Norwich population; he said the SB is spending money unwisely. Dennis Kaufman spoke about the need for a reappraisal town-wide now. Liz Blum spoke about the need to have a fully-qualified assessing contractor to perform the next town-wide reappraisal.
3. Consent Agenda. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion approved unanimously.**
4. Interim Town Manager Report. Francis announced that Simon Keeling has been named as Police Chief; the new DPW Director, Chris Kauffman, starts on January 18, 2022. The town has gone out to bid on the Rte. 132 culvert and the culverts on Tigertown Road. We are losing our Finance Assistant at the end of this week and we are hoping to hire another soon. We haven't been told by our auditor when she will get us the FY21 audit. We are upgrading our server soon and after that we will start replacing aged workstations. Cheryl Lindberg asked about disruptions to the computer system during the server replacement. Francis said that CCI, our contractor, has told us to expect ½-hour interruptions once or twice per day. Linda Cook said welcome to Chief Keeling as the new police chief.
5. Draft Warning. Arnold introduced the agenda topic, saying that the SB would first discuss potential petitioned articles. Andy Scherer read the proposed warning article regarding Beaver Meadow Road (BMR) and a possible sidewalk. He said the petitioners hope to have the town apply for 80% grant funding to construct a sidewalk to enhance safety along BMR. Arnold said the town's counsel has told the town that the article as drafted is outside the scope and power of voters to petition. Arnold said the SB doesn't want to reject the article, so the SB needs to come up with an alternative warning article that will address the concerns raised by the petitioners. Francis said he has spoken to our TRORC consultant at some length about the feasibility study and the project in general. Francis said that, due to inflation following COVID, the estimated cost is likely 2-3 times higher than included in the feasibility study. Francis talked about concerns about the feasibility study and said he has developed possible article language to allow for a follow-up study to explore options for BMR. Calloway asked what a new study would do. Brochu asked if the town got a VTrans grant, would the town pay front and then be reimbursed. Fielding Essensa, Finance Director, said yes, it would be a reimbursement grant. Gere said he'd like to elicit voter input on this issue in order to determine how to proceed. Layton said she hopes everyone can work through this to achieve a safe pedestrian loop. Francis addressed Calloway's question to say that a new study would be done by a different contractor than the one that completed the earlier feasibility study. The new contractor

would examine options for bike and pedestrian on a town-wide basis and generate more specific information about costs. Arnold asked about the Town Plan action item #11. Francis said that action item would result in the production of a town-wide master transportation plan. Peter Orner said he wants the SB to put an article on the warning to take the temperature of the town on this matter. Andy Scherer said he thinks that this is an important investment in the town's safety. Elliot Harik supports the effort to take the temperature of the town with a warning article. He thinks Action Item #11 sounds great but he wants to see forward action on the sidewalk issue. Arnold asked Francis how quickly could the Planning Commission get to work on Action Item #11. Francis said that work on a transportation plan can start in the spring. Francis suggested that the SB could draft an advisory warning article for discussion and inclusion. Andy Scherer said he wants to be sure that whatever warning article language makes it clear that the town is seeking grant funding. After some discussion, SB members discussed language for a warning article and agreed to take up a possible draft article at a future meeting. Arnold said a petition has been circulating to place on the warning an article to eliminate the Board of Listers (BoL) and hire an assessor. Stephen Flanders summarized the purpose and effect of the proposed article. Liz Blum gave some recent history of the BoL and explained why she thinks the town should move to a professional auditor. Brochu said that she is not inclined to support this article for inclusion in the 2022 Town Meeting because it should have more time for discussion. Calloway said she is not inclined to support the article, either. Layton said she would like more time to consider this matter and possibly have the question on the November ballot. Gere said it would be worthwhile to have this question on the November ballot. Arnold said that a way to measure the success of the BoL might be to look at the grievance rate and the history of professional relationships between the BoL and the contracted assessors. Dennis Kaufman spoke about the history of the BoL and said he was a lister previously for over 10 years. Doug Wilberding said Cheryl and Pam have done a great job. Wilberding said this petition effort is insulting and will receive pushback. Cheryl Lindberg said the BoL received one response to the RFP from a qualified responder. Brochu said she heard consensus from SB members that they do not support putting the Listers question article on the 2022 Town Meeting warning. SB members then discussed the rest of the draft warning. Calloway had specific questions and suggestions for edits to the draft warning. Brochu also gave some specific edits for the warning. Cheryl Lindberg spoke against extending the Finance Office hours on tax due dates.

6. Final Version of FY23 Budget. Essensa summarized the changes to the FY23 budget.

7. Capital Improvement Plan. Brochu suggested deferring the remaining agenda items to a future meeting next week. SB members agreed to meet again next week and take up those items on Wednesday, January 19, 2022 at 5:30 pm.

10. Adjourn. Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:52 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on January 26, 2022

Roger Arnold, Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – January 19, 2022 – Meeting at 5:30