

Minutes of the Special Selectboard Meeting of  
Wednesday, December 22, 2021, 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 (left the meeting at 9:00 pm); Rod Francis, Interim Town Manager; Miranda Harris Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

Also participating: Jon Felde, Lynn McCormick, Richard Adams, Fielding Essensa, Cheryl Lindberg.

1. Approval of Agenda. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Gere) to approve the agenda with the addition of a request for expenditure from the Citizens Assistance Designated Fund. **Motion approved unanimously.**

2. Public Comment. Cheryl Lindberg asked the SB to review the land agreement between the town and the fire district.

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

3.5 Citizens Assistance Fund Request (additional agenda item). Rod Francis explained that the Town Service Officer approached the TM office about a family who are experiencing hardship regarding heating fuel. Francis said his office has worked with the Town Service Officer to explore the family's situation and they have determined it is appropriate to provide funding. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Brochu) to authorize the expenditure of \$1,460 from the Citizens Assistance Designated Fund for the purchase of heating fuel. **Motion approved unanimously.**

4. RFP Results for Policing & Community Safety Consulting Services. Arnold introduced the topic and said this RFP came out of discussions earlier this year. The town has received 2 bids. Arnold asked the SB to talk about what they like about each proposal. SB members discussed their initial reactions to the 2 proposals. Brochu said she prefers the proposal from Strategy Matters. Layton agreed and said she was impressed with Strategy Matters's work with the Navajo Nation. Calloway said she'd like to know if, after they know more about Norwich, they might limit their scope and lower their price. Francis said the town has options, including going out to bid again after altering the RFP or approaching the existing respondents to limit the project's scope. Arnold said he liked the Strategy Matters approach to seeking input from members of the public. Brochu and Calloway agreed that public input is very important; Layton agreed, as well. Jon Felde said there's the potential for wasted money here and he thinks that Strategy Matters has a strong proposal that will help Norwich figure out what it needs. Lynn McCormick said she thinks it's important for Norwich to undertake this examination. She talked about her experience as a mental health practitioner. McCormick said she thinks it's important to hire an outside consultant; she was impressed with Strategy Matters's proposal and approach. Richard Adams thanked the SB for undertaking this work; he likes the Strategy Matters proposal and their approach of wanting to learn about Norwich and our particular needs. Adams said he thinks that \$50,000 is not unreasonable, given the importance of this matter. Brochu said we would be well-served to move forward with the Strategy Matters proposal and we have ample funds in the Undesignated Fund to do so. Brochu **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Layton) to direct the Interim Town Manager to proceed with a preliminary contract with Strategy Matters. **Motion approved (4-yes; Calloway- abstain).** Brochu **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Layton) to authorize the expenditure of an amount not to exceed \$50,000 from the undesignated fund to pay for the police study. **Motion approved (4-yes; Calloway- no).** Calloway questioned the propriety of paying for a study with

money from the undesignated fund. Fielding Essensa said the SB has the power to spend from the undesignated fund. Essensa said that spending this money from the undesignated fund will leave sufficient balance in that fund.

5. Interim Town Manager Report. Francis said he and Essensa have been talking with our auditor and we have provided her (Bonnie Batchelder) everything that she has asked for. Batchelder has said she won't likely have the audit finished by January 5, 2022. She said she will work as quickly as possible to finish the audit. Batchelder has offered the possibility of placing an opinion letter in the town report, if the audit is not completed in time for printing. The town will have a new server in early January, after which we will start replacing individual workstations. DPW are doing well in challenging circumstances. We are on the verge of making appointments for DPW Director and Equipment Operator positions. We are receiving excellent support from TRORC regarding grants, etc. Brochu said our auditor's performance has been less than stellar and she looks forward to going out to bid. Brochu asked about the opioid settlement; Francis said we have now signed on to that settlement, in order to opt in.

6. Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Designated Fund. Layton asked if the purpose of the fund is to provide a place to accumulate funds to deal with ash trees affected by EAB. Francis said yes; initially the Conservation Commission will do work to map locations of ash trees along roads. Layton **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Calloway) to authorize Town Staff to draft for review a warrant article regarding an Emerald Ash Borer Designated Fund. After some discussion, Layton withdrew the motion. Brochu **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Layton) to authorize Town Staff to draft for review a warrant article regarding an Emerald Ash Borer designated fund with seed funding from the following sources: \$5,000 to be removed from the FY23 Town Clerk records restoration, \$5,000 to be removed from the FY23 allocation to the Bridges Designated Fund, ask the voters to approve the transfer of \$546 from the Long-Term Facilities Fund and \$1,297 from the Recreation Pool Designated Fund, totaling \$11,843.00. **Motion approved unanimously.** [Robert Gere left the meeting at this point – 9:00 pm]

7. FY23 Budget: Projected Revenue. Fielding Essensa discussed the projected revenue information included in the meeting packet. Essensa and SB members discussed the Recreation revenues in particular. Essensa said that Norwich's Recreation program consistently outperforms other recreation departments in terms of its revenue versus expenditures.

8. FY23 Provisional Designated and Undesignated Fund Balances. Essensa said that currently the John Girard Fund resides in Designated Fund #5 and amounts to approximately \$15,000. SB members discussed options for cleaning up the unused or obsolete designated funds. SB members agreed to address agenda item #10 next, rather than #9.

9. FY23 CIP Commitments. SB members agreed to table agenda item #9.

10. FY23 Budget: Estimates for Total Budget Increase and Tax Rate Considerations. Francis said we've been tracking emerging budget discussion for FY23. Essensa said that current local CPE is an historically high 6%. In order to stick to the SB's desire for maintaining services while controlling costs as much as possible, our current budget draft shows a 4.39% increase overall. We are looking at a roughly equal increase in projected revenue. Taking all things into account, we would see a 6.39% increase in the tax rate in order to maintain the same level of services. Calloway said she'd like to see a smaller increase if we can cut more from the budget. Layton said this is an uncomfortable increase, but she sees that it may be necessary. Brochu said she'd like to explore using some of the undesignated fund to offset some of the increase. The project increase to the operating budget is 4.11% (operating budget only); the operating budget plus monetary articles would amount in a 4.39% increase, with a resulting 6.39% increase in the municipal tax rate, or 3.3 cents.

Arnold asked for SB members' suggestions for increases. Brochu suggested no more than 5.0-5.5% increase to the tax rate. Brochu said we could accomplish this in part by using some undesignated funds money and also consider cutting allocations to designated funds. Arnold agreed. SB members agreed that Essensa and Francis will look at the proposed FY23 budget to trim the tax rate increase.

11. Adjourn. Brochu **moved** (2<sup>nd</sup> Layton) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 10:12 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on January 5, 2022

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Roger Arnold, Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – January 5, 2022 – Meeting at 6:30

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