

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, September 8, 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; Rod Francis, Interim Town Manager; Miranda Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

There were about 21 people in the audience.

Also participating: Linda Cook, Andy Scherer, Peter Orner, Fielding Essensa, Becky Grammer, Rick McGuire, Linda Cook, Chet Clem, Lucy Rojansky, Tom Candon, Brian Riordan, Jenny Barba, Cheryl Lindberg, Brie Swenson.

1. Approval of Agenda. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to approve the agenda with the addition of Interim Town Manager contract at the end of the agenda. **Motion approved unanimously.**
2. Public Comment. Andy Scherer asked if the SB has completed its capital budget planning. Arnold said there is an agenda that speaks to that question. Peter Orner asked if the sidewalk discussion is on the agenda. He said he wants to work with the SB on the sidewalk issue in the future. Arnold introduced Fielding Essensa, the town's new Finance Director. Essensa said he has been working in accounting for his entire career and things have been going well so far and he's excited to join the Norwich staff.
3. Consent Agenda. Becky Grammer explained the process of the Treasurer signing checks. Brochu **moved** (2nd Gere) that the Selectboard approve the process of having the Selectboard Chair sign the A/P warrants. **Motion approved unanimously.** Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the A/P warrants. **Motion approved (4 yes; Calloway – abstain).** Calloway said that she proposed edits to the 8/25/2021 minutes. Calloway suggested that Rosamond Orford might want to call the PUC clerk to discuss her concerns about solar arrays. SB members agreed that the Town Manager's office will post more information on the listserv about VELCO powerline work. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to accept correspondence and the meeting minutes, with corrections proposed by Calloway.
4. Presentation and Discussion with VLCT re: TM Recruitment. Rick McGuire spoke to the SB about the TM (Town Manager) search process. McGuire said he serves as a VLCT consultant for TM searches. McGuire summarized the process of a TM search, which can be estimated at possibly 16 weeks. Calloway asked if the search process can be shortened. McGuire said yes, possibly. McGuire said he will provide the SB at minimum a monthly written report about the progress of the search process. Brochu asked when we can start, if the SB decides to contract with VLCT for search services. McGuire said he could start right away. SB members agreed that Arnold will be the initial point of contact for McGuire to connect with the SB. Brochu **moved** (2nd Calloway) to authorize the Selectboard Chair to sign the Vermont League of Cities and Town Executive Recruitment Services Proposal, as included in the meeting packet. **Motion approved unanimously.**
5. Appointments. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint Suzanne Leiter to the Conservation Commission for a 4-year term ending March 31, 2025. **Motion approved unanimously.** Rod Francis gave information about Patrick Bradley's service on the Development Review Board. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint Patrick Bradley to the Development Review Board for a 3-year term ending April 30, 2024. **Motion approved (4 yes; abstain – Calloway).** Linda Cook spoke about why she is interested in serving on the Historic Preservation Commission. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint Linda Cook to the Historic Preservation Commission for a 3-year term ending April 30,

2024. **Motion approved unanimously.** Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint Marguerite Ames to the Historic Preservation Commission for a 3-year term ending April 30, 2024. **Motion approved (4 yes; abstain – Calloway).**

6. Proposed Gift to the Town. Arnold gave some background information about the need for an MOU between the town and SAU 70. Arnold said this agenda is a holdover from a prior SB meeting. Arnold asked Rod Francis, Planning Director and Interim TM if an MOU is still the right course of action to provide access by the school to the town forest. Francis said the town's attorney has recommended a reciprocal agreement, rather than an MOU. Arnold asked if a reciprocal agreement is the first step in the process and why. Francis said it needs to be determined which party will be the applicant for the necessary zoning permit. A reciprocal agreement would clarify this. Arnold asked if it's appropriate to speculate on the permit process and trail construction. Francis said that once it was clear the trail has to be hard-packed gravel, and not just woodchips, then that meant a zoning permit is necessary. Also, the design process has to be mindful of the land's deed restrictions. Arnold asked if the town or school has enough information yet to know how to construct an ABA-compliant trail. Francis said you would want to hire a qualified professional to draw up plans and drawings. Francis said the town's and school's attorneys are working on necessary documents. Layton said she appreciates the work put into this and it's important to get this done properly. Chet Clem said he is the parent of 2 students. He said he is wondering why we couldn't continue to use the forest while the improvements are being made. Brochu said it wasn't the SB's decision to suspend access; the school said they can't give access to some students if they can't give access to all students. Tom Candon said that providing access to all students is very important. Candon asked if there is a way to expedite the zoning permit process; he also asked if the town's purchasing policy could allow for an emergency exception to the purchasing policy. Calloway said the SB may want to review the emergency provision in the SB purchasing policy. Francis said there is no way to expedite the zoning process, because it is set out in state statute. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to authorize Rod Francis to have the town's attorney begin to draft a reciprocal agreement with the school's attorney. **Motion approved unanimously.** Brian Riordan said this is devastating for children not to have access to the woods, because it's their escape from the school building. Riordan said he encourages the SB to find solutions to allow the children access to the woods. Jenny Barba said she echoes all the parents' and others' concerns about schoolchildren's access to the woods. She urged the SB and town to find expedited routes to allow access to outdoor education in the woods. Barba said that the kindergarteners have outdoor education as part of their curriculum. Peter Orner said he supports what others have said in support of expediting the process. Andy Scherer reminded everyone that whether or not to be outside is the school's decision, not the town's. Lucy Rojansky spoke in support of expediting this process. Wendy Teller- Elsberg said she thinks it's important to remember that everyone has good intentions in this process. She suggested that the parents reach out to the school to try to find solutions to this need for being outside. Brian Riordan asked if it would be possible to use a different piece of property for outdoor use. Jenny Barba said she feels that it's important to take action ASAP. Calloway said there are two parties in this situation, not just the town, and we are working through this process as quickly as possible. Chet Clem asked who made the decision to suspend access to the forest. Tom Candon said the school board made that decision, in consultation with the school administration.

7. Interim Town Manager Report. Rod Francis, Interim TM, said he wants to hear from the SB about recommendations about our COVID-19 precautions. Calloway and Layton recommends mandating mask wearing in Tracy Hall. Brochu said she agrees; Gere agreed, also. Francis said he met with CCI, the town's new IT services provider, and they have begun work. Francis will be letting staff know about new procedures in the next couple of days. Gere said that during this IT transition time, town staff should be very wary of potential phishing scams. Francis said he will reach out to CCI to ask if they have any training or information suggestions.

8. Update Relating to DPW Director Search. Francis said that the former TM started a hiring process for a new DPW Director. We (the town) made an offer and the candidate declined. The candidate was a P.E. with a license. Francis said the town should reflect on whether Norwich truly needs to hire a DPW director with an engineering license, or whether it makes more sense to hire someone with extensive practical experience. Francis suggested we may want to broaden our locations for advertising the opening. Layton agreed that we probably don't need an engineer and also to broaden our advertising outreach. Brochu agreed that there's no need for an engineer. Francis said that, as Planning Director, he found it helpful occasionally to have an engineer's input. Calloway said that if we do hire an engineer as DPW Director, we need to pay their liability insurance. SB members agreed they would like to know how often the town hired an engineer to give us an idea of whether it's worth it to hire an engineer or not. Francis suggested that we advertise for a DPW Director as soon as possible with a de-emphasis on a PE requirement. Brochu supported this idea. Gere said he thinks we need a good DPW manager and not necessarily an engineer. SB members agreed that the TM office will initiate a new DPW Director job search while de-emphasizing the dire for an engineer in that position.

9. Expectations for Budgeting Process. Layton said he main concern is to get back on track with funding the designated funds. Calloway is concerned about finishing the SB financial policies. Brochu said she's concerned that the existing capital budget and plan is not sufficient. Brochu asked if VLCT can help the SB come up with a strategic plan and capital plan. SB members discussed approaches to future budgeting and long-term planning. Cheryl Lindberg said that, in the past, the town has used leasing as an option. She said there are other organizations that can offer guidance on how to budget, such as GFOA. Andy Scherer said the public will have ideas to contribute, so it would be good to know how and what is the process for the public to participate. Scherer gave an idea of having an open forum to hear ideas from the public. Peter Orner said his group has been working on the sidewalk issue.

10. Future Agenda Items. SB members discussed possible future agenda items, including the Master Financial Policies.

11. Proposed Gift to Girard Fund. Brie Swenson, Recreation Director, said the gift is out of a directed fund. Swenson, on behalf of Kathy Girard, asked why the SB gets involved in gifts to the Girard Fund. Calloway explained that the SB is involved because the fund is administered by the town. Layton **moved** (2nd Brochu) to accept a gift of \$2,000 to the John Girard Fund. **Motion approved unanimously.**

11a. Interim Town Manager Contract. Arnold **moved** (2nd Layton) to find that the Selectboard finds that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the town at a substantial disadvantage in its contract negotiations with the Interim Town Manager by disclosing the proposed terms of his employment and compensation before the Selectboard has had an opportunity to privately consider and discuss the same. **Motion approved unanimously.** Arnold **moved** (2nd Layton) to enter executive session under 1 VSA §313 (a)(3) to consider contracts. **Motion approved unanimously.**

The Selectboard entered executive session at 10:08.

Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to enter public session. **Motion approved unanimously.**
The Selectboard moved into public session at 10:40 pm.

Brochu **moved** (2nd Gere) to authorize the Selectboard Chair to present a letter of agreement to the

Interim Town Manager effective August 31, 2021 for countersignature by the Interim Town Manager.
Motion approved unanimously.

12. Adjourn. Calloway **moved** (2nd Layton) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 10:46 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on September 22, 2021

Roger Arnold
Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – September 22, 2021 – Meeting at 6:30

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