

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, October 13, 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 Harris Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

Also participating: Cheryl Lindberg, Linda Cook, Richard Stucker, Marisa Lorenzo, Liz Blum, Emily Scherer, Matthew Swett, Demo Sofronas, Fielding Essensa, Pam Smith, Peter Orner, Andy Scherer, Nathan Margolis.

FÈ Approval of Agenda. Gere **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the agenda with the addition of an item discussing the extra person appointed to the Historic Preservation Commission. **Motion approved unanimously.**

GÈ Public Comment. Cheryl Lindberg said the Fire District met yesterday and expressed interest in using any unused ARPA funds. She said the town will receive a letter from the Fire District about that. Lindberg said the Listers will want to have the SB take up an agenda item about the reappraisal contract bid. SB members agreed that the Town Manager (TM) survey Brochu is writing should ask for 3 to 5 preferred characteristics of the prospective TM candidates. Calloway requested that future monthly reports provided to the SB and put into the meeting packet have the author's name and date of the report.

HÈ Consent Agenda. Calloway asked if it's possible for SB members to see the redacted documents mentioned in the correspondence between Chris Katucki and Roger Arnold. Arnold said yes, in executive session. Calloway asked for that as a future agenda item. Fielding Essensa said that the check to Hanover for Recreation programs is being taken out of this week's payments and will be adjusted for inclusion in the next meeting's A/P warrants. Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion approved unanimously.**

IÈ Update on Recruitment of Permanent Town Manager. Calloway said the SB members individually talked to the VLCT recruiter about the search process and how each of them sees the process moving forward.

ÍÈ Appointments. There were 11 applicants for 2 spots on the Screening Committee for the TM search process. Arnold suggested that SB members each choose their top 3 choices to fill the 2 vacancies. Gere said he used a 0-5 rating system to evaluate the candidates. Arnold suggested that the SB should hear from candidates at tonight's meeting and then make their decisions on appointments at the next SB meeting. SB members agreed to this process. Richard Stucker, Pam Smith, Marisa Lorenzo, Liz Blum, Emily Scherer, Peter Orner, Matthew Swett, and Demo Sofronas spoke about their respective interests in serving on the Screening Committee. Arnold said that Aaron Lamperti had indicated that he was traveling tonight and might not be able to join the meeting. Layton said she was very pleased with the pool of candidates. She said she is listening for candidates with hiring experience. Gere said he was very pleased with the quality and number of applicants and he thinks the SB should consider expanding the number of committee members. Calloway suggested bringing in one more experienced or long-term resident and 1 newer resident. Arnold agreed. Brochu said she likes the idea of including more recent residents in this committee, and also appreciate s the depth of experience of applicants. Layton said she likes the idea of including some younger participants. Calloway said she likes the idea of sticking with a 5-member

committee based on VLCT's experience and recommendation. Layton **moved** (2nd Calloway) to appoint Thad Goodwin as Tree Warden for a term ending March 31, 2022. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Calloway said she thinks the SB should not appoint an applicant who has not attended the SB meeting during which that applicant is being considered for the appointment. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint Nathan Margolis to the Finance Committee for a 3-year term ending March 31, 2024. **Motion approved (4-yes; Calloway – abstained).**

5.5 Appointment of Extra Person to the Historic Preservation Commission. Arnold said the SB mistakenly appointed one more person than there were spaces for; they appointed 2 people to one vacancy. Calloway **moved** (2nd Layton) to appoint Linda Cook to the Historic Preservation Commission for the remainder of an unexpired term ending in April 2023. **Motion approved unanimously.**

6. Interim Town Manager Report. Rod Francis gave a verbal summary of his written report [included in meeting packet], including: Mary Gavin has joined the Finance Office via a temporary employment agency; TM and Essensa have been meeting with department heads regarding the budget; COLA information has been shared with the SB; DPW budget development is challenging because of staff vacancies; the town hopes to be interviewing for DPW equipment operator candidates next week; we are working on posting an ad for DPW Director; the Moore Lane Bridge issues is being addressed; and the Planning Dept. has gone out to bid on a density study and wastewater study. Francis said that our new IT provider, CCI, has installed a new Wi-Fi system, a new firewall, a cloud-based network back-up system, and a new computer for the Finance Director. We will move to new computers and software for the remainder of the town offices.

7. Status/Announcement on Interim Town Manager Candidate. Arnold said that the candidate to whom Norwich offered the position of Interim TM has declined the position. Rod Francis will continue in the Interim TM position.

8. Finance Office Update. Fielding Essensa, Finance Director, said the move to Office 365 with his new computer has cut down completely on spam/fraud emails. Essensa said we have temporarily hired Mary Gavin as an assistant through the Robert Half Agency; Gavin is performing very well. Essensa said he and Gavin have been working on getting a handle on Finance Office operations and are starting to get ready for the annual audit, providing documents to the town's auditor. Essensa has been cleaning up interested allocations to the town's account lines. Calloway asked Essensa if there is anything that concerns him about the office. Essensa said the higher-level functions and analysis haven't had anyone to do them, so his is working on tightening up controls. His biggest challenge in the Finance Office is the lack of institutional knowledge, given the departure of the former finance assistant. He will be relying on the town's auditor heavily.

9. Operating Budget for FY23: Projected and Anticipated Increases. Essensa offered an explanation of the process to determine fixed costs for the 40% of the budget that consists of personnel costs. The COLA for Norwich employees will likely be 2.36% for wages. Also BCBS premiums will go down by 12.9%, assuming employees stay with the same plans as last year. Open enrollment for health insurance starts soon for the new calendar year. Essensa said we will likely see increases in the costs of heating fuel, fuel for vehicles, electricity, and vehicle purchase costs, because of record-high inflation. Essensa said the town should anticipate these cost increases for FY23 budgeting. Arnold asked if we can estimate yet the likely budget increase for the overall FY23 budget. Essensa said more budget development work needs to be done before he can give an overall increase amount. Francis said we will need to be careful to make sufficient allocations to designated funds to allow for our future needs, given the price increases. Francis and Essensa

recommend being conservative about undertaking large capital projects in the coming year. Calloway and other SB members agreed with this overall approach.

10. Capital Budgeting: Summary of Prioritized Capital Budget Items. Essensa explained how the singular sheets – as included in the Sb amended packet – were developed and how they function. Essensa said there is one sheet for each significant proposed purchase. Each sheet contains information about what the item is, why it’s needed, what is its price, and its lifespan. Essensa said these singulars are meant to open discussion with SB members to determine spending priorities and their rank. SB members discussed ways to evaluated spending priorities. We will know more about DPW capital needs when we have a new DPW Director. Andy Scherer asked if there is room in the capital planning process for projects are not headed by a town department, for example the Beaver Meadow Sidewalk. Scherer asked what would happen if the town’s voters vote in favor of building a sidewalk. Francis explained that any town meeting article on spending proposed by citizen petition is by definition advisory, and not binding. The SB would have to make the decision about proposing the spending in the budget. Essensa said that in future meetings, the SB will receive more information about a 5-year plan for spending. Francis said we should have more information about DPW projects soon.

11. Board Expectation of Tax Rate Impact. SB members discussed the issue of tax rate increase. Brochu said she would want a very good explanation of any increase beyond the rate of inflation. Gere and Calloway agreed.

12. Requests for Outside Appropriations / Monetary Articles. SB members discussed their expectations for outside agencies. Brochu wants to follow the existing policy for existing agencies and have them submit at least written requests and justifications and possibly come before the SB at a meeting. Calloway said she will volunteer to revise the appropriations request form to make the appropriations process clear. Brochu said she will work with Calloway on this. SB members agreed that SB members will also contact outside agencies to advise them of the renewed adherence to the existing policy.

Nathan Margolis spoke about his interest in serving on the Finance Committee and also his interest in serving on the TM Screening Committee.

13. Adjourn. Layton **moved** (2nd Gere) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.**

Meeting adjourned at 9:49 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on October 27, 2021

Roger Arnold, Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – October 27, 2021 – Meeting at 6:30

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