

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, Jun 22, 2022, at 6:30 pm

This meeting was conducted via teleconference using ZOOM according to Open Meeting Law requirements. Members present: Roger Arnold, Chair; Mary Layton, Vice Chair; Claudette Brochu; Marcia Calloway; Robert Gere; Rod Francis, Town Manager; Miranda Bergmeier, Assistant to the Town Manager.

Also participating: Demo Sofronas, Jaan Laaspere, Charlotte Metcalf, Stuart Richards, Christine Richard, Cheryl Lindberg, Andy Scherer, Linda Cook, Alka Dev, Richard Kenney, Anne Day, Stuart Richards, Bob Pitiger, Fielding Essensa, Marc Aquila, Anna Ingraham, Mary Gorman, Leslie Wells, Margaret Baghdoyan.

1. Convene Meeting – at 6:30 pm.
2. Agenda Review. Gere **moved** (2nd Brochu) to approve the agenda. **Motion approved unanimously.**
3. Public Participation. Demo Sofronas said the voters defeated a proposal for a new police study; Sofronas expressed concern about the Norwich Police Department (NPD), including low staffing levels and equipment problems. Jaan Laaspere would like the SB to proceed with setting up a 3rd-party option for employees to give feedback and do exit interviews. He said he has questions about our current HR consultant and wants to know what's going on with the personnel issues among town employees. Charlotte Metcalf read aloud from a written statement about her letters to the SB raising concerns about police coverage. Stuart Richards asked when the SB will answer questions in writing. Christine Richard said she is concerned that we have lost so many police officers; she believes it's important to have police in Norwich and wants to have an in-person meeting to discuss the matter. Cheryl Lindberg reminded the SB about reviewing the land management council agreement. Andy Scherer said this is a hiring crisis that affects more than just Norwich; we should think creatively about meeting our needs in town, such as other traffic calming measures. Linda Cook wants to give incentive pay to encourage employees to stay working for Norwich; she wants enhanced communication to the public.
4. Vice Chair's Remarks, Announcements, Town Manager's Report. Layton spoke about being rattled as a town; she announced congratulations to Town Manager Rod Francis for his PhD. Calloway referenced a rumor that Francis had terminated the HR contractor's work; she said that the TM has no authority to do so. Arnold said he is the official contact for the HR contractor and he has heard nothing about any termination. Arnold agreed that the town is rattled and we need to be careful about rumors. Layton said the SB is trying very hard to maintain confidentiality around HR issues, and the public needs to be aware that the SB cannot disclose everything. Town Manager Rod Francis said it's not creosote coming from the Moore Lane bridge; it's another unidentified substance. Tests have shown that the water is not contaminated. The Town is working with our consultant to find a temporary solution while we figure out the long-term solution for the bridge's problem. Francis said we have had continued staffing issues; the Lister's assistant resigned recently. The Police Chief opening has been advertised.
5. Consent Agenda. Arnold **moved** (2nd Gere) to approve the consent agenda. **Motion approved unanimously.**

6. Committee Appointments.

A) Health Officer – Alka Dev spoke in support of her application for Health Officer. Dev wants to serve as Health Officer with the other applicant, Alena Berube. Arnold **moved** (2nd Gere) to recommend Alka Dev and Alena Berube for appointment by the State of Vermont as Health Officer for a 3-year term. **Motion approved unanimously.**

B) Wastewater Study Steering Committee – Richard Kenney spoke in support of his application. Anne Day spoke in support of her application. Brochu **moved** (2nd Calloway) to appoint Anne Day to the Wastewater Feasibility Study Steering Committee as a resident living outside the village. **Motion approved unanimously.** Stuart Richards spoke in support of his application. Bob Pitiger spoke in support of his application. Calloway moved to appoint Stuart Richards to the Wastewater Feasibility Study Steering Committee as a resident living within the village. Motion was not seconded. Arnold **moved** (2nd Gere) to appoint Bob Pitiger to the Wastewater Feasibility Study Steering Committee as a resident living within the village. **Motion approved (4-yes; Calloway-abstain).** Layton **moved** (2nd Brochu) to appoint Marcia Calloway as Selectboard representative to the Wastewater Study Steering Committee. **Motion approved unanimously.** Arnold **moved** (2nd Gere) to affirm Suzanne Leiter, Marc Aquila, and Jamie Teague as members of the Wastewater Study Steering Committee. **Motion approved unanimously.**

7. End of Fiscal Year Update. Finance Director Fielding Essensa spoke about the financial reports contained in the SB meeting packet. So far, we are anticipating an approximately \$250,000 surplus for FY2022. Essensa said the SB can decide what to do with the surplus. SB members discussed options for using the surplus funds, including possible retention bonuses for employees or asking the voters to spend the money on a particular project or reserve fund. Marc Aquila suggested that the surplus money should go back to the voters. SB members agreed to discuss the issue of the surplus in greater depth at a future meeting. Essensa said he has been actively working on finding an auditor to begin work in the near future; he has compiled a list of potential auditors to reach out to.

8. Set Transfer Station Fees for FY2023. After some discussion, Arnold **moved** (2nd Brochu) to approve the Norwich Transfer Station Fee Schedule, as contained in the Selectboard meeting packet. **Motion approved unanimously.**

9. Guiding Principles for Police Chief Selection. SB members discussed ideas about how to approach hiring a new police chief and what qualities and skills they would like the new chief to possess. Demo Sofronas thinks it's important to hire a chief soon. Mary Gorman thinks it's important to hire a chief now and recruit concurrently for chief and officers. Leslie Wells wants to post for a chief and officers at once.

10. Physical Plan Needs Assessment Follow-up. After some discussion, Brochu **moved** (2nd Layton) to authorize the Town Manager to release the RFQ for Space Needs Analysis, as contained in the Selectboard meeting packet. **Motion approved (4-yes; Calloway-no).**

11. Digital Footprint. Brochu **moved** (2nd Gere) to request that the Town Manager provide comparative information on a short list of options for developing a new town website. **Motion approved unanimously.**

12. Preliminary Discussion of Animal Ordinance Revisions. Brochu thanked Calloway for her work on the animal ordinance. SB members agreed to defer this item to a future meeting.

13. Future Meetings. SB members agreed to defer this item to a future meeting.

14. Adjourn. Brochu suggested that the SB develop a written response to residents' questions.

Arnold volunteered to work with the Town Manager to develop draft responses for review and approval by the SB. Layton **moved** (2nd Brochu) to adjourn. **Motion approved unanimously.** Meeting adjourned at 10:21 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on July 13, 2022

Roger Arnold, Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – July 13, 2022 – Meeting at 6:30

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