

Norwich Board of Listers
Regular Meeting – 3:00 pm
Wednesday, October 19, 2022
Draft minutes

Listers Present: Cheryl A. Lindberg and Pam Smith

Others Present: Contract Assessor Spencer Potter, Mary Layton, Linda Cook (joined at 3:03pm), Liz Blum (joined at 3:45pm), Stuart Richards (joined at 4:00pm) and Bonnie Munday (joined at 4:07pm)

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:00pm

2. Review and approval of agenda – discussion/action

Lindberg stated that the Listers have received the annual request from the Connecticut River Valley Flood Control Commission (CRVFCC) for the 2022 Norwich tax rates. Motion by Smith to approve the agenda with the addition of the correspondence from CRVFCC (2nd Lindberg). Unanimous.

3. Public Comments & Correspondence –

Mary Layton thanked the Listers for including her in the meeting. Lindberg said the Listers will respond to the request from CRVFCC. Potter mentioned that there is a pending sale of the Great River Hydro Project to Hydro Quebec.

4. Patriot Properties Agreement & Support Invoice – review/discussion/action

Smith stated that she has compared the contract renewal with last year's contract and the only change is the contract period which was changed from July 1, 2021 to July 1, 2022. Everything else remains the same, including the amount for annual Classic Maintenance and Support. Motion by Smith to renew the Annual Customer Software Support and License Agreement with Patriot Properties beginning July 1, 2022 and to forward the invoice for Classic Maintenance and Support to finance when the signed agreement by the Norwich Town Manager and Patriot Properties and is returned to the Listers (2nd Lindberg). Unanimous. Motion by Lindberg to approve the Patriot Properties Invoice #4305838 in the amount of \$5,300 for Classic Maintenance and Support (2nd Smith). Unanimous.

5. Assessor monthly report and invoice – discussion/action

The Listers reviewed the Assessor's report and the updated permit log, which the Assessor provided. Lindberg would also like to have a report that shows the permits that have been closed by the Assessor. Lindberg asked Potter if he had any further communications with the Town of Sharon regarding the boundary issue on the Adams parcel. Potter said he has not. Potter explained that only the State Legislature has the authority to determine town boundaries. These decisions have far-reaching consequences regarding where property owners pay taxes, vote, send their children to school, etc. The Listers have fulfilled all requests for documents from the Town of Sharon and will wait to hear if any additional information is needed. Lindberg asked if Potter is doing interior inspections. Potter said he has a list of inspections needed but has not scheduled them as yet. Lindberg and Smith offered to assist in the scheduling using Potter's appointment scheduling app. Smith reaffirmed with Potter that new SPAN numbers will continue to be created in NEMRC until Patriot Properties notifies us that AssessPro can perform this function. Motion by Smith to accept the report dated October 1, 2022 and approve Invoice #13650 dated October 1, 2022 in the amount of \$3,402.06 (2nd Lindberg). Unanimous.

6. Approval of Draft Minutes of August 10, 2022 – discussion action

Motion by Lindberg to approve the draft minutes of July 13, 2022 and September 14, 2022 (2nd Smith). Unanimous.

7. RFP for Reappraisal – review/discussion

Lindberg stated that the Selectboard has not placed the RFP on their agenda yet. Smith stated that she had a conversation with Christie Wright, Field Director, Property Valuation and Review, today. Wright stated that the Town needs to make every effort to have a reappraisal firm under contract by December 9, 2022, and that the Town should not assume that an extension will be granted by the State. Wright stated that the Listers are required to file the Detailed Reappraisal Compliance Plan (VT Form RA-308) on December 9, 2022 with all information that is available on that date. Lindberg stated that the Listers will complete form RA-308 on time and will review the form at their next meeting. Smith stated that she is very concerned that we will not have a firm under contract given the Selectboard's current path of having the Town Manager evaluate assessment software prior to approving the Listers issuance of the RFP. The Listers noted that they had previously considered a change of software programs, however, due to the time constraints of the State mandate, the decision was made by the Listers to stay with AssessPro with the intent to move to the cloud-based version. This choice was seen as the least disruptive and least costly to the Town. Wright also stated that, while the Selectboard has the power of the purse, the responsibility for selection of assessing software has not been codified. She further stated that Vermont is a Dillon's Rule state meaning that the Selectboard only has authority to do that which is approved explicitly by the legislature. Most Towns leave software selection to the Listers, according to Wright.

8. Request to Selectboard for Reallocation of Lister Budget – discussion/action

On September 7, 2022, the Listers sent a request for a budget line item reallocation to the Selectboard. Lindberg stated that the Selectboard has accepted our request under correspondence, however, this request has not been on a Selectboard agenda. The request was made due to the current difficulty to recruit and retain employees. Smith also noted that the pool of individuals looking for part-time work with no benefits is even smaller than the pool of individuals seeking full-time positions with benefits. For this reason, Smith and Lindberg have requested a reallocation of the Lister Assistant wages and the Listers stipend into one line item for Lister office wages in the FY23 budget. Smith and Lindberg would work out a schedule to staff the Listers office and be paid for the hours worked in lieu of the current stipend. There is historical precedent for Listers to be paid hourly. Smith also noted her concern that the Town Manager has not issued budget forms for FY24, which are typically sent on September 1 and returned no later than October 1. And, Smith noted that the Selectboard has not included the FY24 budget review on their list of future agenda items. Smith expressed concern that it appears the Listers may not be allowed input in the FY24 budget process by the Town Manager.

9. Meeting with Selectboard Representative, Town Clerk, Town Treasurer and Listers (4:00pm)

Layton led off the discussion stating that the Selectboard wanted to hear from the other elected officials on how to address the issue of performance and morale among paid staff and how elected officials interact with paid staff. Layton said that she volunteered to represent the Selectboard in this meeting. Lindberg stated that she feels that the tone needs to be set by the Selectboard and that this tone is felt throughout all town operations. Lindberg stated that she feels that the Selectboard has been disrespectful of the other elected officials and that this has given the impression to paid staff that they do not need to be respectful. Lindberg offered the Town Manager's report in the October 12 Selectboard packet addressing two issues related to the Town Treasurer without having a conversation with her regarding his concerns. Lindberg

also noted that the Town Manager has consulted with the Contract Assessor and our Property Valuation and Review District Advisor on various issues without the knowledge of the Listers. The Listers exercise exclusive supervision over the tasks of the Contract Assessor, therefore, the Listers feel that information requests should be directed to them and not directly to the Contract Assessor. The Listers would also like to be included when the Town Manager requests information from our District Advisor. Lindberg pointed to several other examples of how she has felt disrespected not only as the Treasurer, but also as a Lister. Smith and Munday also cited examples where they have felt disrespected by members of the Selectboard and Town Manager. Smith cited one example is when the Selectboard Chair calls on Lindberg to “make a public comment” when it is clear that she is addressing an agenda item as the Treasurer or the Chair of the Board of Listers. Smith added that the Chair’s failure to recognize Lindberg as an elected official is very disrespectful. Other instances cited related to being left out of meetings and communications, which gives the impression that elected officials do not matter in the day-to-day operations of the Town. Lindberg stated that elected officials have statutory duties and responsibilities, and we are all trying to do our jobs to the best of our ability. Being “ghosted” by the Selectboard and some members of the paid staff makes it difficult to do our jobs. Smith expressed a concern that some of the “ghosting” happens on days when paid staff members are working from home and stated that she would like to see an end to work from home. Munday expressed her opinion that it is necessary to be at your desk when you work for a municipality so that people can access the services they need. Some staffers are not responding to emails or picking up phone messages on their work-from-home days. Stuart Richards noted some of the instances that he felt were extremely rude on the part of the Selectboard Chair and the need for a more respectful comportment when addressing other members of the Selectboard and the public. Linda Cook stated that she is concerned about the loss of institutional knowledge in town. She noted the turnover among staff members as well as turnover on the Selectboard has led to this loss. Lindberg suggested that the Selectboard should seek input from other elected officials and department heads on their interactions with the Town Manager as a part of the Town Manager’s review. Layton said this was a good suggestion. To close out the discussion, Lindberg reiterated her opinion that the tone is set at the top and she asked that the Selectboard take a more respectful tone with the other elected officials. Layton stated that she made note of all the concerns expressed and that she will share these concerns and the recommendations for improved communication and collaboration among elected officials, as well as among elected officials and paid staff to the Selectboard.

10. Next Meeting Date

The next regular meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, November 9, 2022.

11. Adjournment

Motion by Smith to adjourn at 5:45pm (2nd Lindberg). Unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Cheryl A. Lindberg, Chair
Board of Listers