

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, March 8, 2023, at 6:30 pm

This organizational meeting following the recent election at Town Meeting was conducted in person at the Public Safety building at 10 Hazen Street, Norwich, VT. Members present: Marcia Calloway, Chair; Mary Layton, Vice Chair; Roger Arnold; Pamela Smith; Priscilla Vincent; Brennan Duffy, Interim Town Manager Also participating: Manu Tesone; Cheryl Lindberg, Town Treasurer; Jack Cushman, Chair, Article 36 Taskforce; Stuart Richards; John Carroll; Demo Sofronas; Charlotte Metcalf; Kris Clement; Wade Cochran, Police Chief; Ralph Hybels, minutes taker

Meeting convened at 6:30 PM with Calloway initially serving as Chair pro tem.

1. Election of Chair. Layton nominated Calloway for Chair. Duffy noted that no second was required. Nomination approved unanimously and accepted by Calloway.
2. Election of Vice Chair. Layton nominated herself as Vice Chair. No second necessary. Approved unanimously.
3. Agenda Review. Duffy requested that an item be added for approval of expenditures. Layton moved to add this as item 17 and approve the agenda as amended, seconded by Vincent. Approved unanimously.
4. Choose Official Town Newspaper. Layton moved to accept the *Valley News* as the newspaper of record. Smith seconded. Passed unanimously.
5. Set Selectboard Regular Meeting Schedule. Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to continue to meet on second and fourth Wednesdays of each month at 6:30 PM, with the exception of meeting November 21 instead of 22. Passed unanimously.
6. Authorize Chair &/or Vice Chair to Sign Payroll Warrants. Layton moved, seconded by Vincent. In discussion, Lindberg, as Treasurer, noted that payroll warrants are public documents and therefore could be included in the pre-meeting packets. Motion approved unanimously.
7. Authorize Chair &/or Vice Chair to Sign AP Warrants Off-cycle. Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to authorize the Chair or Vice Chair to examine and sign warrants against the Town when approval of the warrant is for expenditures that are within the purchasing authority of the Town Manager and are necessary to be drawn between regular Selectboard meetings or when the time between regular Selectboard meetings exceeds two weeks, provided that the warrant will be included in the Selectboard packet for the next regular Selectboard meeting.

Motion passed with four votes Yes and one abstention (Vincent).

8. Adopt Procedure for Receipt of Correspondence. There was general discussion of

how best to ensure proper and timely response to any correspondence, at minimum to acknowledge its receipt, but preferably with some indication of when and how any issue raised might be addressed. While this does not represent any departure from the procedures as already codified and presented in the current meeting's packet, the consensus was that better efforts at such communication should be made. Cushman, as Chair of the Article 36 Taskforce, commented particularly in relation to his recent experience when alerting the Board to a potential funding opportunity.

Possible amendments to the Procedure for Receipt of Resident Correspondence were discussed. By consensus, "Hard copies will be made available upon request" will be removed from those procedures.

By consensus, the paragraph, "Resident correspondence is defined as letters, memos, emails and other documents sent to the Board." will be amended by adding "Such information should be sent to the Selectboard email." And the deadline will be changed from 3:00 PM to 12:00 PM on the preceding Thursday.

The paragraph, "When correspondence is received in the Town Offices a letter or email will be sent to the sender of each piece of such correspondence to acknowledge the Board's receipt of correspondence addressed to the Board and to indicate at what Selectboard meeting it will formally be received." will be modified to read, "When correspondence is received in the Town Offices a letter or email will be sent to the sender of each piece of such correspondence to acknowledge the Board's receipt. The acknowledgment of receipt will indicate at what Selectboard meeting the correspondence will be formally received."

The paragraph, "The entire content of correspondence will not be read during Selectboard meetings in order to conserve time; however, writers may attend the meeting and ask to read their correspondence into the record." will be struck in its entirety.

Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to adopt the procedures concerning correspondence as amended. Motion passed unanimously.

Hybels requested that any changes to motions from those available before a meeting be provided him as minutes taker in writing shortly after the meeting in which they're discussed.

9. Adopt Rules of Procedure. General discussion compared the "VLCT Model Rules of Procedure for Municipal Bodies" to the Town's existing "Rules for Conduct of Regular and Special Meetings", both of which are reproduced in the packet. John Carroll commented that the VLCT model reflects best practices statewide and the Town should only depart from that model when well justified and intentional. He said that the Town's rules concerning public comment are "not consistent with statute", which he recommends quoting explicitly therein.

It was agreed that Calloway and Smith will draft revised procedure policy for consideration at the next meeting. Layton moved to table the adoption of rules of

procedure, seconded by Smith.

10. Future Meetings (in-person/remote/hybrid). Vincent advocated for adopting the hybrid format for all meetings Town-wide so interested townspeople could choose to attend remotely or in-person. Calloway reported that she has talked with CATV/JAM regarding possibly having dedicated Zoom capabilities. Cushman cautioned that in his experience managing meetings on Zoom is more difficult than one might expect. This observation was echoed by Richards, who recommended consideration of Microsoft Teams®.

There was general discussion of moving the Board's meetings back to Tracy Hall.

11. Other Topics. Several subjects were discussed.

Tesone suggested scheduling informal quarterly Q&A sessions, for which Trajman expressed support. While Smith, Calloway, and Vincent expressed appreciation for the idea, they were concerned about the implications for complying with the requirements of the Open Meeting Law.

Arnold and Sofronas recommended reconfiguring seating at Board meetings in a V-shape to better accommodate discussion and video recording.

Richards said the Board should talk to "the person" who has taken the Town to court over alleged OML violations, describing the Town's legal expenditures for its defense as "a huge waste."

12. Annual Town Audit Update. The need for a hybrid meeting with the auditors was discussed. Smith expressed dismay that the memo from the interim Finance Director is not signed or dated and does not specify who had "asked" for the information provided. Lindberg expressed concern about public communications concerning the Town's finances in which she felt she as Treasurer should have been better included.

13. Town Meeting Results. Calloway wondered if the concerns raised by the passage of Article 10 at Town Meeting could be addressed at the special Town Meeting necessitated by the inadvertent omission of Schoolboard candidates from the ballot.

14. Open Positions Update. Duffy commented on the lack of applicants for the open Finance Director position and the need to address any perception in the area of the Town of Norwich being a difficult place to work. Another topic was the funding necessary to support the hiring of a fifth police officer as was approved in principle at Town Meeting, with Metcalf emphasizing that townspeople expect police coverage for 20 hours per day seven days a week.

Duffy said he will be working on the job description for the administrative assistant position approved at Town Meeting, which will support the DPW as well as his own office. He said he hopes the buildings and grounds position will be filled "before the grass grows." The equipment operator opening has been filled. Duffy said there still has been only "limited interest from qualified candidates" in the Planning & Zoning Director position.

Duffy said he doubts it will be possible to fill the Finance Director opening by the end of April, when the interim finance director's contract with Robert Half will end. The Town needs to decide whether to offer to extend that arrangement, but may also want to consider hiring Robert Half or another agency to conduct a broader search for a permanent Finance Director, despite the commission that would be required if successful.

Tesone suggested the Board issue a statement assuring the public in the area that Norwich is, in fact, a healthy and supportive employment environment.

In response to Cochran, Arnold moved, seconded by Layton, to authorize the interim Town Manager to purchase a new Ford hybrid police cruiser that was ordered in September and is now ready at the dealership. Motion passed with four yes and one abstention (Smith).

15. Town Clerk Transition. Duffy said the salary of the incoming Town Clerk needs to be settled as well as determining what money will be made available to compensate the retiring Town Clerk for some period during the transition. This may require a special Selectboard meeting, which they tentatively scheduled for next Wednesday and may also include testing Zoom in a hybrid format.

16. Consent Agenda. Cushman addressed the funding opportunity he brought to the Board's attention to earlier in the week. He said Senator Sanders' office had told him they were enthusiastic about helping Norwich with such opportunities and that, while the deadline for the grant in question was the coming Friday, the Town should keep in mind that there are other municipal grant opportunities to consider as well.

Three minor amendments to the minutes from February 22 were proposed.

Layton moved, seconded by Vincent to approve the consent agenda, including those minutes.

17. Open Positions on Boards & Committees. Duffy said they'll be advertising open volunteer positions on the Norwich listserv, but he will need a complete list within a month or month and a half.

18. Future Agenda Items. Layton raised the question of hiring a human resources consultant, which had been planned to be done by the end of March. No conclusion was reached.

Adjournment. Layton moved (2nd Arnold) to adjourn at 10:35 PM. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Ralph C. Hybels, Minutes Taker

Approved by the Selectboard on March 22, 2023

Marcia Calloway, Selectboard Chair

Next meeting – March 22, 2023 at 6:30pm

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