

Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, September 14, 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; Marcia Calloway; Robert Gere; Aaron Lamperti, Rod Francis, Town Manager.

Also participating: Stuart Richards, Robert Kramer, Gretchen D., Michael Costa, Deb Martin, Demo Sofronas, Manu Tesone, Cheryl Lindberg, Jaan Laaspere, Tracey Hayes, Peter Orner, Fielding Essensa, Patrick Wheeler, Andrew Scherer, Brie Swenson.

1. Meeting convened at 6:30 PM
2. Layton moved (2nd Lamperti) to approve the agenda. Motion approved unanimously.
3. Public participation: Stuart Richards expressed concern about the Selectboard (SB) and town's management. Robert Kramer spoke in support of the Girard Field renovation. Gretchen D. expressed concern about her tax payment. Michael Costa spoke in support of renovating Girard Field. Deb Martin and Demo Sofronas expressed concern about the SB and town's management. Manu Tesone expressed support of Officer Ingraham. Cheryl Lindberg said the Listers are disappointed that their RFP didn't make it into the SB agenda; she also said the Girard Fund was not set up for field maintenance. Jaan Laaspere expressed concern about the town's HR practices. Tracey Hayes spoke about the need for school crossing guards. Peter Orner suggested that the SB conduct a question-and-answer session and expressed concern about the Moore Lane Bridge.
4. Errors and Omissions Request to Grand List. Layton moved (2nd Gere) to approve amending the 2022 Grand List to correct an omission (accepting an exemption for a qualified disabled veteran) which will result in a total exemption of \$40,000 being applied to a Norwich parcel. Motion approved unanimously.
5. Tax Due Dates & Homestead Declaration Administrative Conflicts. SB members discussed options for remedying the financial difficulty for taxpayers who receive income sensitivity payments. Fielding Essensa, Finance Director, explained how the August tax payment due date causes difficulty for some taxpayers. Essensa recommends that the town voters decide at the next annual meeting whether to set the first tax payment to a later date than it is now; Essensa recommends the first tax payment be pushed back by one month and made due in mid September.
6. Town Manager's Report. TM Rod Francis summarized the contents of his written report, as included in the meeting packet. SB members discussed issues concerning the Moore Lane Bridge and traffic calming. Peter Orner expressed concern about Moore Lane Bridge. Patrick Wheeler disagreed with TRORC's analysis of the Beaver Meadow traffic study. Andrew Scherer questioned whether the town is required to raise a speed

limit based on the results of a traffic study. Francis said he believes that the town is not obligated to raise the Beaver Meadow speed limit as a result of this traffic study. Stuart Richards expressed concern about the Moore Lane Bridge, speeding on Beaver Meadow, and hiring a new police chief. Peter Orner spoke about ballot Article 10 and speeding on Beaver Meadow Road. Calloway suggested the SB consider tearing down the Moore Lane Bridge as an emergency measure.

7. Authorize Contract for 2022-23 Snowplow Routes. Layton moved (2nd Lamperti) to authorize the Town Manager to enter into an agreement with Daniel S. Clay Excavation to provide snowplowing services for the winter of 2022-23. Motion approved (4 yes; Calloway no).

8. Authorize Repairs and Turf Services for Girard Field and Softball Field. Brie Swenson, Recreation Director, introduced the topic and explained why the field repairs are necessary. After some discussion, Layton moved (2nd Lamperti) to request the Town Manager to obtain bids according to Town Financial Policies for repairs and improvements to Girard Field at Huntley Meadows. Motion approved (4 yes; Calloway no). Layton moved (2nd Lamperti) to request the Town Manager to obtain bids according to Town Financial Policies for repairs and improvements to the softball field at Huntley Meadows. Motion approved (4 yes; Calloway no).

9. Attorney-Client Communications and Advice. Layton moved (2nd Lamperti) to find that premature general public knowledge of attorney-client communications between the Selectboard and Town Attorney as to matters for which legal advice is sought would clearly place the Town at a substantial disadvantage by disclosing privileged communications and waiving attorney-client privilege. Motion approved unanimously. Layton moved (2nd Gere) to enter executive session pursuant to 1 VSA §313(a)(1)(F), for the purposes of considering confidential attorney-client advice, and to invite the town's attorney. Motion approved unanimously. The SB entered executive session at 8:45 pm.

Layton moved (2nd Gere) to enter public session. Motion approved unanimously. The SB entered public session at 10:01 pm.

Upon return to public session, Layton read aloud the following statement from the SB, which statement is also posted on the front page of the Town's website:

The Town of Norwich, like everywhere else, is dealing with uncertainty and change after two years of making things work in the context of a pandemic and its aftermath. We have experienced turnover in nearly all our departments, particularly in the Public Works and the Police Departments. Staff have taken on increased workloads and have handled multiple jobs. Management has begun the work of addressing longstanding structural problems. We have had staff settle into new positions and we continue to fill and advertise vacancies. In addition to paid staff, town government in Tracy Hall operates with elected officials.

In April the Board recognized the need to successfully integrate new town employees, develop shared understandings of leadership hierarchies, and improve the workplace culture for all staff in general. The Town hired Mark Heyman of HR Happens to interview staff and to provide the Town Manager with recommendations and informed analysis on how to strengthen and improve the Town's ability to recruit and retain employees. No report or presentation has been offered to the Board to date.

In May the town's attorneys hired an independent investigator stemming from employee conversations with HR Happens. In a confidential presentation to the Board, the investigation determined that no violations of law or town policies had occurred. Human Resource issues are subject to privacy provisions and the nature of those complaints is not something we can comment on.

The Selectboard's job as it relates to personnel relations is to set expectations for the Town and review progress on achieving clearly defined goals. The Board supports the work of our town manager in his direct oversight of town staff and in managing day-to-day operations. The Board wishes to provide tangible means of support to staff and to review policies and systems, establishing expectations for successful interactions between both elected officials and paid staff.

Town employees do not forfeit some right to privacy in their pursuits simply by virtue of public employment. The Selectboard typically will not comment on, confirm, or corroborate rumors of any kind. We ask for citizens to please be conscientious and avoid disseminating misinformation in their correspondence to the Board and other public forums.

Lamperti moved (2nd Gere) to direct Mary Layton, Vice Chair, to arrange meetings with Elected Officials, including the Listers, Treasurer, and Town Clerk, to get feedback on any concerns or recommendations for greater collaboration between elected officials and paid town staff. Motion approved unanimously.

Lamperti moved (2nd Gere) to hire a consultant for the purposes of collaborative team building between paid town staff and elected officials no later than March 2023, the deadline of which is reflective and dependent on current availability for this type of work. Motion approved unanimously.

10. Consent Agenda. Layton moved (2nd Gere) to approve the consent agenda. Motion approved unanimously. Calloway asked to see prior approved off-schedule A/P warrants.

11. Personnel. Layton moved (2nd Gere) to enter executive session pursuant to 1 VSA §313(a)(3) to review an employee and to invite the Town Manager. Motion approved unanimously. The SB entered executive session at 10:09 pm.

Layton moved (2nd Lamperti) to enter public session. Motion approved unanimously (4 to 0; Calloway absent). The SB entered public session at 10:56 pm. The SB took no further action.

7. Adjourn. Layton moved (2nd Lamperti) to adjourn. Motion approved unanimously (4 to 0; Calloway absent). Meeting adjourned at 10:56 pm.

By Miranda Bergmeier

Approved by the Selectboard on September 28, 2022

Marcia Calloway, Selectboard Chair

Next Meeting – September 28, 2022 – Meeting at 6:30

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