

Norwich Selectboard Special Meeting  
December 7, 2022

1. Welcome and Chair's Comments, Start 6:30 pm
2. Agenda Review. The agenda was amended to move the Town-wide Reappraisal Contract to Action Items, and to add the Norwich Historic Preservation Commission CLG Grant. Layton moved, second by Lamperti to approve the agenda as amended. Vote: Yes-Unanimous
3. Consent Agenda: Layton moved, second by Gere to approve the consent agenda. Vote: Yes-Unanimous.
4. Norwich Historic Preservation Commission CLG Grant application. Layton moved, second by Gere, to name the Selectboard Chair as the designee of the Chief Elected Local Official in order to sign the 2023 CLG Grant Application. Vote: Yes: Calloway, Gere, Lamperti, Layton. No: Arnold
5. KRT Appraisers Contract. Discussion included trying to reconcile the need to meet the December 9, deadline for form RA 308 with concerns about the specific terms of the contract and the lack of a Town Manager to sign it by the deadline. Layton moved, second by Arnold, to authorize review and negotiations of the contract between the Town of Norwich and KRT Appraisers. Vote: Yes: Arnold, Gere, Lamperti, Layton. No: Calloway. Public Comment: Susan Barrett is concerned about the contract. Charlotte Metcalfe asked about an appropriate time to speak regarding the police and was asked by the Chair to do so during the Agenda setting item. Neil Fulton asked if the contract had been reviewed by counsel, and that sections seemed to be based on Massachusetts statute rather than Vermont statute. Leslie Wells asked if the Chair is an attorney. The Chair said yes, but that is irrelevant. Wells said the Town Manager statute is silent on this "dire situation". Linda Cook expressed concern about losing funding.
6. Better Roads Grant: Layton moved, second by Gere, to authorize the Board Chair to sign the Better Roads Grant Application. Vote: Yes-Unanimous.

7. Purchase order PD RAV4 lights & Antenna: Arnold moved, second by Lamperti, to authorize spending \$3630.12 to purchase lights and an antenna for the Police Department RAV4. Vote: Yes-Unanimous.
8. Executive Session: Consideration of Interim Town Manager Agreement: Layton moved, Second by Lamperti, to enter executive session to consider the appointment or employment of a public officer or employee under 1 VSA section 313(a) and to invite one or more candidates to join us. Vote: Yes-Unanimous. Time entered: 7:24 pm. Arnold moved, second by Layton to enter public session. Vote: Yes-Unanimous Time: 7:52 pm Layton moved, second by Lamperti to authorize the Chair to send an offer of employment to a candidate for the position of Interim Town Manager. Vote: Yes-Unanimous.
9. COBRA Administration: Interim Finance Director Joyce Hasbrouck and Town Manager Administrative Assistant Miranda Bergmeier researched firms to administer COBRA benefits for Town employees who have left town employment. They researched three firms and recommended Health Equity at an annual rate of \$528. The town has used this firm in the past.
10. Fire District Fire Hydrant Rental: Michael Goodrich represented the Norwich Fire District. The Fire District has requested an increase in the annual fire hydrant rental fee which was set at \$11,200 in 2016 and increased incrementally until 2022 when it was increased to \$34,000. The Fire District proposal for the next three years is to increase the hydrant rental fee to \$60,000 in FY24, \$90,000 in FY25, and \$120,000 in FY26. The increase is based on guidelines from the American Water Works Association. The water system includes a well on Route 5 North near Pompanoosuc, pipes that connect the source to a 100,000 gallon tank on Dutton Hill, a purification and distribution system, all of which is valued at \$22 million dollars. The components are wearing out and need replacement including a section that runs under I-91. There are 340 hook ups in town. Tracy Hall, the Marion Cross School, the Montshire Museum, the Grange, and businesses are not charged for water. The hydrants serve as a water supply for fire suppression in the Fire District. They enable lower homeowner insurance for fire

protection in the Fire District. Paving of streets that have to be torn up for water main repairs is not paid for by the Town of Norwich or eligible for Paving Grants, and is paid by the Fire District.

Discussion ensued: Michael Goodrich stated that the value of hydrant use is a public good that extends beyond the Fire District. Aaron Lamperti stated that fire suppression outside the Fire District does not use the hydrants, and that the water and insurance benefits are to the members of the Fire District in particular. Roger Arnold called for broader analysis and documentation and wondered if the Fire District could delay their request in that context. A Town Charter could be formed to merge assets, or if that is not possible, then documents showing a fee structure would be needed. Marcia Calloway said that a merger of the Fire District and Town of Norwich would be difficult and needs more scrutiny. Rob Gere asked if after the 60K/90K/120K request was phased in would the requests level off? Michael Goodrich replied that there are still infrastructure upgrades needed. Mary Layton asked for more financial information about the actual cost of repairs completed and infrastructure upgrades needed. Michael Goodrich said that the proposal was sent to the town on July 21<sup>st</sup>. Marcia Calloway could not find an actual written agreement. She wanted to know if the increase was requested to help in Fire District budget planning. Cheryl Lindberg said that bills are sent and paid through the Fire District Enterprise Fund. There is a possibility that water mains could be downsized. Aaron Lamperti said the insurance bills for residents would go up if hydrants are closed down. Public comment by Neil Fulton: Hydrants cannot be shut off, by statute. Roger Arnold asked for next steps, which were identified as 1) Michael Goodrich will report back to the Fire District and 2) The merger process will be explored. It was noted that Rod Francis thought that the FD and TON were not ready to consider a merger during his tenure. Roger Arnold advocated for keeping the hydrant rental at 34K but developing a Memorandum of Understanding for a process going forward. Marcia Calloway said to keep the 60K increase for consideration on the second pass of the budget. A straw poll was taken as to planning for a 60K hydrant rental fee in the FY24 budget. Calloway: Yes, Arnold, Gere, Lamperti, Layton No.

## 11. Budget Presentations

- a. DPW: Chris Kaufman presented. There is a backlog of work. All materials have increased in cost. Staff savings are offset by the private winter maintenance contract. The request is 9.5% higher than FY23. Needed upgrades include repair of the structural steel in the highway garage, repaving at the transfer station, replacing a 1998 John Deer mower, and adding to the Equipment Fund. A Freightliner plow truck will need to be replaced in FY26. Class 2 Roads require \$1.5 million in repaving, grants available. Class 3 roads require \$1.1 million in repaving, no grants available so reserve funds should be used, \$75K over 15 to 20 years. Rte 132 is dangerous and Chris is thinking of a long term plan that first involves culvert replacement, then repaving. The Stantec Bridge Report recommends \$2.8 million in replacement and repairs over 10 years, resulting in a request for \$100,000 annually in the Bridge Reserve Fund. Marcia Calloway asked about a plan for the Moore Lane Bridge. Chris replied that Phase One was containment required by Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation. Chris Bump of VTRANS requires monitoring the containment this summer. Grants may be too specific to be used for the needed repair or replacement. The structure of the bridge is sound. Phase Two will occur if the encapsulation is unsuccessful. The remediation would be to grind off the asphalt, remove the wooden sidewalk, apply an impermeable membrane, and resurface with asphalt. Marcia Calloway asked if there is enough funding for the Phase Two cost. Chris Kaufman replied, if the budget passes there will be \$630 in Bridge Fund, but that paying for Phase Two or other treatments including replacement will affect scheduled bridge projects including a proposed Mitchel Brook bridge replacement in FY/26 at \$750K. Roger Arnold suggested reviewing the Capital plan the SB developed last year. Chris will contact Otter Creek Engineering concerning the structural supports at the Highway Garage.

- b. Recreation: There is increased liability for the Town with the ABA trail at the Milt Frye Nature area. Increases in the FY2 budget include items such as line marking, the MCS rental fee, tennis court resurfacing, and a proposed assistant to the Recreation Director. There is a job description and the salary is proposed at \$41,506 after consultation with several other recreation directors in the Upper Valley. The ABA trail is installed, looks good and is functional. It needs frequent monitoring for blow downs and repair to keep the hard pack smooth. There is training available for ABA/ADA Trail Inspector. Staff fees are at a good level but referee fees are very high. Recreation will work with DPW on field maintenance. The memorial fountain at Huntley Meadow needs repair. The tennis courts could not be resurfaced until this spring. Material will be added after scraping. Roger Arnold stated there could be a shared assistant between DPW and REC. Would the new employee be a union member?
- c. Planning & Zoning: It is not clear what structure this department will have going forward, so it is difficult to estimate costs.
- d. Town Manager and Finance Office: some research is needed to update insurance, bond and debt service.

## 12. Future Agenda Items

- a. December 14: Action item/Minutes Taker
- b. December 21: Budget presentations, second pass; Special Appropriations, Town Committees & Commissions; Town Manager Search continued
- c. Charlotte Metcalfe spoke to the need to support the Police Department

13. Adjourn. Layton moved to adjourn, second by Gere. Vote yes-Unanimous, Time adjourned 10:07 pm

Approved by the Selectboard on December 14, 2022

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Marcia Calloway, Selectboard Chair

Next meeting December 14,2022