

**Minutes of the Special Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, August 2, 2023, at 6:30 pm**

This hybrid meeting was held in the Multipurpose Room in Tracy Hall.

Members present: Marcia Calloway, Chair; Mary Layton, Vice Chair; Roger Arnold (via Zoom); Pamela Smith; Priscilla Vincent

Also participating: Brennan Duffy (via Zoom), Interim Town Manager; Marshall Heinberg; Leslie Wells; Wayne Kniffin; Matthew Swett; Margaret Baghdoyan; Wilfred (Will) Smith

Note that sections are presented here in the order they were addressed at the meeting, which may occasionally differ from their sequential item numbering.

Because not all members were present in person at this meeting, all votes reported below were by roll call.

Welcome. Meeting was called to order by Calloway at 6:38 PM. She reminded anyone wishing to join via Zoom® to present with both first and last names to help prevent unwelcome intrusions, commonly known as “Zoom-bombing.” Given that this special meeting was to be focused almost exclusively on the RFP for the open Town Manager position search, Calloway committed to finishing within two hours.

1. Agenda. Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to approve the agenda. **Passed Unanimously.**

2. Minutes. – July 26, 2023. Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to approve the minutes of July 26, 2023. Prior to the vote on this motion, Smith reported that a correction had been requested by the Town Clerk regarding Cott systems, and that it should be documented under Item #5 that a motion by Arnold and seconded by Layton to approve the contract with Better Bin passed with four yes votes and one abstention (Vincent). It was also pointed out that the draft minutes said Duffy was to work closely with Duffy on Police Chief succession planning whereas it should have said that was to be with Cochran. With these amendments, the minutes of July 26 were **Approved Unanimously.** Smith will deliver the corrections to Miranda Bergmeier to be posted with the final version.

3. Correspondence. None received.

4. AP Warrant(s). None.

- **Public Comments for Items not on the Agenda.** Wayne Kniffen acknowledged that the Selectboard works hard and has to sort out a lot of complex information. Will Smith, via Zoom, requested adjustments to ensure that all SB members could be heard on Zoom.

- **Update on Police Department.** Duffy reported that thus far there has not been much response to the advertised patrol officer position. However, the Town has managed already to hire an Interim Police Chief, Matthew Romei, who will start August 3. Romei served most recently as Chief of the Vermont Capitol Police and has extensive qualifications as well, for instance as a paramedic and EMT. He has been vetted thoroughly already by Chief Cochran, with only a drug and alcohol screening still pending. Duffy said a “meet-and-greet” was to be scheduled soon for townfolk to welcome him and to convey best wishes to outgoing Police Chief Cochran as well.

[Since this night’s Board meeting, the event has been scheduled for Monday, August 7 from 10:00 to 11:30 AM at the Public Safety Building.]

Marshall Heinberg rose from the audience to ask why the new Chief will be titled as interim and from what distance he will have to commute. Duffy replied that Romei will be driving 35-45 minutes from central Vermont where he lives, which is about as far away as Chief Cochran’s base.

Another Norwich resident, Leslie Wells, wondered what steps might be taken to answer the question, “How can we avoid losing another chief?” Duffy responded that while he can’t be specific in regard to compensation, particularly given the ongoing collective bargaining situation, they are endeavoring to meet the Town’s needs and objectives as best they can.

Will Smith said he thinks a change in the composition of the Selectboard’s negotiating team might be in order to ensure no member is “prejudiced against cops.” Arnold responded that the negotiating team, constituted by Layton and himself, has apprised the Board of its work on “at least three occasions” since it was formed in 2022. Calloway emphasized in addition that no actions can be taken without full approval of the Board.

Margaret Baghdoyan said she was “amazed” to have learned that officers such as the recently resigned Chelsea Maxham earn only \$2.50 per hour for on-call duty.

5. RFP for Town Manager search. Calloway reviewed a town manager’s role as defined under statutes, including its discretion and scope, which generally encompass accounting, buildings supervision, and oversight of fire and police, while the Selectboard retains in its entirety the determination and planning of budgets. In her view, the current contract with the Interim Town Manager (ITM) is rather more in line

with the typical role of a town administrator. She said the Board has become increasingly involved in areas that had been by definition the province of its town managers, largely because of distrust between the two, especially concerning such things as buildings and repairs.

Calloway also wondered aloud whether if the Board is not willing to hire to meet the job description of a full town manager, they ought not to ask the voters to consider formally reducing the role to that of an administrator. Or even revert to having the Selectboard once more run nearly everything, as it did before the vote to adopt the Town Manager system some twenty years ago. Given this context, she asked individual Board members how they wished to proceed. Each commented in turn.

Layton agreed that the Town has not had a full Town Manager for some time. Smith said she wasn't party to the original vote to establish that form of government and she wondered if upcoming hearings on the disposition of surplus ARPA funds might not be an opportune moment to raise the issue again, asking voters if they wished to address a related warrant at Town Meeting. She further suggested it might be best therefore to hold off for now on the RFP in question.

Vincent said the Town voted as it did in recognition that the ever-increasing complexity of Town governance had exceeded the capacity of the Selectboard as a part-time and essentially volunteer entity. She further commented that "technically" the work she's been doing in relation to options for heating Tracy Hall this winter ought instead to have been assigned to the ITM.

Arnold noted he found it "very instructive" that discussion on an agenda item for crafting an RFP had ventured instead into questioning whether the Town should even have any Town Manager. He was particularly concerned about what signal this might send to prospective hires, who are by definition of working age—a cohort showing generally little interest in even becoming involved at all in public service. In his view, too, career public servants want to know that elected decision-makers understand and appreciate their roles. The decision was made, we don't need to frame the discussion. He said the problem with Norwich is "we tend to exhume imagined crises of the past" rather than working for the future. "It's exhausting."

Will Smith commented that he was confident that with his fifteen years of experience in advertising, he could find a competent Town Manager and would do the work for free, asserting that the last one was "a disaster."

Marcia then shared her screen, color-coded to show who had suggested what. Duffy said of the Introduction section that he agreed the number of staff he oversees as ITM is approximately thirty. After some discussion, the Board reached consensus that the deadline for replies from targeted agencies will be September 8, 2023, with no

particular time of day specified.

At Vincent's suggestion, the scope of work description will be moved to the second section. It was also determined that in addition to reviewing details on education, criminal and civil litigation, social media, references, and background checks, in any Town Manager search a credit check should be completed since the position entails considerable attention to financial matters.

It also was decided that the "About the Town of Norwich" section should tout the proximity of the VA hospital and the Montshire Museum. Arnold suggested that since the term "bedroom community" connotes suburb and is often pejorative, a substitute should be found. The Board decided to instead describe the Town as a "neighbor" to Dartmouth and other employers.

Vincent said that although it is a separate municipality, the document should not imply that the Fire District provides sidewalks. "Provides water" they decided said enough.

Arnold requested more gender-neutral language be used instead of "he or she", "he/she", or "s/he". The Board decided that instead simply referencing "the candidate" where necessary would be satisfactory and sufficient.

The text may also reference somewhere the need for a candidate with a good sense of humor.

In the Qualifications section, "financial stability" will be changed to "financial ability" and/or "financial acumen."

The Board decided to state in the RFP that the most important criteria for selecting among search firms will be cost, approach, and timeline. At this point, the Board determined their editing of the RFP was complete and it was decided Calloway would see that the agreed-upon changes were made and return a final draft to each member for a last evaluation.

The Board agreed to accept Mary Gorman's suggested list of four search firms to be targeted with the RFP, plus the VLCT. It will be kept open or others as well. Responses will be received in the ITM's office.

Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to authorize the Interim Town Manager to issue the RFP as amended to: *Municipal resources, Inc.*; *Raftelis*; *Baker Tilly*; *Colin Baenziger & Associates*; and *Vermont League of Cities & Towns*; and to post the RFP to the Town website homepage, the Norwich listserv, and any other reasonable venue for distribution. **Passed Unanimously.**

Adjournment. Layton moved to adjourn, seconded by Vincent. **Passed Unanimously. Meeting Adjourned:** 8:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted (with thanks to Mary Layton for very useful notes),
Ralph C. Hybels
Minutes Taker

Approved by the Selectboard on

Marcia Calloway, Selectboard Chair

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