

**Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, July 12, 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; Pamela Smith; Priscilla Vincent

Also participating: Brennan Duffy, Interim Town Manager; Lily Trajman, Town Clerk; Wade Cochran, Police Chief; Officer Chelsea Maxham; Jeffrey Grout, TRORC Intermunicipal Regional Energy Coordinator; Neil Odell, Chair, Dresden School Board; Deputy Fire Chief Matthew Swett; John (“Jack”) Cushman; Demosthenes (“Demo”) Sofronas; Stuart Richards; Charlotte Metcalf; Linda Cook; Daniel Bornstein; Cole Flannery

Welcome. Meeting was called to order at 6:35 PM by Calloway. She also reminded that anyone wishing to join via Zoom must present with both first and last names, which will help prevent unwanted intrusions, commonly known as “Zoom bombing.”

1. Agenda. By consensus, Item 6, concerning an RFP for the Town Manager position, was deferred to a subsequent meeting, and Item 8A was added, concerning personnel issues in the Police Department. Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to approve the agenda. **Passed Unanimously.**

2. Minutes. – June 21, 27, and 28, 2023. Amendments to the June 21 minutes were discussed, with consensus that Arnold would incorporate the changes approved as discussed. Layton moved, seconded by Smith to approve the minutes of June 21, 2023, including the changes discussed. **Passed Unanimously.**

Smith moved, seconded by Vincent, to approve the minutes of June 27. **Passed Unanimously.**

Smith moved, seconded by Layton, to approve the minutes of June 28 with two corrections as discussed. **Passed Unanimously.**

3. Correspondence. Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to accept the correspondence. **Passed Unanimously.**

4. AP Warrant. Layton moved to approve AP Warrant number 2010, seconded by Smith. **Passed Unanimously.**

At this point, several audience members expressed desire to speak to issues concerning the Police Department, including Demo Sofronas, who spoke for many in saying how disappointed he was to learn of the loss of yet another officer and wanted to hear what plans there may be to address the situation.

Lily Trajman said that while she's on the agenda to give a full report at the next meeting, she would take this opportunity to invite any interested citizens to request a tour of the Town Clerk's offices, including the vault, which contains many significant historical documents.

Richards said that he thinks the Planning Commission, of which he is a member made a "big mistake" deciding in a 4-3 vote not to open for reconsideration the letter regarding the current Norwich Solar Technologies proposal.

Duffy invited Chief Cochran to join the Board at the front of the room. He cautioned that not only is the Department about to lose one officer due to a resignation, but a combination of vacation time and unanticipated medical events will shortly reduce the cohort of active duty officers on the street to just himself. Both he and Duffy emphasized that they are very actively recruiting, though it's a tight market.

Metcalf presented a letter to the Board outlining her concerns about the future of Norwich policing, in particular asserting that there is no lesser need for policing on weekends.

Linda Cook said "It's a sad day for me in Norwich," reflecting on not only staffing issues but communication breakdowns she perceives across departments as well.

Dan Bornstein, describing himself as "a relative newcomer," said he would like to hear each Board member's position before entering executive session to discuss personnel matters.

Chelsea Maxham joined via Zoom to share her perspective as an outgoing officer, in particular focusing on issues with work/family balancing and travel requirements, and especially her experiences while "on-call", which she believes is underpaid and widely misunderstood as far more akin to free time than it really is.

Speaking for the Board as a whole, Calloway thanked Maxham for her service and wished her well. She also said she hopes people can understand that it's necessary to address some issues in executive session and only after relevant facts have been fully gathered.

Duffy reported that there are currently two open positions on the Development Review Board, one regular and one alternate. The deadline for applications is August 2, 2023.

5. Tracy Hall information/presentations. Jeff Grout summarized the report he submitted to the Board, the full version of which was included in this meeting's packet. He

emphasized the differences between an energy assessment and an energy audit, the first yielding a general overview while the second provides a more detailed view. His general recommendations include a geothermal system with electrical backup stored in batteries. He also noted, however, that since Norwich is a higher-income community in which fewer people have significant difficulty paying their energy bills, less assistance for such a program here may be available from the State.

In response to an inquiry from Smith, Grout emphasized his support for the intent of Article 36, but he is not confident that its goals can be fully met in the near future. To meet that need, he recommends investment in a new high-efficiency boiler.

Via Zoom, Trajman added that as Town Clerk she is statutorily required to be physically present in the building to grant access to the vault, whose contents cannot simply be moved to another location.

Also via Zoom, Neil Odell weighed in on a proposed hookup from the Town into the new septic system proposed for the Marion Cross School. Regrettably, ARPA funds may not be applied to the school's needs, but he wondered if perhaps they could offset any related Town expense. Since MCS is in the permitting stage already, he stressed that this would be the time for the Town to express any interest.

Duffy said that such an arrangement could prove to be a win-win, benefiting both the Town and the School.

Matt Swett joined the conversation, noting that he recently spoke with Ben Trussell, Town Custodian, who told him that with annual pumping, historically the Town's system has not presented significant problems, with the one exception resulting from overuse during a particularly effluent party. Even then, the issue was in the pipes, not the tank.

Addressing a discussion of what types of professional expertise might be best engaged for guidance of a general Tracy Hall renovation project, Jack Cushman, via Zoom, said the goals have already been made clear by the voters, namely to rapidly phase out fossil fuel use in Tracy Hall. He further emphasized that if an architect is chosen as the project lead, it should not be on the basis of personal connections.

Duffy said he will develop an RFP broadly enough defined to allow for the involvement of a broad range of specialties.

Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to authorize the Interim Town Manager to develop and issue an RFP to engage a professional to establish goals for the Tracy Hall project and create design options to meet these goals. **Passed Unanimously.**

At this point in the meeting, Cole Flannery requested that the Board turn to the permitting issue of concern to him sooner rather than later. To accommodate him, the Board reshuffled the agenda such that Item 11 came next.

11. [taken out of order] Application for Liquor License. Flannery said he's been a Norwich resident for five years, is a Vermont Law School Graduate and served as a JAG for six years. The enterprise for which he's seeking a permit also builds on his background in the brewery industry. He said that he is not buying Norwich Wines & Spirits and has instead formed an LLC for the commercial sale of wine and beer, but not hard liquor. He is registered with the State and now wishes essentially to do the same with the Town, paying the \$70 fee required.

Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to recess the meeting of the selectboard for the purpose of executing the duties of the local control commissioners under authority of 7 V.S.A. § 167 et seq. **Passed Unanimously.**

Selectboard recessed: 9:24 PM.

Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to approve the liquor license application for Uncle Jam Industries, DBA Half-Step Beer and Wine. **Passed Unanimously.**

Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to close the Norwich Liquor Commission session and reconvene the Selectboard meeting. **Passed Unanimously.**

Selectboard reconvened: 9:28 PM.

The Board took a break from 9:29 to 9:36 PM.

6. [items here resuming normal order] RFP for Town Manager position. Tabled.

7. Set Town Tax Rate. Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to set the Fiscal year 2023-24 Homestead Rate at \$2.6649 (equal to a school homestead rate of \$1.9960 plus a town rate with local agreement of \$0.6025 plus the monetary articles rate of \$0.0585 plus a Windsor County rate of \$0.0080) and the Non-Residential Rate at \$2.5365 (equal to a school nonresidential rate of \$1.8676 plus a town rate with local agreement of \$0.6025 plus the monetary articles rate of \$0.0585 plus a Windsor County rate of \$0.0080). **Passed Unanimously.**

8. Update on Finance Department. Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to find that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1). **Passed Unanimously.**

Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to enter Executive Session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(A) to discuss the Finance Department and possible contract or contracts, and to invite the Interim Town Manager. **Passed Unanimously.**

Entered Executive Session: 11:12 PM. [this item taken out of sequence—see below]

Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to enter public session. **Passed Unanimously.**

Entered Public Session: 11:34 PM.

Item #8A Update on Police Department personnel Executive Session regarding contracts and labor relations agreements with employees. Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to find that premature general public knowledge would clearly place the public body or a person involved at a substantial disadvantage pursuant to 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1). **Passed Unanimously.**

Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to enter Executive Session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(1)(B) to discuss the Police Department personnel, and to invite the Interim Town Manager and the Chief of Police. **Passed Unanimously.**

Entered Executive Session: 9:37 PM.

Layton moved, seconded by Smith, to enter public session. **Passed Unanimously.**

Entered Public Session: 10:49 PM.

9. Recreation Scholarship Fund Deficit. Tabled.

10. Engagement letter with auditors: Sullivan, Powers & Co. Layton moved, seconded by Arnold, to authorize the Interim Town Manager to execute an engagement letter with auditors Sullivan, Powers & Co. for the FY 2023 audit. **Passed Unanimously.**

12. [for Item #11, see above] Contract for Innovative Surface Solutions. Layton moved, seconded by Arnold, to authorize the Interim Town Manager to execute the contract with Innovative Surface Solutions for the period of three years beginning July 31, 2023. **Passed Unanimously.**

13. Contract for the Better Bin application. Duffy explained that this concerns annual contracting for a computer application Transfer Station users can access to indicate what of their materials are recyclable and what are not, in order to reduce contamination, which can raise the Town's recycling costs. Some concerns have been expressed about the vendor's use of this as an advertising channel.

The decision to adopt the system has already been made. The present question is whether to approve the contract.

Smith moved to **table** further consideration of this contract. Layton seconded. **Passed Unanimously.**

The Board asked Duffy to review with the Solid Waste Committee how they are monitoring the services of this vendor.

Arnold moved to **table** all remaining items except #8 (see above), seconded by Layton. Calloway, Layton, Arnold, Vincent, Yes; Smith, No. **Motion passed.**

Adjournment. Layton moved to adjourn, seconded by Smith. **Passed Unanimously.**

Meeting Adjourned: 11:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Ralph C. Hybels
Minutes Taker

Approved by the Selectboard on

Marcia Calloway, Selectboard Chair

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