

Town of Norwich
Regular Selectboard Meeting
1/11/2023

Active participants: Selectboard members Roger Arnold, Marcia Calloway, Robert Gere, Aaron Lamperti, and Mary Layton. Interim Town Manager Brennan Duffy, Interim Finance Director Joyce Hasbrouck, Pam Smith, Stuart Richards, Charlotte Metcalfe, Cheryl Lindberg, Priscilla Vincent, Omer Trajman, Manu Tesone, Demo Sofronas, Leslie Wells, Brian Shiner, Linda Cook, Bonnie Munday, Nan Carroll. Meeting convened at 6:32 pm.

1. **Welcome and remarks by Chair Marcia Calloway** included a tribute to late resident Roger Blake and noted inclusion in the packet of a letter describing his exemplary character, released recently by the Norwich Historical Society.
2. **Agenda Review: Layton moved, second by Gere, to amend Item 3 to read Executive Session under 1 V.S.A. section 313(a)(1)(B) and 1 V.S.A. section 313(a)(3), and to approve the agenda as amended. Vote: Yes-Unanimous.**
3. **Executive Session: Layton moved, second by Gere, to find that premature general public knowledge of the Town's planning for and negotiation of a labor agreement with NEPBA would clearly place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. Vote: Yes-Unanimous.**

Layton moved, second by Gere to enter executive session to discuss planning for and negotiation of a labor agreement with NEPBA, to discuss potential appointments of Town employees, and to invite the Interim Town Manager and the Chief of Police, and to invite the Town Attorney to join the discussion if necessary. Vote: Yes-Unanimous.

Time entered executive session: 6:37 pm

Arnold moved, second by Lamperti, to enter public session. Vote: Yes-Unanimous.

Time entered public session: 8:43 pm.

4. **Budget Presentation by Interim Finance Director Joyce Hasbrouck.**

An adjusted budget was presented with an expense total of \$ \$6,039,076, which is a 13.7% increase over the FY23 budget. An additional adjusted budget was presented with a 6% deduction for each non-salary line, to include expenses related to employment. The expense total for this budget was \$5,845,313, an increase of 9.4% over the FY23 budget. The adjustments made to each budget included \$3,250 for Police part time wages; \$18,192 for electricity for Tracey Hall; \$30,670 for the Regional Energy Coordinator; \$27,000 for the Listers Assistant; the Tennis Court allocation reduced to \$10,000; Huntley line marking reduced by \$2500; Fire Department equipment repairs reduced by \$500 to bring to the FY22 budget level of \$14,500.

Answers to questions: the tax impact has been stated for each department. The Town Clerk salary level with "average experience" was not answered, as was the # of

FTEs for Town Clerk's offices in other towns. Petitions are still coming in for Monetary Articles. On hand are Norwich Community Nurse (\$5,000), Windsor County Mentors (\$2,500) and Advance Transit (\$13,920). The \$15,000 of state reappraisal money was allocated to the designated fund and "I see no indication that the funds received from the state were added to the approved appropriation expensed from the general fund." If the Lister appropriation was kept at \$50,000 then the \$15K will have been counted twice. The total revenue and expense lines were not stated as equal in the last presentation. This was found to be a "cell error in the tax calculator that caused the revenue line to not recalculate properly."

- 5. Fire District Monetary Request. Tabled to 1/18/2023.** **Cheryl Lindberg** explained that the Land Management Council would like to set up a Forestry Plan. They came first to the Fire District Prudential Committee and now to the Selectboard for approval to expend money from a reserve fund for this purpose. She noted that the Land Management Council includes two members appointed from the Selectboard and one from the Prudential Committee. The LMC came to the Prudential Committee which approved the decision to expend funds for this work. If the Selectboard approves the release of funds the Chairs of the Selectboard and the Prudential Committee would each have to sign a contract for completion of the work. **Brian Shiner** joined the meeting at 1:24:51 minutes. He reiterated **Cheryl Lindberg's** remarks. In addition, he stated that the forest lands total about 1000 acres of a watershed, that parts of the forest have been cut in the past with proceeds going to the Fire District, and that the current ask is for \$4500 for a comprehensive forestry plan for the entire watershed. **Byron Haynes**, **David Hubbard** and **Brian Shiner** were appointed by the Selectboard to the LMC. **Layton** said that this request seems routine and in keeping with the **Fire District's** practices. She asked for a future agenda item to discuss information in the **Prudential Committee** minutes that mentioned a possible conservation easement. **Layton** wants to know the impact of a conservation easement on the Town's development rights clause in the Agreement with the Land Management Council, and any tax implications. **Arnold** wanted to know if timber cuts had been done in the past and why there had not been a comprehensive plan, also where information about the Land Management Council can be found. **Shiner** said he also wondered as a new member about the LMC history, rules and procedures, and charter. It is not clear to **Shiner** where minutes can be found or posted. **Calloway** noted that the Agreement requires yearly review by the Selectboard, and that the **Interim Town Manager** can help to reveal the "structure" so that people can know what is going on. **Aaron Lamperti** noted that Selectboard members have not been appointed to the Land Management Council for years, and that therefore the LMC cannot decide anything. The Council should be brought "back into the fold" before decisions are made. He then reiterated Layton's points. **Arnold** suggested tabling the discussion until some of these questions are answered. **Calloway** thought the request is

routine and justified. **Lamperti** said due diligence is needed to follow the formal rules of our Town before we honor this request. **Shiner** stated that the Agreement between the Fire District and Town was renewed by the voters two years ago. **Gere** said it would be inappropriate to spend the money on this request at this meeting. **Arnold** is not confident about due diligence. **Town Clerk Bonnie Munday** stated that her office holds all submitted minutes of the Town. She said there is history behind this request and that the Selectboard should not immediately say no without knowing the background information. **Calloway** suggested tabling this item to the 1/18/23 meeting. **Cheryl Lindberg** noted that in the Town Report the LMC is incorrectly listed as the Watershed Council. **Arnold** stated that when he was Chair, he compiled correspondence regarding the LMC, and recommends tabling the topic until research has been done. **Shiner** has been invited back to the 1/18/23 meeting so that the Selectboard has time to do research before making a decision. **Charlotte Metcalfe** wanted to know if the forest management plan is required by the state.

6. Budget Discussion and vote. Tabled until 1/13/2023 at 5:30 pm.

7. Consent Agenda

a) Approve draft meeting minutes from 12/28/22 & 01/04/2023

b) Consider AP Warrant

c) Correspondence.

Arnold moved to accept the Consent Agenda as amended to include the AP Warrant and Correspondence. Meeting minutes corrections are pending. **Calloway** noted in reference to correspondence from **Doug Wilberding** that there is no requirement in statute or in town policy requiring Selectboard members to sign a conflict of interest agreement. **Omer Trajman** and **Manu Tesone** submitted correspondence regarding a warrant article for increasing the police force to five officers.

8. Warrant articles/Petition discussion: Public Comment: Manu Tesone wanted to know if the Selectboard could share information about offers to two Police officer candidates, and asked if it was true that the ITM had no say over the hiring process. **Calloway** replied that the Interim Town Manager can hire candidates with Selectboard approval. **Stuart Richards** asked if the Selectboard was thinking about having a warrant article to ask the voters if they would approve of increasing the police force to five officers.

Calloway asked the Selectboard how they would like to put together the warrant articles. **Arnold** said we usually start with drafts of the articles. **Lamperti** said we have to remember to change the date of the summer tax payment, and the ARPA reserve fund needs approval, plus we have to discuss before we can draft. **Cheryl Lindberg** suggested asking **Jamie Teague**, Business Administrator of SU 70 to join a future meeting in reference to the proposed tax payment deadline change. Also, she said cash flow payments should be taken under consideration. **Arnold** will send a draft of this article to

Interim Town Manager **Duffy** before further review by the Selectboard. **Calloway** will draft the ARPA article. **Lamperti** mentioned bonding the tennis court restoration. **Arnold** thinks that is a good idea but not for this year as we do not know if the school district will bond the school septic system renovation. **Town Clerk Bonnie Munday** said that review of cost and terms of existing bonds is needed before adding another one. In reference to moving the property tax due date she said people should work with their mortgage companies. **Calloway** noted that public comment had shown that at least two citizens would like to see a warrant that asks voters whether they would like a fifth police officer. **Layton** stated that she understands the position of this Selectboard to be that of rebuilding the force back to four officers, at this time. **Calloway** asked if the Selectboard would like to submit an advisory article that would inform decisions about the size of the police force in the next budget cycle. **Arnold** argued for waiting for the next budget cycle to decide about a fifth officer as conditions may have changed. He felt a negative vote might “tie the hands of the board.” The Selectboard prefers a deliberative budget process. **Charlotte Metcalfe** asked for clarity regarding **Roger Arnold’s** statement about changing the date of the August property tax payment. **Linda Cook** would like the public to have more information about what ARPA funds might be spent on. **Calloway** said we will take this up in our February 8th meeting. **Lamperti** stated that the funds must be spent by 2026. **Omer Trajman** spoke regarding possible warrant articles. One would ask if voters would allocate the “delta” between what the Selectboard can offer candidates and what the market demands. The other asks the voters whether they would like to see five police officers. He wanted clarity about Roger Arnold’s argument. **Arnold** said the article must be advisory and that a deliberative budget process would be more productive and sufficient. **Lamperti**: it is the responsibility of the Selectboard to decide what to fund, and the voters decide who the Selectboard members are. **Arnold**: next year would be a better time to decide about a fifth officer. **Calloway**: A petition can be circulated by citizens and placed on the warrant with 10% of voter checklist. **Layton**: Does the Selectboard have final approval to place on the warrant? **Calloway**: A binding article must be placed. **Priscilla Vincent**: A dizzying discussion. Regret to say that the SB is reluctant to support the PC, concerned about lack of support, concerned that SB is not listening to the public. The Town is not being asked. **Leslie Wells**: A lot of people have commented on this topic for half a year. Meetings, letters, listserv posts, an organization has been formed. We can afford it. Please listen to the Police Chief and respond to the public. **Demo Sofronas**: read a letter into the record concerning building up the police force. Read a VLCT quote about ARPA funding: “What will you leave behind, this will be your legacy.” **Stuart Richards** advocated for a five person police force and for Norwich police officers earning a competitive wage. **Manu Tesone**: Why is this board against asking the people of this

town whether they want something or not? **Arnold:** Would like to resolve the question of five officers in the context of budget development. **Calloway:** the consensus of the board is to not create an article for the warrant concerning five police officers. **Manu Tesone:** let's put the question to bed with a vote of the Town. **Calloway** notes that there is still time for a citizen petition. **Charlotte Metcalfe:** Incorrect that we had four officers in the past. **Chief Robinson** stated that 24/7 coverage is not possible with four officers. **Nan Carroll:** Do not get in the habit of having advisory votes. We have SB members, will have a new TM, may have new SB members soon. Give advice during this process. March of 2024 could be very different. Appreciate effort to be fiscally responsible. Do not assume that there are monolithic opinions. **Calloway:** Look at the warrant as a document next week? **Arnold:** Is it appropriate for the TM office to put the warrant together for us to review? **Calloway:** Yes, if ready this week, then we will review next week.

9. Future Agenda Items: January 13th budget vote. January 18th, Town Clerk, Moderator, TM search plan, emergency plan for Tracey Hall, whatever comes up. **Arnold:** avoid "things that come up" for the next few meetings. **Calloway:** grants and contracts appear. **Lamperti:** the Land Management Council. **Arnold:** that might have been better left off. **Lamperti:** more research was needed on that topic. **Calloway:** unexpected aspects came up.

10. Adjournment. Layton moved, second by Gere to adjourn. Vote: Yes: Unanimous. Time adjourned: 10:35pm.

Approved by the Selectboard on February 8, 2023

Marcia Calloway, Selectboard Chair