

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

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

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

Also participating: Brennan Duffy, Interim Town Manager; Craig Layne; Catherine Harwood; Peter Orner; David Hobson; Kit Burgin; Jeffrey (Jeff) Goodrich; Ernest (Ernie) Ciccotelli

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

**Welcome.** Meeting was called to order by Calloway at 6:30 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.”

**1. Agenda.** There was consensus to postpone discussion of the reciprocal Assistance for Mutual Aid Agreement to the next meeting. The Chair also proposed removing the update on Hemlock Rd. from Informational Items, substituting for it a new #6 under Action Items, which would allow voting regarding the one vendor proposal thus far received. Smith and Vincent objected that the Board had not seen the information necessary to conscientiously effect any such vote. Layton moved, seconded by Arnold, to amend the agenda to put the update on Hemlock Rd. in the Action Items section. Calloway, Arnold, Layton, Vincent, Yes; Smith, No. **Motion Passed.**

Layton moved, seconded by Arnold, to accept the Agenda as amended. Calloway, Arnold, Layton, Vincent, Yes; Smith, No. **Motion Passed.**

**2. Minutes.** As Vincent recommended, the term “high efficiency” was removed from the minutes of August 16, which were also amended to clarify that the types of heating not considered by Smith and Vincent were only propane, natural gas, and cordwood. Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to accept the minutes of August 16 and August 23, 2023, as amended. **Passed Unanimously.**

**3. Correspondence.** Layton moved, seconded by Arnold, to accept the correspondence as submitted. **Passed Unanimously.**

**4. AP Warrant.** Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to approve the AP Warrant number 1034 in the amount of \$15,559.70 for the Police Cruiser outfitting. **Passed Unanimously.**

Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to approve the AP Warrant number 1035 in the amount of \$3,992,296.88 which includes the aforementioned School District Tax. **Passed Unanimously.**

**Public Comments for Items not on the Agenda.** Catherine Harwood came to the table to draw attention to the scourge of the emerald ash borer, whose devastation she expects will enhance the supply of raw materials for wood pellets, one of the heating sources currently under consideration.

Peter Orner said it was unfortunate that more progress has not yet been made on installing new electronic speed signs, maintaining crosswalks on Beaver Meadow Rd. at Huntley St. and the Ballard Trail, and determining how pedestrian safety on Beaver Meadow Rd. might best be addressed with additional sidewalk. Duffy responded, in part, that the installation of the new signs has proved more involved than anticipated and that the Police Chief is investigating options that may not require hooking up to adjacent utility poles.

Pam Smith wondered if, in the context of the Town having received only one response to its RFP regarding renovations at Tracy Hall, other potential vendors had been informed of the RFP's deadline having been extended to September 14. Duffy said only one other vendor had expressed any interest but has not yet placed a bid.

Smith also asked for an update on the status of the existing oil boilers. Duffy said a technician from ARC Technology had come that day to attempt repairs on the currently inoperable oil burner and plans to return soon to complete the job.

Duffy reported also that the Rosenbloom litigation has been settled with no change in the assessed value of the property in question.

**5. Land Management Council Selectboard appointment.** Three applicants appeared. Craig Layne emphasized his long familiarity with the land involved developed over his tenure on the Conservation Commission. David Hobson cited Thoreau on the need for natural diversity in the landscape. Kit Burgin said he's only lived in Norwich for about a year but wants to get involved in Town affairs and the current opening would fit well with his interests and professional background in

forest management and outdoor recreation. Arnold moved, seconded by Vincent, to appoint Hobson. Layton, Vincent, Arnold, Smith, Yes; Calloway, No. **Motion Passed.** In parting, Layne commented, "You couldn't have gone wrong here."

**6. Update on Hemlock Road and Vendor Review.** Duffy said he's been told by FEMA that the situation involves a "toe-cut" slope degradation caused by the severe rain and is likely to be a reimbursable expense to the Town, which he anticipates will be borne 75% by the Feds, 12.5% by the State, and 12.5% by the Town.

He reported there still has been no communication with the landowner whose property would best serve for temporary access. Other potential routes have also proved infeasible. Therefore, Hemlock Rd. itself must serve as the only access point.

Duffy said the Town's request for proposal (RFP) and request for qualifications (RFQ) have yielded only one response thus far, which is from Stantec. He reported that the DPW Director, Chris Kaufman, recommends continued discussions with them. Duffy asked the Board to proceed with negotiations with Stantec. Further information will be necessary to determine engineering requirements and costs. He said he anticipates having more information at the next meeting.

Duffy added that the illicit work done on the road had filled in the cracks, but fortunately they have photographic evidence predating that unapproved intervention. He warned that the road presently should not be considered driveable. He stated that the present goal is to have a plan in place by September 27.

Jeff Goodrich stepped forward to say that as a professional with relevant licensing the three-minute limit for comments might be insufficient, but he wanted to take the opportunity to urge the Town to engage a more local firm for the geo-technical analysis, preferably one for which that is their main focus, as opposed to Stantec, which is a large conglomerate based in Canada. He also said he thought the cracks evident in the road surface did not justify closing the road.

Ernie Ciccotelli said he visited the area by canoe and that he saw no erosion or undercutting of the slope to the river sufficient to justify the road's closing. He said he thought Stantec, as a "transnational" with "400 offices around the world," was "completely inappropriate" for the work, and "it seems like there's some serious self-dealing here, the judgment is self-serving as far as I can tell."

Arnold moved, seconded by Layton, to authorize the Interim Town Manager to accept the Qualification Based Selection (QBS) proposal submitted by Stantec Corporation for the Hemlock Road project, which will allow the next steps of negotiations to determine remedy options, scope of work, and pricing. Calloway, Arnold, Layton, Yes; Vincent, Smith, No. **Motion Passed.**

**7. RFP for the Compensation Study to hire a selected vendor.** Duffy reported they received information from four consultants with estimates and overviews of their relevant qualifications by the Town's deadline of August 24, 2023. These ranged in cost from \$35,000 to \$16,200. He and Miranda Bergmeier, the Assistant Town Manager, recommended contracting with GovHR USA, which not only had the lowest bid, but also very positive references, evident understanding of the issues involved, and extensive relevant experience. This includes several projects completed for Vermont municipalities despite being headquartered in Northbrook, Illinois. The firm expects to complete the project within 90 days of receipt of an executed contract. Smith asked that the motion specify that the work will concern both wages and benefits and agreed with Arnold these together should be referred to as "total compensation," as is reflected below.

Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to authorize the Interim Town Manager to engage the firm of GovHR USA to perform a total compensation study for the Town of Norwich for the estimated cost of approximately \$17,000.00 to be paid from the Operational Performance and Development Fund #51. **Passed Unanimously.**

**8. Personnel hiring procedures.** Calloway proposed that the Board follow the advice she received from the Town Attorney to entertain two motions to clarify the language in the Interim Town Manager's contract, one to authorize hiring decisions he's already made and another to determine what process to follow from now on. Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to ratify all prior final hiring decisions made by the Interim Town Manager during the entire period of the Interim Town Manager's contract (as adopted and extended). Calloway, Vincent, Arnold, Layton, Yes; Smith, No. **Motion Passed.**

Layton moved, seconded by Vincent, to authorize the Interim Town Manager to make future final hiring decisions, subject to the prior discussion of candidates with the Selectboard and any parameters or conditions the Selectboard may impose. Calloway, Vincent, Arnold, Layton Yes; Smith, No. **Motion Passed.**

**Future Meeting Dates and Potential Topics.** Duffy said Chris Kaufman had said to avoid any potential violation of the Open Meetings Law he would set aside time between 12 and 4 PM on any given day to meet individually with each Board member and provide a tour of the DPW facilities. Since some members had conflicts with the particular day he and Kaufman had discussed, which was September 13, 2023, Duffy said he would ask Debi Wade, his Administrative Assistant, to facilitate scheduling each visit over the next two weeks.

By consensus, the next full Selectboard meeting will be September 27, 2023, unless something urgent arises in the meantime, and that in the interim, Calloway is authorized to sign any warrants as may be necessary.

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

**Meeting Adjourned:** 8:48 PM.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ralph C. Hybels  
Minutes Taker

Approved by the Selectboard on

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Marcia Calloway, Selectboard Chair

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