

**Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting of
Wednesday, January 10, 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, Town Manager; Bob Harnish; Miriam Trajman; Alex Northern, Fire Chief; Matt Swett, Deputy Fire Chief; Jeff Lubell; Jaan Laaspere; Peter Orner; Barrie Rosalinda, Finance Director.

Welcome. Meeting was called to order by Calloway at 6:35 PM.

1. Agenda. Vincent moved (Layton seconded) to approve the Agenda. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Public Comment. Pam Smith thanked Town Manager Brennan Duffy for helping to get the meeting posted for the Trustees of Public Funds when other staff members were on vacation. Smith said her takeaway from that is that we need to have fallback plans when staff are absent. Bob Harnish said he hopes to have a future Selectboard (SB) agenda item regarding the Vermont Inclusion Initiative, which asks VT towns to embrace diversity in their population. This initiative aims to show that Vermont welcomes newcomers. Harnish asked to make a 5-6 minute presentation to the SB regarding the statement of inclusion at a future meeting. Calloway said that the Town Manager's (TM) office would be in touch with Harnish. Miriam Trajman said she goes to school at MCS and is concerned about the sidewalks not being plowed when she needs to walk to school. Vincent expressed sympathy for the problem and for the challenges to the Dept. of Public Works in completing the work.

2. Minutes of December 13 and 20, 2023. Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to approve the minutes of December 13, 2023. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to approve the minutes of December 20, 2023. **Motion passed unanimously.**

3. AP Warrants. Smith asked a question about the off-cycle AP Warrant for the purchase of police equipment. Duffy explained that the expense was approved by the SB during FY2023, but due to supply chain delays, the equipment and invoice did not arrive until FY2024. The Finance Office and TM recommend paying the invoice from the FY2023 surplus. The alternative would be overspend the FY2024 police equipment budget. Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to approve AP Warrant #1089 in the amount of \$70,608.26 paid from the general fund. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to approve AP Warrant #1090 in the amount of \$547.34 paid from Kids' Bridge Fund #53. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to approve AP Warrant #1092 in the amount of \$16,639.98 paid from Town Reappraisal Fund #12. **Motion passed unanimously.**

4. Correspondence. Calloway addressed the question from Chris Katucki in correspondence. Duffy said the TM Office is working with the consultant on the compensation study and hopes to present the results in February. Calloway summarized other items of correspondence. Vincent moved (Layton seconded) to approve the correspondence as submitted. **Motion passed unanimously.**

5. Fire Department Request to approve three (3) expenditures from Fire designated funds #25 and #26. Alex Northern summarized the requests for the Fire Department's overhead door repair and said the other two requests are to finish outfitting the new fire engine. Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to approve funds not to exceed \$515.00 from Fire Station Fund #25 for costs to repair a damaged overhead door. **Motion passed unanimously.** Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to approve funds not to exceed \$3,937.20 from Fire Equipment Fund #26 for tool mounting on new Engine 3. **Motion passed unanimously.** Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to approve funds not to exceed \$1,179.85 from Fire Equipment Fund #26 for installation of radio equipment on Engine 3. **Motion passed unanimously.**

6. Affordable Housing VCDP grant application. Calloway said the Affordable Housing Subcommittee (AHS) is returning to the SB to report answers requested by the SB. Jeff Lubell, member of the AHS, spoke and said the last item on the grant application – a landowner letter – is not needed; the AHS has amended the application to make clear that the letter requirement is not applicable. Calloway said the Town's lawyers raised some concerns, such as the likely legal costs of approximately \$10,000 to the town if the development proceeds. Calloway raised other questions, including the Town's in-kind match, the Town's staff capacity to oversee the grant, the level of TRORC's commitment to providing the necessary support to administer the grant, and how the Affordable Housing Fund will be used and replenished. Lubell said that TRORC has orally committed to providing necessary work on the grant and he will ask for a commitment in writing. Lubell said the Town can charge for volunteers' time, whether or not those volunteers are appointed by the SB, and that time will count towards the Town's in-kind grant match. Lubell said the Affordable Housing Fund doesn't need to be depleted, because the grant is most probably a reimbursement grant. Layton expressed concern about additional expenditures beyond the planning stage. Arnold said he thinks we need to wait to embark on an Affordable Housing grant process until we have a Planning Director in place. Arnold also expressed concern about what might be found on the site in question; he asked what would happen if we find environmental problems on the site. Lubell said there is a state law that would shield and assist a developer/purchaser regarding liability. Vincent expressed concern that the project could stall if environmental problems are found. Duffy said he shares concerns about doing this project without having a Planning Director and hopes we will have a director in place soon. Lubell said the grant wouldn't be awarded until June 2024. Smith asked about the grant submission deadline; Lubell said it is due in April 2024. Jaan Laaspere said that the Planning Commission's (PC) opinion about subcommittees is that the subcommittees are non-voting bodies that make recommendations to the PC, which then votes. Laaspere said that any public hearing on the grant would be a joint meeting with the PC and the subcommittee. Calloway expressed concerns about the powers of subcommittees. Arnold expressed concerns about the Town staff's capacity to supervise an affordable housing project. Lubell said there are very qualified volunteers and also TRORC available to help, so we're not going it alone. Calloway suggested the SB table the grant issue for now and get TRORC's written commitment and explanation of their services. Layton said

she'd like more specificity regarding TRORC's work and she supports moving forward with the project. Lubell said he will get specifics in writing from TRORC and work with the TM to finalize the project budget. SB members agreed that the TM should work with Jeff Lubell to develop a budget and discuss specifics with TRORC. No motion was made.

7. Selectboard Handbook. Calloway introduced the topic, including an Open Meeting Law (OML) statement and the role and composition of subcommittees – in particular, whether subcommittees should be comprised of committee members. Vincent agreed that subcommittees need to be comprised of committee members, but this is a problem, given the current composition of some of the Town's subcommittees. Layton said she found Laaspere's earlier reasoning about subcommittees interesting, where subcommittees serve to report back to the appointed committee. Layton said she thinks there could be an appointed liaison between the appointed committee and the non-appointed subcommittee. Layton said there is a need to educate all participants about the requirements of OML. Arnold suggested making the Affordable Housing Committee one that is appointed by the Selectboard, rather than it being a subcommittee. After some discussion, SB members agreed that all committees (and former subcommittees) should be appointed by the SB. Layton suggested that all the new committees have liaisons to related already-existing committees/commissions. SB members agreed to have the TM office advertise for open positions on various committees, commissions, etc. Laaspere suggested that the SB wait to make decisions on subcommittees until a later time. Laaspere gave the example of the Solar Siting Subcommittee as working well in its current configuration. Peter Orner expressed concern about the tone of the SB's discussion of this topic and said that it is undemocratic and discourages participation.

Calloway brought up the draft SB handbook as it addresses the OML. Layton said she thought Smith has a valid concern about how to ensure public bodies' compliance with OML. Duffy said that the Town will be getting directive from Town counsel regarding OML compliance and we will be distributing that information to all body chairs. Smith asked who will monitor to ensure compliance with OML and said it's essential that someone from a committee needs to follow up to see that materials are posted timely. Arnold said that committees can't do their work without Town staff to do the work of posting and meeting other OML requirements. Laaspere asked about a timeline for the SB handbook. Calloway said she will share the handbook with the SB when ready, then once the SB is comfortable with it, they will send it out to other committees/boards/commissions.

8. Preparation for Public Meetings Regarding Use of Surplus Funds Not Previously Budgeted. Calloway introduced this topic by walking through the draft Jan 17th SB Special Meeting Agenda, as contained in the meeting packet. Duffy said that, on January 17th, the Tracy Hall consulting architects will be present to solicit input from the public regarding the use of Tracy Hall and ideas for work on Tracy Hall. SB members discussed the draft agenda for Jan. 17th and what topics should be covered, including how to solicit input on existing ideas for using the FY2023 surplus. SB members agreed that they will present very brief summaries on each idea for spending before opening the floor to public reactions and input. SB members reviewed all of the ideas listed in the meeting packet to decide whether to put them before the public on the 17th. SB members agreed to present four ideas: Tracy Hall improvements; Fire Department Apparatus; DPW Garage; and Generators. SB members agreed on up to 5-minute presentations on each idea. No motion was made.

9. Preparation for Warrant Articles. Calloway introduced this topic. Duffy said he and the Finance Director will look into whether it's advisable to zero out or close an unused designated fund. SB members agreed that all four of the articles on page 91 in the meeting packet need to go into the warning, although Duffy and Rosalinda will research the question of whether to close an unused fund before the SB finalizes the article language. The four articles as shown in the meeting packet are:

Fund 10- Police Station Fund: Shall the voters approve the movement of all remaining money in Fund 10-Police Station Fund to Fund 47- Public Safety Facility Fund and the closure of Fund 10?

Fund 16- Recreation Fund-Dam: Shall the voters approve the movement of all remaining money in Fund 16-Recreation Fund -Dam to Fund 05-Recreation Facility & Improvements and the closure of Fund 16?

Fund 25- Fire Department Apparatus Bay: Shall the voters approve the change in the title and purpose of fund 25 to be "Fire Department Apparatus Bay" with the purpose "to be used for the repairs, replacement and maintenance of the Apparatus Bay and its mechanical equipment?"

Fund 47 – Public Safety Facility Fund: Shall the voters approve the change in the purpose of fund 47- Public Safety Facility to be "to be used for the repairs, replacement and maintenance of the Public Safety Facility and its mechanical equipment?"

SB members agreed to hear from the DPW Director about the intent of establishing a DPW Roadway and Pedestrian Safety Fund. A majority of SB members agreed to include in the warning an article to establish a Culverts Fund. A majority of SB members agreed to include an article to allocate \$30,000 to replenish the Operational Performance Fund, and also agreed to include an article to allocate \$150,000 to a Culverts Fund.

No motion was made.

Informational Items: Calloway said the FY2023 Audit Report is available and posted on the Town's website.

Adjournment. Layton moved (Vincent seconded) to adjourn. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Meeting Adjourned: 10:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Miranda Bergmeier, Assistant Town Manager

Approved by the Selectboard on January 24, 2024

Marcia Calloway, Selectboard Chair

PLEASE NOTE: JUNCTION ARTS & MEDIA (formerly CATV) POSTS RECORDINGS OF ALL REGULAR MEETINGS OF THE NORWICH SELECTBOARD.