

Town of Norwich, Vermont
Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting
Wednesday, August 27th, 2025

Active Participants at Tracy Hall: Mary Layton (SB Chair), Priscilla Vincent (SB member), Marcia Calloway (SB member), Kimo Griggs (SB Vice Chair), Matt Swett (SB member), Brennan Duffy (Town Manager), Megan Brendel (Town member), Russell North (Finance Committee)

Active Participants on Zoom: Cheryl Lindberg (Lister and Treasurer), Jaan Laaspere (Planning Commission), Watt Alexander (Town member), Kris Clement (Town member), Peter Orner (Town member)

Key: *Motions noted in italics.*
[Public comment noted in blue.](#)

The meeting was called to order by Chair Mary Layton at 6:30 pm.

YouTube Timestamp: 32:50

1. Agenda

Timestamp: 33:32

I move to approve the agenda as presented. – Swett moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: yes (unanimous)

2. Chair's Report

Timestamp: 34:09

The Chair (1) met with Town administration to plan this and future agendas, (2) shared that the Town Manager met individually with Calloway and Swett to get input on how to structure the Town Manager evaluation process, (3) held back three Tracy Hall vision statements until the other two are ready, (4) noted disgruntled messages on the Listserv about Town employees and read a related personal statement, which included ideas for actions the Selectboard could take in response, (5) read the following statement:

The Norwich Selectboard Chair supports constructive criticism of work done under the town administration, preferably submitted via letters to the Selectboard or direct contact with the Town Manager. A negative political climate in town, as recently expressed on the Listserv, is not constructive, in my opinion, and I believe it affects retention and hiring of employees. Hostile and defamatory posts are

noticed by staff. They affect morale and cannot as individual statements reflect the balanced view that might include the goodwill and support of the greater community.

And (6) highlighted Listserv posts by individual Selectboard members and shared her belief that it is good practice for Selectboard members to keep content related to Selectboard business off the Listserv due to open meeting law considerations.

The Chair and Vincent discussed the use of the Listserv by Selectboard members, possible open meeting law violations, how to best voice frustrations, a potential communications policy for Town staff, and limitations to freedom of speech.

Calloway read a memo she wrote in the Selectboard packet correspondence about criticism from townspeople on the Listserv.

I move that the Selectboard vote on and issue the following public statement: Comments by individual Selectboard members relating to any contracted or other services procured by the Town of Norwich do not represent the views of the Selectboard unless duly authorized by the Selectboard by majority vote. The Selectboard acts as a body, by majority vote, and work of the Town Manager is directed by that legislative body, not on the request of any individual member of the Selectboard or the community. – Calloway moved (2nd Layton), ultimately tabled.

Swett shared that he agreed with Calloway's statement and highlighted a communication with a town member who was upset by the tenor of Listserv communications. Swett shared his interest in drafting informational Listserv posts, including one on the new parts of the open meeting law that addresses Listserv communications and one on appropriate and productive ways to voice frustrations with Town operations and staff.

Griggs noted his own frustration about not being able to respond to Listserv posts and his desire to highlight new storms, increasing populations along roads, and other factors involved in the condition of roads.

Calloway noted support for using the Listserv judiciously and having the Chair post statements that has been collectively agreed upon.

Selectboard members discussed freedom of speech, personal vs. official Selectboard statements, and the experience of being on the Selectboard.

The Town Manager questioned Vincent's post on the Listserv about progress on the Moore Lane Bridge, specifically her decision to post as opposed to directly reaching out to the Town Manager for an update.

Cheryl Lindberg shared that written correspondence to the Selectboard may not feel rewarding to townspeople and highlighted memos from the Chair about the Listers that Lindberg found uncollaborative and hurtful.

Calloway highlighted that the Selectboard decides to put some correspondence topics into future meeting agendas.

Lindberg asked if the Chair had had any email communications from Schoolboard members.

The Chair noted a communication from Garrett Palm that she had not responded to.

Griggs suggested tabling the motion until it is on the agenda.

3. Public Comments for Items not on the Agenda

Timestamp: 1:06:39

Megan Brendel stated that Selectboard members should note in Listserv posts that they are sharing their personal viewpoints to resolve the debate discussed earlier. Brendel noted communications from individuals thanking her for speaking up about the condition of dirt roads. Brendel stated that "our roads are the arteries to our homes" and questioned the maintenance of the town roads.

Jaan Laaspere noted that the next Planning Commission meeting on Sept 9th at 6:30 would be entirely dedicated to a discussion with the Two Rivers Regional Commission on the future land use maps in the regional plan.

Watt Alexander shared that the back and forth in the packet between Vincent and Calloway showed the difficulties inherent in the Town Manager form of government. Alexander pushed for open acknowledgement of the difficulties involved in order to constructively work through them. Alexander additionally found Calloway's response to Vincent's questions about finances and AP warrants lacking.

Vincent expressed appreciation for Michele Ilich-Daubas's work with the Police Department and highlighted a gathering the next day to celebrate her retirement and contributions to the Police Department.

4. Moore Lane Bridge Update

Timestamp: 1:25:48

The Town Manager reminded the Selectboard that Stantec had been contracted as the consulting engineer to create a bid document for the option selected at the end of spring. He shared that it had been posted today with a bid deadline of September 17th, that he hoped to make a bid recommendation at the Selectboard meeting on September 24th, and that they would confirm a vendor with the goal of completing the work by mid-November. The Town Manager shared that if they are unable to find a vendor able to complete the work within that timeframe, he would look to reissue a bid for November with the plan to complete the work in early spring 2026.

The Town Manager highlighted that townsperson Peter Orner had expressed concern about emulsion around the bridge and shared that Clean Harbors, an environmental clean-up firm, had inspected the bridge and removed absorbents in July. He added that he had visited the site of the bridge earlier in the day and noted a faint odor but did not notice any sheen on the water that would be indicative of petroleum.

Calloway wondered whether it would be worth reconsidering the next steps for the bridge. The Town Manager stated that he would “hate to go backwards at this point.”

[Laaspere voiced his disappointment in the length of time between the decision made in May and the release of the bid.](#)

The Town Manager explained that Stantec created a scope of work that he approved in June, and that it took Stantec between then and a week or two ago to create a document. He added that the Town is not Stantec’s only client and that he found the timing reasonable.

5. Financial Reports

Timestamp: 1:33:06

Vincent clarified that differences among people on the matters discussed are philosophical, not personal. Vincent shared that she had numerous outstanding questions on financial matters, including her inability to find the \$700,000 surplus infusion.

The Chair read a series of correspondence between Vincent and the Finance Director about the surplus.

Swett highlighted similar questions emailed from Chris Katucki that were resolved by taking into consideration the \$700,000 infusion.

The Town Manager raised concern around the email thread involving Katucki and Vincent's awareness of the thread, specifically given the open meeting law criteria.

Calloway emphasized that her concern is Selectboard members telling the Finance Office how to do bookkeeping and encouraged the Selectboard to continue the existing process of sending finance questions to the Town Manager, who would then have an answer by the next meeting.

Swett noted communication within the Selectboard regarding the creation of the agenda, during which support was shared for Vincent getting answers to her financial questions to her level of satisfaction.

Russel North explained that the \$700,000 does not show up in accounting reports because of different statutory purposes and that the Selectboard cannot propose a budget that is not fully funded. North suggested that the packets could include a line that shows how much cash is available to fund operations.

The Town Manager recounted the evolution of how financial data is communicated in the Selectboard packets and noted the harm that ongoing suggestions of financial incompetence on the part of the Town Manager and Finance Director poses to staff retention and confidence in Town leadership.

Vincent shared that she was made to feel by the Selectboard that it was not okay to take up the Town Manager or department heads' time. Vincent explained her pointed communications in the packet as the only available avenue for expressing her feelings while not violating open meeting laws.

The Chair encouraged Vincent to meet with the Town Manager or North to understand the financial processes.

Lindberg explained a past example of a buying down of the tax rate and the details of this year's financials. Lindberg further shared her disappointment at the lack of quarterly discussions of financial statements.

Kris Clement thanked Lindberg and North, both members of the Finance Committee, and expressed her hope that the Selectboard utilizes the committee more extensively.

6. TM Evaluation Planning

Timestamp: 2:02:42

The Chair suggested a timeline of (1) a self-evaluation for the Town Manager at the September 10th meeting in an executive session, (2) a similarly timed anonymous survey of department heads, and (3) evaluation forms filled out by the September 24th meeting.

Selectboard members discussed the timeline of the evaluation forms, how to best review the evaluation forms without violating open meeting laws, the format and content of the evaluation, the classification of the evaluation synopsis as private or public, and the review of last year's evaluation summary.

7. Finance Committee Voting

Timestamp: 2:14:50

Swett shared that he had reached out to a member of the Shelburne Town Manager's office as part of an effort to see how other towns engage with their Finance Committees. He learned that their Treasurer is not part of the Finance Committee and that the Committee works on budgets and special topics, among other findings.

Selectboard members discussed the Finance Committee's role and engagement with the School Boards, as well as the regulations around the motion to reconsider.

I move to give the ex officio member of the Finance Committee the right to vote. – Griggs moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: Yes (Swett, Vincent, Griggs, Layton), No (Calloway)

Griggs highlighted that the change had been requested by the committee and that he could not find a conflict of interest due to the committee being advisory.

The Chair raised that every Town Manager had noted friction with the Town Treasurer and shared that she hoped a Finance Director would not leave due to this friction.

Griggs clarified that he approaches the topic from the perspective of the role, and that if a person in the role is causing distress, the Selectboard should likely try to remove them.

Selectboard members discussed the appropriateness of reinstating the vote of the Treasurer and Lindberg's history in the Treasurer role.

8. Finance Committee Task

Timestamp: 2:45:32

The Chair shared the suggestion of giving the Finance Committee the task to research comparable towns for comparison to Norwich to help inform short-term decisions and long-term financial planning.

Selectboard members and the Town Manager discussed the metrics needed to make up a well-informed comparison for Norwich and the benefits of having the produced comparative information. Swett asked that the committee review nearby towns in addition to those of comparable size.

North proposed coming up with five towns and some metrics for comparison to ensure the Selectboard and Committee are aligned.

I move to invite the Finance Committee to propose five comparable towns for Selectboard approval and then to engage in the work described in their memo of 08/13/2025. – Griggs moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: Yes (unanimous)

9. Town Manager Report

Timestamp: 3:03:50

The Town Manager shared that (1) the tax bills have been sent to the printer and will likely be mailed on Friday, (2) preparations are beginning for the annual audit, (3) Frances Willette started as the Administrative Assistant for the Police Department on Monday, (4) a fourth equipment operator has been hired for DPW, (5) there is a need to be kind to help improve town staff retention rates and that issues should be brought to the Town Manager so that he may act as a buffer between town staff and members of the public, (6) the Norford Lake culvert work is in progress, (7) the first requisition of the FEMA reimbursement went smoothly, (8) the oil tank has been removed from Tracy Hall and there was no concerns of contamination, and (9) he had explored vendors for propane and was interested in maintaining Dead River for the short-term but wanted to pursue a more robust RFB in April to ensure optimal pricing.

Clement asked if there are exit interviews for departing town staff beyond management positions and noted communications from former town staff who said they were treated poorly.

Peter Orner questioned the cleanup done by Clean Harbors and the length of time it took for the bid to be sent out, then suggested an associated lack of accountability in the process.

Selectboard members and the Town Manager discussed construction timelines and the scope of Clean Harbors' work.

The Town Manager shared that there was no update on the Tracy Hall chimney.

Lindberg asked if a full staff at DPW would translate into a reduction in the use of Chase Site Services for plowing.

The Town Manager shared that the increased staffing would result in fewer roads being plowed by Chase.

10. Department Reports

Included above.

11. Approve Minutes

Timestamp: 3:30:48

Vincent noted a typo under the Selectboard Handbook agenda item; the minutes stated *residence* instead of *residents*.

I move to approve the minutes for August 13th, 2025 as amended to correct one typo. – Calloway moved (2nd Griggs) Vote: yes (unanimous)

I move to approve the minutes for August 19th, 2025 as presented. – Calloway moved (2nd Griggs) Vote: yes (unanimous)

12. AP Warrants

Timestamp: 3:34:36

I move to approve AP Warrant #1383 in the amount of \$148,818.78 to be paid from the General Fund; AP Warrant #1380 in the amount of \$292.78 to be paid from the General Fund; AP Warrant #1379 in the amount of \$79.50 to be paid from the General Fund; AP Warrant #1386 in the amount of \$1,405.00 to be paid from the Records Restoration Fund; AP Warrant #1385 in the amount of \$489.89 to be paid from the Main Street Flags Fund; and AP Warrant #1384 in the amount of \$200 to be paid from the Citizen Assistance Fund. – Calloway moved (2nd Griggs) Vote: yes (unanimous)

13. Receipt of Correspondence

Timestamp: 3:36:59

I move to receive all correspondence. – Griggs moved (2nd Swett) Vote: yes (unanimous)

The Chair voiced appreciation for Steven True's ability to enforce zoning regulations in relation to advertising signs.

14. Adjournment

Timestamp: 3:42:58

I move to adjourn the meeting. – Calloway moved (2nd Griggs) Vote: yes (unanimous)

Meeting adjourned at 9:40.

Minutes taken by Jenny Tolman.

Minutes approved on September 10, 2025

Mary Layton, Selectboard Chair