Town of Norwich, Vermont
Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting
Wednesday, October 22, 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), Matt Herbert (EMS Head of Services for NFD), Matt Romei (Chief of Police), Marga Rahmann (Hemlock Ridge leadership), Steven True (Planning Director and Zoning Administrator), Graham Webster (Town resident), Steven Hepburn (Finance Committee Chair), Cheryl Lindberg (Treasurer and Lister)

Active Participants on Zoom: Jaan Laaspere (Planning Commission)

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: 0:00**

1. **Agenda**
   Timestamp: 0:33

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

2. **Chair's Report**
   Timestamp: 1:15

   The Chair (1) met to develop the agenda, (2) attended the Improving Energy Efficiency in Historic Buildings Zoom meeting by the Historical Society, (3) wanted to give a heads-up that there would be back-to-back sessions on November 12th and 19th, and Dec 10th and 17th due to the holidays.

3. **Public Comments for Items not on the Agenda**
   Timestamp: 2:45

   Jaan Laaspere shared that he often walks in town and notices frequent speeding and seldom sees police cars present outside of school morning drop-offs. Laaspere highlighted the number of traffic stops per month, as listed in the monthly reports, and urged the Selectboard and Town Manager to ask the police to increase the priority on visibility and road safety.

4. **Winter Road Salt Purchase**
   Timestamp: 4:30

   The Town Manager referenced the memo in the packet from DPW Director Chris Kaufman. The Town Manager highlighted the recommendation to select Cargill, despite being the more expensive of the two bids, due to supply issues last year with American Rock Salt.

   Vincent noted the difference in estimated salt quantity needed between the two bids.

   Swett asked if the Town had experience with Cargill, to which the Town Manager responded that he was not sure if the Town had experience but that the company was one of the larger suppliers in the Northeast.

   I move to authorize the Town Manager to accept the road salt quote supplied by Cargill, Inc. – Griggs moved (2nd Calloway) Vote: yes (unanimous)

5. **Opioid Settlement Funds Plan Memos**
   Timestamp: 7:37

   The Chair recapped that the Selectboard had asked for advice on possible opioid fund recipients and had received responses from Police Chief Matt Romei, EMS Head of Services Matt Herbert, and the Norwich Community Nurse.

   Matt Herbert shared that he had identified Upper Valley Turning Point for their effort to improve access to resources and increase resources, Good Neighbor Health Clinic for their long-term efforts and material support like a free vending machine, and Norwich Police and Fire to bolster UV-specific resources.

   Calloway asked how an opioid problem in Norwich would be ranked relative to other towns in the area. Herbert responded that the numbers fluctuate due to varying supply quality with no oversight and movement of unhoused people between towns day-to-day.

   Calloway asked which organization is called on most frequently to help, to which Herbert responded that it was likely Health Care and Rehabilitative Services (HCRS), though he was not sure if they had "all the tools" or that their mission statement fit what the Selectboard was looking for.

Griggs asked whether the funds would be restricted to support only Norwich, to which Herbert responded that wherever the funds go, it would be difficult to restrict it to just Norwich residents, as unhoused individuals do not necessarily have a set town residence.

The Chair stated that the goal for that night's agenda item was to get an idea of the needed scope and possible destinations for donations. She further noted that there would likely be two future agenda items: (1) how would we disperse funds, and (2) if we are going to disperse, how much and to whom.

The Police Chief voiced his support for Herbert's ideas. He shared that he had suggested HCRS because they are the Town's designated mental health agency. The Police Chief described the utility of resource guides and the potential for the funds to help HCRS create something like that for the Upper Valley.

The Police Chief highlighted that every overdose seen in the past three years has been a polypharmacy overdose, rather than a single drug overdose, which complicates overdoses. He stated that call data might not reflect significant drug use in the town but that a lot of drugs move through the town, specifically on Route 5 and Interstate 91.

I move to ask the Town Manager to return at the next agenda item for the opioid settlement with proposals for how to account for the money and how we can easily distribute it. – Swett moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: yes (unanimous)

6. **Hemlock Ridge Encampment Complaint**
   Timestamp: 29:27

The Town Manager recounted that at the last meeting, a number of residents of the Hemlock Ridge Development wanted to bring to the Norwich Selectboard's attention that a couple had encamped next to the development and caused disturbance to quality of life. He noted prior discussions with the residents over the course of the summer.

The Police Chief shared a map of the area around the Hemlock Ridge community, as well as photographs of the walking trail and encampment.

The Police Chief noted that the encampment was unoccupied, had been that way for some time, and was on private property. He explained that the property is in a trust and that the Trustee has elected not to authorize the Norwich Police to go on the property. He highlighted that there were other encampments in Norwich and noted his stance of "not fixing non-problems."

The Police Chief additionally highlighted legal restrictions on the Town and the Police Department. He stated that he had been in contact with the residents of the encampment, knew they “had some challenges,” and has tried to balance enforcement and support services. He noted that one needs to be quite far into the private property on the trails and know where to look in order to see the encampment.

The Police Chief recognized that there had been challenges with the encampment residents but that most of the challenges had not happened in Norwich. He highlighted a comprehensive guide from the Montpelier Police Department for dealing with encampments, though noted that the guide is for public property, not private property. He emphasized that law enforcement actions on private property “are wholly the decision of the property owner.”

Calloway asked how the Police Chief would handle a transgression with users of the trail and unhoused individuals. He responded that they would approach it in the same way that they would handle something in the Dan and Whit’s parking lot.

Marga Rahmann, part of the leadership of Hemlock Ridge, stated that the encampment is occupied right now and is occupied by new people, not the couple that was there previously. Rahmann shared that the Hartford Police had gotten involved in the matter because the new resident accosted a person who lives at Hemlock Ridge as she was walking her dog. She emphasized that people are feeling afraid because of the behavior exhibited over the last several months, and because of the hazard of fire in a wooded area.

Vincent pondered whether the matter is something that should be addressed by the Hemlock Ridge residents filing a lawsuit against the property owner.

Swett highlighted that Steven True had mentioned at the previous meeting that there could be a zoning component of the matter.

Steven True shared that the Zoning Office Administrative Officer does have jurisdiction to find zoning violations on private land. He stated that under 6.01 of the land use regulations, no development, with the exception of the exemptions, may commence without issuance of a zoning permit.

Selectboard members and True discussed the possibility of the dwelling being construed as a structure, which would require a permit, and mechanisms of zoning violation enforcement.

True stated that he has an obligation to investigate when an alleged violation has been brought to his attention.

7. Webster License for Waterline
Timestamp: 56:38

The Town Manager explained that the request is from a town resident who has reported that their shallow well has run dry and that their ability to dig a deeper well is restricted by environmental contamination known to be in the vicinity. He stated that the most feasible solution is to connect to the water district main line that runs along Route 5 and that the license agreement would memorialize that the town has granted the requester the permission to encumber the town's right of way with this new water line.

Calloway asked about the cost, to which the Town Manager responded that the town is not paying, only allowing access through the right-of-way.

Graham Webster, the requester, shared that he had met with the Fire District yesterday after receiving a permit from the State, and that the Selectboard's approval is the last step in the process.

Vincent spoke in favor of approving the request.

I move to authorize the town manager to execute the license agreement, as included in the Selectboard meeting packet. – Calloway moved (2^{nd} Swett) Vote: yes (unanimous)

8. Planning Grant for Master Plan Approval
Timestamp: 1:02:50

Steven True explained that the Planning Commission is asking the Selectboard to sign the municipal resolution which would provide evidence that the Selectboard recognizes and supports that the Commission is pursuing a municipal planning grant. True added that it is a competitive bid grant and the application is due on November 3^{rd}.

Vincent highlighted the commitment to match funds, which True confirmed would mean that the grant would provide 90% of the funds and the Planning Department would provide 10%.

Calloway questioned the borders of the Norwich village area in the master plan, which differ from the town plan, and why a state agency would grant money for an area arbitrarily designated as the village. True responded that the study area includes the village zoning district and the infill/transition area identified at the regional level in their future land use map.

Jaan Laaspere explained the area of the proposal as being to plan for the whole area with a unified mindset but not to change the zoning areas or to turn the whole area into a certain density. Laaspere added that the emphasis of this grant would be to encourage public participation.

True added that the point of a master plan is to gather information and opinions, and that it does not create new uses or zoning districts.

Calloway stated that the town plan needs “a lot of fixing” and wondered why the master plan is being pursued instead of focusing on the town plan.

True responded that there were topics to focus on in anticipation of looking at the entire town plan, which is a process that will begin mid-next year.

Swett shared that he had attended a number of Planning Commission meetings and considered this to be a good way to begin with a subset of a larger plan.

Calloway questioned whether the town met the stipulations in the third paragraph of the planning grant document in the packet, to which Laaspere clarified the form seeks to verify that a town is actively involved in planning to receive the grant and that the Town does spend money to do planning.

I move to endorse and sign the FY26 Municipal Resolution for Municipal Planning Grant, as included in the Selectboard meeting packet. – Swett moved (2nd Griggs) Vote: yes (Griggs, Vincent, Swett, Layton), no (Calloway)

9. FY27 Budget Process and Schedule
Timestamp: 1:20:22

The Town Manager shared that he has been working with the Finance Office on operational budgets for FY27 and reviewing capital budgeting needs based on the plan adopted two years ago. He shared that he hopes to have a version ready for the November 12th meeting.

The Town Manager stated that he would like to get a sense of the Selectboard’s year over year increase and noted that last year the board majority landed on a roughly 6% target for the increase from the prior year.

The Chair asked about the expected increase in health insurance costs, and the Town Manager shared that the costs had gone up but not as significantly as was initially proposed by the insurer.

The Town Manager highlighted that the other big driver in the operating budget is wages, with a 3.6% cost of living adjustment that went into effect this year, as well as a 2% step increase, both of which flow down to the benefits.

The Town Manager shared that he thought 6% would be a fair and reasonable budget increase expectation.

Vincent reflected that she thought the Town had a surplus of about $970,000 and wondered how a large surplus would factor into the idea that the budget would need to be increased.

The Town Manager stated that he was unclear where that number came from and stated that annually the Town will have a surplus but that the exact number is unclear until the audit of FY25 is completed.

Swett asked if a significant surplus would indicate that there are ways to trim the next year's budget or if the surplus is generated by planning for positions that have to be held open and budgeted for but are not filled.

The Town Manager reiterated that a surplus is expected and that a surplus is typically a combination of a few factors.

Griggs questioned the automatic step salary increase and quoted the state's differing policy on merit step increases. Layton shared that union negotiations and a five-year contract led to the present policy.

Calloway highlighted relevant statute language, including that incorrectly predicting future expenses and having a deficit means that a town must add a tax of 5%, or a multiple of 5%, to the next annual tax bill. She noted that the VLCT does not advocate for this approach to budgeting but acknowledged that the Town has done it and that people have preferred it in recent iterations of the Selectboard. Calloway stated that "for lack of anything else, I'd say 6%."

The Chair shared that she was fine with 6% as a starting point but wanted more information about the expenses behind the number.

Griggs stated that he felt somewhat unprepared and that this approach feels "like pushing upstream rather than getting downstream information that we can then respond to." Griggs added that despite knowing that wages would increase by 5.6%, he would expect to have the ratio of the salary to the total budget ahead of making any budget increase suggestion. Griggs passed on giving a percentage.

Vincent stated that she would like to know how much of the budget is wages and how much is other types of expenses. Vincent shared that she wanted to know what departments actually need to run and that she could not give a number that night.

Swett shared that he was comfortable with 6% for a ballpark given the approximate 6% step up in wages and 15% step up in benefits, and that the operating budget is significantly driven by wages and benefits.

The Town Manager stated that he wanted a starting percentage to make the process efficient and reduce the likelihood of consternation in the departments through the budget process. He added that the Town had underfunded its capital budgets for years and tried to do a "catch-up" two years ago, which led to the two-digit increase.

Griggs stated that he would be happy with 6% if the wages and insurance make up such a significant part of the budget.

Selectboard members and the Town Manager discussed how the Selectboard would like to see the budget in the coming meetings. Selectboard members requested to see the whole budget by line item, as well as an executive summary.

Steven Hepburn highlighted that the various school boards have draft budgets available for next year and created them using last year's budget, estimates for health insurance increases, step increases for salaries, and CPI for remaining items.

Hepburn further suggested tasking the Finance Committee with exploring cuts to the budget if cuts are needed. He noted that he personally is not clear on what level of service is expected for various departments and highlighted the desire by some to have 24-hour service from the police department.

The Town Manager recapped the conversation, including the 6% goal and the first meeting on November 12th with 1.5 hours designated for budget discussion.

10. Finance Committee / Task Report Out

Timestamp: 2:01:40

The Chair shared that Hepburn presented a memo on the chosen towns for a comparable analysis with Norwich.

The Town Manager overviewed possible data point comparisons and noted that Manchester and Sharon could be considered comparable towns.

Hepburn stated that the initial list of selected towns was based on high-level comparability.

Calloway stated that the town being reviewed should have the "big ticket" items that Norwich has, such as a fire department, police department, and possibly a Town Manager.

Swett noted appreciation for the inclusion of paved versus unpaved roads, especially since the matter has come up due to the difficulty of maintaining dirt roads.

Selectboard members and Hepburn agreed to include Chester and Manchester.

11. **Finance Committee / School Board MOU**
    Timestamp: 2:12:47

The Chair shared that Calloway was in touch with Garrett Palm and revised the MOU, as seen in the Selectboard packet, to reflect his input.

Griggs noted that Norwich and Hanover used to have equal representation on the Committee and noted concern that the MOU would have fewer Norwich representatives.

The Chair added that this MOU would be for a year and could then be tweaked, and that the priority was to reestablish the relationship.

Vincent voiced frustration that the School Board suggested re-interviewing the Committee members, to which Swett clarified that the original MOU had already said that if the Finance Committee for Norwich was going to be part of the School Board, the School Board had to be part of the original interview process.

Swett stated that it was an advisory committee and that he therefore did not see an issue with the inequitable numbers.

The Chair emphasized that no insults were intended anywhere in the creation of the document.

Selectboard members discussed the steps in developing the current draft MOU.

Steven Hepburn shared that he understood the three references in various documents to be the Norwich Finance Committee, which was currently six members. He noted the Hanover Finance Committee’s constitution of five members plus a School Board member and Selectboard member.

Selectboard members and Hepburn discussed adjusting the wording of the memorandum to reflect that the membership of the Finance Committee would not be amended for the purpose of the work with the Dresden Committee.

Hepburn clarified that he understood the matter differently but was willing to be directed by the Selectboard if they can provide guidance on how to select five individuals if that path is chosen.

Cheryl Lindberg noted that there was a different process in the past in which the seven-member Committee met in equal status with the seven-member Hanover Finance Committee, who all came together to automatically make the Dresden Finance Committee. Lindberg added that the Norwich School Board budget meetings were ongoing and that it would be a catch-up at this point.

The Chair stated that she was “ready to tank it” or table it. The Chair added that the relationship with the school has not worked out in a way that she thinks is amenable to everyone and that the MOU “does not appear to be a good one.”

Selectboard members, the Town Manager, and Hepburn discussed next steps and agreed to have Calloway ask Garrett Palm for an explanation of the five-person Committee participation.

Linderberg requested the documentation of the five-person Finance Committee in Norwich’s history from Calloway.

12. Town Manager Report
Timestamp: 2:44:25

The Town Manager shared that (1) the full payment to SAU 70 of the first installment had been paid, (2) the Finance Department had met with the auditors for two days in early October, (3) there is a formal drug take-back day on October 25th, (4) DPW is wrapping up remaining fall projects, (5) there would be limited road paving on Hopson St, (6) an equipment operator resigned, (7) there is an applicant for the Building and Grounds Technician position, (8) five firefighters are currently enrolled in training, (9) planning is underway for the Halloween festivities hosted in the public safety building, (10) a dry hydrant initiative is currently going through permitting, (11) the Recreation Director attended the Vermont Recreation and Parks conference, (12) tennis court demolition is underway, (13) signage has been put up at Huntley Meadow and kiosks have been ordered, (14) Recreation Dept Halloween events are being planned, (15) BCA hearings have been completed with a Nov 20th deadline for decisions, and (16) the boiler conversion has been mostly completed.

13. Department Reports
Timestamp: 2:50:27

No comments.

14. Town Manager Contract Extension
Timestamp: 2:51:07

The Chair explained that the Selectboard was considering this matter now in order to give the Town Manager and the Selectboard time if they decide to move forward together or if they decide not to.

I move to enter Executive Session under 1 V.S.A. § 313(a)(3) to discuss the Town Manager employment contract and to invite the Town Manager. – Calloway moved (2nd Swett) Vote: yes (Calloway, Layton, Griggs, Swett), abstain (Vincent)

Lindberg questioned the urgency to bring this matter forward at this time relative to other items and whether there was more discussion that could take place in public.

The Chair responded that the idea was to help ensure stability for the Town and allow enough time to figure out whether the Selectboard would want to continue the Town Manager's contract or engage in a search.

Lindberg questioned why more information about the Town Manager's goals and position results are not shared with the public. She stated that engaging in a search follows the Town policy and engages community members.

Time entered executive session: 9:37 pm

I move to enter public session. – Swett moved (2nd Griggs) Vote: yes (unanimous)

Time entered executive session: 11:22 pm

Vincent shared that she thought the Town Manager was doing a good job and that she would like him to continue but found it to be too early to renew his contract eleven months in advance.

Swett shared that the Town Manager was able to lead the Town into a more stable position over the past two years and that he thought it would be in the best interest of the Town to continue with him.

Griggs stated that he looked forward to contract negotiations.

Calloway stated her gratefulness for the Town Manager's willingness to serve.

The Chair thanked the Town Manager for what he had done to stabilize the Town.

I move to authorize the Chair to execute a second addendum to the Employment Agreement for the Town Manager, executed 9/27/2023, for an additional three (3) years. – Calloway moved (2nd Griggs) Vote: yes (Calloway, Layton, Griggs, Swett), no (Vincent)

The Town Manager thanked the Selectboard for their continued support and shared that he looked forward to continuing the path of growth and stability in the Town.

15. Approve Minutes
Timestamp: 3:03:20

On page 114 of the packet, under Item 4, the first full paragraph should be changed to add a new sentence: Selectboard members debated next steps for the project, whose input to prioritize, and possible meeting spaces beyond Tracy Hall. <u>Griggs recommended that an advisory committee be formed.</u> The group agreed that the next step would be for Sonsalla to compile a list of options for the Town Manager to review and distribute to the Selectboard.

On page 114 of the packet, between Items 4 and 5, regarding public comment about the Hemlock Ridge encampment, the following sentence should be changed to add a word (agenda) and delete three words (for handling fires): Swett raised that it could be helpful to have a future agenda item for the Police Chief to briefly explain jurisdiction ~~for handling fires~~ on different forms of property.

I move to accept the minutes as amended. – Calloway moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: yes (unanimous)

16. **AP Warrants**
Timestamp: 3:06:39

I move to approve AP Warrant #1408 in the amount of $2,500.00 to be paid from the Public Safety Facility Fund; AP Warrant #1409 in the amount of $342.50 to be paid from the General Fund; AP Warrant #1410 in the amount of $172.30 to be paid from the General Fund; AP Warrant #1407 in the amount of $124,182.18 to be paid from the Tracy Hall Fund; and AP Warrant #1406 in the amount of $350,144.10 to be paid from the General Fund. – Griggs moved (2nd Calloway) Vote: yes (unanimous)

17. **Receipt of Correspondence**
Timestamp: 3:08:00

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

18. **Adjournment**
Timestamp: 3:09:30

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

Meeting adjourned at 11:32 pm.

Minutes taken by Jenny Tolman – left before the Selectboard returned from executive session due to unusually late hour.

Minutes approved on November 12, 2025

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Mary Layton, Selectboard Chair