

Town of Norwich, Vermont
Minutes of the Selectboard Meeting
Wednesday, Jan 14, 2026

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), Lily Trajman (Town Clerk), Jaan Laaspere (Planning Commission), Cheryl Lindberg (Town Treasurer and Lister), Lindsay Putnam (Town member), Pam Smith (Lister)

Active Participants on Zoom: Tricia Spellman (Town Member), Barrie Rosalinda (Finance Director)

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: x

1. Agenda

Timestamp: 41:27

The Chair highlighted an agenda item for schoolhouse tax exemption and shared that she would like to “step around” for Root District because she is on their board. She suggested Griggs preside during that agenda item.

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

2. Chair’s Report

Timestamp: 42:52

The Chair met to set up the agenda.

3. Public Comments for Items not on the Agenda

Timestamp: 43:02

Town Clerk Lily Trajman gave a reminder that individuals interested in running for a town office must submit their petition by January 26th at 5:00 pm and must have the

signatures of 30 registered Norwich voters in order to be on the ballot. Interested individuals must also turn in a consent of candidate form.

Jaan Laaspere highlighted a letter in the Selectboard packet from Two Rivers about Act 181 and Tier 1B designation, relating to changes to Act 250 and the town potentially petitioning to have the village area exempted from certain Act 250 hearings. Laaspere shared that the Planning Commission would have a special meeting later in the month focused on the topic and anticipates bringing the topic with Two Rivers to the Selectboard.

Calloway asked how the Planning Commission defined “village” for this matter.

Laaspere responded that it was based on the Act 250 and Act 181 designations of village center and village area and were different boundaries than those in the town plan.

Laaspere additionally shared that the Planning Commission voted to approve a proposed short-term rental interim bylaw to go to the Selectboard. Laaspere explained that because it is an interim bylaw with a two-year limit, it requires just one public hearing from the Selectboard. The proposal would make owner-occupied short-term rentals allowed uses in all districts, subject to permitting requirements, for two years as a stop-gap action “to get our hands around this.”

4. Recreation Council Member Appointment

Timestamp: 49:26

Lily Trajman shared that Geffen is in 10th grade and a “go-getter.”

I move to appoint Geffen Melamut as Youth Representative to the Recreation Council. – Griggs moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: yes (unanimous)

Calloway and Vincent shared that they prefer to have individuals come to the meeting when seeking appointment.

Cheryl Lindberg asked if the position had been advertised.

The Town Manager stated that he was unaware as to whether the position was advertised recently.

5. Town Clerk Spending Requests

Timestamp: 51:41

Town Clerk Lily Trajman showed an example of town reports she had had bound recently, as required by statute. Trajman shared that the reports had been bound by Holzer Bindery. Trajman noted that the town reports had not been bound since 1987, and that the ones bound up until 1987 had been held in place by metal clips that were causing the paper to degrade. Trajman shared that she would return with a request in the coming weeks to have those older reports bound by Holzer Bindery as well.

Griggs asked what the rolled storage boxes would be used for.

Trajman explained that they would be used for documents like highway maps, plans for Tracy Hall, and other maps that were copies given to the town by the state and never recorded.

Selectboard members and Trajman discussed ideal storage methods and locations for the documents. Trajman offered to reach out to the state archives and records division to ask if the documents need to be kept but requested the storage boxes in the interim.

I move to approve the expenditure of an amount not to exceed \$750.00 from Restoration Fund #45 for the purchase of a new map display portfolio, rolled map storage boxes, and a vault storage cabinet. – Griggs moved (2nd Swett) Vote: yes (unanimous)

6. Presentation on Tax Exemption for Schoolhouses

Timestamp: 59:30

The Chair moved to the public seating and told Griggs that he would preside over the agenda item.

Lindsay Putnam shared that the Beaver Meadow Schoolhouse is a community center that is open to the public and is primarily used by the local West Norwich community. Putnam highlighted that they host speaker events and pizza nights and are a designated warming center. She noted that the schoolhouse is managed by a board of trustees, she believed they have not paid property tax for the life of the schoolhouse, and they are requesting a renewal of that exemption.

Griggs asked about the jurisdiction for this matter.

The Chair, speaking from the public seating, stated that it is on the warrant for the voters to decide.

Vincent asked if the schoolhouse building was insured, to which Putnam responded that it was.

Swett asked if the schoolhouse is a nonprofit, to which Putnam explained that they are a 501c4, a community organization.

Swett asked if the group had gotten the 30 signatures needed to get an article on the warrant, to which Putnam responded that they were told that they didn't need to get a petition and could go to the Selectboard instead.

Swett asked about the length of the tax-exempt status to be granted.

Lister Pam Smith stated that the statute says that the initial status is for 10 years and then a renewal is required every five years thereafter.

Vincent asked if the draft article 27 referencing the Beaver Meadow Union *Chapel* was a separate request.

Griggs responded that the wording of the statute had been changed to *School*.

The Chair, speaking from the public seating, stated that she is on the board of the Root District Schoolhouse. Layton explained that the building's foundation failed about 12 years ago and the board spent many of the following years fundraising to get a new foundation with good drainage. Layton shared that they are at the point of developing a community, especially through musical performances.

Layton shared that the building has a 501c3, Root District Game Club Inc., and had never been issued a property tax bill to her knowledge.

Layton explained that the building was a functioning schoolhouse until a consolidation in the 1940s, at which point the Root District Game Club got a quit claim deed from the school district to use and maintain the schoolhouse. Layton added that they had renegotiated that deed and that the property would revert to the town if the 501c3 were to dissolve.

Layton explained that the Root District Schoolhouse is the actual structure and the funding mechanism is the Root District Game Club Inc.

Griggs asked if there are other institutions in the town like these that will come up in future years that she is aware of.

Layton stated that she thought the Grange used to but that they might have gone through the Development Review Board and now have a permanent exemption.

Selectboard members and Layton discussed the relationship between the game club and the schoolhouse. Layton explained that the game club is the organization that maintains and runs the Root District School House and that the club was historically a group of “neighborhood guys that liked to hunt.”

Griggs asked if the organization would be open to the public, to which Layton explained that it is open to the public and they are looking to expand engagement.

Calloway asked if there had been use by the public, to which Layton responded that after renovations and permitting, there was a “pretty full program of cultural events” but that they have cut back lately because they want to find community groups that want to use the space on a regular basis.

Swett reminded the Selectboard that they have a meeting with their lawyer at 7 pm.

Griggs shared that he was inclined to continue the tax-exempt status as the buildings are great town resources.

Town Treasurer Cheryl Lindberg stated that it would be easier if the agenda item had a written request from the organizations so that it is clearer who they were. Lindberg also noted that there used to be other exemptions voted that have changed to a permanent non-taxable status like the Grange. She added that voting an exemption only votes the municipal tax exemption, not the education tax and therefore the rest of the town will have a local agreement tax rate to raise the education taxes for the voted exempt properties.

Griggs noted that getting a petition with signatures would help publicize the schoolhouses’ efforts and broaden awareness of the requests among voters.

7. Meeting with Town Counsel Regarding Possible Litigation (Appointment at 7 p.m.)
Timestamp: 1:21:14

I move to find that premature public knowledge of attorney-client communications would place the Selectboard at a substantial disadvantage, including by potentially waiving attorney-client privilege and disclosing confidential information. – Griggs moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: yes (unanimous)

Under 1 V.S.A. §§313(a)(1)(E) and (F), I move to enter executive session with the Town Manager and legal counsel. – Griggs moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: yes (unanimous)

Time entered executive session: 7:10

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

Time entered public session: 7:51

The Chair stated that the Selectboard would not take an action at this point based on their discussion.

8. FY27 Budget

Timestamp: 2:03:20

Swett asked whether the Emerald Ash Borer appropriation request of \$60,000 was on the list of articles as a result of collecting the required number of signatures.

The Town Manager explained that the group had filed a petition with the Town Clerk with the required signatures that day. He added that if the request passes, there will be \$60,000 more that needs to be raised in revenue.

Vincent highlighted a question from Chris Katucki in the correspondence as to why the borer money is a petition and not in the budget.

The Chair stated that she thought there was a lot of information that would be helpful to come out of the committee as to actual costs before she thought “we’d want to take it on.”

Griggs asked if the Town Manager had any comments on the budget draft.

The Town Manager shared that he thought it was a good budget with an increase of a little over 2% from last year.

I move to accept the budget as presented. – Griggs moved (2nd Swett) Vote: yes (unanimous)

9. Review Town Warrant Articles Draft

Timestamp: 2:09:26

The Chair raised the matter of setting the tax due dates.

The Town Manager shared that he and Finance Director Barrie Rosalinda had two dates to propose: August 27th and February 18th, both Thursdays.

Griggs highlighted that the Town did not meet this year's due date for taxes due to the reappraisal and that there is no language for an adjustment in due date.

The Chair stated that the reappraisal was an extraordinary circumstance and that these proposed dates would be fixed.

The Town Manager noted that delinquent taxes would be after February 18th, the second collection date.

Relating to article one, Town Treasurer Cheryl Lindberg clarified that the Town Treasurer will serve as the School District Treasurer as well, unless separately elected, which has not been done for at least 30 years.

Trajman noted that there are two Dresden-Norwich School Director positions coming up and that she has reached out to the Secretary of State's Office about whether they can be listed as one item where you choose two since there is no distinction between the two positions.

The Chair asked what the issue was with the Cemetery Commission.

The Town Manager explained that there is an empty seat that is going to be voted on and that there is also an appointment for an unexpired term that will be taken up by the Cemetery Commission following the election due to the timing of the resignation.

For article two, the Town Manager read the proposed budget of \$6,855,322, to be added to the article language.

For article three, Trajman highlighted that the submitted petition contained slightly different language than what was on the draft in the packet. She read the following submitted petition language: Shall the Town of Norwich appropriate \$60,000 to Fund 52, the Emerald Ash Borer Response Fund, to remove ash trees along Norwich public roads due to dangerous effects of the widespread EAB infestation?

The Town Manager shared that they had made the language of the Response Fund more open in the previous year to allow for general mitigation efforts.

Calloway asked if they should consider money for borer mitigation efforts like inoculations.

The Chair shared that she is not clear on what has been done so far and that she thought they might be behind schedule on some of the proposed tree cuttings.

Vincent raised that they had put in their minutes that they were behind schedule due to the weather and discussions with the highway crew.

The Chair suggested an evaluation at some point on how the group's work is going.

Swett stated that Katucki's questions were all worthy of answers and shared that he was somewhat uncomfortable that the appropriation "kind of sidestepped debate" as far as the "overall budget needs and wants."

Calloway asked if there was still money available for mitigation, which could be used for inoculation.

The Town Manager responded that there is and that they "haven't really spent any of this money yet." He added that he thought it would be good to invite the EAB Subcommittee Chair to come in and talk about what they've done so far ahead of the vote.

Lindberg asked if there was any information on the private funds that had been raised for the fund, to which the Town Manager responded that it is a separate topic from the warrant article.

Griggs shared he understood the inoculation funding to be a separate effort for private landowners, not trees in the town right-of-way.

Trajman noted that the only two items that increased in their requested amount among the warrant articles were the Cemetery Commission and library.

The Chair noted that those two items were added by petition and therefore "they are what they are." She explained that if the amount of a request stays the same, they do not need to petition.

Griggs asked if the organizations have asked the town to roll over their requests to the next year. The Town Manager shared that the Assistant Town Manager does reach out to

requesters and ask if they are still interested and if they would like to increase their requested amount.

The Town Manager shared that there would be a final draft of the warrant articles in the packet ahead of the special meeting on January 21st, during which the Selectboard will vote to set the warrant.

Tricia Spellman, Treasurer for the Norwich Public Library Board, shared that the town appropriation is about 74% of the library's revenue.

Rosalinda asked for clarification on the request amount for article five. The Town Manager clarified that the request for \$32,000 is in the budget.

Trajman shared that she was not sure what had happened with the voter-exempt properties in the past and learned from the Secretary of State's Office that there is not a statute that applies to this and that it varies by town. She stated that it would be helpful in the future to have institutional knowledge on how this process is done for Norwich.

Griggs asked whether the Selectboard would have to apply qualifications to requesters to ensure that the public is welcome. Trajman explained that if a requester went before the Board of Civil Authority, qualifications would need to be met for the requester to be voted tax exempt.

Trajman added that it would be helpful to put a parcel number in each request for tax-exempt status to communicate what property it applies to.

The Chair suggested an edit to article 26 to include "Inc." because it is a 501c3 and a state corporation.

Selectboard members, Lindberg, and Smith discussed the wording of article 26 and the relationship between the game club and the schoolhouse.

For article 27, the Selectboard agreed to update the language to *Beaver Meadow Schoolhouse Association* from *Beaver Meadow Union Chapel*.

Selectboard members and the Town Manager discussed the timeline for adding the school board's articles to the warrant.

10. Set Date for 2026 Informational Meeting

Timestamp: 2:41:32

I move to schedule the 2026 Informational Meeting at 7:00 PM on March 2, 2026. – Griggs moved (2nd Vincent) Vote: yes (Griggs, Swett, Calloway, Layton), no (Vincent)

The Town Manager explained that March 2nd is the Monday before the Tuesday election and is historically when the informational meeting has been done.

Trajman shared that the Monday night right before the meeting is difficult given that the gym needs to be set up for voting after the meeting concludes, many people vote early, some older people do not drive at night, and there is little time to review the info meeting video recording if someone is unable to watch live. Trajman reminded the Selectboard that they are allowed to hold the meeting on any of the 30 days leading up to the town meeting and suggested a Saturday afternoon.

The Town Manager suggested reviewing the request again next year but earlier in the fall.

Vincent shared that she had previously lived in a town in Massachusetts that successfully held town meeting on a Saturday.

11. November Financial Reports

Timestamp: 2:47:31

Griggs asked why the Town's receivables were over \$10 million.

Rosalinda explained that it is the second installment that includes the municipal tax as well as the school tax.

Vincent expressed confusion that the town seems to have collected most of the property taxes yet there is another payment due in February.

Lindberg explained that when taxes are billed, there is a debit to receivable and credit to revenue. As taxes are collected, the receivable is removed and put in cash.

12. Approve Minutes – December 17, 2025

Timestamp: 2:53:42

I move to approve the minutes for December 17th, 2025 as presented. – Calloway moved (2nd Griggs) Vote: yes (unanimous)

13. AP Warrants

Timestamp: 2:57:12

Vincent asked why the bills for Green Mountain Power were not bundled. Rosalinda explained that the Green Mountain Power bills got messed up at one point and the Finance Office has kept each account separate since then to maintain clarity.

Vincent asked about the payments to Health Equity, Inc. and distinctions between the payments. Rosalinda noted that it looked like it might have been misclassified but that she wanted to look at it first.

Selectboard members discussed how to navigate the approval and corrections.

Swett concluded that because the checks were still going to Health Equity but they were just coded to different accounts, he was fine with approving the warrant.

I move to approve AP Warrant #1437 in the amount of \$134,200.18 to be paid from the General Fund and AP Warrant #1438 in the amount of \$3,504.87 to be paid from the General Fund. – Griggs moved (2nd Swett) Vote: yes (Calloway, Griggs, Swett, Layton), no (Vincent)

14. Receipt of Correspondence

Timestamp: 3:04:39

Vincent expressed thanks to Doug Wilberding for serving as a Trustee of Public Funds.

Vincent suggested an agenda item on the letter from Kristen Shamis regarding the tax exemption agreement between the Fire District and the Town of Norwich. Calloway asked that the Selectboard consider having counsel at the discussion.

The Chair raised that Calloway had requested an item about the process for maintaining the Selectboard Handbook.

Vincent expressed surprise at the \$160 expense for wildflower seeds and a \$9,000 monthly contract to Kurtzhalz Excavation on the “FYI” warrant article signed by the Chair. Swett clarified that it was the new snowplow company.

Swett requested a short discussion on speeding.

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

The Town Manager reminded the Selectboard that there would be a special meeting next Wednesday with a one-topic agenda of the warrant articles.

15. Adjournment

Timestamp: 3:12:52

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

Meeting adjourned at 9:02.

Minutes taken by Jenny Tolman.

Minutes approved on January 28, 2026

Mary Layton, Selectboard Chair