

**Norwell Board of Selectmen  
Open Meeting Minutes  
12/4/19**

TOWN OF NORWELL  
TOWN CLERK  
2020 JAN 21 AM 11:13

**Present:** Ellen Allen, Jason Brown, Alison Demong, Bruce Graham, Peter Morin

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The meeting was called to order at 6:55pm by Ellen Allen.

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to designate Pamela Davis as the signatory on behalf of the BOS for the DOR forms to set the tax rate for 2020. Unanimously voted*

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to support a site readiness grant applied for in the SSEDG letter. Unanimously voted*

All discussed a possible Warrant Article to amend the right of use for Business District B to include single story self-storage facilities, potential revenue and the physical appearance of this type of business. This area includes Queen Anne's Corner behind the Big Y, where an alternate use to construct work force housing is being considered. Discussion will continue later in the meeting.

The board considered Mr. Morin's proposal to add more hours to the administrative positions in the Building Department, noting that there is currently not enough in this budget to expand. This proposal is listed as an Article in the draft Warrant list in tonight's packet.

The board signed the ground lease for 449 Prospect Street, the group home for Road to Responsibility.

Mr. Morin will rewrite the OPEB Trust fund document.

**Approval of Minutes**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to approve the following Open Meeting minutes; 10/23/19, 10/30/19, 11/13/19, 11/20/19. Unanimously voted*

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to approve the Executive Session minutes of 10/30/19. Unanimously voted*

Mr. Morin gave Mr. Brown suggested wording for the motions for this evening's meeting topics.

The traffic study report (EIR) on the impact of the PREP Hanover Mall project has been completed. The traffic impact from this project would be a disaster for the Town, especially at the South and Main Streets intersection. Ms. Allen met with the BETA consultant, Mr. Ferguson, and other Traffic Study Committee members to review and record their comments on the EIR. The draft will be finalized tomorrow to meet the Friday deadline.

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to authorize Town Administrator Peter Morin to sign off on the EIR commentary to recommend traffic mitigation. Unanimously voted*

The goal is to obtain recognition of the traffic impact that the mall project will have on the Town. The hope is to get some remediation. Everyone will have the option to discuss measures to uphold the Town's position. There is no hope for a Massworks grant at this point. The Hanover town boards are not pursuing the same path as the Norwell Town boards would have chosen. Peak traffic on a weekend would significantly impact traffic levels by as much as 53%. All discussed possible options for mitigation, adding that this is not great news.

COA Director Susan Curtin is ready to submit the lengthy paperwork application that she completed for a \$40K abatement on the Town's transportation assessment for the MBTA. Kudos to Ms. Curtin!

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### **Upcoming Agenda Topics**

After December 11<sup>th</sup>, the next scheduled board meeting will be January 8<sup>th</sup>. The board may hold a short meeting at 6pm on 12/18/19, if needed.

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### **Open Session, continued in the Osborn Room**

The televised portion of the meeting commenced at 7:32 pm. Chair Ellen Allen reminded all that the meeting is televised and recorded. All rose to recite the pledge of allegiance.

### **Approval of Agenda**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to approve the agenda as written and amended for Item 4d(2), which is being removed. Unanimously voted*

### **Citizen Comments - None**

### **BOS reports and Announcements**

Ellen Allen again asked all citizens to fill out the Master Plan update survey. Ms. Allen summarized the upcoming BOS meeting schedule through the end of the year.

### **Town Administrator's Report - None**

### **7:40 Public Hearing – Tax Levy Classification 2020**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to open the tax levy classification public hearing at 7:40pm. Unanimously voted*

*The notice of Public Hearing published in the Mariner was read by Alison Demong.*

The Board of Assessors (BOA), Rob Allen(Chair), Joan Osborne and Sue Kirby, was present to review the calculations prior to setting the tax rate for 2020. Mr. Allen reviewed each option with the board as follows:

1. Open Space Discount – not recommended by the BOA
2. Residential Exemption – not recommended by the BOA, as Norwell is not a vacation community with non-owner occupied residences/non-residents who are not allowed to vote
3. Small Commercial Exemption – not recommended by the BOA

The BOS deliberated on each of these categories prior to the annual vote required by the DOR.

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, that the board not support the adoption of an Open Space Discount, not grant a Residential Exemption or Small Commercial exemption as recommended by the Board of Assessors. Unanimously voted*

Per Mr. Allen, the BOA recommends that the BOS select a tax rate factor of "1" to adopt a single tax rate for all classes of properties. He reviewed examples of average tax calculations if a separate tax rate were to be adopted for commercial properties, concluding that the average benefit to residents would be much less than the increased tax expense for commercial business owners. The Town clearly needs commercial development, and adopting a split rate at this time could be detrimental to the economic development that is currently in the planning stages. The board discussed a split vs. single tax rate and comparisons to other towns in the state.

Mr. Morin noted that the majority of towns in the Commonwealth have a single tax rate. Norwell is not a good candidate for the split, because of its strong residential real estate market. In a good market residential taxes will consistently outgrow the commercial real estate taxes. These high residential values are beneficial, but frustrate the opportunity to shift some of the tax burden to commercial property. Mr. Morin added that other communities trying to stimulate

economic growth will use programs like tax incentive packages or creating an economic zone and identifying a distressed property for tax increment financing. The board continued to discuss options to address commercial growth and tax burden shifting.

Mr. Allen informed the board that the tax rate will go up from \$16.40 to \$16.63. He expanded on what residents can expect with the tax bill; valuations in the Town have both increased and decreased. The AVERAGE tax bill increase will be about 2.9%. The tax rate is calculated by dividing the amount of money the Town needs to operate (the tax levy) by the total value of all taxable property. That amount is divided by 1000 to determine the tax rate per \$1000. There are towns with lower tax rates and higher assessed property values. Regardless of this fact, 85% of the Town's taxes are paid with residential property tax, and any increases are immediately apparent in the tax bill. Ms. Allen added that the BOS is working hard on some economic development efforts to hopefully address this tax burden.

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to adopt a single tax rate. Unanimously voted*

Ms. Allen invited public comment. Ted Dawe, 43 Wilder Road, asked which periodicals published this notice. Mr. Brown replied that the public notice, as read at the beginning of this hearing, was published in the Mariner on 11/20/19. It was also posted on the bulletin board in Town Hall. Mr. Dawe looked in other publications for tax classification hearings and didn't find this notice. He personally didn't know that this hearing was taking place and wants the Town to do more advance notice and expanded on this topic. In response to Ms. Allen's question about the BOS office advertising policy, Mr. Morin explained that the policy is to advertise in the cheapest newspaper. The Patriot Ledger is double the cost and as a larger paper, the legal ad is harder to find. In addition, the board gives a summary of their future meeting agendas at each weekly meeting. This tax classification hearing date has been mentioned at the last few BOS meetings. All discussed options to find this information online in the future. Mr. Morin will follow up on the two websites that collect tax notification hearings for more information.

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to close the public hearing at 8:23pm. Unanimously voted*

### **Approval of Housing Production Plan Update – CHT**

Gregg McBride, CHT Chair, was present to answer questions from the board. Also present was CHT member Andy Reardon. Ms. Allen recapped the plan update timeline and Mr. McBride elaborated on the revisions to the draft created by AH consultant Karen Sunnarborg. The Planning Board sent a letter yesterday stating that they unanimously adopted this plan update. Mr. McBride will finalize the document which will be posted on the website. Ms. Allen asked for further questions from the board; hearing none, Mr. Brown made the following motion:

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to approve the update to the Housing Production Plan presented by the Community Housing Trust. Unanimously voted*

Mr. McBride will send the final copy to the Selectmen's office and the state.

### **Sign Bylaw Update Discussion**

Ms. Demong invited Town Planner Ken Kirkland to participate in the discussion. Ms. Demong and Mr. Graham have been working on this project with Mr. Kirkland, who reviewed his presentation from last year with the current revisions. A copy of the presentation is attached to these minutes. The revisions addressed concerns from the Chamber of Commerce and local businesses; the top concern being not enough signage space. The new codification numbers and references are highlighted in this draft of the bylaw. Mr. Brown asked about lighted "Open" signs; if the business is open, lit "Open" signs are allowed. The signage differences between Town Center and the rest of the Town's business districts were addressed with specific revisions to the bylaw. Businesses can still come in to the ZBA for a special permit to address special situations. The board and Mr. Kirkland asked and answered questions about the existing

bylaw and the proposed changes. The Planning Board hearing for this revision is scheduled for next week on 12/11/19, along with the MS4 stormwater bylaw update. Mr. Graham thanked Mr. Kirkland for his hard work on this bylaw.

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### **Reopen Winter Special Town Meeting Warrant**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to open the Warrant for the Winter Special Town Meeting. Unanimously voted*

Ms. Allen cited these two possible Article additions;

1. Amend right of use in Business District B (the whole Washington Street corridor) – Ms. Allen expanded on an idea to add commercial tax revenue from light self-storage unit facilities. This would not add traffic and would be largely invisible. She reminded all that Federal Realty owns the big strip of property that includes the Big Y shopping center and large area behind the stores. There is no specific Article language yet, but she asked for feedback from the board on a placeholder Article. Mr. Morin added that the idea would be to write this Article language as narrowly as possible, creating the business opportunity to earn revenue without additional traffic. Questions about permitting this specific use were asked and answered. The board agreed to a placeholder Article for the time being.
2. Placeholder Article for a transfer of funds into the Building Inspector's personnel account to address funding of additional personnel hours, which will smooth out the workload in the department coverage and admin support. Mr. Morin gave the board background information on this issue, adding that the transfer might not be needed; this would be a contingency Article.

Questions about fund transfers, free cash, bonding and funding department positions were asked and answered for this and other STM Articles.

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to insert two placeholder Articles:*

*1. to amend the right of use in business district B to include light self-storage as presented this evening, and 2. transfer of funds into the Building Inspector's personnel account. Unanimously voted*

Ms. Allen allowed a comment from a resident; Paul Ricciardi, 370 Grove Street, commented on the proposed Article to allow self-storage and amending the right of use for business district B. He voiced concern about the implied inclusion of the assisted living overlay in this Article. The board reassured Mr. Ricciardi about that proposed Article, which is would be filed as a citizens petition and is not on this Warrant.

Mr. Morin emphatically reminded residents that the proposed Assisted Living Overlay Article is a *citizens' petition*, and will be on the Warrant for the Special Town Meeting in May. **He stated again that this is NOT a Board of Selectmen Article, but is sponsored by an independent group of individuals.**

Resident Ramona Caruso, Grove Street, also commented at length on the proposed right of use. Mr. Brown reminded her that this is only a vote to place the Article on the Warrant.

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to close the Winter Special Town Meeting Warrant. Unanimously voted*

### **RAVE**

Ms. Demong gave an overview of this draft storm communications policy to better inform the public during power outages, giving examples from past events. All reviewed the 2 page draft document, noting that the Town is not responsible for power restoration, which falls to National Grid. The Town will provide a "sit rep" (situation report) at specific times of the day to inform residents on the status of items included in this policy. RAVE (the company name) is the "smart or reverse 911" information system that the Town uses. She encouraged residents to sign up for this service on their cell phones to have access to the information when the power is out.

Discussion ensued about this policy and cell phone privacy protection. Chief Reardon expanded on the RAVE system and how to sign up.

The board further discussed the shortcomings of National Grid over the past storms, and hope that a support representative will be assigned to the Town during future outage events. The board reviewed and suggested edits for this draft. In response to suggestions from the board about who should have access to update the website, Mr. Morin noted that Town Hall loses both email and internet access during power outages. Further discussion ensued about how and who should update the website during outages. Ms. Allen complimented the team on the progress with this policy. Suggestions were made to get the word out to residents to sign up for this service, which will be called the Norwell Emergency Alert System, eliminating the use of the product name. Next steps include finalizing a business card with information to sign up for the NEAS service, cleaning up the confusion on the Town website home page and redrafting the policy with tonight's updated information for review by the board. The board thanked Ms. Demong, Chief Reardon and his department for their hard work on this project.

#### **Adjournment**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to adjourn at 10:10pm.*

*Unanimously voted*

*Ellen H. Allen*