

**Norwell Board of Selectmen**  
**11/24/20**  
**Open Session – Remote meeting**

TOWN OF NORWELL  
TOWN CLERK

2021 JAN 14 PM 1:57

**Present:** Ellen Allen, Alison Demong, Jason Brown, Bruce Graham, Peter Morin, NHC members, Ted Nichols, Barbara Mello, Patrick O'Connor, Dave DeCoste, Ted Ross, Wendy Bawabe

**Open Session**

The meeting was opened by Chair Ellen Allen at 7:03pm. She announced that all votes will be roll call votes as the meeting participants are using remote access software. The meeting is being recorded and the audio file will be available on the Town website. Ms. Allen noted that this meeting will be conducted pursuant to the Executive Order dated March 12, 2020 suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law, Gen. L. c. 30A §20 et seq. and 940 CMR 29.01 et seq.

**Approval of Agenda**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Bruce Graham, to approve the agenda.  
Unanimously voted by roll call vote*

**BOS Reports**

Ms. Allen congratulated the Fire Department on their excellent EMS review and almost perfect scores. Well done!

The BOS letter of support was helpful in securing a MassWorks grant for the town of Hanover in the amount of \$1,265,000. The grant will fund the resurfacing of Mill Street in conjunction with the mall development project. The town of Rockland did not receive a grant, but there is no word yet on the reason. The next BOS meeting on 12/9 will include the tax classification hearing to set the tax rate for 2021.

Mr. Brown reported that the Police Chief Search Committee (PCSC) is well into the process to find and hire a new police chief. There were good responses to the questions sent to selected applicants. Candidate interviews will start next week; the goal is to schedule the BOS interviews by the end of December. Mr. Brown outlined the timeline and milestones to give everyone a better idea of the progress to date and work yet to be done.

Mr. Graham announced that the Town will be celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eleanor Norris' gift to the Town of the Norris Reservation. He will be working with Ralph and Betsy Gordon on a video tape commemoration, and would like to include a proclamation from the BOS.

**Town Administrator Report**

Mr. Morin announced that, effective 11/30/20 through the end of the calendar year, access to Town Hall will be by appointment only. This is a precaution in light of anticipated family gatherings through the upcoming holidays and the rising number of cases in the Commonwealth. Safety modifications have been made to the offices in Town Hall, but he feels it is incumbent upon the Town to return to the measures used to protect employees and others during the early stages of COVID-19. This will ensure that there is no crowding and adequate documentation for contact tracing. The Town Hall Facilities staff has done a great job in providing good protection, but there is concern over the risk of increased exposure. All department heads endorse this plan.

The key factor in reopening to the public will be a reduction in cases. The current numbers and trend are disturbing and this a safe move.

Health Agent Ben Margro added that Norwell is now in the yellow category with 18 cases in the last 14 days. Within a 30 mile radius, most towns are in the yellow category, but some are in the red. Another rise in case numbers is predicted for the upcoming holidays, so please stay safe and make responsible decisions. Mr. Margro responded to questions from the board.

**Citizen Comments - none**

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**Recognize Chief Ted Ross for his service in the Norwell Police Department**

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Ms. Allen congratulated Chief Ross on his upcoming retirement. She welcomed State Sen. O'Connor and State Rep. Dave DeCoste to the meeting.

Sen. O'Connor cited the excellent work done by Chief Ross, giving examples of his initiatives and accomplishments, adding that Norwell has become a nationally recognized community. He thanked Chief Ross for his exemplary service to the Town. He has demonstrated excellent leadership in Plymouth County and at the state level for policies that changed laws in Massachusetts. Sen. O'Connor read the citation from the Senate, stating that it is people like Chief Ross who turn towns into communities. Well done! Chief Ross thanked Sen. O'Connor for all his support and kind words.

Rep. Dave DeCoste cited Chief Ross' quick rise through the ranks to become Chief of the department. The House of Representatives citation noted that he is at the top of his profession in a career of distinguished service which included input on bills and legislation at the local and state levels. He thanked Chief Ross for his years of service to the Town and thanked his family for their support. Chief Ross thanked Rep. DeCoste for his remarks.

Ms. Allen read the testimonial on behalf of the BOS and the Town, thanking Chief Ross for his many contributions and service to the department and the Town. She cited all of his hard work to make the new police station a reality. Well done!

Mr. Brown recognized Chief Ross' many years of service in Town government, performed with integrity and excellence. He appreciated the professional and personal relationship he has had with Chief Ross. His job was done with dignity, honor and respect when working with the Town as well as with people who have been on the other side of the law. He wished Chief Ross and his family the very best, adding that he has set an awfully high bar for his successor. Thank you.

Ms. Demong stated that she found Chief Ross intimidating at first, but incredibly warm, personable and funny. Ever during difficult situations he remained professional and courteous. She thanked Chief Ross for his friendship and added that he will be sorely missed. She wished him and his family all the luck in the world.

Mr. Graham thanked Chief Ross for his service, noting that he is a paragon of police chiefs and the epitome of an excellent Chief.

Mr. Rull stated that he agreed with everything said by the other board members. Chief Ross is a consummate professional who went above and beyond for the Town - up there with the best. He thanked Chief Ross for his service to the Town and the Commonwealth. Mr. Rull wished him "Best of luck and thank you from my family to yours."

Ms. Allen invited Chief Ross for a return visit after the COVID pandemic is over so that all could say goodbye and good luck in person.

Ms. Demong presented Chief Ross with a framed photo collage of the hearts on front doors in Norwell during the pandemic.

Mr. Morin stated that it has been a pleasure to work with Chief Ross. Searching for his replacement has made Mr. Morin even more appreciative of the outstanding job he did. Mr. Morin's comments are below:

"There is a quote from Harper Lee's book 'To Kill A Mockingbird' that brings the Chief to mind. 'There are some men in this world who are born to do our unpleasant jobs for us.' Chief Ross is one of them. He was a great police chief, willing to do the hard things and jobs that were not always pleasant. He had to make a lot of difficult decisions. He did this job as well as I have ever seen anyone do it. He always had a willingness to do what was best for the Town. I hope to find someone of his kind, but they are few and far between. I wish you the best in your retirement. Thank you."

Chief Ross thanked the board and Mr. Morin for their kind remarks and thanked the Town for allowing him to serve in the department for almost 33 years.

#### **Update on the Jacobs Farm building project**

Consultant Barbara Mello and Ted Nichols gave the board a progress report. The TBA architect team did a site visit and essentially restarted the project. Their drawings have been turned over to the NHC subcommittee for review. Ms. Mello and Mr. Nichols outlined next steps which include sending the plans along to Historic New England and the Mass Historical Society. Both commented that the deliverables have been somewhat more timely. Hopefully there is now a sense of urgency to make progress on this project. The board thanked the group for their work.

#### **Jacobs Farm License Discussion**

Ms. Allen updated the board on the particulars of the current license between Cross Street Flower Farm (CSFF) and the Town. This complicated agreement includes management by the NHC, Con Com and the BOS, with the NHS having oversight for the museum. There is a current need to resolve the license fee charged to CSFF to rent the west barn. Currently the other renters of various parts of the farm have 3 year licenses that automatically extend each year for one more year. Con Com will meet with CSFF to do the farm plan for the upcoming year. There is only one significant change-the use of the west barn for bouquets and distribution. CSFF paid a rental fee of \$2K for use of the west barn in 2020. There is a question of what to do with NHS equipment stored in the barn. CSFF would like to license the use of the west barn for one year in 2021 as a test run. Once the pandemic is over, there is some interest in renting out the west barn for events, the details of which are to be determined.

Questions were asked and answered by the board. The BOS will have to re-sign the updated license every year and vote the year's extension on the 3 year license. The farm plan will be reviewed and updated every year by Con Com.

This topic will be on a future agenda to vote a license fee of \$3.5K for CSFF for the use of buildings except the west barn, with an additional \$2K for use of the west barn, plus an annual fee agreed upon Con Com farm plan.

#### **Public Hearing Policy proposed policy update**

The public hearing policy is being updated due to expanded COVID restrictions. Hybrid meetings will now shift to in-person ONLY if requested by advance notice of 48 hours. Mr. Morin acted as the in-person facilitator for 3 ZBA meetings. He noted that people have become more comfortable using a remote meeting format, so there is not an overwhelming need to meet in person.

All reviewed and clarified the draft of the updated ZBA public hearing policy.

#### **FY21 Revenue Update, YTD 9/30/20**

Mr. Morin reported that local receipts show a nominal difference of 3% lower than last year at this time. There may be a timing difference for such things as cell towers lease payments. The Town just filed the contracts for new leases last month, so payments have been slightly delayed. The revenue will equal out as this is just a timing issue. There is somewhat lower ambulance revenue as the public is not so much out and about. Overall, the Town's finances are in pretty good shape; the 3% is not concerning and actually far better than anticipated. State aid will help. We are on the right track, and there is time to see a correction if revenue is not hitting last year's target.

#### **Meeting minutes approval- 11/10/20.**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Alison Demong, to approve the open meeting minutes of 11/10/20. Unanimously voted by roll call vote. Mr. Graham and Mr. Rull abstained as they were not present at that meeting.*

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**Future meetings:**

The next BOS meeting will be on 12/9/20. Agenda items include setting the tax rate for 2021.

**Adjournment**

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Alison Demong, to adjourn to Executive Session at 8:06pm, not returning to Open Session, to discuss personal contracts. Unanimously voted by roll call vote.*

*Ellen H. Allen*

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Ellen Allen, Chair

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