



TOWN OF NORWELL
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**Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes
4/30/2020**

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Peter Smellie at 6:00 P.M. Also present were Town Administrator Peter Morin and Board Members Mark Cleveland, Harry Solis, Susan Darnell, Rick Goulding, Jesse McSweeney, Karen Reynolds, and Kate Steele. Unable to attend was Julie Sim. Jesse McSweeney joined the meeting at 6:30 P.M. The meeting was held remotely, as allowed under 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.

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

Minutes

The minutes of the April 9 meeting were distributed and reviewed.

Motion made to accept the Minutes of the April 9, 2020 meeting as submitted. Seconded and passed 5-0-3 by roll call vote, members McSweeney, Solis, and Steele having abstained

Bills – None

Reserve Fund Transfer Requests – None

Correspondence/Notices – None

Action Items / Discussions – None

2020 TOWN MEETING ARTICLES

Article 2 - Operating Budget

Mr. Morin advised that he is in the process of trying to determine the extent of the revenue shortfall for next year. Official state guidance to this effect has not yet been issued, but information from Mass Taxpayers Foundation and the Tufts Center for State Policy Analysis suggests a 10%-15% reduction in state revenues, translating into an approximate \$520,000 reduction in local aid to Norwell. Tax receipts are also likely to be impacted.

Mr. Morin and Finance Director Donna Mangan have prepared model budgets with varying degrees of reductions, and are awaiting additional guidance from the state as well as the outcome of possible Federal aid to states and towns. As the budget can be adjusted downward on the Town Meeting floor but not upward, he recommended that the Board approve the budget for the amount previously approved, with a disclaimer that additional reductions are likely to be recommended. He will advise the Board further once more information is available; as of today, he is anticipating a likely 10%, or about \$900,000, reduction.

All parties discussed possible areas for budget reductions. Mr. Morin indicated that new positions, reclassifications, non-union salary increases, and funding to hire new firefighters, were all on hold and departments with vacancies were being asked to leave them vacant. A line item regarding interest on short-term debt in the amount of \$20,000 can be removed; this was added in anticipation of a need to borrow for construction of the new library.

Mr. Smellie asked whether the Highway Barn project was likely to be placed on hold. Mr. Morin felt it may make sense to proceed with engineering and design, as they have already received bids from architects. However, financing the project through a bond issue is now a harder question to answer, as Standard & Poor had recently issued a negative outlook on all municipal bond issues.

After further discussion, the Board voted to recommend Article 2 in the amount of \$58,458,795 with the understanding that recommendations on additional reductions will be forthcoming.

Motion made to recommend Article 2 in the amount of \$58,458,795. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Article 3 - Capital Budget

Mr. Morin advised he had asked departments that had submitted capital spending requests to consider which ones they could temporarily do without. Based on their feedback, he recommended removal of the following previously approved requests:

\$50,000 for asbestos abatement at the Sparrell building (School Department)

\$45,000 for carpeting at the Middle School (School Department)

\$25,000 for a road sweeper (Highway Department)

\$40,000 for a Gator/spray rig (Highway Department)

Removal of these requests would reduce the total Capital Budget from \$906,500 to \$745,500. Capital Budget Board Member Tim Greene indicated that he had no issues with the reductions given the extraordinary economic circumstances.

Major expenditures remaining include \$350,000 for a new ambulance and \$260,000 for a 10-wheel dump truck. Tasers for the Police Department and kitchen equipment for the School Department have also been retained based on feedback from the respective departments that these were higher-priority needs.

Mr. Cleveland questioned whether the 10-wheel dump truck could be carried over to another year given its expense. Chair Smellie indicated that he had talked to Highway Department workers, who stated that their existing six-wheel trucks were taking up to an hour to warm up on cold mornings, which in turn impacts road conditions. Ms. Reynolds noted that such a large-ticket item would be just as or possibly more difficult to fund next year. Mr. Greene added that it was important to avoid creating a large backlog of unfunded capital needs that would ultimately have to be addressed in the future.

After further discussion, Mr. Morin indicated he was okay with keeping the truck funded for now, as it could still be pulled if economic conditions required. The exact funding source for the truck and ambulance was still to be determined.

Motion made to recommend Article 3 in the amount of \$745,500. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Other Spending Articles

Mr. Morin recommended that the funds requested for technical upgrades in Article 12 be reduced from \$250,000 to \$150,000. There is still a need for the upgrades but some can be spread out more over time.

Motion made to update the funds requested in Article 12 to \$150,000. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Morin recommended that the \$25,000 request in Article 14 for road safety upgrades not be funded.

Motion made to reconsider Article 14. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Motion made to recommend Article 14. The motion did not pass 0-8-0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Morin recommended that the \$15,000 request in Article 14 for drainage mapping not be funded. In response to a query from Ms. Darnell, he indicated that this was not a mandated activity.

Motion made to reconsider Article 19. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Motion made to recommend Article 19. The motion did not pass 0-8-0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Morin recommended that the request in Article 30 for \$5,000 in annual funding for Jacobs Pond weed treatments not be funded. They are looking to fit this expense into another budget.

Motion made to reconsider Article 30. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Motion made to recommend Article 30. The motion did not pass 0-8-0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Morin recommended that the \$2500 grant to ARC of the South Shore in Article 37 not be funded. Members Smellie and Darnell questioned this cut given the small dollar amount, but Mr. Morin felt it was not proper to provide grant funding to a private entity in these times.

Motion made to reconsider Article 37. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Motion made to recommend Article 37. The motion did not pass 0-8-0 by roll call vote.

Mr. Morin indicated that the above-referenced monies would likely go into Free Cash or stabilization funds. There may be additional unfunded articles forthcoming; in particular, he requested that discussion of union and non-union salary adjustments and articles concerning an engineering design study for Norwell Center and demolition of Stony Brook Cottage be tabled.

Article 27 - CPC Allocations

Ms. Mangan noted that CPC had previously voted on CPA reserve fund transfers of \$135,000 for historic preservation, \$135,000 for open space, and \$82,000 for affordable housing; this article needed to be voted on by the Board.

Motion made to recommend the article titled CPA reserve transfers in the amounts of \$135,000 for Historic preservation, \$135,000 for Open Space, and \$82,000 for Affordable Housing. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

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Accord Park Zoning Article - Amended

Mr. Smellie thanked the Board of Selectmen for working with the Board to address the concerns of abutters on High Street. Selectman Graham advised that the amended article removed two parcels from the proposed Accord Park Loop as discussed in previous hearings; there were no other changes to the article.

Prior to the vote, Ms. Steele commented that the colloquy regarding the two parcels felt like a “negotiation” to her that was beyond the scope of the Board’s function. Mr. Cleveland felt there was some conflict of interest given the Board had one abutting resident, and expressed concern at the possible loss of tax revenue, but indicated that he would vote for the amended article.

Motion made to recommend the article titled Accord Park Zoning Article as amended. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Citizens Petition - Repeal of CPA Surtax

Board of Selectmen Article - CPA Surtax Percentage Reduction

Petitioner Don Mauch advised he was requesting that the Board postpone voting on the article proposing repeal of the CPA surtax due to guidance he discovered from the state Division of Local Services indicating that a town’s amendment or repeal of the CPA must be accomplished in the same manner in which it was approved. As the CPA was originally passed by ballot question, he intends to amend the article language so it asks that the question of repeal be placed on the ballot.

Mr. Morin noted that guidance documents are not necessarily binding, but he had no issues with postponing the Board’s vote. The warrant goes to print on Monday, but a note could be added that a recommendation would be made at the Town Meeting. Mr. Mauch added that he would be okay with a Board vote at this meeting on the understanding that an amendment would be forthcoming.

All parties discussed how the CPA surtax repeal article would impact an article proposed by the Board of Selectmen to reduce the CPA surtax. Mauch stated that historically revocation and reduction questions have simultaneously appeared on election ballots, but Selectman Alison Demong wanted to hear Town Meeting Moderator William Coffee’s opinion as to whether and how a yes vote on one article would impact the other. As a majority of Board members preferred to wait to hear from the Moderator and Town Counsel, the matter was tabled pending the receipt of additional information.

MISCELLANEOUS

Mr. Morin indicated that there currently were about 74 COVID 19 cases in town; there may be a coming spike in these numbers due to new information from nursing homes that may have been underreporting their own cases. Town Hall is closed until at least May 18; building inspections are taking place when unoccupied.

In response to a query from Chair Smellie, Mr. Morin advised he had recommended that the Conservation Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals not conduct public hearings remotely due to limitations of the Zoom platform. As an elected board, the Planning Board will make its own decision. Members Smellie and McSweeney noted there could be a lag in tax revenues if projects can’t move forward but Mr. Morin felt employee safety and integrity of the hearings took precedence.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Mid-May.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn at 7:55 P.M. Seconded and passed 8-0-0 by roll call vote.

Peter Smellie, Chair

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