



**TOWN OF NORWELL**  
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TOWN CLERK

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**Norwell Advisory Board Meeting Minutes  
November 30, 2021**

The Advisory Board was called to order by Chair Jesse McSweeney at 7:00 P.M. Also present were Town Administrator Peter Morin, Town Accountant Christine McCarthy, Select Board Chair Bruce Graham, and Board Members Mark Cleveland, Bob Perniola, Susan Darnell, Elizabeth Hibbard, Rob Galibois, and Peter Leppanen. Susan Darnell attended remotely. Unable to attend were Rick Goulding and Dane Hutchison. The meeting was held in the Osborn Room at Town Hall and 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.

**AGENDA**

Mr. McSweeney modified the agenda to include discussion of a reserve fund transfer to purchase a new truck for the School Department

*Motion made to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded and passed 7-0-0.*

**ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS**

**Minutes** – Tabled so new members can review the September 9 and 21 minutes.

**Bills** – None

**Correspondence/Notices** – None

**Reserve Fund Transfer Requests**

**School Department**

Mr. Morin requested a \$30,030.00 transfer from the reserve fund to purchase a new pickup truck for the School Department. This was originally included on last year's Capital Expenditure list but was omitted from the warrant due to a printing error, so Town Meeting could not approve the purchase. The current truck is over 13 years old, and is used for maintenance and snow removal. School Department personnel use the truck to plow school parking lots, freeing up DPW to focus on the roads.

Mr. Perniola asked about the possibility of leasing vehicles. Mr. Morin has done it but not often due to the associated cost and paperwork. Mr. McSweeney asked to see a schedule for town vehicle replacements; Mr. Morin will forward a copy of the 10 year capital expenditure plan, which will include this information. The Department may seek to purchase a van for team transportation due to recent difficulty and expense of securing bus transportation.

*Motion made to transfer \$30,030.00 from the Reserve Fund for the purchase of a truck for the School Department. Seconded and passed 7-0-0.*

## **Action Items / Discussions**

### **October Storm Overview and Discussion**

Mr. McSweeney advised he had asked Mr. Morin for cost figures from the October 26 and 27 storm. Mr. Morin noted this storm posed unique challenges as, because there was no snow, the Town cannot deficit-spend to cover its expenses for tree and debris removal, police and fire overtime, and Council on Aging expenses from acting as a warming/charging center. These expenses totaled about \$500,000, exceeding last year's entire snow and ice budget of \$465,000.

At Mr. Morin's request, the Select Board declared that a State of Emergency existed on October 26 and 27; this allows the Town to deficit-spend and access free cash funds to pay off the storm-related debt. No action is required of the AB at this time.

Ms. Hibbard asked if there had been any coordination between area towns to advocate for state funds. Mr. Morin has had some discussion with administrators in neighboring towns, but thinks the state will expect the towns to handle their storm expenses on their own. Mr. Graham added that both State representatives had unsuccessfully argued for state aid.

Mr. Perniola asked whether National Grid bears any of the cost of tree removal; Mr. Morin indicated it was presently a Trees and Grounds cost, but the Town needs more proactive tree maintenance by National Grid in their right of way to lessen outages. He is following a reimbursement request submitted by Hull for upgrades to their wiring to see if any funding for tree maintenance is included. National Grid, Verizon, and other utilities will be discussing their storm performance with the Select Board in January.

### **Role of Advisory Board**

All present discussed the AB's role in the upcoming budget review process. Mr. Graham thanked all Board members for taking on this significant responsibility, noting that residents rely on the AB's recommendations regarding the Town budget and Town Meeting articles.

Mr. Morin noted that the Charter of the AB is to "review and consider all articles before Town Meeting." Thorough questioning by the AB prepares him and other article proponents to field questions at Town Meeting. Mr. Morin is available to answer questions from Board members and go through budgets in depth. He has asked Town Departments to submit "level-services" budgets this year, with justifications and/or offsets for any increases.

The Board typically meets twice a week from late January through early April and reviews all budget requests and Town Meeting articles with Mr. Morin, the Town Accountant/Finance Director, and Department/Committee heads or article sponsors. Articles can range from citizen petitions to special funding requests from departments. Mr. Morin bases his budget in part on the Governor's recommendations regarding local and school aid amounts, as these are generally lower than the Legislature's, and generally budgets for a 2.5% increase, adjusting for new growth and local tax receipts. He relies on the AB to test the foundations of his budgets, and is open to savings and/or changes made as a result of Board member questions.

Mr. Cleveland noted that the detailed presentations from the School Department and South Shore Vo-Tech were very useful, and would like other Department heads to summarize their requests if possible.



All agreed that the usual practice of having members act as liaisons to certain departments made sense; Mr. Cleveland noted that having more than one liaison is helpful for the School, Police, and Fire Departments. Mr. Morin will email a list of the usual liaison assignments, and members will reply with their preferences. Ms. Hibbard suggesting randomly assigning the liaisons as a way to avoid politics and expand members' expertise, but Mr. Perniola felt there was a benefit to members choosing assignments according to their background and interests.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

Mr. McSweeney welcomed Rob Galibois and Peter Leppanen to the Board, and thanked Mr. Graham and the Advisory Board Nominating Committee for their efforts in vetting candidates.

## **Water Department**

All present briefly discussed a communication from the Water Department regarding discolored water. Mr. Morin indicated that today's incident was due to a one-off instance of equipment failure. Regarding an issue with elevated PFA6 levels discussed at the September 21 meeting, Mr. Morin advised this can be mitigated with activated carbon filtration, which is eligible for ARPA funding and not likely to impact rates.

## **Recusal**

Mr. Cleveland noted that at the September 8 meeting, Board members agreed they would recuse from article votes if they decided to run for Select Board; Messrs. Galibois and Leppanen advised that they had no interest in running. As Mr. Morin indicated that a Charter amendment would be required to codify this in policy, Mr. Cleveland asked that members consider this an informal expectation that all would agree to follow.

Mr. Morin commented that in his experience, the weight of the AB's recommendations is based on its perception of being impartial, whereas the Select Board is perceived as a more political entity, and suggested that all AB members consider potential conflict issues if they did decide to run for Select Board.

## **FUTURE MEETINGS**

Mr. Perniola inquired about a possible 7:30 start time. A majority preferred to keep the start time at 7 p.m., as meetings tended to run late, and a later start time may require town employees to work later. Mr. Morin advised that some meetings may run longer this year since the Finance Director and Town Accountant are both new; members can attend remotely as needed if there is a quorum of members attending in person.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

*There being no further business, a motion was made to adjourn at 8:26 p.m. Seconded and passed 7-0-0.*

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Jesse McSweeney, Chair

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