

**Town of Norwell
Select Board
Open Meeting
11/15/23**

Present: Jason Brown, Brian Greenberg, Andy Reardon, Peter Smellie, Bruce Graham, Darleen Sullivan, Kim Roy

The meeting was called to order by Pete Smellie.

Approval of Agenda

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to approve the meeting agenda. Unanimously voted

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to approve the minutes of the 11/1/23 Open Meeting. Mr. Graham abstained as he was absent from that meeting. Brown voting yes, Greenberg voting yes, Reardon voting yes, Smellie voting yes.

Select Board Report

Mr. Reardon congratulated the Norwell football and soccer teams for their tremendous seasons. Well done, everyone!

Town Administrator Report

Ms. Sullivan reported on the Town activities in honor of Veterans Day, thanking all veterans for their service.

Citizens Comments – none

Review and Approval; Town of Norwell Federal Project Management Policy and Procedures

Ms. McCarthy gave the background and reasons for this policy, which was requested by the auditors as the Town is now subject to single audit procedures. The office follows the rules for single audit compliance, and federal money spending parameters along with up-to-code internal controls. This agreement formalizes these procedures and is similar to policies in other communities.

Motion; made by Brian Greenberg, seconded by Andy Reardon, to approve the Town of Norwell Federal Project Management Policy and Procedures as presented by Finance Director Christine McCarthy. Unanimously voted

Resignation – South Shore Vo-Tech Representative

Motion; made by Brian Greenberg, seconded by Jason Brown, to accept with regret the resignation of Bob Molla as the Vo-Tech Rep. Unanimously voted

Mr. Molla was the representative for almost 50 years. He also served as a call firefighter for many years. Mr. Molla created the Harbormaster bylaws for the Town and was instrumental in the establishment of the North and South River Watershed Association. The board thanked Mr. Molla for his years of distinguished service to the Town.

Applications – South Shore Vo-Tech Representative

Both Mr. Reardon and Mr. Brown recused themselves from this discussion and vote because of family ties to applicants.

1. Dustin Reardon, 620 Main Street, gave a summary of his background and reasons for applying. He is a graduate of the Vo-Tech. and has been an active member of the alumni association and activities.
2. Earl (Chip) Servant, 70 Kings Landing, gave a summary of his background and reasons for applying. He has been in the trades all his life through the family business. He has great interest in all the trade occupations and wants to promote these professions to the students at the Vo-Tech. He added that the average age of the electrician working today is 55. Mr. Molla is his neighbor and asked him to apply for this seat. In answer to the board's questions, he works on mostly small scale projects.
3. John Lunn, 79 Norwell Ave., gave a summary of his background and reasons for applying. He is also a graduate of the Vo-Tech. He is a master electrician and sheet metal worker who does many large projects. He has a good handle on construction costs. Both Steve Marsh and Dave DeCoste recommended that he apply.

All three candidates left the meeting after being interviewed. The board discussed the strong points in favor of each excellent applicant.

Motion; made by Pete Smellie, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to appoint John Lunn as the South Shore Vo-Tech Representative for a term expiring 6/30/26

Discussion ensued about the prospect of a split vote as Mr. Graham planned to nominate a different applicant.

A motion was made by Pete Smellie, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to rescind his motion to appoint Mr. Lunn. Unanimously voted

Motion; made by Bruce Graham, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to appoint Dustin Reardon as the South Shore Vo-Tech Representative for a term expiring 6/30/26.

Unanimously voted

Not Your Average Joe's – Change of Manager

John Forbush was present to give a summary of his background to the board. He is a 20 year employee at the restaurant.

Motion; made by Andy Reardon, seconded by Jason Brown, to approve John Forbush as the new manager of Not Your Average Joe's Restaurant, 111 Pond Street, Norwell MA. Unanimously voted.

Board of Assessors/Assessors Department overview – Cyclical review project update

Assessor Board members Mary Granville and Ted Dawe, Assessor Meredith Rafiki and Assistant Megan Howell were present. Chair Mary Granville called their board meeting to order.

Ms. Rafiki updated both boards on her cyclical review project. To date, 3779 properties, representing about 80% of the total number in the Town, have been reassessed. The

DOR has reviewed the work and approved the quality after several rounds of corrections.

The goal is to move forward to set the annual tax rate. The Assessors office is continuing their quality check to make sure the data is correct. Ms. Rafiki noted that she is working on a plan to ensure that this large a project with a tight deadline does not recur. The boards discussed the option to use an estimated tax rate for the next tax bill vs rushing to set the actual rate. The Town's cash flow would continue, but an estimated bill would result in a larger 4th quarter tax bill for residents.

The board is not in favor of an estimated tax bill and would like to avoid this if possible. Mr. Reardon asked about the cause of this big delay in getting the process started earlier in the year. Ms. Rafiki noted that this larger cyclical work load was due to the pandemic delays. Mr. Greenberg asked about the timeline for the 6 months between February and August to start this project. Ms. Granville added that new builds were not picked up on the data check from the state. There was some confusion about the timeline clarifications from Ms. Rafiki with regard to the bad data issues. She also noted that the Assessors asked the DOR for an extension in February, but the "data quality" issue was not brought to their attention until June.

The DOR did not grant the extension and the data was not certified. The Town Meeting Article to fund additional consultants to do the assessments passed, but the consultant that was hired could not start the work until December.

Further discussion ensued about the 9 month delay and the DOR rejection of the explanations. Ms. Rafiki noted that she started looking for additional help to revalue 2975 properties in June but couldn't get started until July 21st.

She advised that residents should be sure to review their property cards during the disclosure period. Ms. Sullivan added comments about quality checking with residents' input.

The board asked the following questions:

Mr. Brown;

1. Why weren't the quality issues recognized until the DOR review? The office problems were well documented.
2. Re: the outside contractors – is the quality problem occurring during the actual assessment or internally in the office? The consulting company does this for a living so it might be a better option. *Answer - Ms. Granville opined that the Town quality has historically been poor and has been known for a long time.*
3. Why not a constant effort until now? Every town does the same process, so why does Norwell have such low quality assessments? *Answer from Ms. Sullivan and Ms. Rafiki – the cyclical reviews weren't being done over the ten year period. Ms. Granville thinks this problem has been corrected.*
4. How do the Assessors get the data generated by the Building Department permits and inspections? *Answer – the Building department uses Permiteyes for all permit applications. This Hopefully equalizes the playing field for the whole Town as the Assessors have full access to this data.*

Ms. Rafiki and Ms. Granville noted that they are implementing new procedures, with the goal of doing 10-15% of the revaluations each year to avoid a recurrence of this problem. Ms. Sullivan added that Ms. Rafiki has reached out to other town offices for best practices.

Mr. Reardon;

1. Some residents were not aware that this process was going on and had concerns about random people on their property. Are workers identified? He would like to see additional measures taken to make sure that everyone is aware of the activity. *Answer - Ms. Rafiki discussed the steps taken to inform residents of this process and identify Town employees and consultants doing the field work.*

Mr. Greenberg;

1. Were all the prior assessors doing poor quality work?
If this poor quality was so well known, why weren't you working on this the second that you started to work here?
2. Why did this take two years? What happened? *Answer – Ms. Rafiki stated that she had staffing issues and “mis-education” so she was doing the job incorrectly, which was a misstep on her part, to an extent. She was also “not aware” of GIS capabilities. She added that the DOR uses new tools now to verify the data which highlighted the poor quality.*

The Select Board agreed that this update work should be a year-round activity. Ms. Rafiki will continue to quality check the data. She added that she wants to do a good job.

The Board of Assessors adjourned their meeting at 8:30pm and left the Select Board meeting.

Role of Community Housing Trust (CHT/Trust): planning and development of the Lincoln Street property

CHT members called their meeting to order at 8:32pm.

Mr. Reardon gave a short recap of this topic, including the Trust's role in the project and Affordable Housing in the Town. He noted that the CPC application to fund this project has been withdrawn. Mr. Greenberg presented his and Ms. Quirk's perspectives on this proposed project, opining that nothing could be done without more detailed property surveys. CHT member Jamie King asked why Ms. Quirk came to their meeting to ask for funding but didn't involve the Trust in the CPC application. Why was someone else in control other than the CHT?

Mr. Greenberg stated that Ms. Quirk was the “point person” with technical expertise and a full-time staff member. Mr. Smellie opined that he had neighborhood connections with targeted groups. Both Mr. Greenberg and Mr. Smellie expanded on this topic and their neighborhood outreach efforts. They noted that funding was needed and the suggestion was made to ask the CHT .

The Planning Board hired Merrill Engineering to complete those tasks.

Mr. Graham expressed concern about the “we” used in this explanation, noting that it did not include any members of the CHT.

CHT Chair Gregg McBride noted that the Trust feels marginalized and would like to know why this happened. He gave a comprehensive explanation of problems that occurred with the prior project proposal. He added that the Planning Board and the Select Board took this current proposal over and did not include the Trust. He then asked for guidance from the Select Board and heard nothing from the Chair. Mr. Smellie opined that if the Trust had initiated the project it would already be dead.

In response to Ms. King's comments on the October 4th SB motion to submit the CPC application and take over the project, Mr. Smellie said that the decision was a timing issue as the CPC application was due before the CHT's next meeting date. Mr. Greenberg added that his participation was only in his role "as a resident" to initiate the beginning stages of the project. For the next 3 months he will be happy to keep the CHT in the loop. Once the site plan is done, he and the Planning Board expect to work with the CHT as the Trust has the funds to do this project.

Mr. McBride stated that the CHT discussed modifying their initial vote to give the money to the Planning Board on the condition that the CHT is involved. He noted that the Trust was formed to comply with MA General Law to support and create Affordable Housing in the Town of Norwell, which does mean that the focus of this activity should involve the Trust.

He added that never in 25 years of working at the Town Hall has he seen a Planning Board Chair take over a project. Mr. Graham reminded the Select Board about the proposed West End Way project when the Select Board took him to task for not keeping the entire board informed. He called Mr. Greenberg and Mr. Smellie out for doing exactly the same thing. Further discussion ensued about this topic.

Mr. Reardon proposed moving forward and opening the lines of communication. It is incumbent on both boards to share this project information and include all of the appropriate people with a good level of sensitivity. Discussion ensued about having the same goals. Hopefully this will be a collaborative future project. Volunteers are a valuable asset for the Town.

Mr. McBride noted that the CHT will modify their approval of the funds to do the survey as long as the Trust is involved. After the vote is amended, he asked that the Planning Board share whatever work is done. All will work to keep the neighborhood involved. Mr. Greenberg will ask Mr. Sullivan to forward the draft sketches to the Trust.

Discussion about the background of this idea continued.

Mr. Reardon will talk to Ms. Quirk about the Merrill contract for the proposed work. The CHT is meeting in December prior to the next Select Board meeting.

Future Meeting Agendas/Dates; 12/6, 12/13

Adjournment

*Motion; made by Andy Reardon, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to adjourn at 9:22pm.
Unanimously voted*

Peter W. Smellie, Chair