

**Town of Norwell
Select Board
Open Meeting
3/27/24**

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

The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:05pm. All rose to recite the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda

Motion; made by Bruce Graham, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to approve the agenda as written. Unanimously voted

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Motion; made by Andy Reardon, seconded by Jason Brown, to approve the minutes of the 3/20/24 Open Meeting with edits as noted. Unanimously voted

Select Board Reports – Congratulations to the girls' basketball team!

Town Administrator Report – Ms. Sullivan reported that she has been working on the Town Meeting Warrant draft. The Advisory Board had its last meeting of the budget season.

Citizen Comments

Resident Don Mauch, 296 Main Street, was present to comment on the Citizens Petition for the Wildcat land options and give feedback on relevant meeting discussions with Select Board Chair Pete Smellie and other parties as noted in his comments. A copy of Mr. Mauch's comments is attached to these meeting minutes and will be available (with the minutes) on the Select Board page of the Town website.

He respectfully urged the Select Board to put this discussion topic on their next agenda. Mr. Graham invited the board to give feedback on Mr. Mauch's comments and request, adding that Mr. Mauch's suggestions make sense. The agenda topic could include;

- 1) Discuss the pros and cons of a "cage fight" over the 2 Articles at the May Town Meeting
- 2) Discussion and Vote to Indefinitely Postpone (IP) the Wildcat Article and Petition and add a nonbinding question to the 2024 November state election ballot.

Town Clerk Pat Anderson noted that, in general, state ballots only allow "limited types of local questions". A municipal ballot is better suited to this nonbinding question. Ms. Anderson could instruct the Select Board to IP the petition and Article at the May Town Meeting, and then add the nonbinding question to the 2025 Town election ballot. More questions were asked and answered about this process and its consequences.

Ms. Anderson added that she needs 35 days (4/13/24) before the Town election to place a question on the ballot at the Select Board's request.

The pros and cons of this proposal were debated. Mr. Mauch added that the land "is not going anywhere; there is no need to rush to vote on its future." This ballot vote would be a mutual agreement that is nonbinding, from which the Town could take guidance.

Mary Beth Shea, 52 Franklin Road, offered an option to go ahead with the presentations to inform residents about each choice and then IP both the Article and petition. A debate could take place or not.

Mr. Reardon stated that there is no deadline or pressure to act on the future of this land. Maybe the best option would be to take a step back. Adding a nonbinding question to the 2025 municipal election ballot would give the Town a year to publicize the choices and encourage discussion among residents.

All debated the pros and cons of the nonbinding question on this year's ballot. Mr. Brown stated that he is not ready to vote tonight. The board would be in favor of waiting and avoiding a "cage fight". FYI, Ms. Anderson noted that there are 8500 registered voters vs. about 4000 households. The municipal ballot information is sent to households 7 days prior to the election.

The Select Board agenda for April 10th will include this discussion to IP the Articles as agreed in the meeting referred to by Mr. Mauch. Mr. Reardon would like to take the time to have an informed discussion about next steps. Town Counsel will be invited to the Select Board meeting.

Discussion/Action Items

a) Committee Application – Sthefano Piassa, Board of Appeals

Mr. Piassa was present to give a summary of his background and reasons for applying. He has had conversations with Chair Lois Barbour about this board's activities and is ready to be appointed.

Motion; made by Andy Reardon, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to appoint Sthefano Piassa as an Associate member to the Board of Appeals for a term expiring on 6/30/27. Unanimously voted

b) Conservation Housekeeping Articles - Will Saunders

Conservation Agent Will Saunders was present to give a brief recap of the 2 Articles:

- 1) Dog Waste Services – this program has been very successful for the past year, with more residents using the bags provided to clean up after their pets. This is for one year of service, with the hope for a more permanent solution for next year's Town Meeting vote. The cost is \$7500 per year.
- 2) Housekeeping Article – this is a transfer of land to conservation. There are 4 parcels (mostly wetland) located in various parts of the Town. These transfers will give oversight to the Conservation Commission.

c) Public Hearing to Opt out of "Vote By Mail" for Saturday, May 18th 2024 Town Election.

Motion; made by Bruce Graham, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to open the public hearing. Brown – yes, Graham – yes, Greenberg – yes, Reardon – yes, Smellie – yes. Motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Greenberg read the notice of public hearing.

Ms. Anderson summarized the reason for this hearing, citing the cost of mailing ballots to residents, which does not make sense for an uncontested local election. She is requesting that the board vote to opt out of "Vote By Mail", which needs to be done 45 days before the Town election.

Part 2 of this agenda topic is a request to change/reduce the voting hours if there are no local electoral races. However, given tonight's earlier discussion, if there is a question added to the ballot she would not ask for this option.

In answer to questions from the board, she noted that Absentee Voting is available until 12 noon on Friday, May 17th. Voters may still add write-in candidates.

Motion; made by Bruce Graham, seconded by Andy Reardon, to approve the Opt Out of Vote By Mail. Brown – yes, Graham – yes, Greenberg – yes, Reardon – yes, Smellie – yes. Unanimously voted

Motion; made by Andy Readon, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to close the Public Hearing. Brown – yes, Graham – yes, Greenberg – yes, Reardon – yes, Smellie – Yes. Unanimously voted

The board and Ms. Anderson discussed the second question about reducing the voting hours for a local election from 8am to 6pm by 4 hours to 9am to 3pm.

This will save costs associated with extra election workers, police details, etc.

Motion; made by Bruce Graham, seconded by Brian Greenberg, to change the Voting hours for the May 18, 2024 local election from 8am to 6pm to 9am to 3pm. Unanimously voted

d) Town Hall Move Update

Ms. Sullivan updated the board on her negotiations with the architect and the OPM. She presented the following timeline:

- Recapped 2023 Town Meeting Article and funding to purchase 93 Longwater Circle and fund fit-out, with maybe a small additional ask. At that time, an architect fee was not anticipated.
- Review and comment on design from architects
- Send questionnaires out to departments for feedback on space usage, follow up with meetings.
- End of April – review schematic design and choose floor plan
- Collate and present options within existing budget at Town Meeting. Make decision to move forward or IP the Warrant Article asking for additional funding to do the building fit-out. Her hope is to work within the parameters of the current budgeted amount
- Although the sellers addressed and repaired some of the building issues, this expensive additional cost was not included in the Article.
- Needed to go to procurement to hire both an architect and an OPM, so anticipated costs went from \$600K to \$1.5M. If Article passes at Town Meeting and costs are less, Ms. Sullivan will turn excess back to Free Cash.
- Bids and contractor procurement will take about 2 months and retrofit of building will be about 4 months. She is anticipating a possible move-in date in November.
- Considering option to just move in and budget for fit-out with Town employees in building.

Mr. Reardon asked how the plan went from "buy a building and move in" to all of this extra unanticipated cost and work. Ms. Sullivan cited unforeseen problems with the large open spaces at the building and inability to work with the contractors hired for a rehab of 345 Main Street.

She noted that the eventual goal at 93 Longwater is to have counters, partition walls, keep almost all the existing offices, with the interior parts of each floor to be

assigned with at least some sense of security and privacy. The option to “just move in” may still be on the table.

Mr. Brown expressed concern that “the number” is not the real “number”. These estimates are much more than originally thought. Discussion ensued about increased costs and managing expectations. Costs have increased so much! All agreed that it’s tough to go back and tell residents that the cost is much higher. Mr. Graham suggested selling the Wildcat parcels to underwrite some of these costs. Ms. Sullivan hoped to use some of the ARPA funds, bonding premiums and some turnback Article money, but it is still not enough. And the project was inadvertently delayed.

Discussion ensued about the Town Hall Article wording and adding a dollar amount to the motion at Town Meeting. Mr. Greenberg suggested a followup discussion on the 4/24/24 agenda.

e) Warrant Articles review

The board reviewed the list of Town Meeting Warrant Articles for both the Special and Annual Town Meetings. Questions were asked and answered.

Select Board Reports, cont'd.

Mr. Reardon updated the board on the Eversource Gas Beach Betterment project , which is going through the Town on its main roads in phases. He noted that this work has been and will continue to be hugely disruptive to the Town, first on River Street last year and Main Street this year, as proposed by Eversource. Residents will not bear the cost of this project, which does Not benefit Norwell. Highway Surveyor Glenn Ferguson is working to ensure that this project does not continue to experience the same host of problems and delays that occurred on the River Street phases over the last two years. Ms. Sullivan added that a strong argument was made to Eversource to refute their work plan but they were not receptive. The Town does have the option to stop issuing permits. Mr. Greenberg noted that state rebates for the purchase of natural gas appliances are being phased out.

Future Meetings: March 29th (zoom), April 10th, April 24th

In response to questions from Mr. Reardon, Mr. Greenberg noted that the 80-90 Norwell Avenue Tax Rollback agenda item is a title issue. The land was misclassified as 61A land, so there are back taxes owed to the Town. The buyers are ready to close and have a rate lock that expires on Tuesday, 4/2/24. The Select Board signoff needs to take place this Friday. He apologized for the lack of information on this topic and the delay over the last few months.

Adjournment

*Motion; made by Jason Brown, seconded by Andy Reardon, to adjourn at 8:50pm.
Unanimously voted*