

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
APRIL 20, 2022
7:00 P.M.
Town Hall Meeting Room, 83 Mountain Road, Suffield CT
Hybrid Meeting**

Selectmen present: Colin Moll, Kathleen Harrington, Mel Chafetz and Jerry Mahoney

Selectmen absent: Pete Hill

Also present in person or via Zoom: Town Attorney Derek Donnelly and Library Commission Chair Austin Roberts

First Selectman Moll called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and asked everyone to join him in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Beth Kraseman, 185 North Main Street – Ms. Kraseman wanted to show support for Bill Sullivan’s presentation this evening on the placement of the Tamar Witness Stone.

Approval of the minutes from the April 6, 2022 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen

Selectman Harrington motioned to approve the minutes from the April 6, 2022 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen with two (2) minor changes as follows:

- Page 1 – Second paragraph the word “and” needs to be removed from the final sentence.
- Page 7 – A period is necessary at the end of the motion in which **Selectman Mahoney** appointed Nathan Prusi to the Social Services Commission.

Vote: 4-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion and approval of Library Director Salary and refer to Board of Finance

First Selectman Moll explained that the town has been in search of a new Library Director for the last few months without success. It appears that the salary for this position is too low when reviewed against CCM comparable towns and the salaries of their Library Directors. Upon speaking with the Library Commission and Chairperson Austin Roberts, The Library Endowment is willing to use endowment funds to cover the difference. Currently the town is offering salary of \$65,000 and the endowment is willing to cover up to \$85,000 in salary with an additional \$5,000 in endowment funds for benefits. **First Selectman Moll** stated that he was in support of this proposed plan and opened the floor to discussion amongst the selectmen.

Selectman Mahoney asked if the decision to utilize funds from the Library Endowment to cover up to \$20,000, plus increased benefits in perpetuity, has been memorialized at a Library Commission meeting by a vote and, if so, was that vote reflected in the meeting minutes. **Library Commission Chairman Austin Roberts** stated that without a specific figure, the commission had not agreed to an exact dollar amount to be given, however, they have re-written and voted on their new funding policy for all the endowments so that based upon that policy this is the amount that they can add to it as a commission. He

clarified by stating that there was not a vote that stated they would be putting \$20,000 toward the Library Director Salary specifically, but there was a vote that opened up that \$20,000 to be used as needed. It was confirmed that the vote was to approve the policy only. **Selectman Mahoney** requested a copy of the policy documenting the position taken by the Library Commission and asked that the selectmen have an opportunity to review it as this will be a commitment made by the Town of Suffield to an employee. **Mr. Roberts** agreed, offering to send the policy to the selectmen later this evening as he did not have it with him at this time.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to table the approval of the Library Director Salary.

Selectman Chafetz disagreed with **Selectman Mahoney** and suggested the group move forward with advertising the position at the proposed salary of \$85,000 in order to fill the position as soon as possible as he feels there have been too many delays already. **Selectman Mahoney** stated that he did not feel it would be responsible of the Board of Selectmen to make a financial commitment to an employee who may work for the town for a substantial number of years without the proper documents evidencing what will be approximately 25% of the individual's salary and benefits. He went on to say that while we have a "representation" being made, it is not adequate or sufficient enough to vote in favor of taking on that financial commitment for the next twenty or thirty years. **Selectman Chafetz** continued to express his opposition to holding up the process to wait for the Library Commission to officially put the decision in writing as he feels they have already shown their intent to do so. **Selectman Harrington** said that while she could understand **Selectman Chafetz's** position, she supported **Selectman Mahoney's** viewpoint. She feels it is great that the Library Commission approved a policy to free up these funds and fully respects that it is their intention to use the funds in this fashion, however, it has not happened yet. **Selectman Harrington** explained that the Library Commission can call a special meeting and so can the Board of Selectmen. Once the policy is provided to the Board of Selectmen and the decision has been officially made to commit the funds, the Board of Selectmen will be able to move forward and approve. **Selectman Harrington** supports this arrangement as long as the selectmen have the full commitment from the Library Commission. **First Selectman Moll** is in agreement with **Selectman Mahoney**.

Vote: 3 in favor (Moll, Mahoney and Harrington) and 1 against (Chafetz.) Motion passed.

Discussion and appointment of Aysha Moore-Manwaring as alternate member of the Historic District Commission to fill the remainder of Lisa Sabbatino's term through August 31, 2024

Selectman Harrington motioned to appoint Aysha Moore-Manwaring as alternate member of the Historic District Commission to fill the remainder of Lisa Sabbatino's term through August 31, 2024. Vote: 4-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion and approval of Tamar's Witness Stone location

First Selectman Moll invited **Bill Sullivan**, a member of the Suffield Historical Society and a faculty member at Suffield Academy, to provide a brief overview of the most recently proposed location for the Tamar Witness Stone. **Mr. Sullivan** presented a slideshow outlining a proposal for a new location, Lot 272A, explaining how the new location came into play and why the northwest corner of Lot 272A would be most appropriate. **Mr. Sullivan** explained what the Witness Stone Project is all about, how the locations are generally determined and what the stone will look like once it has been placed in the ground. **Attorney Donnelly** provided background information as to the timeline of events that have led us to this point, including earlier locations that had been discussed, lot restrictions and incorrect assumptions made with regard to Lots 273 and 272A. He suggested that once a location is approved, the Highway Department should make sure to "call before they dig" in order to avoid any dangers prior to placement. **Attorney Donnelly** feels the proposed location is suitable and will avoid all previous issues and

stumbling blocks we have encountered. Discussion ensued amongst the selectmen with regard to options discussed last year. **Selectman Harrington** expressed her desire to give **Selectman Hill** an opportunity to weigh in on this decision as he is not in attendance this evening. She would also like the opportunity to consider both locations further before making a decision as the viability of this location was only confirmed today. **Selectman Mahoney** agreed with **Selectman Harrington** with regard to **Selectman Hill's** participation and the location options at this time. He would also like to discuss this new option with the veterans in town to get their input prior to making a decision.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to table the approval Tamar's Witness Stone location. Vote: 4-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Selectman Harrington motioned to add agenda item 6a "Discussion and approval of Records Request Prepayment and Indigency Policy." Vote: 4-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion and approval of Records Request Prepayment and Indigency Policy

First Selectman Moll explained that due to the number of FOI requests we have been receiving it has become a very costly and time consuming endeavor as there is a lot of work that is put into pulling the necessary details and the process of redacting certain information. As of late, the Police Department has been spending days/weeks completing the FOI requests on the body camera and the time it takes to do this is directly effecting the amount of work that can get completed on other jobs. The proposed policy would allow for the Town of Suffield to charge \$.50 per page or an amount equal to the hourly salary of the employee doing the work. **First Selectman Moll** is in support of this policy.

Attorney Donnelly noted this is similar to a 2018 Policy with the addition of the body camera component. At this time it is unclear as to how the FOI Commission plans to address the issue of how to properly redact information from body cameras. This is basically becoming a new line of business just based on basic motor vehicle accidents. While guidance should be coming soon, **Attorney Donnelly** believes that this policy implementation will allow us to get ahead of the curve and have a policy in place that includes a way of compensating the town for the time spent on these requests. He pointed out that the other big change since 2018 is the huge amount of electronic requests we are receiving. The process has changed over the years as we move from a paper driven delivery to advanced electronic technology. This policy lets us acknowledge the changes and account for them. **Selectman Mahoney** said he is in favor of the town trying to recoup some of their time but has concerns, which he voiced to the selectmen. He used the example of a routine car accident and how it could become rather costly. **Attorney Donnelly** agreed and explained how some of the situations would play out. Without FOI Commission guidance we are unsure at this time how to respond to potentially large dollar requests. The indigency piece allows us to make adjustments for those who cannot afford the cost or are perhaps incarcerated. Other towns seem to be following this same path while they also await legislation and further guidance.

The Town wants to be diligent about redacting information and images in order to avoid any liability if not done properly. **Selectman Mahoney** inquired about the possibility of putting a policy in place to set the fees not to exceed a specific dollar amount. **Attorney Donnelly** explained the options and noted that the Board of Selectmen passes policies which remain in place until they are replaced, therefore, we can certainly pass a more updated policy. **Selectman Mahoney** would like to move forward, however, he feels it would be good to hear from the Police Chief who can provide information and discuss exact language and provide perspective on how it will impact the police department. He stressed that fees could fluctuate wildly based on the actual incident in question. **Attorney Donnelly** explained the current process for FOI requests and what filters through his office versus what flows directly through the Police Department. **Selectman Harrington** would like to either include language "not to exceed" or "at the discretion of the First Selectman or Board of Selectmen" into whatever policy is moved forward. She

also wondered whether this move might also weed out some requests that may not truly be necessary. She requested data from a reasonable time period in order to provide verifiable information that will assist in the decision making process. **First Selectman Moll** stated he would ask **Chief Canon** to come in. **Selectman Harrington** said she felt comfortable passing the policy tonight with the option to adjust once additional data is available for review. **Selectman Chafetz** inquired as to whether this policy would cover the schools and traffic cameras and cameras on buildings throughout town. **Attorney Donnelly** stated he would look into in further for a more solid answer. It was also agreed upon that setting a maximum dollar amount is very important as the idea is not to make access to public records impossible, but to instead emphasize the fact that it does come at a price with the overall intent to recoup costs on the most time consuming requests.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to approve Records Request Prepayment and Indigency Policy as proposed with the opportunity to add additional language as data becomes available. Vote: 4-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Selectman Chafetz asked how it will work if the Library Commission gets the requested policy to the Board of Selectmen fairly quickly. He wondered if an in-person Special meeting would be required. **Attorney Donnelly** noted there is still flexibility and a hybrid meeting could be called.

Selectmen Updates

Finance Director

First Selectman Moll noted that on Monday, April 18th the town welcomed **Eric Remington**, as the new Finance Director. **Mr. Remington**, a town resident, has volunteered his time for a number of years on the Retirement Commission and will be a great addition to the Finance Department.

Arbor Day Tree Planting

On April 30th **First Selectman Moll** will be assisting the Tree Committee as they plant three trees, which have been donated by Eversource, near the town green. All are welcome to attend.

Rotary Day of Service

On April 9th, **First Selectman Moll** and his assistant **Kris Lambert** participated in the Rotary's Day of Service at Sunrise Park. The event was very successful, with many projects being completed by over 100 volunteers who were in attendance despite the less than ideal weather. Thank you to all who came out to help.

Selectman Chafetz asked that the diversity discussion be placed on a future agenda. **First Selectman Moll** acknowledge his request.

The Selectmen all wished **Selectman Chafetz** a happy birthday.

Public Comment

Dave Gauthier, 3219 Phelps Road – Mr. Gauthier relayed information related to the Tamar Witness Stone placement which he feels will be helpful in the final discussions. He recalled a recommendation by one of the selectmen last spring to place the stone just north of Lot 272A and on the Library property. The reason for this suggested location was because all parties thought that Lot 272A was part of Veterans Memorial Park. After conducting research, **Mr. Gauthier** discovered that Lot 272A has nothing to do

with the Veterans Memorial Park and the Town Attorney is in agreement. This information is pertinent to the discussion as to why the location was not an option last spring. He also wanted to make the selectmen aware that the property pins and markers had been removed during the renovation of the library parking lot and therefore if the witness stone is placed on the backside of the library a survey will be required.

Bill Sullivan, 185 North Main Street – Mr. Sullivan discussed the minutes from last spring and would like to get more clarified language with regard to **Selectman Hill's** location suggestion last spring as it pertained to the Tamar's Witness Stone which occurred sometime in May/June of 2021. He discussed the symbolic statement that will be made depending on which location is chosen for the stone. He apologized for not being more aware of the dialogue rules during the meeting earlier this evening.

Kristina Hallett, 1211 Newgate Road – Ms. Hallett endorsed Mr. Sullivan's presentation and his suggested placement of the Tamar Witness Stone and asked the selectmen to strongly consider the Lot 272A location which would put the stone toward the front of the library and closer to Main Street as opposed to the back area of the lot. **Ms. Hallett** also thanked **Selectman Chafetz** for mentioning the diversity discussion and would also like to see it added to the next meeting agenda. She reiterated her request during Public Comment at the April 6th Board of Selectmen Meeting to have the Inclusivity Statement reinstated and placed back on the town website. She also asked that the board reaffirm the statement especially in light of the "ongoing, highly significant and escalating racial issues within our schools, including one even today."

Neil & Annie Hornish, 584 Thrall Avenue – Mr. and Mrs. Hornish echoed Ms. Hallett's sentiments regarding support of the Tamar Witness Stone placement. They thanked Mr. Gauthier for all the work he did on locating the markers and the pins. **Mrs. Hornish** asked the selectmen to reinstate the Inclusivity Statement on the town website as soon as possible and also to consider adding the diversity discussion to the agenda this evening and by not doing so the selectmen are refusing to acknowledge what is going on in this town.

Bob & Kerry White, 995 Newgate Road – Mrs. White expressed support and agreement with Ms. Hallett's comments and feels it reflects the character of the town in not including the statement regarding diversity back onto the town website. **Mr. White** would like to see the Tamar Witness Stone in the location proposed by Mr. Sullivan this evening which would be closer to Main Street where many people will be able to "stumble" upon it which is the goal of the stone.

Ted Ruddock, 15 High Street – Mr. Ruddock expressed his support for the witness stone and thanked those who have been involved. He believes that Lot 272A would be an appropriate location and feels that the value of having it closest to Main Street does exactly what a witness stone is intended to do. He encourages the board to take action and choose the location presented this evening by Mr. Sullivan.

Cassandre Victor Vega, 2 Melrose Lane – Ms. Victor Vega expressed her support for the Tamar Witness Stone and thanked all who have been involved in the project. She is hopeful that the stone will be placed in the correct location where it will allow people to see it and honor Tamar's life as she deserves to be honored. Ms. Victor Vega discussed the egregious acts of racism occurring in all of Suffield's public schools at this time and believes the Inclusivity Statement must be reinstated and asked the selectmen to take an active role in returning the inclusivity statement to the town website immediately.

Executive Session – litigation

Selectman Mahoney motioned to move into Executive Session to discuss litigation at 8:09 p.m. and invited Town Attorney Derek Donnelly to be present. Vote: 4-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session ended at 8:35 p.m.

Action on Executive Session

No action taken on Executive Session.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to adjourn at 8:36 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary