

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

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

Also present in person or via Zoom: Town Attorney Derek Donnelly, Director of Planning & Development Bill Hawkins and Town Engineer Karen Isherwood

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

Neil Hornish, 584 Thrall Avenue – Mr. Hornish wished to address the Board of Selectmen with regard to his dog Dexter who is currently being held at River Valley Animal Hospital. (*See Attachment A for full statement.*)

Heidi Partain, 9 Oxford Drive – Ms. Partain is very much in favor of the proposed dog park at Stony Brook Park and explained why she feels it will be good for the town of Suffield.

Ed Luukko, 8 Oxford Drive – Mr. Luukko, speaking on behalf of himself as well as his wife, stated that they were not necessarily against a dog park in general but they are definitely against the Stony Brook Park location. He noted that he took it upon himself to visit other dog parks in surrounding towns and shared his observations with the selectmen which were not necessarily positive.

Anna Posniak, 119 Remington Street – Ms. Posniak stated that she was speaking on behalf of herself as well as her two neighbors who live directly across from Stony Brook Park. **Ms. Posniak** researched documents back to the 1970's pertaining to Stony Brook Park and was able to gather information pertaining to the intention/purpose of the park when it was created as well as how the park was meant to be utilized, which she shared with the selectmen. On numerous occasions she quoted directly from town documents as well as the deed for the park. In **Ms. Posniak's** opinion, the proposed dog park constitutes a "change in land use" and should be reviewed by a regulatory commission, such as the TP&Z Commission, for a special permit prior to moving forward with any type of decision. She referenced the August 23, 2022 Conservation Commission Meeting minutes where **First Selectman Moll** mentioned additional parking will be allowed in the grassy areas of the park. **Ms. Posniak** feels that this additional parking should definitely trigger the need for a TP&Z 8-24 review. She expressed her concerns with the lack of transparency she feels the town is exhibiting and feels that decisions are being made behind closed doors with no intention of truly taking into consideration the desires of the residents before coming to a decision. **Ms. Posniak** is not in favor of the dog park being located at Stony Brook Park and feels it goes against the deeded uses for the property.

First Selectman Moll asked for the names and addresses of the other two residents **Ms. Posniak** was representing. From the audience **Jesse Leonard** of 151 Remington Street and **Dean Moulton** of 129 Remington Street identified themselves.

Jesse Leonard, 151 Remington Street – Mr. Leonard, a resident of Remington Street since 2017, noted that in addition to concerns regarding the impact on the landscape, the residents and the wildlife, he also has additional concerns that need to be addressed. These concerns include: park rules, hours of operation, excessive barking, increased parking and overall monitoring of the facility. **Mr. Leonard** has also visited area dog parks and noted that all of them were located in established municipal areas with no residents nearby. He expressed his disappointment at not being “invited to the table” to discuss this project prior to it coming to the Board of Selectmen for approval. He urged the selectmen to postpone their vote and not rush a decision before considering all the pertinent facts.

Ray Perleoni, 274 Remington Street – Mr. Perleoni, a resident of Remington Street since 1978, has spent many years watching how the people of Suffield utilize Stony Brook Park. He explained that his observations include families having picnics, residents walking dogs on leashes, sunbathers lounging in the grass and those who bring their chairs to sit and relax. He expressed his concerns with the aesthetics of a chain link fence and what it says about the rural community we are trying to keep. He feels that stewardship of the land is important and right now the selectmen are not doing their job by creating a dog park in this area when there should be other locations considered. In his opinion the residents have been left out. In closing, **Mr. Perleoni** expressed that he is not against dog parks, just this particular location.

Dean Moulton, 129 Remington Street – Mr. Moulton referenced the August 17, 2022 meeting minutes regarding letters being sent to the abutters of Stony Brook Park and soliciting opinions for discussion. He feels that approval this evening is not fair. **Mr. Moulton** also provided his observations of the park and the individuals who currently utilize it. He discussed covenants of the park and quoted sections of the Suffield Land Records as they pertain to Stony Brook Park. He feels a dog park is not an acceptable use of the land. He expressed that he is not opposed to a dog park, but he is opposed to the location. He suggested Bruce Park as an alternative location. He also questioned whether the town of Suffield is creating an “attractive nuisance.”

Andy Brydges, 19 Remington Street – Mr. Brydges expressed his concerns that this is not the correct forum to be having a discussion about the dog park site when the word “approval” is on the agenda without actually engaging the abutters and feels the selectmen should “all know better.” He encouraged the selectmen to delay the vote until a proper siting process can be considered, including the opportunity for all town residents to weigh in as opposed to just the abutters. **Mr. Brydges** feels there are other open spaces throughout town that may be more appropriate locations and would not impact abutters of the property. He provided the selectmen with information he obtained through his research of “best practices for siting a dog park” and urged the selectmen to pause and not make this the first and last forum for public input on an investment in the town.

Lauren Perleoni, 302 Remington Street – Ms. Perleoni expressed similar concerns to those who had spoken before her this evening. She stated that she is not opposed to the dog park, however, she is opposed to this location and hopes it will be placed where it will not impact a residential location.

Selectman Harrington motioned to amend agenda item 3 to read “August 17, 2022” instead of “August 18, 2022.” **Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.**

Approval of the minutes from the August 17, 2022 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen

Selectman Harrington motioned to approve the minutes from the August 17, 2022 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen as drafted. **Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion and approval of Dog Park at Stoney Brook Park sponsored by USA Recycling and transfer of funds from the Remington Bridge Account to Suffield Dog Park Account and refer to Board of Finance

First Selectman Moll, Selectman Mahoney, Selectman Harrington and Selectman Hill clarified the use of the term “approval” on the agenda and assured the public who came out this evening to provide their public comment that it does not necessarily indicate a decision will be made, however, it is standard language added to most agenda items to allow of the opportunity to take action if so desired. **First Selectman Moll** went on to explain that all letters of concern that he has received thus far have been shared with the selectmen and walked the group through the various locations that he has visited and provided his concerns with each location. Sites include: the opposite side of Stony Brook Park with entry on South Street, Sullivan Field off Hill Street, Bridge Street (former location of Bridge Street School) and Cervione Fields and Babbs Fields in West Suffield. He mentioned that connectivity was a main reason for the location of the dog park on Remington Road as the new multi-use trail on Mountain Road would allow residents to walk safely to the park if they desired.

The selectmen debated the possibility of using Bruce Park behind the A. Ward Spaulding Elementary School. It would need to be reviewed for land usage rules and the proximity to children. **Attorney Donnelly** provided his initial thoughts on this location and agreed to look into the possibility. He also provided his interpretation of the covenant which had been mentioned earlier in the meeting. He plans to look into the question of the 8-24 Review requirement as he felt that was a very legitimate question that should be answered prior to moving forward. **Attorney Donnelly** noted that he does feel like the town is following in the spirit of the deed at this point.

Selectman Chafetz motioned to table the agenda item for further review.

Selectman Hill asked questions of **Attorney Donnelly** pertaining to the level of improvements being made to the stony brook property if the dog park is built there and offered suggestions on how he feels the group should move forward, including an outreach campaign to the entire town and not just the abutters. He stressed the need to take the time to get this right. **Selectman Harrington** agreed with tabling the item for this evening, thanked the public for coming out to share their concerns and expressed her disappointment that individuals felt that the process was being done in secrecy and was not transparent. She also provided an in depth explanation of how the funding has come into play thus far and why it was necessary to do this in advance in order to provide a plan to all boards who will be involved in the decision making process. **Selectman Mahoney** emphasized the logic behind the funding also and noted that it was not done with the intention of secretly pull something over on the public.

Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion and approval of Tax Abatement Ordinance and refer to Town Meeting

Director of Planning and Development Bill Hawkins provided background on how the request for changes to the Tax Abatement Ordinance came into question and referred to **Attorney Donnelly** for further clarification to the selectmen. **Attorney Donnelly** explained what the Tax Abatement Ordinance is designed to accomplish and who the abatement is targeted to assist. The administrative process was discussed and it was agreed that with the updated ordinance, there would be much more clarity and transparency for all parties involved. **Attorney Donnelly** and **Selectman Harrington** discussed proposed wording changes and the group agreed to the suggestions.

Selectman Hill motioned to approve Tax Abatement Ordinance with changes as noted and refer to Town Meeting. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion and approval of RFP for solar at the Landfill

Director of Planning & Development Bill Hawkins presented to the selectmen with regard to the continued discussion on the potential for a solar project at the Landfill. The RFP, which has been reviewed by **Attorney Donnelly**, would be sent out by Kirt Mayland to solar developers to seek proposals for possible development of solar at the town Landfill and the surrounding property. The RFP process will help us to determine what type of project can be done in this particular area and how strong the interest might be. Discussion ensued amongst the selectmen, **Mr. Hawkins and Attorney Donnelly** who answered their questions accordingly. Suggested wording changes were brought up by **Selectman Harrington** and agreed upon by the group.

Selectman Harrington motioned to approve the RFP for solar at the Landfill subject to changes as noted. **Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion and approval to apply for SS4A grant and refer to Board of Finance

Town Engineer Karen Isherwood the following overview:

The Capital Region Council of Governments (CRCOG) informed members of a notice of funding opportunity for Safe Streets for All (SS4A) discretionary grant program with \$5 billion in appropriated funds over the next 4 years. In fiscal year 2022, up to \$1 billion is available. Funds for the fiscal year 2022 SS4A grant program are to be awarded on a competitive basis to support planning, infrastructure, behavioral and operational initiatives to prevent death and serious injury. A minimum of 40% will be awarded for Action Plan Grants used to develop or complete an Action Plan. Implementation Grants will be awarded for implementation of safety improvements identified in an Action Plan.

Suffield is in a position to apply for an Implementation Grant to fund improvements identified in the Town-wide Traffic Safety Study, completed earlier this year, and acts as our Action Plan.

Awarded funds would provide for 80% of project expenses which may include planning, design and development activities for projects and strategies identified in an approved action plan. CRCOG is coordinating with CT DOT on behalf of member communities seeking grants for projects on state owned roads.

Following a joint meeting conducted with our Traffic Safety Study consultants, Police Chief Cannon and Director of Public Works Chris Matejek, **Ms. Isherwood** submitted an intent to apply form to CRCOG identifying a proposed modern roundabout at the intersection of Mountain Rd (Rt. 168) with North and South Stone Streets.

The intent to apply form was submitted with supporting accident data, by CRCOG to the DOT on July 21, 2022 and we anticipate a response from DOT review shortly.

As the US DOT is encouraging joint applications, we are considering submitting a joint application with 4 other municipalities (Bloomfield, Canton, Farmington, Hartford.)

The original minimum expected amount to be requested for individual rural communities is \$4.8 million. Federal funding will be reimbursable at 80%, requiring a 20% local match. The request for \$4.8 million translates to a town share of \$960,000. Total funding for the project should be included in the budget for FY23-24. It is important to note that 80% federal reimbursement applies to the total requested and will not increase if project costs exceed the grant amount.

The request before the Board is for a motion to allow the Town Engineer to appropriate approval from the Board of Finance to apply for SS4A funding, and upon authorization, to submit all required documentation for the SS4A application due September 15, 2022.

Discussion ensued amongst the selectmen and **Ms. Isherwood**. They discussed the impact on local farming in the area and the level of importance for this particular intersection versus others in town. They also discussed the traffic study that was conducted during the last two years and the results. Concerns were expressed regarding the budgetary impacts and it was determined that moving forward with the application would not cause any harm to the town.

Selectman Harrington motioned to approve to apply for SS4A grant and refer to Board of Finance. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion of Bridge Street Park

First Selectman Moll stated that he was not looking to make any decisions this evening but explained that they were interested in earmarking \$1,000,000 for parks. Suggestions about what should be placed on this property were shared and discussed. The pros and cons of another soccer field were considered, as a new field on the Bridge Street site was included in some of the designs presented to the town by SLR. **Selectman Hill** liked the idea of another soccer field, **Selectman Mahoney** and **Selectman Harrington** were not in favor and would like to hear different ideas and suggestions from the public. Irrigation of existing soccer fields in town is being considered which may solve some of the field issues currently in place. **First Selectman Moll** plans to forward the results of the survey completed by SLR to the selectmen for review.

Selectmen's Updates

Suffield in Stitches

The Suffield in Stitches quilting group recently bestowed upon the town a quilt that was created for the 350th Anniversary Celebration. The quilt had been won in a raffle and gifted to a former Suffield resident who now lives out of state. This individual felt that it was too beautiful not to be displayed somewhere in town and offered to donate it back. The quilt now hangs proudly at the top of the stairs in the new entryway at the Kent Memorial Library.

Suffield on the Green

First Selectman Moll explained that, unlike prior years where there was an official town tent to greet residents, he has chosen to volunteer in different tents throughout the weekend. He encouraged all to come out for the event.

Parks & Recreation

First Selectman Moll reminded all that the Parks and Recreation 5K and 10K road races will be held this Saturday morning.

VFW

The VFW will be hosting a Pig Roast this Saturday at 3:00 p.m. at the VFW Post on Sheldon Street in West Suffield.

Hilltop Farm Concert

A concert will be held at Hilltop Farm on September 17, 2022 @ 7:30 p.m. for the PMC Jimmy Fund. Tickets can be purchased through Chris Nikolis.

Public Information Hearing

There will be a Public Information Hearing for the Plan of Conservation and Development on Thursday, September 15th at 7:00 p.m. **First Selectman Moll** encouraged the public to attend.

Oktoberfest

Oktoberfest will be held on Saturday, October 15, 2022 from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at Hilltop Farm. Tickets are \$75 per person and include a commemorative beer stein, beer, food, music and games. Proceeds to help with Hilltop Farm restoration efforts.

Friends of the Library Annual Book Sale

The Friends of the Library will be holding their annual book sale at Sacred Heart Church beginning on Friday night and running through Saturday.

ARPA

First Selectman Moll noted that the ARPA Commission has reconvened and encouraged the selectmen to present any thoughts they might have on the subject. **First Selectman Moll**, noting that traffic is one of the top complaints he receives from the public, recommends taking \$300,000 of ARPA funds and putting it towards the Police Department strictly for the use of pulling over drivers who are exceeding the speed limits posted throughout town.

VFW Breakfast

First Selectman Moll thanked Suffield resident **Jim Irwin** for coming out to volunteer at the recent Veterans Breakfast at the VFW. **Mr. Irwin** will be running for State Representative of the Connecticut 61st District, a position currently held by Tami Zawistowski. Best of luck to **Mr. Irwin**.

New Teacher Meet and Greet

First Selectman Moll attended the New Teacher Meet and Greet at the Suffield High School at the end of August. He wished the teachers and students a successful school year.

Wellness Fair

The Town of Suffield and the Board of Education held a Wellness Fair on August 30th from 12:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Suffield Middle School which was well attended. Thanks were extended to **Karin Ziemba** and **Shannon Foley** from the TOS Human Resources Department and **Kathy Carney** from the Board of Education for all their hard work coordinating the vendors and organizing the event, and to **Kris Lambert** from the First Selectman's Office for assisting during the fair.

New Library Director

Julie Styles has officially joined the Kent Memorial Library as Director. Please stop by and hello!

Public Comment

Heidi Partain, 9 Oxford Drive – Ms. Partain, the current President of the Suffield Rotary, wanted to make the selectmen aware of funds that the group has received via grants and memorial donations which are to be used for the benefit of the town. She also noted in particular, the Packard Memorial funds which are earmarked for the youth in town. **Ms. Partain** encouraged the selectmen to look to the Rotary and include them in discussions that involve improvements to the town as they do have funding and would be most willing to help.

Dean Moulton, 129 Remington Street – Mr. Moulton wanted to remind the selectmen of the State of Connecticut rules and regulations concerning bears. He is greatly concerned that the dog park will attract bears and create an uncontrollable situation as he envisions dog biscuits, treats, human food and candy from children being left behind by visitors. He pointed out that this is another example of “unintended consequences” of having a dog park near a residential area.

The selectmen thanked Ms. Partain for the generous offer she extended on behalf of the Suffield Rotary.

Executive Session – River Valley Animal Hospital Agreement

Executive Session – Hornish Litigation

Executive Session – TRC Litigation

Selectman Mahoney motioned to enter Executive Session at 8:44 p.m. to discuss River Valley Animal Hospital Agreement, Hornish Litigation and TRC Litigation and invited Attorney Donnelly to join. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Executive Session ended at 9:03 p.m.

Action on Executive Sessions

Selectman Mahoney motioned to extend the agreement with River Valley Animal Hospital through October 6, 2022. Selectman Harrington made a friendly amendment to change the motion to correct the date to October 19, 2022. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

No action taken on Hornish Litigation or TRC Litigation.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to adjourn at 9:05 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary