

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
NOVEMBER 1, 2023
7:00 P.M.
Town Hall Meeting Room, 83 Mountain Road, Suffield CT
Hybrid Meeting**

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

Also present via Zoom or in person: Derek Donnelly – Town Attorney, Bill Hawkins - Director of Planning & Zoning, Chris Matejek – Director of Public Works and Joe Duval – Leadman, Landfill and Transfer Station

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

Dave Gauthier, 3219 Phelps Road – Mr. Gauthier stated that for the public record he wanted it known that he had forwarded two items to the Board of Selectmen. He forwarded information regarding his communication with the DOT concerning the rock formation on Phelps Road and forwarded a suggestion on how to document policies in order for residents to find them with ease. He also wanted to mention his communication with **First Selectman Moll** regarding the town funds that had been lost by the former Town Treasurer and ideas on how the town may go about recovering the funds.

Discussion and Approval of the minutes from the October 4, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen

Selectman Harrington motioned to approve the minutes from the October 4, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen with the following changes:

Page 1 – Selectman Hill was incorrectly noted as being present at the October 4 2023 meeting and should be marked as absent.

Page 6 – The first line of the first paragraph reads, *“what was what happened in the past.”* It should read, *“which was what happened in the past.”*

Page 8 - In the first public comment, on line 3, we should add the word *“problem”* after the word *“obvious.”*

Under the Composting Initiative in the Selectmen Updates section, it was incorrectly reported, “\$6,000 was raised and a \$3,000 match will be provided for a total of \$9,000.” The correct information should read, “\$6,000 was raised in order to receive a one and a half times match of \$9,000 which will provide us with a total of \$15,000.”

Vote: 4 in favor (Moll, Harrington, Chafetz and Mahoney) and 1 abstain (Hill.) Motion passed.

Discussion and approval of proposed edits to the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Matching Grant Program and refer to Town Meeting

First Selectman Moll said the only change is that the board is proposing edits to the TIF Master Plan that were discussed at the last Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen that allows for the use of this specific grant. If the board is ready, the proposed changes can be approved and referred to a Town Meeting. A brief discussion ensued among the selectmen who provided their thoughts on the proposed changes.

Attorney Donnelly clarified that the language in the original TIF Master Plan did not necessarily prohibit the grant program, but it did not expressly provide for it either. The goal of the amendment is to make it very clear that this proposal is available for businesses, that it is well documented and that all are aware of the criteria involved.

Selectman Harrington pointed out two small typographic errors on the third and fifth page of the Policies and Procedures section. **Attorney Donnelly** noted both and confirmed he would change them accordingly.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to approve the proposed edits to the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Matching Grant Program and refer to Town Meeting. **Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion of DPW Usage Policy

First Selectman Moll explained that he has been working with **Attorney Donnelly** and **DPW Director Chris Matejek** to create a DPW Usage Policy. The policy will cover all non-town sponsored events, which may require assistance from DPW employees and/or use of town property. In the past, the DPW Director or the First Selectman were responsible for making decisions on a case-by-case basis, which has raised multiple concerns. The issues include; liability/insurance requirements, who can or cannot, receive the town's help, and whether or not fees/charges should be imposed. **First Selectman Moll** feels that the proposed DPW Usage Policy will provide answers to most of these questions and clearly define what the guidelines are should an individual or group be interested in utilizing the services of the DPW.

Discussion ensued among the selectmen as to how the policy will work, who will be involved, how decisions will be made and how the town will be covered from a liability perspective. **Attorney Donnelly** provided various scenarios to walk the selectmen through the process and answered all questions accordingly.

Discussion of Landfill Policy

First Selectman Moll, Attorney Donnelly, DPW Director Chris Matejek and Joe Duval, the Leadman for the Landfill and Transfer Station have been working together on the Landfill Policy in an attempt to fix some of the issues that are currently plaguing the Landfill. **First Selectman Moll** feels the first two issues to address should permitting and monetary issues. Permitting has not been enforced since sometime prior to COVID and the fees have not been raised in approximately ten years. The reinstatement of permitting should alleviate numerous daily complaints currently received at the landfill. The second issue to be addressed is the fee schedule, which needs to be brought in line in order to cover the costs of current services. **First Selectman Moll** provided examples of the disparity in fees. He also noted the current ordinance refers to a Landfill Commission that can be used to oversee these types of changes in policies. The town has not had a Landfill Commission in the recent past and he recommends that the Landfill Commission be eliminated from our ordinances in order to allow a working group to help review policies moving forward.

Discussion ensued among the selectmen who are all in agreement with the proposed fees. Also discussed in depth was the impact on reinstating permitting, the actions of contractors who utilize our landfill and the opt-out feature for residents who bring their trash directly to the landfill. **Attorney Donnelly, Mr. Matejek and Mr. Duval** answered all the selectmen's questions accordingly.

This document is still a work in progress, however, it was noted that should these changes move forward to implementation, the town will need to provide adequate time to notify and educate all that will be involved; both residents and employees.

Discussion of Blight Ordinance

First Selectman Moll opened the discussion on Blight and referenced a memo from the Suffield Building Official Kimberly Rogers, outlining a summary of State laws authorizing municipalities to regulate and address blighted properties. She explained the value of a blight ordinance and how it would be a helpful tool for departments to use for code enforcement and will allow officials better access to buildings.

Attorney Donnelly explained that a Blight Ordinance has been informally and formally looked at since 2016; however, no real action had ever been taken. He explained that this version of the Blight Ordinance exempts farms. He feels this is

important for the town. The most notable changes to this document have been made since October 1st and have largely been driven by new law that was passed by the General Assembly. These changes include; 1) the definition of blight has been expanded to include commercial properties where it had previously only included residential properties, 2) the fee structure for how to enforce blight has gone up and references have been changed to include statutory references in order to avoid having to change ordinances each time a fee increases and 3) the legislature has come up with the idea of blight receiverships. **Attorney Donnelly** spoke on each of these changes and how they will affect the town's handling of blight.

Discussion ensued among the selectmen. Questions pertaining to various components of the ordinance, the subject of hoarding, the definition of a blighted property, the zoning enforcement process, the hearing process and the legal language involved were asked of **Attorney Donnelly**. He provided explanations and answers accordingly.

Selectman Updates

Betty Stroh Celebration

First Selectman Moll extended his thanks to the Suffield Garden Club for inviting the Board of Selectmen to the Betty Stroh presentation at Hilltop Farm

Oktoberfest

First Selectman Moll thanked Howie Orr, Kacy Colston and the Friends of the Farm for another successful Oktoberfest event.

Town Hall Trick or Treat

First Selectman Moll thanked all the parents and children who came out to the Town Hall Halloween Trick or Treat event held yesterday.

Composting Rollout at Spaulding School

A composting rollout event will be held at Spaulding School on Monday, November 13th at 9:00 a.m. **First Selectman Moll** thanked the Suffield Sustainability Council, which is a student group led by Justin Kaput. He also thanked Sustainable Suffield, the Spaulding staff and USA Recycling for the hard work they are putting into this effort.

Community Cleanup Day

On Saturday, October 14th from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. a fall Community Cleanup Day was held. **First Selectman Moll** thanked Sustainable Suffield, USA Recycling and the residents who came out to participate. The event was a success and we look forward to doing it again in the spring.

Veterans Day

First Selectman Moll explained that this year the town is celebrating Veterans Day with all four public schools rather than at the Veterans Monument. He invited all veterans to attend the various programs throughout the morning. He also invited all board members to attend and recognize our amazing veterans. He extended thanks to Michelle Zawawi, Assistant Superintendent, for organizing the event and taking the lead. Additional thanks were extended to the staff of all four schools for organizing and participating in the event.

Suffield Alight

Suffield Alight is one month away!

Christmas in Suffield

Christmas in Suffield will be happening this coming weekend.

Veterans Breakfast

The monthly Veterans Breakfast at the VFW on Sheldon Street will be held this Saturday, November 4th.

New EV Level 2 Charging Station

First Selectman Moll explained that the new EV Charging Stations have been installed at Town Hall. There is a charge of \$0.25 per kilowatt hour, which is the average in the area. Town Hall all-in pays \$0.17 per kilowatt hour, but with all of our credits we do not pay anything

New Fire Engine

The final new fire engine arrived yesterday and is located at Station 1 on Mountain Road.

ARPA Grant Award Presentation

The ARPA Grant Award presentation for the Suffield Historical Society will take place at the King House on Friday at 1:30 p.m. All selectmen are invited to attend. **First Selectman Moll** thanked this board for approving the idea he had for these awards through the ARPA Commission.

Facilities Master Plan

First Selectman Moll encouraged the board to continue looking through the Facilities Master Plan, which will be discussed in the next few weeks.

Thank you

First Selectman Moll made the following statement to the board:

"I would like to take a moment to thank this entire board for their hard work and dedication over the last two years. It has been an absolute pleasure working with all four of you. I think we provide unique and differing viewpoints and opinions, which helped create and balance the decisions we make for this town. While we may not all agree on everything, we are able to communicate effectively and express our views to each other without taking things personally and attacking each other. I think it is something that lacks in today's politics and I have appreciated this approach and I wish you all the best on next Tuesday's election. I am looking forward to continuing our work in the future."

Land Conservancy

Selectman Chafetz encouraged residents to visit the Land Conservancy located across from the Suffield High School. He noted that the ARPA Commission contributed funds to help create this beautiful area.

Selectman Hill stated that he likes the TIF plan that is in place but feels that going forward the town needs to think bigger and do something for industrial, such as the Route 75 Corridor, which has been empty despite the town's attempts to market it. He feels this area is perfect, especially with inevitable expansion of the airport. He reminded all about the upcoming monthly Veterans Breakfast this Saturday and most importantly, he encouraged everyone to vote next Tuesday.

Public Comment

Annie Hornish, 864 Thrall Avenue – Ms. Hornish provided her thoughts and concerns on the proposed Blight Ordinance discussed this evening. Her concerns include how the ordinance will impact hoarders in town, who are suffering from a mental illness and will be punished by having extremely high penalties imposed upon them. She also expressed concerns about the vague language being used and feels it may invite an abuse of power.

Dave Gauthier, 3219 Phelps Road - Mr. Gauthier spoke about a number of concerns including the replacement cost section of the proposed DPW policy, the Landfill policy and the opt-out feature and the Annual Town Report which he states has not been approved/published as of yet.

Rick Sotil, 426 South Grand Street – Mr. Sotil stated he was happy to hear that the board has excluded the farmers from the Blight Ordinance.

Tracy Hespelt, 875 Copper Hill Road – Ms. Hespelt expressed her gratitude and support for all members of the Board of Selectmen. She feels that each member brings a unique perspective to the board and have all show that even when they do not see eye-to eye on a topic they represent themselves and our community with dignity and show respect to their peers while engaging in spirited debate. She thanked all members of the board and voiced her support for them next Tuesday, which is Election Day.

Tom Frenaye, 489 Warnertown Road – Mr. Frenaye said he was happy to hear that there are provisions included in the Landfill policy for those who opt-out of garbage pick-up and take their trash directly to the landfill. He also suggested that when there is a discussion item that includes draft language, the board should consider attaching the documents to the agenda for the meeting in order to allow individuals to familiarize themselves in advance and follow along during open discussion. Mr. Frenaye also commented directly on the Blight Ordinance, noting the many different ways in which residents maintain their homes and landscapes. He feels that there are many different visions of what blight is. He also expressed concerns over the possible cause of the blight, including foreclosures, illness and poverty. He suggested paying particular attention to input from the town Zoning Enforcement Officer and the Tax Collector who may be able to provide guidance.

Jen Valentino, 221 Griffin Road – Ms. Valentino spoke on the Blight Ordinance and agreed with Mr. Frenaye pertaining to posting draft documents in advance. She also expressed concerns with some of the wording in the ordinance, including the term “unreasonable” and the definition of “blight.” She discussed different types of properties, including those yards that are designed to be sustainable, and expressed her hope that accommodations will be made for such properties. She encouraged the board to hold off on the implementation of any ordinance until the enforcement departments have been properly staffed and the appropriate conversations have been had with social services and other departments that will be able to help people with the challenges they may be facing.

Attorney Derek Donnelly agreed with the suggestion to have draft policies attached to meeting agendas allowing residents to review in advance. He also clarified a few of the sections in the Blight Ordinance that directly deal with some of the concerns raised this evening.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to adjourn at 8:14 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary