

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
JANUARY 3, 2024
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

First Selectman Moll called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m., wished all a Happy New Year and asked everyone to join him in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Public Comment

Dave Gauthier, 3219 Phelps Road – Mr. Gauthier provided his thoughts on the Suffield Community Aid Building Fees Waiver, which he is in favor of. He also commented on the Blight Ordinance and expressed his concern over wetlands being excluded from the ordinance. In his opinion, this is a mistake that should be looked at further. Another concern involved the exclusion of active farms. He said he is “comfortable” with the exclusion, however, he feels it is an insult to our farmers in Suffield. He explained that there are many farms in Suffield that have no issues with blight while other farms in town have campers, boats and non-farm equipment on their property that appear to be blight. He would like to ask that for the farms, if the blight is a result of non-farming buildings, structures and equipment, those items should *not* be excluded, and the farms should be required to comply in the same manner as all others.

Fred Sweitzer, 165 South Stone Street – Mr. Sweitzer identified himself as a “lifelong democrat, lifelong liberal and a member of ABAR.” He reflected on the December 6th meeting and expressed his feelings of being thought of as the enemy. He commented on the Kent Memorial Library Commission and noted that two members of the board said that their decisions were not based on politics. In response, Mr. Sweitzer noted “*that may be true with regard to the desire to replace most of the members that were up for reappointment, but the discussion and the process appeared to reveal, in my view, a pretty nakedly partisan display.*” He also expressed concerns with the “strategy” he felt the majority members planned and carried out; what he perceives to be a “lack of transparency” by members of the board, and the characterization of ABAR as a group that seeks to divide the town. He noted that when this characterization was challenged at the last meeting, First Selectman Moll publically aired an email from two years ago, which involved an issue that had long since been resolved, and suggested that the writers could be considered to be anti-Semitic. In his opinion, this action was shameful. His hope, as we enter the new year, is that all points of view are considered and treated with respect.

Discussion and Approval of the minutes from the November 29, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen

Selectman Harrington motioned to approve the minutes from the November 29, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. **Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion and Approval of the minutes from the December 6, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen

Selectman Harrington motioned to approve the minutes from the December 6, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen with one change as follow:

- 1) **Page 2 – Spelling correction needs to be made to read “Kelly Giannuzzi.”.**

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

Discussion and reappointment of William Gozzo to the Permanent Building Commission through December 31, 2027

Selectman Harrington motioned to reappoint William Gozzo to the Permanent Building Commission through December 31, 2027.

First Selectman Moll noted that he put out an email to all parties regarding this position and asked for interested candidates, however, he did not receive any new interest. He also shared that he had spoken with both candidates up for reappointment this evening. Selectman Chafetz raised concerns regarding the process undertaken to reappoint and/or replace Kent Memorial Library Commission members at the December 6th meeting of the Board of Selectmen. He wanted to know why the same requests were not made for these reappointments. First Selectman Moll explained that he *did* make the same requests, however, nobody indicated an interest in either position on the Permanent Building Commission. Discussion continued among the selectmen as to the process for reappointing individuals to commissions, with Selectman Chafetz continuing to express concerns and making comparisons to the December 6th meeting in which 7 positions on the Kent Memorial Library Commission, claiming that the “rules keep changing.” Selectman Mahoney provided his opinion on why the two situations were not the same. Selectman Chafetz did not agree and suggested that moving forward the board be consistent.

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

Discussion and reappointment of Glenn Neilson to the Permanent Building Commission through December 31, 2027

Selectman Harrington motioned to reappoint Glenn Neilson to the Permanent Building Commission through December 31, 2027. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion and approval to waive building fees for Suffield Community Aid

First Selectman Moll noted that he had recently spoken with Suffield Community Aid Director Danielle Annibalini and Kevin Goff who had presented on this subject a month ago and had been told they have no additional information for discussion. It appears to be a matter of whether the board would like to waive these fees, and in doing so, potentially open themselves up to further requests. First Selectman Moll explained that if approved, the board should be prepared to create a policy or guidelines for such requests in the future. He reminded the group that Suffield Community Aid was offered \$200,000 in ARPA funds in early 2022, which were rejected due to an already health fund balance. First Selectman Moll suggested that instead of a “yes” vote, the board could offer an increase of \$1,700 during the upcoming budget cycle to help offset these costs. This action would prevent the board from having to make further considerations and policy in regard to waiving building fees, while still supporting the Suffield Community Aid’s housing project efforts. Selectmen Mahoney stated that he still has the same concerns he had when the subject was originally presented to the board for consideration, however, he would be in favor of First Selectman Moll’s proposal to offer an increase of \$1,700 during the upcoming budget cycle. Selectman Hill feels the board should encourage more involvement with Suffield Community Aid and

when projects arise they should be considered on a case by case basis. In his opinion, if someone wants to improve our community by offering assistance to an individual who needs help, it is the duty of the board to help. He suggested creating a policy to address these situations. Discussion continued regarding the possibility of creating a policy, the best way to draft it and what types of parameters should be included. Selectman Harrington noted that she originally felt that the proposed \$1,700 increase to the upcoming budget cycle was the way to proceed, but would now be willing to consider Selectman Hill's idea of drafting a policy. Discussion continued at a high level and the selectmen agreed to table it for further discussion at a later date.

Selectman Hill motioned to table. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion of Farm Building Exemption

First Selectman Moll explained that up for consideration is an ordinance that would provide a tax exemption for farm buildings. The Town of Suffield has always recognized and understood the importance of our farms and retaining our rural character. Provisions of Section 12-91 (c) of the Connecticut General Statutes allows for such an ordinance for farm buildings. The purpose of such an ordinance would further protect, preserve or promote the welfare and quality of life for our farming community while exempting certain farm buildings. Given the uncertain weather patterns of the last three years, the volatility with inflation and the cost of goods, First Selectman Moll believes it is an appropriate time to consider more protections for our agricultural community. Tobacco is one of our largest sectors within this community and due to the excessive rain over the last few years, tobacco farmers lost a majority of their crops, leaving them to claim losses with their insurance. Insurance does not cover the full cost of the loss to the farmers. Thirty (30) towns in Connecticut, including Ellington and East Windsor, are currently offering this exemption. First Selectman Moll provided the selectmen with information pertaining to the farms that may be impacted, including locations and information from the town Assessor. Attorney Donnelly walked the board through the ordinance, clarified language and discussed recent valuation jumps with regard to these properties. Selectman Mahoney stated that generally he is in support of the idea, however he would like both the board and the residents to get additional information about insurance costs and what exactly this type of insurance covers. He also pointed out what will or will not be covered and provided that information to the group. He feels that a 50% exemption would be appropriate, allowing for some relief and taking additional action somewhere down the line if it makes sense. Attorney Donnelly suggested making some language adjustments to the draft document with regard to revenue and expense requirements. Selectman Harrington also expressed concerns and stated that she would like more data before making any type of decisions. She suggested having the Town Assessor attend a future meeting to walk the board through the numbers. Selectman Hill also feels it is a good idea but agrees there are questions that must be answered prior to making any decision. Selectman Chafetz would like to get more information on what other types of abatements the farmers may be receiving. He said he is currently not sure where he stands on this issue as tobacco is not one of the healthiest products to be growing. Attorney Donnelly addressed some of the selectmen's concerns, explained the limitations within the statute and suggested that the Town Assessor will be able to address those questions when she presents to the board.

Discussion and approval of Blight Ordinance and refer to Town Meeting

First Selectman Moll noted that the selectmen are all in receipt of the most updated version of the Blight Ordinance with suggested edits included. Attorney Donnelly provided red-lined versions to the board in an effort to make the editing process thus far easier to understand. Selectman Harrington commended **Attorney Donnelly** for the edits he made based off of the comments provided. Attorney Donnelly clarified the wording that she was referring to was in Section 6 under Enforcement. The added language now reads "*The Blight Enforcement Officer shall determine violations of the section and shall make at*

least two (2) documented attempts to resolve those violations with the owner of the blighted property. If no resolution can be achieved, the Blight Enforcement Officer shall take steps to enforce this ordinance and.....” The overwhelming comments were that we not rush and work to resolve these issues with the resident. Selectman Harrington pointed out

- 1) Page 1 – Edits made at the bottom reads “Board of Selectman” and it should read “Board of Selectmen.”
- 2) Page 7 – Correct the spelling of “rehabilitate”
- 3) The first sentence of section 11 has “the” written twice. One needs to be removed.
- 4) Add the word “or” at the end of A and at the end of B
- 5) Page 7/Section 11 (b) – change wording to “at the time of the sale of the blighted property the bona fide purchaser demonstrates the financial ability and intention to immediately rehabilitate the blighted property”
- 6) Page 7/Section 11 (c) - change wording to “All rehabilitation is completed in accordance with a stipulated plan to rehabilitate the blighted property while holding all penalties and leans in advance.”

Selectman Hrrington asked Attorney Donnelly to address Mr. Gauthier’s earlier public comment regarding the wetlands. He answered accordingly. Discussion ensued and it was determined that a public hearing might be necessary prior to making a vote on this issue.

Selectman Harrington motioned to table. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Selectman Updates

Budget Season

First Selectman Moll noted that budget season is upon us and invited all board members to join him at any of the departmental budget presentation meetings if interested.

Policies

First Selectman Moll noted that he is continuing his work work on policies and has a few coming up, including a Town Green Policy and an Agenda and Minutes Policy. The board should be receiving draft copies of these proposed policies for their review in the next few days.

Solar Projects – Landfill

First Selectman Moll shared an update on the two Landfill solar projects that were discussed approximately a year and a half ago. The smaller project is still proceeding as planned, but the larger project will not be moving forward due to capacity issues with Eversource.

New Director of Public Works

First Selectman Moll noted that after a thorough hiring process, he was happy to welcome Lee Corbert as the town’s new Director of Public Works. He pointed out that the hiring process was exactly the same as it had been when hiring the former DPW Director, with the exception of the former being hired as an internal candidate and Mr. Corbert being hired as an external candidate. After interviewing potential candidates, the town chose the final two contenders. Mr. Corbert was chosen for the position because it was felt that he presented the ability to move the town in a newer and better direction.

Selectman Chafetz asked for a copy of Mr. Corbert's resume. First Selectman Moll agreed to forward it to him.

Open Positions

- Part-time Fire Marshal
- Library Director
- Assistant Building Official

LOTICIP Requests

First Selectman Moll explained that the town is preparing our 2024 LOTICIP requests and we have reached out to the Town of East Granby to gauge their interest in applying jointly to add a rotary at the Route 187 and South Stone intersection. This was one of the recommendations from our recent Traffic Safety Study. First Selectman Moll encouraged the board to share any ideas they may have.

TIF Matching Funds Grant

The TIF Matching Funds Grant will be open for applications this upcoming Monday. First Selectman Moll looks forward to all the applications and the support and improvements the town will be providing to our local business within the TIF District.

Library Task Force

First Selectman Moll has created a task force to address the library youth behavior. They will be meeting for the first time tomorrow. He thanked all members who have volunteered to be in the group.

First Selectman Coffee Hour

First Selectman Moll will be hosting his first Coffee Hour at Café Barista on Friday, January 5th. All residents are welcome to stop by to share thoughts, present ideas or ask questions.

Apology

First Selectman Moll announced that he would like to make an apology to Dr. Kristina Hallett. At the December 6, 2023 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectman, First Selectman Moll made remarks about documents that included Dr. Kristina Hallett and that "*certain documents could be perceived as anti-Semitic.*" After discussions with her, he realized he was wrong to lead into that kind of perception and publicly apologized to her for doing it in such a way.

Budget Meetings

Selectman Harrington requested to sit in on the Fire Department budget meeting and Selectman Chafetz requested to be included in the Library and Highway Department budget meetings.

Public Comment

David Gauthier, 3219 Phelps Road – Mr. Gauthier said he was glad to see that the board is considering a policy for waiving building fees and mentioned that the Conservation Commission already has a policy for waiving their fees. He shared what he had read in the document and provided his interpretations to the

board. He also pointed out the connection between the Blight Ordinance and the Conservation Commission and shared concerns he has with wording that he feels should be reconsidered.

Fred Sweitzer, 165 South Stone Street – Mr. Sweitzer noted that since he was publicly critical of the statement regarding potential anti-Semitism he also wanted to publicly appreciate **First Selectman Moll's** apology.

Tess McCool, 10 Sutula Road – Ms. McCool wanted to echo **Selectman Chafetz's** sentiments regarding commission appointments. She feels that if resumes and/or interviews are required for one commission, they should be required for all commissions, even if no one else other than the previous appointees are seeking reappointment. She thinks this process would be helpful in bringing transparency and consistency, as well as help the public understand and trust in the process.

Executive Session – Current Litigation

Selectman Harrington motioned to enter Executive Session to discuss current litigation and invited **Town Attorney Derek Donnelly** to join at 8:12 p.m. **Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.**

Executive session ended at 8:49 p.m.

Action on Executive Session

No action taken.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to adjourn at 8:50 p.m. **Motion passed unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,
Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary