

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
JANUARY 17, 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, Lisa Trase – Assessor and James Canon – Suffield Police Chief

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

Bob White, 995 Newgate Road – Mr. White, a former Kent Memorial Library Commission member, spoke on the recent search for a new Library Director. He pointed out that Library Director Julie Styles resigned as Suffield’s Library Director last September. He provided the following commentary: *“According to town rules, the Library Commission is in charge of hiring a new Library Director. Library policy and the method used to hire all ten Library Directors in the last fifty years is for the commission to form a search committee. Usually, an Interim Director is hired to run the library until the new permanent Library Director is hired. I would like to make three points to summarize this process so far. Point 1: The library commission found four people qualified to act as Interim Director; three of them were not interested. When the only person willing to take the job was recommended to Colin Moll, he refused to hire that person. No other First Selectman has ever done this before. Point 2: The search committee found one outstanding candidate, which all five members, including two town employees, agreed, was the best person for the job. They presented to the Library Commission at large, who voted to hire this candidate as the permanent Library Director. Colin Moll refused to hire this person also. No other First Selectman has ever done this before. Point 3: Colin Moll removed every member of the search committee by not reappointing them. Colin is the only First Selectman in Suffield history to ever remove Library Commission members and he has now done it six times. Does this matter? It certainly matters to the KML staff. They are struggling to run the library with no Interim Director and no permanent Library Director. This has been the longest gap without a director in the 52 years since the library building was built. Does this matter to Colin Moll? That can be determined by the lack of any item on tonight’s agenda about hiring a Library Director.”*

Neil Hornish, 864 Thrall Avenue – Mr. Hornish commented on the Town Green Policy being discussed this evening and expressed his thoughts and concerns as follows: *“Reading through there are a couple of things. First, it doesn’t appear that it describes the size of the event, so my interpretation is if a family wanted to go have a picnic on the town green with this wording they would have to go through the approval process. Second, I don’t understand why the approval has to go through the First Selectman. I would think that the Parks and Recreation Department or the Planning and zoning Department would be a more appropriate avenue. If I am not mistaken, the farmers market went through the Planning and zoning committee. Third, I think just in general, I think this is probably not a good policy to have. Especially when it says think like, one of the aspects I the conduct of such activity is not reasonably likes to cause, among other things, disorderly conduct. The town green was established, I believe in 1671, over 350 years ago. What has happened over the last 350 years? Had the Declaration of Independence. I would assume there were some loyalists in Suffield at the time. Had the Civil War, the Emancipation*

Proclamation, Women's Suffrage, Civil Rights Movement, Vietnam. I would think those things at some point probably caused an event to occur on the town green, and yet, the town green and the Town of Suffield are still intact. Without a policy. It is one thing is someone wants to have an event and is asking specifically for help from the DPW or the Police, Ambulance or Fire Department. I think to create a blanket policy that could inhibit citizen's ability to peacefully assemble on the town commons would be a very dangerous milestone. I think some people would consider that against the First Amendment."

Dave Gauthier, 3219 Phelps Road – Mr. Gauthier also expressed his interest in speaking on the Town Green Policy. He made the following statement: *"I actually agree with the previous individuals comments about their freedom to assemble on the Town Green in general. There were a couple of very specific things I noticed that we are changing on the town green, specifically, when it comes to signage. It appears, when I read this, the only signs now to be allowed on the town green are for those describing upcoming events. That is what this policy says. I am not sure that is what the intention was. The other thing that this policy does is it opens up the north side of Mountain Road for signs. We previously had a gentleman's agreement with the town. Signs always used to be on the north side of Mountain Road and a number of people, including myself, complained about it because it interfered with Soldiers Monument, a memorial, a very specific memorial. It was a gentleman's agreement that would not allow signs on that side of the road anymore and it would be moved over to the south side. That is what happened. So now, the new policy opens up the other side of Mountain Road again. The third item that just kind of boggles my mind is that it say the Kent Memorial Library cannot have signs out front unless they have been approved by the permit for someone on the green. I don't know what the library has anything to do with signs on library property when we're talking about the green. You should maybe have a policy on government buildings, town buildings, this building here, the fire department buildings, the police station buildings; they all have signs of some sort. All of a sudden, the library can't have a sign out front unless it is tied to an event happening on the green. It didn't make any sense to me. The last point is Soldiers Monument. I am glad this has come up because I was specifically going to ask, at some point, that we do something about Soldiers Monument. It is from 1886 with 31 townspeople on there who died. That is the true memorial here in town. The other memorial has everyone who ever served during war. I would like to see a buffer zone around Soldier's Monument. We have the town green....I see both political parties very close to it within the shadow of the monument. I see things being sold there and I just don't think it's appropriate. I think we ought to do the right thing and honor that monument and the people on there appropriately."*

Discussion and Approval of the minutes from the January 3, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen

Selectman Harrington motioned to approve the minutes from the January 3, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen with the following changes:

- 1) Page 2 – On line 7 of the First Selectman's comments on waiving the fees for the Suffield Community Aid, it reads "health" and it should be changed to "healthy."**
- 2) Page 4 – Item 6 of the Blight Ordinance the word "leans" is misspelled. The correct spelling is "liens."**
- 3) Page 4 – Item 6 of the Blight Ordinance reads "in advance" and should read "in abends."**
- 4) Page 4 – In the Selectman Updates section under Policies the word "work" is noted twice; one should be deleted.**
- 5) Page 5 – In the Selectman Updates section under LOTCIP Requests the word "guage" is misspelled on line 2. The correct spelling is "gauge."**

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

Updates from the Assessor

Assessor Lisa Trase provided an overview of the recent Revaluation and provided highlights for the selectmen. She referred to a document provided to the selectmen for review and walked through the highlights for those in attendance. **Ms. Trase** offered a number of examples that illustrated the dramatic changes some residents have experienced this year. She explained, in detail, the differences between the old revaluation system used by the town versus the new revaluation system now in place. **Ms. Trase** reported on the overall increases seen by residential and commercial properties and explained the rationale behind the results. Discussion ensued between the selectmen and **Ms. Trase** who addressed their concerns and answered their questions accordingly.

Discussion and approval of tax abatement in the amount of \$4,668.30 to Joseph Michael and Lucy Rochette due to overpayment

Selectman Mahoney motioned to approve tax abatement in the amount of \$4,668.30 to Joseph Michael and Lucy Rochette due to overpayment. **Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.**

Discussion and approval to transfer funds from Capital line items “Wood Chipper” in the amount of \$40,000 and “Mower” in the amount of \$6,228 to new Capital line item “Construction Equipment” and refer to Board of Finance

First Selectman Moll invited **DPW Director Lee Corbert** to present on his request. **Mr. Corbert** provided details of the request to the selectmen, discussed each piece of equipment being requested and explained how the Public Works Department will be able to utilize it. He also provided the group with a plan to change how the town currently handles mowing and roadwork. He was able to provide them with a cost analysis, a plan for training staff, contracting out certain tasks and reported the potential savings to the town. The selectmen reviewed the list, expressed concerns and asked questions, which **Mr. Corbert** addressed accordingly.

Selectman Mahoney motioned to approve the transfer of funds from Capital line items “Wood Chipper” in the amount of \$40,000 and “Mower” in the amount of \$6,228 to new Capital line item “Construction Equipment” and refer to Board of Finance. **Vote: 4 in favor (Moll, Mahoney, Harrington and Chafetz) and 1 against (Hill.) Motion passed.**

Attorney Donnelly congratulated **Mr. Corbert** on the great work the DPW/Highway Department has done with the roads during the recent snowstorms.

Discussion of Police Department Radio Project

First Selectman Moll invited **Police Chief Canon** to present to the board on the Police Department Radio Project. **Chief Canon** provided a detailed historical overview of the radio tower system currently in place, which currently handles all town-wide communications for Police, Fire, Ambulance, Suffield Public School System, WPCA and Public Works/Highway Department. The bottom line is that we are currently looking at a 34-year old system; which is operating with parts that are no longer available for replacement or repair with cell towers that were considered structurally unsound over ten years ago. He provided examples of issues the department experiences with communications. **Captain Canon** explained that ACCE provided funding to the department during FY 2023-24 to be used for the hiring of a consultant to conduct a study on

the current system. Communications Design Consulting Group, LLC (CDCG) was hired to complete the work and provided the town with a completed study, which was shared with the Board of Selectmen. **Chief Canon** referred to the study during his thorough presentation, discussed the options to either move forward with building our own system or join the statewide communications system and shared the pros and cons of both. A five point system has been recommended by CDCG that would cover 95% of the area 95% of the time. The group discussed the recommendations in depth, asking questions and offering suggestions. **Chief Canon** and the answered questions and offered further insight accordingly. The board thanked **Chief Canon** for his presentation.

Discussion of Farm Building Exemption

First Selectman Moll invited **Assessor Lisa Trase** to address the group and noted that during the last Board of Selectmen meeting the board reviewed the initial draft of the Farm Building exemptions. During the presentation, questions and concerns arose and the board requested additional data. Concerns included current property values, loopholes within the exemption, marijuana usage/potential for 50% exemption and details regarding what amount tobacco insurance actually covers for losses. Extensive discussion ensued among the selectmen with **Ms. Trase** and **Attorney Donnelly** answering their questions, providing numerous examples and addressing their concerns accordingly. **First Selectman Moll** invited a resident farmer from the audience to speak on behalf of the insurance coverage when crops are lost or damaged. The selectmen asked a few questions of the farmer with regard to the cost per acre, what is included in the coverage and the levels of coverage available. After thorough discussion, the board agreed to put the subject on a future agenda for consideration as there are still some components that need to be revisited prior to making a final decision.

Discussion of Town Green Policy

First Selectman Moll noted that while creating the DPW Usage Policy recently, he realized that there was no policy in place to coordinate events held on the town green that were not town-sponsored. He feels it is important to have guidelines in place to set expectations on how the town green is to be used and to outline how the town will enforce any improper use which could result in damages in which the town could be held liable. He asked the selectmen if they had any suggestions, additions, removals or general thoughts after having a chance to review the document. **Selectman Chafetz** expressed concerns with the language pertaining to signage. **Attorney Donnelly** explained the rationale behind the language. **First Selectman Moll** questioned whether a definition of “event” should be included. **Attorney Donnelly** explained that there are certain things under this policy that can be regulated and others that cannot. He provided examples of both and went on to say that this policy is intended to target larger events that people have hosted or have been trying to host on the town green, such as Suffield on the Green and larger events that encompass town resources as opposed to smaller, more impromptu events. In his opinion, it is a very difficult area to tackle, especially from a legal perspective. He provided examples of events in which town resources were involved and the different concerns that come into play. The idea behind the policy is to provide a consistent process for all groups to follow. **Selectman Harrington** expressed concern about the vagueness and potential for subjectivity in Section B of the Criteria for Approval. She also identified additional areas within the document where she felt the wording was questionable. **Attorney Donnelly** provided his interpretation and noted that the document is currently in draft format and it is certainly possible to make changes or add definitions to provide more clarity. **Selectman Mahoney** also provided his thoughts on the legal interpretation. **Selectman Hill** expressed his concerns with the policy, feeling that it is just shy of micromanaging. He offered numerous examples of possible events that would be very difficult to monitor. He is very uncomfortable with limiting the right to assemble, although he did agree that there will be instances when a policy would be

helpful. After extensive discussion among the board members and Attorney Donnelly it was determined that additional consideration should be given prior to moving forward.

Discussion of Agenda and Minutes Policy

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

Updates from the Veterans Memorial Expansion Committee

First Selectman Moll invited the Chair of the Veterans Memorial Expansion Committee, **Dave Gauthier**, to provide updates to the board. He also thanked Mr. Gauthier and the entire committee for all of their hard work. Mr. Gauthier walked the board through Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the committee's charge. The first phase included the addition of four (4) names to the existing memorial which has been completed. The second phase involved the creating of a second memorial for regional wars and conflicts, determine the criteria for inclusion and come up with a design. Mr. Gauthier and the committee contracted with Rogers Memorial for consulting and design work. Mr. Gauthier provided details of the memorial, noting that it will be made from the same granite as the original memorial and will reflect the same lettering to create unity between the two memorials. The selectmen asked questions which Mr. Gauthier answered accordingly.

Selectman Updates

Building Official

Town Building Official Kimberly Rogers will be leaving the town at the end of this month to become the Deputy Building Official for the State of Connecticut. We wish her all the best in her new role. This leaves an additional opening in the Building department, as there is already an open position for the Assistant Building Official due to the upcoming retirement of Lionel Mailloux.

First Selectman Coffee Hour

First Selectman Moll will be hosting his next Coffee Hour at Café Barista on Friday, January 19th from 8:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. with special guests: **Police Chief James Canon, Fire Chief Scott Cunningham and Suffield Volunteer Ambulance Chief John Spencer**. He thanked those residents who came to the last coffee hour for their engaging conversation and encouraged all residents to stop by to share thoughts, present ideas or ask questions.

Open Positions

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

Thank You to Department of Public Works

First Selectman Moll expressed his thanks to the DPW employees for the nice job they have done on the roads during the last two storms. We appreciate the long hours and dedication they put in to ensure safe travels for our residents.

Department Head Budget Meetings

First Selectman Moll noted that Budget meetings have been scheduled with all department heads for the next few weeks. He encouraged the board members to reach out to **Kris Lambert** if they have interest in participating in any of the scheduled discussions.

Rejection of Applications for Library Director Position

First Selectman Moll addressed one resident's comments earlier about rejecting any applications for the Library Director Position. He firmly stated that this comment was "not true." He clarified that he had made a request for the candidate to meet in person and that was as far as the discussions went. He assured all that the Kent Memorial Library Commission is hard at work trying to find a Library Director. He reiterated that he found the earlier statements to be false.

Selectman Harrington clarified that **First Selectman Moll** did not personally take anybody off a commission; it was a vote made by the majority of the Board of Selectmen to change commission members.

Public Comment

Annie Hornish, 864 Thrall Avenue – Ms. Hornish commented on the policy for the Town Green. She stated that this policy seems designed to limit freedom of speech and freedom to assemble, which she finds to be "hugely problematic." She went on to make the following statement: *"This policy also seems very directed. I think voters watching this know, and there's quite a few people watching today, know why you're doing this. It's directed at a certain group. Please do the right thing with this. I won't say the name of the group here, nevermind, but people know why you are doing this. What I find unsettling tonight is the issue of why this is going through the Office of the First Selectman and not through Parks and Recreation or Planning and Zoning; why this was not even discussed by the board. You talked about everything but that. This is the fundamental problem, because there's been a documented history of anti-LGBTQ actions by the Office of the First Selectman. The examples being the book censorship and the hanging of the Pride banner. So that was the big elephant in the room, not even addressed this evening in the discussion, and please give that some thought. Finally, again, we're seeing the word unreasonable resurfacing in these policies. The word unreasonable is subjective and vague and it invites the problem of abuse of power. Someone could just say I find that unreasonable, and they could bar someone from doing something. This is fundamentally about our democracy and I'm shocked that Republicans are leading this charge because typically our town... there's a lot of libertarian tendencies in this town, and that is all about these fundamental freedoms of government non-interference. And we are seeing policy after policy, punitive policies, being proposed by this board and I'm not sure if you guys are just, you know, drunk with power. I don't know what is going on, but you have to stop and give it some thought because your actions are really impacting people's lives. Please consider this with seriousness."*

Kerry White, 995 Newgate Road – Ms. White commented on the statement that Attorney Donnelly made earlier that one of the goals is no signs on the library property. She is in agreement that this area should not be open to signs for other organizations or events, however, she feels it is appropriate for the library to advertise its own programs on its own property.

Attorney Donnelly clarified for Ms. White that the town is exempt from that policy and the library is included as part of the town. The library would be allowed to have signs.

Shannon Watson, 333 Griffin Road – Ms. Watson stated she was confused on the new policy for the town green, asking if it was something that the town would need to vote on or if it was just something that the board would put in place. She also wanted clarification on whether the Blight Ordinance would require town approval. **Attorney Donnelly** explained that ordinances are voted on at Town Meetings, while a policy is merely the Board of Selectmen’s regulation for the term of the board or until replaced. Ms. Watson thanked **Attorney Donnelly** for the clarification and continued her comments as follows: *“I’m not surprised you’re having a hard time finding someone for the Library. I am surprised to see a Republican majority Board of Selectmen becoming a Nanny State Board of Selectmen who wants to control people’s yards, their homes, their property, where they gather, how they gather, when they gather, what they say and what they read at the library. The overreach is an hypocrisy coming from the Republican Party, which claims to be for small government and personal freedoms. It is mind numbing to me and I don’t know if you’re really thinking about the effects of the policies and ordinances you’re putting in place on the entire town and how these things are going to affect people long term. I just find it very ignorant in general; the direction this town has taken in the last five years. I guess that is really all I wanted to say. I don’t even know why you’re doing this. I don’t understand why we need this. What has been the big issue on the town green that has led up to needing all of the time and effort that’s gone into creating this? It seems like such a waste of energy. Like...I can’t imagine there’s nothing better to do with anyone’s time than this. Other than you got some phone calls about something, which to be honest, I am sorry, but that’s your job; fielding phone calls of people that are annoyed. Someone’s always going to be annoyed with something, that’s part of living in a country that’s supposed to be free. You don’t like everything, you get over it, move on and deal with your own crap. I just can’t believe this is being discussed and that’s all. I just wanted to get that on there.”*

Selectman Mahoney motioned to adjourn at 9:24 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary