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REC'D BY: *Amu*

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
NOVEMBER 20, 2024
7:00 P.M.
83 Mountain Road, Suffield CT
Hybrid Meeting**

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

Also Present: Bill Hawkins – Director of Planning & Developing and Engineering Liaison, Michele Urch – Assistant Town Clerk and Kathy Dunai – Town Clerk

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

None

Approval of the minutes from the November 6, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen

Selectman Harrington MOTIONED to approve the minutes from the November 6, 2024 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen with the following changes:

- 1) Page Two – Under the Economic Development Alternate appointment, on the second line the word “the” should be deleted before Roger Murray’s name and on the third line “selectman” should be changed to “selectmen”
- 2) Page Three – In the sixth sentence of the second paragraph “selectman” should be changed to “selectmen”

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

Discussion and approval to appoint a full member to the Economic Development Commission to fill the remainder of Jack Henrie’s term through March 31, 2025 and appoint Jack Henrie as an alternate member of the Economic Development Commission through June 30, 2028

Selectman Mahoney MOTIONED to appoint Maria Silvestri as a full member to the Economic Development Commission to fill the remainder of Jack Henrie’s term through March 31, 2025 and appoint Jack Henrie as an alternate member of the Economic Development Commission through June 30, 2028. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion and approval to appoint Michele Urch as the new Town Clerk to fill the remainder of Kathy Dunai’s term effective December 8, 2024 through January 3, 2028

First Selectman Moll thanked Ms. Dunai for her years of service and wished her the best in retirement and congratulated Ms. Urch on her appointment as the new Town Clerk.

Selectman Harrington MOTIONED to appoint Michele Urch as the new Town Clerk to fill the remainder of Kathy Dunai’s term effective December 8, 2024 through January 3, 2028. Vote: 5-0 in favor. Motion passed unanimously.

Discussion on affordable housing required by the State of CT

First Selectman Moll noted that at the last Board of Selectmen meeting the board determined that they would like to see Bill Hawkins, Director of Planning & Development take the lead on this endeavor. He reported that Mr. Hawkins had agreed to take this on and if he needs assistance at any point, a consultant will be hired to assist. First Selectman Moll and

Mr. Hawkins met recently and after discussion they determined that some areas for review include financial options, viability of using Bridge Street property, possible expansion of the housing authority and the creation of affordable housing zones. He opened up the floor for discussion among the selectmen who shared their thoughts and opinions on the subject and offered suggestions. Mr. Hawkins also addressed the board and shared his understanding of what the board was asking him to do. He stated that he was confident in handling the research piece and reporting back to the Board of Selectmen, however, he feels that he may need assistance with some of the recommendations from the Affordable Housing Committee that have to do with planning and zoning. He described his prioritization plan and noted the areas in which he would be looking for assistance. All board members agreed that his approach made sense and that they plan to continue discussing the progress with him at future meetings.

Update on Delinquent Taxes and Tax Sale Liens and foreclosures

First Selectman Moll provided an update on delinquent taxes, tax liens and foreclosures. He described a project, which began last year, which entailed looking at the 1.5% of taxes that are uncollected. A list was compiled of all outstanding property taxes, which equated to over a million dollars, and 140 letters were mailed by the town attorney this past summer. As of the end of October, approximately \$300,000 has been collected, which appears to be a direct result of the letters being sent. He noted that some of these funds have been outstanding from as far back as 2009. He explained that the town plans to send a final demand notice to provide property owners one last opportunity to set up a payment plan or pay the entire amount they owe before the town moves forward with tax lien sales. The tax lien sales will allow the town to recoup the money they are owed, leaving a third party to deal with the foreclosure process. In-depth conversation ensued among the selectmen with each sharing their concerns and asking numerous questions about how this happened and why the town attorney was involved as opposed to the Tax Collector. First Selectman Moll answered their questions in detail and agreed that it was not the job of the Town Attorney to be handling this. He explained that the goal moving forward is to put a policy into place so that each year this number will become lower. First Selectman Moll plans to draft a policy, bring it to the board and discuss it further at a future date. He also thanked the Town Attorney for taking this project on as it was extremely time consuming and required quite a bit of work. The board decided to invite the Tax Collector to a future meeting for further discussion on the subject and to get their input on possible policy creation.

Discussion of Charter Revision Recommendations

First Selectman Moll reiterated that the final Charter Revision Recommendation was to make the Treasurer position an appointed position rather than an elected position, but keep the Town Clerk and the Tax Collector as elected. He referenced steps provided by the Town Attorney for proceeding forward, and reminded the board that they must determine what they would like to do with this recommendation. He stated that, while he appreciated the work that the Charter Revision Commission had done, he felt the points they made did not necessarily make sense with their recommendation or that those points actually strengthen the argument for all positions being appointed rather than elected. He provided the group with his perspective on the arguments to keep the Tax Collector and Town Clerk elected which included 1) elected officials are more accountable to the voters, 2) an elected position provides a level of independence from other elected officials which they would not have if those roles were appointed, 3) by electing town residents for these positions the voters will receive a higher level of service than a regular employee because they are accountable to the voters, 4) if it is not broken then don't fix it, 5) a lack of support for change and 6) the idea that the Treasurer deals with all the money. He struggles to understand how only one position was chosen to be appointed as opposed to making all three positions appointed based on these arguments. He expressed his desire to look into this further before making any decisions and encouraged the selectmen to share their thoughts and opinions. Each selectman addressed the arguments provided and explained why they did or did not agree with them. It was suggested that all three positions be posed as one question to the voters versus the Treasurer position only. First Selectman Moll invited Assistant Town Clerk Michele Urch to provide her thoughts on how she would feel had she not been selected as the next Town Clerk and a newly elected individual came into the office to assume the role. Ms. Urch shared her thoughts and opinions with the group and provided examples of the benefits of making the Town Clerk an appointed position. Additional discussion ensued involving the possibility of including certification requirements to the jobs. First Selectman Moll said he would invite the Town Attorney to the next Board of Selectmen meeting in order to answer any outstanding questions and a decision by the board will be made at that meeting.

Public Comment

Victoria Copes, 223 Hickory Street – Mrs. Copes asked questions regarding affordable housing state requirements and Suffield’s specific requirements and asked about a property located at 301 Hickory Street.

The selectmen informed Mrs. Copes that Public Comment was not a back and forth communication, and encouraged her to reach out to the First Selectman’s office for a full response.

Kathy Dunai, Town Clerk - Ms. Dunai thanked the board for following the succession plan created in the Town Clerk’s office by appointing Michele Urch as the next Town Clerk. She feels confident that she will be leaving the office in very capable hands. She described Ms. Urch as a person who has her finger on the pulse of this community, knows the town and the layout and is incredibly competent. She also praised the talents of Assistant Town Clerk Erica Boucher. Ms. Dunai thanked the Board of Selectmen for the support they have given her over the years and expressed her appreciation for the level of communication that has been available. Each selectman thanked Ms. Dunai and offered their best wishes for her retirement.

Selectman Updates

Joint Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance Meeting

A Joint Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance Meeting will be held on Monday, November 25, 2024 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Hall Lower Level Meeting Room.

Veterans Day/Global War on Terror Monument Unveiling

First Selectman Moll thanked all those who came out on Veterans Day to attend the various events in town. Veterans Day Programs were held at all four of the Suffield Public Schools on Monday, November 11th. In addition, there was a Veterans Day Ceremony at the Veterans Memorial Monument at 11 a.m. which included the unveiling of the new Global War on Terror Monuments. First Selectman Moll thanked the Veterans Memorial Expansion Committee for all their hard work and dedication in handling the monument project. He also thanked Assistant School Superintendent Michelle Zawawi for her efforts in coordinating the Veterans Day Programs held at the local schools.

Budget Season

Budget season is fast approaching. All town department heads will be receiving their budget packets within the next two weeks. Meetings with department heads will begin at the end of January.

Collective Bargaining Agreements

There are currently five expiring collective bargaining agreements that will be negotiated over the next six months.

Suffield Alight

Our annual Suffield Alight celebration on the town green will be held on Friday, December 6th from 5:30 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. with a rain date of Saturday, December 7th. All are invited to join the fun and kick off the holiday season with friends and family!

First Selectman Moll wished the selectmen and all those in attendance a Happy Thanksgiving.

Selectman Mahoney MOTIONED to adjourn at 7:59 p.m. Motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Kristen O. Lambert
Recording Secretary