

# TOWN OF WILLINGTON

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Board of Selectmen  
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## BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Meeting Minutes  
Lower Level Conference Room

March 4, 2019  
6:30 PM

*\*Minutes are not official until approved at the next regular meeting*

First Selectwoman Wiecenski called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM with the following in attendance: Selectmen Makuch & Blessington, and residents. First Selectwoman Wiecenski then led the Pledge of Allegiance.

### Approval of Minutes:

Selectwoman Makuch moved to approve the minutes of February 19, 2019 as written.

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.

Selectwoman Makuch moved to approve the minutes of the special meeting, held on February 26, 2019 as written.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.

### Present to Speak

No one was present to speak.

### Correspondence

A list of Correspondence was available for the Selectmen.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that she will be meeting with Lieutenant Corey and our new liaison, Sergeant King of the Connecticut State Police tomorrow morning. They will discuss the monthly reports and talk about how they can break down the incidents into sections around town as Selectwoman Makuch had suggested.

### First Selectman's Status Report

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that we have extended a verbal offer to a new Assistant Transfer Station Operator. Once we receive the signed paperwork, we are hoping he will be able to start work at the Transfer Station next weekend.

Our Revenue Collector, Lisa Madden will be holding interviews for the Assistant Revenue Collector this week.

Last week, we received a resignation from Ms. Madden, who will be leaving us for the Town of Somers for a significant pay increase. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that this brings up the conversations we have had in the past; regarding our limited resources as the town of Somers is not much larger than we are. We know all of our salaries are incredibly low – do we look at someone coming here to get their certifications then leaving

shortly afterwards? A competitive salary shows that we value our employees – which we do but cannot compete financially. This is definitely something for us to think about when discussing budgets and figure out who we want to be.

In the meantime, Ms. Madden's last day with the town will be Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup>. Lisa has offered to come in on Fridays to keep the office going until it is fully staffed. Selectman Blessington said it sounds like we have no other choice and should probably make a formal motion about it.

**First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to add item F to New Business; "Tax Collector Resignation"**

**Selectwoman Makuch seconded the motion**

**Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.**

#### Public Works

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the crew worked all night cleaning up snow from last night's storm. The roads are in great shape.

Our new Director, Troy Sposato will begin working with us two weeks from today. We are looking forward to having him join the Town.

#### New Business

##### **A. Discussion – Solar rendering at Button Hill**

Don Berg, member of the Willington Housing Authority was present. Mr. Berg is seeking permission to install solar panels at the new housing complex within and outside of the lease line; which includes town property as the areas along the housing complex are limited.

Mr. Berg presented plans of potential areas around the complex that would work best for the proposed solar panels. In addition, he showed the Selectmen different design options and what they would look like. As noted, the leased area is limited and the Town owns the land (and leases it to Button Hill), therefore, he is asking for permission to move forward. Mr. Berg said that he would like as much land as possible which will allow for the panels to tilt and swivel (for snow removal) and spread them out so there is less shading.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that Mr. Berg will also need to get permission from Planning and Zoning for this project as well. She then asked if the panels will be put in by the Housing Authority. Mr. Berg said yes, although his plan is that he would be the installer along with an electrician to help save on cost.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked Mr. Berg if the Housing Authority has approved funding for the project yet? Mr. Berg said no, not yet, so far they have only approved the plans. Mr. Berg stated that he wants to move quickly, because Eversource is offering incentives and this could be the last year they offer this, so he wants to have everything in place. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that she will have to look at the wording of the lease to see if they need anything additional from us. Mr. Berg then stated that he still isn't quite sure how much land he will need as it is hard to tell by looking at plans. He then stated that he has an appointment to meet with the Zoning Agent to discuss the plans. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that she will speak with Mr. D'Amato after they have had their meeting to follow up and get further information.

Mr. Berg stated that he still needs the blessing of the boards as well as a sign off from Access once they review the numbers. First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that we have several questions that need to be answered, but will start looking at this tomorrow and should have further information for a future meeting.

## **B. Current vacancies for Town Boards and Commissions**

First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked the Town Clerk to give her a listing of vacancies on Town Boards and Commissions –for informational purposes to get the word out and see if anyone is interested in serving on these boards.

Elected positions: Planning & Zoning Commission currently has 1 regular vacancy and 2 alternates and we are currently looking for a Republican representative Justice of the Peace.

Appointed positions consist of: Conservation Commission has 2 alternate vacancies; EDC has 1 regular vacancy and 2 alternate positions available. Inland Wetlands has 1 regular and 1 alternate vacancy; Solid Waste Advisory Committee has 2 regular and 2 alternate vacancies lastly, the Zoning Board of Appeals has 1 regular and 1 alternate vacancy.

First Selectwoman Wicneski stated that she wanted to advertise these vacancies because you never know who will be interested and who we are reaching – by putting the word out she is hopeful someone will see this and show interest. The only requirement, with the exception of the Justice of the Peace position (which that person must be a Registered Republican); is that you have to reside in Willington and be registered to vote.

## **C. Appointments**

Rich Mindek, Chairman of the Willington EDC had sent a letter of nomination to the Selectmen asking them to appoint Noah Vertefeulle as a regular member on the board.

Mr. Vertefeulle was in attendance. He stated that he recently moved here a few weeks ago and is originally from Ashford/Eastford area. He recently served on the Planning & Zoning Commission in Ashford as well as the RTC. He is also involved with St. Phillips and Knights of Columbus to name a few. He is interested in growing the tax base instead of putting the burden on the residents. Mr. Vertefeulle said he is looking forward to serving the Town. First Selectwoman Wiecenski thanked him for his willingness to serve. The EDC has become very active over the past year and are moving in a nice direction.

Selectman Blessington asked Mr. Vertefeulle what types of business he likes and doesn't like. Mr. Vertefeulle stated that he is more in favor of the mom & pop shops and likes to see them flourish as they are what adds flavor to the town. Selectman Blessington said his favorite is local farming and asked Mr. Vertefeulle if he would be able to get involved with land use as they are trying to change regulations of farm stands/tourism/selling. Mr. Vertefeulle said he grew up on a small farm and that is close to his heart.

**Selectman Blessington moved to appoint Noah Vertefeulle as a regular member of the Willington Economic Development Commission; effective March 4, 2019; expiring March 3, 2024**

**First Selectwoman Wiecenski seconded the motion.**

**Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.**

**First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to re-appoint Rick Maloney as a regular member of the Willington Economic Development Commission; retroactive January 2, 2019; expiring January 1, 2024.**

**Selectwoman Makuch seconded the motion.**

**Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.**

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that almost all of our appointed salaried positions (Town Clerk, Tax Collector, Registrars, etc.) are 4 year appointments. When we appointed our Assessor, Walter Topliff back in November, his appointment was inadvertently made for 4 years; however the Assessor appointment is only a 2 year term. For clarification; First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to change his appointment to the correct term.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to amend the appointment for Walter Topliff; Assessor; effective November 26, 2018; expiring November 22, 2020.

Selectwoman Makuch seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.

#### **D. Public Act 490 Open Space update**

The Town Assessor sent a memo to First Selectwoman Wiecenski regarding open space. There seems to be confusion with the current policy. The memo was forwarded to the Board for review; noting that Mr. Topliff has been working and researching this issue with our Land Use Department for several weeks. First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that Mr. Topliff was not able to attend the meeting as he had a family emergency therefore was not here to hold discussion.

In the memorandum, there was a timeline regarding what he found during his research; noting a request for the Selectmen to address the issue by referring the matter to the Planning & Zoning Commission to clarify the ambiguity in the current policy.

The memo reads: With the current ambiguity in the adoption of the requirements for P.A. 490 open Space, I am requesting that the Board of Selectmen address this issue by referring this matter to the Planning Commission to clarify the ambiguity in current policy. Once they have made a recommendation to the Selectmen, to then hold a public meeting to inform the residents of the clarified policy, and then take the matter up for a vote at a future board of Selectmen's meeting. This needs to be addressed as there are property owners in town who are receiving benefits that are different from other property owners. The town needs specific criteria that the property needs to meet before the designation can be approved. Once the new criteria are adopted, this office will research those properties that are out of compliance with the adopted criteria and make adjustments accordingly. I will be happy to assist in any way I can to develop a defined set of criteria.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that Mr. Topliff was expecting to be here to hold the discussion and answer questions; but was not able to attend. He said he will plan to attend a future meeting where he can answer any questions.

Robert Shabot, who was in attendance, noted that the Historical Society had gone before the Board of Assessment appeals a while ago, asking for an open space designation on 4.56 acres that they own, so they would not have to pay such high taxes on the property. The Society is a non-profit organization and solely runs on donations. They have paid over \$15,000 on the property, since it was donated to them several years ago. When they met with the BAA; the Society was told it was not possible to get the Open Space provision because there was not enough land (needs to be 5 acres). Mr. Shabot then stated that he was doing some research shortly after that, and found two nearby lots along Ruby Road that do have the Open Space designation – but one lot is less than an acre and the other is a 2 acre building lot – those owners pay a fraction of what the Society has been paying in taxes for years – which seems very unfair.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski noted that the bottom line is that we need to set the criteria so it is the same across the board for everyone.

Selectman Blessington asked Mr. Shabot if he tracked down these other parcels and found out how they might have been granted the open space? Perhaps they were grandfathered? Mr. Shabot stated that is not his place; but he was researching the Society's land and came across the other two parcels that had been listed as open space.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated it seems as if the designations were made at the discretion of the Board of Assessment Appeals at the time and there is no continuity. Nothing is documented. Everything defers to the Plan of Conservation and Development; which in turn should refer back to zoning regulations. In 2002, a memo

was sent from the Assessor to the PZC & Land Use Agent suggesting to make a set minimum parcel size requirement of 5 acres; but there is no further documentation after that. No regulations on this exist. The first step would be for us to agree to refer the matter to the PZC to clarify. The PZC would then develop a plan and bring back to the Selectmen to start the process over again from 2002.

Selectman Blessington stated if we do this, he wants to know if it were the Board of Assessment Appeals, or was it some other process that allowed these other parcels to be put in open space and the reasoning behind it.

Bob Wiczenski who was in attendance noted that back in the 1990s 1 acre could have qualified for all we know. First Selectwoman Wiczenski clarified that Walter is not looking to change what has been done, but would rather like to move forward with a set of standards. She then added that we can table this until the next meeting, where Walter can be here to answer questions.

Selectwoman Makuch stated that we should ask the PZC to go back and make some recommendations - and that is something she would be in favor of moving on sooner than later. We should establish some sort of policy. First Selectwoman Wiczenski was in agreement; noting that those recommendations will have to come back to us to bring to a town meeting and there will be several discussions before anything is put forward anyway. That will also give us time to get the answers to the questions while we are moving along. Selectman Blessington disagreed and said he would rather have the answers to the questions before we start moving out then getting half way through the process to find that there was a good answer to that question in the first place.

Selectwoman Makuch said we should have an established policy in place. The next question is what we will do with those who are not in compliance. Selectman Blessington said that is what he is afraid of. First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that it would have to be done either way - it is a chicken and egg sort of question. No matter what happens, will have to come before this board to decide. Selectman Blessington warned that he would hate to see someone who has been under the provision for over 40 years find that they are no longer in compliance to find that they owe \$100,000 in back taxes. First Selectwoman Wiczenski clarified and reiterated that is not what we are looking at here. We are saying that decisions are being made without a policy in place. It is currently on a discretionary base, and that is not the way to move forward. Selectwoman Makuch then asked why should the decision be left up to the person who is looking at it? Selectman Blessington cautioned that we should find out why these things were done before we start trying to change things.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski stated that research has shown that we have absolutely nothing in place and there are no records.

**First Selectwoman Wiczenski moved to authorize the Zoning Agent and the Planning Commission to help clarify the ambiguity in the current policy of the PA490 Open Space.**

**Selectwoman Makuch seconded the motion.**

Selectman Blessington said this leaves things way wide open. He is not going to be accepting of it if it does not give some point of which these other parcels gain their status. We can either assume the status is legal or it is illegal. First Selectwoman Wiczenski clarified that we are looking to move forward, not go backwards.

Selectman Blessington said he is always looking to go forward. He gets nervous that others are not.

**Vote: 2 Yes (Wiczenski, Makuch) 1 No. (Blessington) motion passes.**

#### **E. Approve CIP Plan (out years)**

First Selectwoman Wiczenski recapped that the Selectmen approved year one of the CIP Plan at the last meeting. The CIP Committee met last week and finished years 2 through 5, at which was going to be approved at this meeting, however Donna was not in today, and did not submit the final plan to CIP Chairman Cobb or the Selectmen. First Selectwoman Wiczenski then suggested holding off on approving the plan until the Selectmen (and Chairman Cobb) have had a chance to look at it. It will be voted on at the next regular meeting.

Chairman Cobb recapped the plan. He said that there are several broad issues that he wanted to bring to everyone's attention - the first is that the Board of Education is considering what their future plans are in terms of renovating both schools; only renovating one or building a new school. A decision should be made by the Board of Education by November - either way that is a big ticket item and certainly above the scope of the CIP plan. He warned, even with the state reimbursements, it is a large ticket. He referenced Birch Grove School in Tolland that has been on the news - it has to be replaced and the estimate is at \$46 million. This is something that residents will need to prepare for in the near future.

Another issue is the general amount of CIP funding - generally speaking it has remained flat for many years; - occasionally it goes up a little here and there. The pattern has always been to follow the Grand List. This year the Grand List is up 0.61% but the problem is that the expenses go up even more than that - the expenses for new trucks far exceed that and over time, more and more of our CIP funds are going to be allocated towards leases of Public Works trucks than anything else. This will hinder several upcoming projects that we have planned.

Mr. Cobb then warned that the towns budget as a whole never follows the Grand List - the cost of doing business goes up much more than that 0.61% and that has not been reflected in the CIP budget; which in turn limits our spending. For example, the list of equipment replacements that Public Works has requested alone far exceeds the entire CIP budget and there is no money left to fix a roof or purchase a phone system. At this point, Public Works is looking to keep what they have and just maintain it; but we all need to remember that the costs (maintenance, etc.) keep going up but the CIP does not.

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted the plan that we voted on at CIP left 3 of the 4 remaining years roughly in the \$550,000 - \$560,000 range. It was year 5 that got out of sorts; but that is not unusual every year.

Chairman Cobb added that the other large ticket projects that are coming down the pike (have been on the plan for several years) is Village Hill and Schofield Road drainage. New on the list is Liska Road culvert. The Town Engineer is estimating the project to cost \$750,000. When something like that exceeds the entire CIP Plan (which is \$550,000) and you have vehicle / equipment leases tied up in some of that funding, how do you even look at moving that forward?

First Selectwoman Wiczenski noted the portion of the CIP Plan that affects the Selectmen's budget that is being submitted to Board of Finance this week was year 1 and that was approved at the last meeting. The remaining years will be incorporated at Town Meeting later this month so we have some time to approve it. We will add it to the next Agenda to approve and will make sure Donna submits to the Selectmen prior to March 18<sup>th</sup>.

The Selectmen thanked Chairman Cobb for presenting the plan.

#### **F. Tax Collector Resignation**

First Selectwoman Wiczenski reiterated that Ms. Madden has resigned and Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup> is her last day. Ms. Madden has offered to come in on Fridays at a per-diem rate to train the new people and keep the office running in the interim. The per-diem rate she is asking for is equivalent to the salary she will be making at her new job in Somers.

**First Selectwoman Wiczenski moved to employ our current tax collector on a per diem basis until such time as we have hired and trained a replacement at her requested rate of \$35.00 per hour.**

**Selectwoman Makuch seconded the motion.**

First Selectwoman Wiczenski thanked Ms. Madden for offering to help us get through this time. Ms. Madden has done very well here in the role she has been in making sure the town is running smoothly. First

Selectwoman Wiecenski added she cannot thank her enough for helping out until we get the Department up and running again.

Selectwoman Makuch then asked for clarification of expected number of hours that Ms. Madden will work? First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that she most likely will not be here more than 6 hours per week; as we are open from 9-2; suspecting that she will not exceed 7 hours per week.

Selectwoman Makuch made a friendly amendment regarding the hours not to exceed 7 per week.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.

#### Old Business

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated that she has not had a chance to research the Performance reviews. This item was tabled.

#### Good & Welfare

First Selectwoman Wiecenski stated as of last Thursday, the Tax Collector had \$6,705 left to collect off of the 2017 Grand List. As of this morning, she has met budget and is now \$2,869 over, so she is leaving the Tax Office in good shape when she leaves. Kudos to Lisa – she may have given us her notice, but she has not stopped working in favor of the town. Christine Psathas said she is sorry to see Lisa leave – she has done so many good things for the town and has also cleaned up the delinquents in town as well. She will be missed.

We had a family in town who suffered a severe loss today as a fire broke out in their home. First Selectwoman Wiecenski gave kudos to both Fire Departments and surrounding towns who came to assist fighting the fire. Thankfully no one got hurt. First Selectwoman Wiecenski asked for thoughts and prayers to the family as they move forward in the process.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to go into Executive Session regarding a personnel matter; inviting the Town Clerk.

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to come out of Executive Session at 8:20 P.M.

Selectwoman Makuch seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.

First Selectwoman Wiecenski moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 PM

Selectman Blessington seconded the motion.

Vote: 3 Yes (Wiecenski, Makuch & Blessington) 0 No.

Respectfully submitted,

Robin Campbell

Administrative Assistant

TOWN OF WILLINGTON, CT

Received for record March 6, 2019

At 12:45pm Marianneagon