

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE
CORNWALL BOARD OF SELECTMEN**

Tuesday, October 6, 2020
7:30 p.m. – Remotely via Zoom

PRESENT: First Selectman Gordon Ridgway; Selectwoman Marina Kotchoubey; Selectman Priscilla Pavel; Two Members of the Press; 16 Members of the Public

First Selectman Gordon Ridgway called the meeting to order at 7:30 PM.

MINUTES: Selectwoman Marina Kotchoubey moved to approve the minutes from the September 15, 2020 Regular Meeting of the Board of Selectmen. Selectman Priscilla Pavel seconded, and the motion unanimously passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Joanne Wojtusiak of Cornwall commented on cost estimates for the West Cornwall Waste Management Program, and asked the Board of Selectmen to respond to a letter published in the Lakeville Journal written by Caroline Nastro of Cornwall. Steve Simonin of the Litchfield County Cable TV Advisory Committee made comments regarding the high expense of fiber optics infrastructure. Rocco Botto of Cornwall and Cornwallct.org spoke about current efforts to upgrade www.cornwallct.org. The new changes to the website should be rolled out by the end of 2020. Caroline Nastro commented on the Cornwall Internet Connectivity Committee's status as a private group.

COMMUNICATIONS: None

ADDITIONS TO THE AGENDA: First Selectman Ridgway moved to add West Cornwall Sewer Septic Schedule and the Allen Cemetery to the agenda. Selectwoman Marina Kotchoubey seconded, and the motion unanimously passed.

COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS UPDATE: First Selectmen Gordon Ridgway provided an update on Covid-19. Covid-19 positive rates are spiking in Connecticut and New York City. Health officials are advising people get their flu shots in mid-October. Voting for the November 3rd election will be held at Cornwall Consolidated School. First Selectman Gordon Ridgway moved to adopt a policy requiring people to wear a mask if there is more than one person in a room of a Town building. Selectman Priscilla Pavel seconded and the motion unanimously passed.

NOVEMBER TOWN MEETING: The Board of Selectmen discussed the date and location to hold a Town vote on the Annual Town Report and the five-year capital plan. A final decision was not made.

WEST CORNWALL SEWER SEPTIC SCHEDULE: The Board also discussed planning a 2nd Town meeting to vote on a funding referendum for the West Cornwall Sewer Project. The process to move forward on the West Cornwall Sewer Project would involve approvals from the Board of Finance, The Board of Selectmen, a Town Vote, and Planning and Zoning. The Board discussed a date of December 5, 2020 for a Town Vote, but ultimately - it was decided to further discuss the timing of the Town Meetings at the next Board of Selectmen meeting.

FIVE YEAR PLAN: The Board of Selectmen discussed the Five-Year Plan related to capital projects. First Selectman Gordon Ridgway moved to adopt the plan and send it to the Board of Finance and to a Town Meeting for a vote. Priscilla Pavel seconded and the motion unanimously passed.

CAPITAL PROJECTS REVIEW: First Selectman Gordon Ridgway discussed current capital projects such as building repairs and a new truck that will be delivered soon to the Town Highway Department.

HOUSING PLANNING GRANT UPDATE: The Board of Selectmen discussed an agreement to hire the NHCOC to assist with the affordable housing plan. The expense is the approximate amount of the affordable housing planning grant (\$10,100). Selectman Priscilla Pavel moved to authorize First Selectman Gordon Ridgway to sign the agreement. Selectwoman Marina Kotchoubey seconded and the motion unanimously passed.

CORNWALL WEBSITE UPGRADE: The Board of Selectman discussed work in progress to upgrade www.cornwallct.org. The Board collectively praised the new web design and thanked Cornwall resident, Rocco Botto, for his time and effort to bring a modern look and functionality to the site. The Board also discussed a letter from the Internet Website Committee requesting \$3,000 to compensate Mr. Botto for his work. First Selectman Ridgway noted that such an expense has not been budgeted at this time, but there is a possibility that the funds could come from the Cornwall Town Endowment. The Board of Selectmen decided it would be prudent to explore potential compliance requirements which could arise if the Town were to pay for the website upgrades prior to a decision regarding the \$3,000 request.

APPOINTMENT – PETER DEMY, INLAND WETLANDS: First Selectman Gordon Ridgway noted that it was recommended that the Board appoint Peter Demy to replace Andy MacDavid who resigned from the Inland Wetlands Agency after moving away from Cornwall recently. Mr. Demy has been an alternate on Inland Wetlands. First Selectman Ridgway moved to appoint Peter Demy to the Inland Wetlands Agency. Selectman Priscilla Pavel seconded, and the motion unanimously passed.

CONNECTIVITY & FIBER OPTICS: First Selectman Gordon Ridgway discussed connectivity efforts in Cornwall and in the region. First Selectman Ridgway spoke about the connectivity group in Cornwall that is working on a report for the town. He noted that the group is not an official Town committee. He also stated his appreciation to Steve Simonin of the Cable TV Advisory Council for his previous comments. The Board will continue to monitor regional efforts to increase internet connectivity. Next, First Selectman Ridgway reported that he has been in contact with the Connecticut Siting Council and with Verizon Wireless Legal Counsel. First Selectman Ridgway reported that Verizon's Counsel indicated that Verizon plans to install an antenna on the Popple Swamp Tower within a year's time of having received their extension from the Siting Council. First Selectman Ridgway noted that cellular service is important, especially from an emergency management perspective. Selectwoman Marina Kotchoubey advised the Board to take the time to make informed decisions and to hear all options; she noted that allowing strategies to compete could prove to be beneficial. Selectman Priscilla Pavel stated that Steve Simonin of the Cable TV Advisory Council made important points regarding internet connectivity and fiber costs, and she also stressed that cell phone service is key for metro newcomers to Cornwall. The Board agreed to ask the Internet Connectivity Committee when they expect to have a report.

UTILITY ACCOUNTABILITY: First Selectman Ridgway was pleased to report that the Connecticut State Legislature passed a Utility Accountability Bill with strong bi-partisan support. The "Take Back the Grid Bill" will implement: public utility performance standards; make safe program requirements; a municipal liaison program; and require Eversource to meet with each town within the next two weeks.

TAX REFUNDS: First Selectman Gordon Ridgway moved to grant two tax refund requests for overpayment of motor vehicle tax – one for \$5.28 and the second for \$236.91. Selectwoman Marina Kotchoubey seconded and the motion unanimously passed. The Board also discussed a request for abatement for real estate taxes. It was determined that this issue should be further considered during an Executive Session at a later date. First Selectman Ridgway noted that the Board of Selectmen are empowered by State statute to abate taxes.

ALLEN CEMETARY: First Selectman Gordon Ridgway discussed the plan to ‘resurrect’ the fence and remove some downed logs at the Allen Cemetery. First Selectmen Ridgway noted that there have been no complaints from the neighbors.

COGSWELL ROAD BRIDGE: First Selectman Ridgway reported that he has been in touch with Engineer Steve McDonnell regarding the new guiderail at Cogswell Bridge. First Selectman Ridgway relayed the engineer’s message that one rail would probably be sufficient with a more modest rail on top to prevent people from falling over. Also, painting the rail would be OK, but it could become a maintenance issue in the future. First Selectman Ridgway discussed painting the rail and changing the top rail in the Spring during the next construction season. Selectman Priscilla Pavel advised the Board to involve citizen input regarding next years bridgework if the bridges warrant doing something a little more attractive. First Selectman Ridgway noted that he has heard a variety of opinions from the Ford Hill and Cream Hill / Cogswell areas. Selectwoman Kotchoubey concurred that community feedback is good.

PUBLIC COMMENT: Joanne Wojtusiak of Cornwall commented: 1) The Cornwall Website Charter specifies no payments to persons on the website committee; 2) Approved of the upcoming work at the Allen Cemetery; 3) Requested assistance from the Town with upkeep for the Calhoun Cemetery; 4) Commented that the town was able to spend money on Pandemic Hazard Pay for Town employees and gifts to CERT Volunteers; 5) Asked to delay the Town Vote regarding the West Cornwall Septic project bond funding. Next, John Coffin of Cornwall commented on the new guiderail at the Cogswell Rd Bridge, and asked the Board to do something to make it look more attractive. Tobie Cornejo asked about why and who was selected to assist with the affordable housing plan, and what the scope of that study entails. First Selectman Ridgway then answered Tobie’s question. Finally, Caroline Nastro of Cornwall commented on grant money provided by NHCOG to NW Connect to further the efforts of expanding broadband access in Torrington. Caroline questioned the appropriateness of using Cares Act funds for a potentially long-term project. Caroline also questioned whether or not the Cornwall Internet Expansion Committee is subject to regulations that would govern an official Town committee.

Selectwoman Marina Kotchoubey moved to adjourn, and the motion unanimously passed. The meeting adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jonathan Berry
Administrative Assistant
Town of Cornwall