



# TOWN OF WARNER

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Select Board: Harry Seidel, Chair  
Faith Minton  
Allan N Brown  
Butch Burbank, Interim Town  
Administrator

## January 30, 2024 Select Board Meeting Minutes

### Open The Meeting and Roll Call

- Chair Seidel opened the meeting at 5:03 PM.
  - *Present:* Harry Seidel (Chair), Faith Minton, Allan Brown
  - *Also Present:* Butch Burbank, Clyde Carson, Judy Newman-Rogers, Georgia Flanders

### Minutes

- Will be put off until the next meeting due to length of agenda

### Public Hearing- Citizen Petition for a 5-Member Select Board (Ballot Question on Election Day)

- Chair Seidel opened the public hearing.
  - Ballot Article: *Are you in favor of increasing the Board of Selectmen to five members?*
- Sponsor: Christine Frost
  - Division of duties may be easier with five people on the board
  - Possibility of greater variety of expertise
  - Con: Less than a quorum not a legal meeting
    - May encourage conversations among board members that circumvents transparency
- Public Comment
  - Concerns regarding ability to persuade two more people to run were raised
    - Struggling to fill positions and retaining board members currently
  - Additional two \$3,300 stipends would create added budget expense
  - Criteria for running for Select Board?
    - Per RSA: Only requirement to run for an elected position is to be a registered voter in Town - not within the town's authority to create criteria
    - Comment that may-be a possible RSA regulating size of board based on population
  - Town has been run well for many years with three selectmen and town administrator
  - Petition does not address term length, etc. (\*Stated in RSA)
    - Information addressed on petition, but not available at public hearing
- Board discussion
  - May make board less efficient
  - Creates difficulty in running a meeting and keeping it moving
- **Allan Brown moved not to recommend the article. Faith Minton seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.**

### Public Information Session: Community Power

- Clyde Carson gave a presentation to the board and assembled public regarding Community Power
  - Benefits include lower rates, clean energy options, community investment, and local control
  - Excess resources allocated back to the community
  - Coalition is statewide, and other towns in Merrimack County plan to go live later this year
  - Most customers with Eversource are automatically opted in
    - Net metered customers are the exception and will not be automatically enrolled
    - Community Power Coalition is working with the state to change this

- Participation is voluntary and opting out- or opting in if using a third-party supplier- is possible
- Warner Community Power is self-funded and no taxes will be used to cover program expenses
- Warner Community Power will become default power source for Warner customers
- Public discussion
  - Questions were raised regarding electric rates and reduction at Eversource
    - Reductions at DOE
    - Analysis of natural gas prices
  - Would be available to commercial customers as well, such as local businesses
  - Automatic opt-in?
    - Municipal Aggregation Act allows towns to shop for energy deals
      - RSA 53e
      - Creates another default service option
  - No minimum number of opt-ins
    - Community Power is the second-largest energy purchaser in NH aside from Eversource
    - The state allows Community Power to choose an opt-out model
  - Difficulty of opting out?
    - Easiest way to opt out is through the website
    - Can also opt out over the phone, but must have account number
  - Who reaps the benefits of surplus?
    - Use of surplus would be determined by the Selectboard
    - Surplus will not likely occur for several years
  - How is power acquired?
    - Concerns regarding natural disasters and sources of electricity
    - Power is purchased in a similar manner to utilities, but must have a high credit rate
      - This addresses issues with uncertain power supply
    - Community Power has been purchasing power for a relatively short time, but has steadily been building credit

### **Information Session: Warner Connects**

- Allowing Warner Connects (Food Pantry and Family Closet) to occupy Warner Community Center rent-free
- Citizen Petition Warrant Article, will come before the town at town meeting
- Would hopefully promote discussion of the future of the community center
  - EDAC is currently working on estimates of costs to maintain community center
    - Info sessions will occur throughout 2024
    - Possible grant funding
  - Building is expensive to maintain, but the services are vital
- The food pantry serves a very large number of households in Warner
  - 13,291.5 meals in one year
- The building is old, but strong
- Initiatives for town professionals to donate time and energy to bring the building up to code?
  - Liability issues would be present regardless
- Family Closet financial support allows Food Pantry to pay rent and acquire necessary supplies not covered through other funding
  - Also part of 501-3(c) nonprofit
- Questions regarding fairness of allowing some nonprofits and not others in building to operate rent-free
- **Allan Brown made the motion not to recommend this article. Chair Seidel seconded the motion, and the motion passed.**

### **Information Session: Posting of Zoom Recordings**

- An article to post video or audio recordings of Select Board, Planning Board, Zoning Board, and Budget Committee

- Could be posted on YouTube rather than directly hosted on the website
  - Embeds or links are options as well
- Amendments could be made from the floor to update technology in article according to the town's plans
- Contingency plans for technological failure are necessary
- **Allan Brown made a motion to recommend the article. Faith Minton seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.**

#### **Information Session- Appointed To Elected Planning and Zoning Boards**

- Board is reconsidering this article after input from the boards themselves and further consideration
- Other positions of the town with less power- trustees of the library and the cemeteries, Parks and Rec- are elected
  - Smaller communities are able to elect boards
  - RSAs cover what to do regarding a vacancy
- Select Board reviews qualifications of an appointed board
  - This would not be the case for an elected board
    - Personal agendas could become an issue
      - Processes exist to deal with this
  - The law allows anyone to run for any elected position
  - There has been a history of most appointments being accepted
    - Concerns by board around perception of stacking appointments
    - Appointments tend to be approved
- Possibility of running for office being a deterrent for prospective members
- Difficulty of soliciting volunteers
- Perceived biases of board in appointing officials
- **Faith Minton made the motion to remove these articles from the warrant. Chair Seidel seconded the motion, and the motion passed.**

#### **Information Session- Combined Town Clerk and Tax Collector Position**

- Being discussed due to the retirement of the current tax collector
- Due to upcoming revaluation and new software, this may be a difficult time to make the change
  - Defunding tax collector position to a \$30,000 stipend may also be unwise in conjunction with this
  - Onboarding of new tax collector and assessor may not be smooth
- Warrant article regarding tax collector benefits
  - Warrant Article 21 in 2000 guaranteed full benefits and retirement to elected Town Clerk and Tax Collector positions
- There is a need for discussion with individuals in existing positions
  - Job descriptions, wages, and hours must be transparent in order to make an informed decision
- Reduction to \$30,000 is not sufficient to cover current tax collector wages
- Current tax collector position is salaried
  - Hours are not being charged
- Concerns with office space and confidentiality if combined into the Town Clerk's current office
- Concerns with workload for the individual in the position
- Other towns have stated that Avitar's software works well for them and streamlines the workload
  - These statements come from individuals in combined town clerk/tax collector positions in towns nearby Warner, including some that are larger
  - Most of these towns had two people in this office full-time: a town clerk/tax collector and a deputy
    - There may be other staff hired during tax season
- Other staff needing to be hired during busy seasons may reduce savings
- More information needed regarding cost vs. savings

- Concerns from existing staff regarding aggressiveness and speed of change
  - Possibility of moving the combined position out to 2027 and voting in 2026
  - More information still needed
- Chair Seidel made the motion to remove the article from the ballot. Allan Brown seconded the motion, and the motion passed 2-1.
  - Aye:

DRAFT