

**Borough of Stonington
Board of Warden and Burgesses
Annual Meeting – April 30, 2022
Draft minutes**

CALL TO ORDER

Warden Jeffrey Callahan called the 222nd annual meeting of the Borough of Stonington Board of Warden and Burgesses to order at 10:00 a.m. The meeting was held at Borough Hall and also by way of Zoom conferencing video. Present in Borough Hall in addition to Warden Callahan were Burgesses Shaun Mastroianni, Amy Nicholas, Kevin Rogers and Amanda Barnes. Clerk-Treasurer Lisa Coleman attended via Zoom. Burgess Kevin Rogers assisted the Clerk-Treasurer in recording the votes. Thirteen residents were in attendance in person and via Zoom.

ELECT MODERATOR

On a motion by Burgess Mastroianni, seconded by Burgess Nicholas, the election of Richard Easton as the moderator for the annual meeting, was unanimously approved.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

A motion by Burgess Mastroianni, seconded by Burgess Rogers, to waive the reading of the minutes of the 2019 Annual meeting, was unanimously approved.

A motion by Burgess Barnes, seconded by Burgess Nicholas, to approve the minutes of the 2019 Annual meeting, were unanimously approved.

WARDEN'S REPORT

OPENING REMARKS --- Welcome to the two hundred and twenty-second annual meeting of the Borough of Stonington. It's been three years since we have gathered in this hall, and it's good to see people here again. I don't need to tell you that it has been a strange interlude, throughout which, with help from Zoom and the State of CT, Borough government has continued to function. I'll talk about the highlights later in my report.

FIRE DEPARTMENT --- The volunteers of the Borough Fire Department continue to keep our residents and those of surrounding communities safe. Since we last met in person, the Borough Fire Department has responded to about 400 calls. Incidents have included everything from hazardous material spills to motor vehicle accidents to water emergencies to actual fires, demonstrating the wide range of issues our fire department trains for and handles with skill. There have been a significant number of calls to assist the Stonington Ambulance Corps. Wearing his fire marshal hat, Chief Jeff Hoadley has been very active with annual inspections while observing Covid restrictions. He is required by law to inspect every year all places of assembly and buildings with three or more units.

ZONING --- Second only to fire protection, planning and zoning are very important functions of your government. Zoning has generally been free of controversy this past year, but still busy with

45 permits issued and several enforcement actions taken. On the planning side an update to the Borough's Plan of Conservation and Development is now underway.

ADMINISTRATIVE & REGULATORY ACTIVITY --- First, you should know that the Borough has a new, much improved website..... stoningtonboroughct.gov. There's lots of good information on it. Check it out.

The Borough passed the annual recertification of compliance with FEMA's Community Rating System and thereby preserved the 10 percent discount our residents receive on flood insurance policies issued through NFIP. Participation in the CRS program imposes a significant administrative burden, but I believe it is worth the effort, because over half of the Borough is within the 100-year flood zone and about 35% of the Borough's structures carry flood insurance.

The joint Borough-Town storm water management plan is working well. The report for 2021 was recently submitted to DEEP. You can find it on the Borough website.

We successfully completed our financial audit for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021. The Borough's net position—or net worth -- was \$4,407,810, an increase of 2.1 percent since 2019. We currently have about \$500,00 in reserves.

The 2020 census found that for the first time in decades, the Borough's population has increased! The official figure is 976. Covid probably had something to do with it.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT (ARPA) --- No doubt many of you have heard of ARPA, the 2021 federal law that distributed money to states, cities, and towns all across America. Remarkably, even the tiny Borough of Stonington was included in this program and was awarded about 260 thousand dollars in two tranches, the first last June and the second this coming June. Like all federal grant programs, the money comes with restrictions on how it can be used, one of which is that it cannot be used to reduce local taxes. The Board has applied the first allotment in various ways, including stipends to our staff and volunteer fire fighters and ambulance corps who continued show up and respond even during the worst phases of Covid. We also distributed part of the funds as grants to local not-for-profit and small businesses so they could undertake improvements and programs that they couldn't do during the pandemic. Finally, we have contracted with an engineering firm to conduct an assessment of our storm water system to identify and recommend solutions to problems that cause street flooding.

INFRASTRUCTURE --- Sections of Union and Grand Streets were repaved last year, and Denison and part of Water Street are to be done in May. All of the viaduct pole lights are back in place. Also, the Wayland's seawall has been completely repointed.

TRAFFIC STUDY --- Last year the Borough hired a consultant to study traffic and parking issues. His report, which is on the website, includes many useful suggestions, almost all of which I'm sure will find opposition from someone or some neighborhood. Rather than the Board deciding which ones to implement I think it would be better to form a citizen's committee to go over the plan and make recommendations to the Board. If anyone is interested in serving on such a committee, please contact me or Burgess Kevin Rogers.

COMFORT STATION --- A long standing deficiency in Borough amenities is public restrooms. Last year the Board formed a building committee to try to solve this problem, and we hired architect Julia Leeming to develop a preliminary design. The first step was to select a location, and because of flood plain restrictions it quickly became clear that the only suitable publicly owned land is Wadawanuck Square. Given the prominence of the Square and our iconic library, it was clear that the design of what became known as the comfort station had to be elegant and compatible with nearby structures. As a result, Julia's design — which is very elegant and functional — is also expensive. So, I decided to put the project on hold for now in the hope that a more affordable solution may be found.

RECOGNITION --- Keeping the Borough going as an independent municipality is a team effort involving a small paid staff and lots of volunteers. We don't have a big pool from which to draw volunteers for our boards and commissions, not to mention people willing to run for elective office. First, I want to recognize my colleagues on the Board of Warden & Burgesses, clerk-treasurer Lisa Coleman, and our tax assessor, Michael Schefers, for their service to the community.

I want to give a big thankyou to the citizens who serve on Planning & Zoning, which is chaired by Don Maranell; the Zoning Board of Appeals, chaired by Tony Crane in 2021 and now by Alan Vaskas; and the Harbor Management Commission, a joint commission with the Town. Another very important group of volunteers are the fire fighters, who respond not only to fires but also to floods and other emergencies.

Our paid staff includes Ann Fiore who replaced Barbara Perry in the office after Barbara retired in 2020; part-time zoning officer Tom Zanarini; fire chief/marshal Jeff Hoadley; and Sue Cordeiro and Phoenix Grimes, who keep the streets clear of leaves and snow (remember the Blizzard of '22?), as well as maintaining our six parks and responding to fallen tree limbs, clogged storm drains, and other situations of all sorts. By the way, Sue is now in her 41st year of service in the Borough Street Department; and Jeff Hoadley has been a member of the fire department for 48 years and chief for 31. All together they are the corporate memory of this government. Borough Attorney Nick Kepple continues to provide wise advice on a whole range of legal matters.

PASSINGS --- Each year I note the passing of some members of the community, people who gave in various ways to make the Borough a better place to live for all. Among those we have lost over the past year are Howard Fromson, Michael Davis, Kathe Hewes, Sandy Bragdon, David Black, Ann Ryon, Frank Gonsalves, Robert Szostak, Elizabeth Talbot, Idalina Simao, Judith Keegan, Bernadine Shea, and Cindy Rita Berg. I also want to remember Roger Collelo, former member of the Borough Highway Department, who died in a boating incident two years ago.

WALDRON-WILLIAMS FUND --- For many years, the Borough has been fortunate to have two charitable funds with which to assist residents who need some financial help. In 2019 the trustees of the two funds agreed to explore merging them to improve the efficiency of their operations. It took a while, but with help from Atty — and now probate judge — Beth Leamon as well as Borough Atty Nick Kepple, we received permission from the Court of Probate to merge

the funds. The combined fund, now known as The Waldron-Williams Fund, is incorporated in the State of Connecticut. It has three trustees, one of whom is appointed by the Board of Warden & Burgesses. The other two will be elected later in this meeting.

OUTLOOK --- Stonington Borough enters its 222nd year in good shape fiscally, physically, and socially. Our financial reserves are strong, our infrastructure is in relatively good shape, and the institutions that bind the community together have withstood the challenges of the past two years.

The English word "borough" comes from the old German and Dutch words for fortress. We live in a fortress of sorts, one of civility, reason, and generosity. A community like this does not just happen. It took years of work and citizen participation to create this fortress, and it continues to take work and participation to keep it in good repair. I encourage everyone to get involved.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Lisa Tepper Bates thanked everyone for their service. She was concerned that the Comfort Station might be put on hold. Warden Callahan addressed the cost of the building which is approximately \$300,000. ARPA funds, which were initially looked at as half of the cost, are going to be used toward other projects in the Borough.

Resident Kevin Bowdler asked about the Borough taking out a bond to build the Comfort Station. Burgess Mastroianni mentioned the fire trucks will be paid off in two years and once paid off that will be \$100,000 a year.

Janet Vaskas asked about funding. Warden Callahan said a combination of donations and fundraisers could be used to raise the money. Warden Callahan asked for letters to be sent to Board Members to ask that the issue be moved ahead.

BUDGET PRESENTATION, DISCUSSION AND VOTE

The mill rate will remain the same, at 3, as the last two years. Total revenue is \$1,352,486. The total expenses are the same, \$1,352,486. Of note in the expenditures are the increases in health care costs and salaries, fire department by 2.5%, public buildings in which the roof of Borough hall had to be repaired, Parks and Trees due to large trees that need to be taken down.

Faith Lutat (lives on Church Street) asked about having parking only on one side of Church Street. She asked about when the street will be widened.

Gillian Barr asked about how the rates are set for renting the fire hydrants. Warden Callahan answered the rates are set by the water company and PURA.

A motion by Resident Michael Schefers, seconded by Burgess Nicholas, to approve the FY 2022-23 budget, was unanimously approved.

CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

FY 22-23: Pave and Widen CHURCH STREET; Pave WATER STREET (Church to Harmony) (\$150,000)

FY 23-24: REPAIR UPPER CLIFF STREET AND AROUND CANNON SQUARE; REPLACE BOROUGH HALL FIRE ESCAPE (\$120,000)

FY 24-25: PAVE BROAD STREET (Main to Water); PAVE DIVING STREET (\$150,000)

FY 25-26: PAVE WATER STREET (Viaduct to High) (\$100,000)

FY 26 -27: PAVE PEARL STREET (Main to Water); PAVE NORTHWEST STREET (\$130,000)

A motion by Burgess Nicholas, seconded by Burgess Barnes, to approve the capital improvement program, was unanimously approved.

REPORT OF THE WALDRON-WILLIAMS FUND, ELECT TRUSTEES

Warden Callahan reported that the Waldron-Williams Fund is now a combined fund and has received its 501c3 designation. Trustee Caroline Muller asked all present to spread the word that this fund is available, and applications are available on the Borough website, in Borough Hall and at Tom’s newsstand. Trustee Michael Schefers gave a report on the Waldron-Williams Fund. \$850 in donations have been received since the inception of the merger of the two funds. Funds were granted in total amount of \$5,975. Cash on hand is now \$210,844.

A motion by Warden Callahan, seconded by Burgess Rogers, to elect Caroline Muller and Michael Schefers as Trustees of the Waldron-Williams Fund, was unanimously approved.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Burgess Nicholas, seconded by Burgess Barnes, adjournment of the meeting at 10:53 a.m., was unanimously approved.

Respectfully Submitted,
Lisa M. Coleman
April 18, 2023