



Town of Warner

Board of Selectmen

DRAFT – Special Meeting Minutes

w/ Town Election Officials

August 10, 2020, 6:00 PM,

No physical location for this meeting; it was conducted via Zoom.

MEETING ANNOUCEMENT/ROLL CALL

At 6:04 p.m., Chairman Clyde Carson called the meeting to order and made this announcement: “As Chair of the Board of Selectmen, I find that due to the state of emergency declared by the governor as a result of COVID-19 pandemic, and in accordance with the governor’s emergency order number No. 12 pursuant to Executive Order #2020-04, I’m invoking the provisions of RSA 91-A: 2,III (b). I also find that this meeting is imperative to the continued operation of the Town of Warner government and services which are vital to public safety and confidence during this emergency. As such, this body is authorized to meet electronically, and this meeting will be conducted electronically via Zoom without a quorum of this body physically in the same location.

“At this time, I also welcome members of the public accessing the meeting remotely and even though this meeting is being conducted in a unique manner and under unusual circumstances, the usual rules of conduct and decorum will apply.”

Chairman Carson said that if any votes of the selectboard taken at the meeting, they will be taken by roll. In addition, a roll call vote will be taken of board members who are present, with each member stating whether if there are other people in the room at the time, as required by the state’s Right-To-Know laws.

ROLL CALL:

Clyde Carson, Chairman, no one else present

Judy Newman-Rogers, no one else present

Jonathan Lord, no one else present

Also present: *ELECTION OFFICIALS*: Ray Martin, Moderator; Christine J. Perkins, Chair/Supervisor of the Checklist; Kathy Carson, Supervisor of the Checklist; Michele Courser, Town Clerk; Darcie Buskey, Deputy Town Clerk; *OTHERS*: Dan Watts, Webmaster; Nancy Ladd; Sara McNeil, Joyce Sterling; Ken Cogsell; Diane Ricciardelli, Town Administrator; and Ray Carbone, Recording Secretary.

ELECTIONS

Chairman Carson said that there are two upcoming elections in town – a primary election in September and a general election in November – and, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and related issues – this year’s votes will be different than those in previous elections, particularly in terms of procedures.

The chairman asked Ray Martin, Moderator, to begin addressing the group. The moderator said the town will try to keep the process as normal as possible, despite the unusual circumstances. The principal voting area will still be the main hall in the Town Hall building and there will be one check-in list and one check-out list for voters. He asked Kathy Carson and Christine Perkins, supervisors of the checklists, if they wanted to use the same space that has been used before for residents who would be registering the same day, i.e., in a corner of the hall.

Christine Perkins said that in some recent training done by the secretary of state’s office, it was suggested that the set-up for those same-day registrants be located in a separate room and that there should be an alternate ballot box for those voters; both in the same room. She suggested that town election officials could direct those same-day registrants/voters to the large room downstairs in the building or, if maintained in the operation remains in same corner space in the main hall, that area could be separated from the rest of the hall with some kind of barriers or markers.

Ray Martin said he was considering using the downstairs room for voters who do not want to wear a protective face mask. The moderator could verify their identity by bringing their identification upstairs to the supervisors to have that person checked-in, then go back downstairs with the ballot and an envelope. The voter could fill out the ballot and exit out the side door while the moderator would then take the envelope up to the main hall where the supervisors would check the voter out on their lists, and the moderator puts the ballot into the ballot box.

The moderator added that he doesn't anticipate many voters refusing to use protective facial masks, so the supervisors could have the downstairs area if they wanted it. If they'd like, they could remain in the main hall and have some additional area because the Warner Historical Society and other food vendors will not be selling baked goods, etc., as it has at previous elections. (No food sales will be available that day; poll workers will be asked to brown-bag their food.) Ray Martin assured the supervisors that they didn't have to make a decision right now.

Christian Perkins said the downstairs area doesn't have the best air ventilation so it might now be the best place for voters not wearing masks. She suggested that enlarging the space for same-day registrants in the rear of the main hall.

Ray Martin agreed and stressed the importance of not denying anyone the right to vote. He noted that the secretary doesn't like "curbside" voting, as has been practiced in some school district meetings earlier this year. He said he would not be concerned about non-mask wearing voters using the basement space, even with its ventilation, because they would be alone most of the time and completing a ballot is not typically a quick process. The moderator also said that voters who are not wearing masks could use some other unused office space in the building for marking their ballots.

Chairman Carson said that in previous elections, the downstairs hall has been used for food for poll workers, but Michele Courser, Town Clerk, said that would not be done this year. She said she will be notifying all workers before the elections.

The secretary of state's office is recommending that the Board of Selectmen formally approve a measure requiring that everyone entering the polling space wear a protective face mask or a face shield, Ray Martin said. "That would give me some authority to escort them downstairs," he explained.

Jonathan Lord asked the moderator if it would still be possible for a voter who used the downstairs area (i.e., not wearing a mask) to, after casting a ballot, have his/her affiliation changed back to "independent," and Ray Martin said that should be easy to manage.

Chairman Carson made a motion that on both primary and general election days in 2020, protective face masks be required for everyone (voters and workers) on the main floor of the town hall (including the main hall voting area), and if someone is opposed to wearing a mask for any reason, an alternate procedure will be available elsewhere in the building. Jonathan Lord seconded the motion. ROLL CALL: Chairman Carson, yes; Jonathan Lord, yes; Judy Newman-Rogers, yes. Motion passes unanimously.

Ray Martin asked Michelle Courser, Town Clerk, and Darcie Buskey, Deputy Town Clerk, to talk about the status of absentee ballots. Michelle Courser said that her office has received a significant number of requests, including close to 100 for the primary election and already more than that for the general election. She said that many of the requests are related to new measures allowing citizens to use absentee ballots due to

concerns about COVID-19. In addition, she said that the secretary of state's office has not yet released full guidelines about exactly how the use of absentee ballot will be altered due to the pandemic related restrictions. She advised the meeting against using the secure drop-box in front of the town hall for absentee ballots, based on counsel from the secretary of state's office. Instead, it would be preferable to simply drop absentee ballots off at the town clerk's office or mail them to the town clerk's office. The selectmen advised that a sign be put up at the mailbox warning citizens against using the lockbox for absentee ballots. Michelle Courser said it might be used for the absentee ballots, but the relevant paperwork needs to be filled out properly to ensure that the correct information related to both the voter checklist and the completed ballot choices are completed. Ray Martin said he would oversee the lockbox sign.

Ray Martin also said he was trying to reach Alan Bates about the lighted road sign that sits in front of the NH Telephone Museum with a message that encourage residents to request and submit completed absentee ballots as early as possible. The moderator said that, as of today, all ballots must be in the town's hands by 5 p.m. on election day, regardless of the postmark date.

Ray Martin asked Michelle Courser, Town Clerk, and Christine Perkins, Chair/Supervisor of Checklist, about the status of poll workers. The town clerk said that she's already heard from one former worker who said he would not be available this year because he doesn't want to wear a face mask; she said she will try connecting with others later this evening.

At approximately 6:20 p.m., there was an interruption of electrical power at some of the remote locations; virtually all participants were able to reconnect within five minutes.

When the meeting resumed, Kathy Carson, Supervisor of the Checklist, said that she's recently begun canvassing a list of people who may want to serve as ballot counters, and many have declined because of safety concerns related to COVID-19. She said that she's only gotten one confirmation.

At 6:25 p.m., Kathy Carson's electronic connection to the meeting was cut off.

Christine Perkins, Chair/Supervisor of the Checklist, said that at a recent training session presented by the secretary of state's office, some participants suggested reaching out to 17 year-olds, who are too young to vote, but who could be available to serve as ballot counters. She also suggested reaching out to Kearsarge Regional High School as well as students at Magdalen College to ask if they may be able to help the town as ballot counters, poll workers, or in some other capacity on the election day. The secretary of state suggested reaching out to high schools and colleges, she concluded, because younger people may not be as concerned about catching the COVID-19; homeschooling parents may also be interested. (Students may not need to be Warner residents.)

Chairman Carson noted that election day work might be considered a form of community service for students seeking academic credit. He also asked if an announcement could be posted on the town website regarding the appeal.

Ray Martin asked if it was necessary for someone to be 17 years-old, and Christine Perkins, Chair/Supervisor of the Checklist, said that was what she understood from the training session remarks. The moderator said he would reach out to Kearsarge Regional High School about the idea, and Supervisor Perkins said that some of the shifts the students may apply for could be done in two-to-three hours, although ballot counters do have to stay until their task is completed. In response to a question, she added that she was unsure if the young people could check voters in and out on the voter registration lists. Michelle Courser, Town Clerk, said she would call the secretary of state's office to check on details regarding the participation of the high school/college students.

Michelle Courser also said that on Sept. 17, the town would be receiving PPE and other related materials (personal face masks, sanitizers, face guards, etc.) to assist with the election process. The materials will be used for both the primary and general elections.

Ray Martin said that he hopes to have residents waiting on line to vote and adhering to the recommended minimum six-foot separation between people (except with family/household members), but it's a challenge he's not yet sure how he'll accomplish. He noted that it would be good to have someone outside the building and someone inside the town hall, reminding voters about the recommendations but the projected paucity of workers could make that problematic. "If they have a mask on, they don't need to be six feet (apart), technically," the moderator said, "but it would be ideal."

Chairman Carson asked about the group of political supporters who traditionally hold signs supporting their candidates outside town hall. Ray Martin said they will be allowed if they comply with town and state regulations, but he does have the authority to move them into a single area or even to suspend their activities if they're disruptive to the electoral process. "I'll make them social distance and wear masks," he explained. The moderator suggested that additional guidelines may be issued by the secretary of state's office before the elections.

Chairman Carson opened the meeting up to comments and questions from the public.

Sara McNeil said she's now working as publicity chair for the Kearsarge/Sunapee chapter of the League of Women Voters. She said that earlier in the day, the group was working on an advertisement that it plans to publish regarding absentee voting; the members have been surprised at the different information being issued by the secretary of state's office as well as by officials in local towns. "They're quite confusing," she said. The local League chapter's ad will be running in the Kearsarge Shopper, the InterTown Record and a number of other local publications in the coming weeks.

Sara McNeil also remarked about ongoing confusion even about applying for an absentee voter ballot; a person needs to ask town officials for a separate ballots for the primary and the general election. There two separate envelopes used: one is the standard postal envelope; the second is the one where voters write their own name and other identification information to insure that it's properly recorded on the town's voter registration list. The town's address is on the postal envelope, and the voter puts his/her ballot inside the second envelope, which is then put inside the postal envelope and mailed.

In addition, Sara McNeil mentioned other areas of possible confusion regarding both the request for an absentee ballot and the ballot-casting process. She encouraged voters to read all instructions carefully, and suggested the town try to educate voters about possibly problematic issues, as well as use of the drop box. Finally, she raised the idea that voters be discouraged from bringing children, etc., to the ballot this year.

Nancy Ladd said that she understands that Magdalen College is trying to keep its students under a strict quarantine once classes resume in the fall, so they may not be available to help on the election days. In addition, she offered that medical experts say that face masks provide much better personal protection than face shields alone.

Chairman Carson requested that a summary of the issues discussed by posted on the town website. Diane Ricciardelli, Town Administrator, said that she's already emailed Michelle Courser, Town Clerk, and Ray Martin, Moderator, connecting them with Dan Watts, Webmaster; as soon as information is clearly delineated, it will be posted, she said.

Michelle Courser, Town Clerk, noted that Labor Day is the day before the primary election day, so everything related to the voting operations need to be set up before the weekend.

Chairman Carson suggested that following the elections a deep cleaning should be done to the town hall. Nancy Ladd explained that "time is your friend" in such cases, so the longer the time the space can be left undisturbed – especially with windows opened – the more likely that harmful bacteria will be destroyed.

Sara McNeil suggested that poll workers speaking with people on lines waiting to vote should review what information is needed (ID/driver's license, etc.), as well as PPE/protocols. She also asked whether the town might be able to use a "check-in/check-out" system, as people enter and exit the voting area, similar to what's used at business establishments; that would help keep the number of people allowed in the space to an acceptable limit.

Diane Ricciardelli, Town Administrator, said that she and Michelle Courser, Town Clerk, have the information about how many people can be in the town hall at one time to maintain recommended safety protocols. Nancy Ladd noted the recommended numbers

be appropriate, not only for people attending a presentation, but also for an election, where people are moving around in a single space with tables, etc.

Chairman Carson suggested that the election and town officials reconnect after the primary election day to review how the process went and to discuss how to move forward for the general election in November.

At 6:54 p.m., Chairman Carson adjourned the meeting.