

MINUTES

Town Council Steering Committee Meeting

December 27, 2022

7:00 PM

Town Hall Conf. B

1.Call To Order, Roll Call;

The meeting was called to order by Chair Matthew Kyer at 7:00 PM

Members Present: Matthew Kyer, John French, Jon Hand, Lisa Thomas (Ex-Officio Member & Council Chairwoman)

Also Present: John Elsesser (Town Manager)

2.Acceptance Of Minutes:

a. November 28, 2022:

French moved to accept the minutes of November 28, 2022, Hand seconds

Discussion/Changes: None

Vote:

For- French, Kyer

Abstain-Hand

b. December 5, 2022:

Hand moved to accept the minutes of December 5, 2022, French seconds

Discussion/Changes: None

Vote: Unanimously all in favor

3.Reports:

3.A. Chairperson:

Kyer had no report.

3.B. Committee Members:

Committee members had no report

3.C. Review/Possible Recommendations: Board & Commission Monthly Reports:

Kyer asked Elsesser for any updates. Elsesser informed that the only committee that is starting to become a problem is the Pension and Retirement Committee. He explained they only meet 4 times a year, and he will have to see when they meet next. He added that Amanda Backhaus (Coventry's Finance Director) is looking to put out a Facebook Ad for recruitment. Thomas questioned if she would use LinkedIn. It was clarified that LinkedIn is used for Town Staff hiring, but not volunteer recruitment for Boards and Commissions.

Elsesser made mention that a lot of the vacancies on the vacancy report will be removed following the next Town Council meeting when appointments and reappointments are made

Kyer asked if there were any other concerns. Elsesser discussed that the High School Walls Committee is low on members, but they are almost completed with their task. Once the project is complete, the committee will be discharged. Kyer asked if a member from the High School Walls Committee serve on the Pension and Retirement Committee. Elsesser said no.

4. Reappointments:

4.A. Parks And Recreation Commission: Carlson

Hand moves to recommend to the full council to reappoint Beverly Carlson to the Parks and Recreation Commission for a new term to expire 1/1/2025. French seconds.

Discussion: Kyer noted that he had the opportunity to serve with her on Parks and Rec., and that she brings so much to that commission. He expressed appreciation for her continued service.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

4.B. Planning & Zoning Commission: Pollansky

French moves to recommend to the full council to reappoint Darby Pollansky to the Planning and Zoning Commission for a new term to expire 11/1/2025. Hand seconds.

Discussion: French expressed some concerns regarding the way Darby Pollansky was questioned for her interview. He stated that he felt it was insulting and belittling to ask her to step down, especially with her years of service to the Town. Thomas interjected that Pollansky was not asked to step down. French reminded her that she is not the chair of the Steering Committee, which she expressed she understands. Kyer made a point of order that she was not asked to step down.

French continued that it seemed odd that Mr. Murray, Kyer, and Thomas used about the same verbiage, regarding bringing in new "blood" to build a bench. French also added that during the last couple of weeks, he reviewed a few of the Planning and Zoning meetings to see how they interact, and it seems as though they interact very well with each other. He further explained during the last Planning and Zoning meeting on November 28th, there were major concerns from the other PZC members about Pollansky not being reappointed. He added that even the chairperson was confused, and insisted that Pollansky is not going anywhere. French also informed that some of the democratic members of the PZC felt this was politically motivated, as indicated

in their meeting recording. French felt if this was a democrat candidate, then this conversation would have never happened, and this was a terrible thing to do because now you are pitting members against members. French also felt that we should apologize to Planning and Zoning, for interviewing 3 of their members during their scheduled meeting. He felt that instead, we should have planned better and had the IWA candidates come in on November 28th, and held a special meeting for the Planning and Zoning Candidates on December 5th.

Kyer referred back to the minutes that the committee just voted to accept from 11/28/22. Kyer read Thomas's quote from pg. 4 that stated, *"Thomas-Has one question, that relates to concerns we have, with trying to "build a bench" on these commissions. How do we make sure that when we have people like you who have served for so long, and have so much knowledge, how do we retain and make sure others know how to use that knowledge? Would you be willing at some point, sooner or later, to step down from a full member to an alternate, to allow someone who is an alternate to function as a full member, and start to learn those ropes?"*. He felt that what the quote states, is very different from what French is saying. He also reminded everyone that Pollansky was unanimously reappointed to the EDC earlier this year, by this Steering Committee. He expressed that he doesn't understand how French could suggest that this wouldn't have happened the way it did, if it was a democrat candidate. Kyer also pointed out that Brian Murray had reached out independently asking to be appointed to a full member of the PZC, as such he was afforded the right to interviewed.

Thomas asked if Kyer did in fact send a letter to the chair PZC regarding the interviews, and to clarify this matter. Kyer responded that he absolutely did.

French asked if Kyer watched the Planning and Zoning meeting from November 28th. Kyer informed that he did not have to, as they reached out to him separately, outside of the meeting due to misinformation. Kyer pointed out, that at that point, no decisions had been made regarding the reappointment, so suggesting that anything was politically motivated, was jumping the gun. Kyer also added that we have a motion on the table to recommend the reappointment of Pollansky, and it was seconded by one of our democratic members. He continued, once discussion has concluded, we will have a vote.

Hand commented that he feels that it is very unfortunate that aspersions are being cast that this is a partisan thing. He added that he takes this process seriously, and he believes all other Steering members do as well, to try and marshal our resources and to get members from our community to build a bench. This includes opportunities for other volunteers and leveraging those who have served a long time. He informed that he has heard from those serving on other committees that they stay on the committees for a longer time period, because they worry if any new members will want to come in and have the same dedication, so they can step down, if they no longer want to serve. He added that he believes in this case, there are some people searching for something, that isn't actually here.

Thomas also commented that in today's current climate, it is very unfortunate that there is a jumping to the conclusion that something is partisan driven, all the time. She felt that it has been made clear from the beginning that the goal of Steering, is to give people the opportunities to participate in the democratic process.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

4.C. Planning & Zoning Commission Alt: Burrington

Hand moves to recommend to the full council to reappoint Robert Burrington to the Planning and Zoning Commission as an alternate for a new term to expire 11/1/2025. French seconds.

Discussion: Elsesser commented that it was nice to listen to him at the interview, as he did not know him and was very pleasantly surprised. French added that he is a great guy. He had concerns regarding his paperwork as he was indicated as a democrat on one, and unaffiliated on the other and wants to make sure the paperwork is accurate. Kyer extended his thanks to Robert Burrington for coming in to be interviewed. He explained when Brian Murray reached out with interest to become a full member from and alternate, he felt it only fair that the other alternates be given the same opportunity.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

Following item 5.A. on the agenda, Thomas was able to clarify that Burrington is registered as an unaffiliated voter on the voting list. She suggested that be double checked with the Registrar's Office. Elsesser made note so that it will be correct on future agendas

4.D. Inland Wetlands Agency: Laramie

Hand moves to recommend to the full council to reappoint Patricia Laramie to the Inland Wetlands Agency for a new term to expire 9/15/2025. French seconds.

Discussion: French questioned if it had been looked at, that all those being voting on to be reappointed or appointed are either unaffiliated or democrat. He reminded he had asked Elsesser at the last meeting if there was any ruling on minority seating, like a republican. Elsesser informed that no, the state law calls for unaffiliated, or republican, or independent, or whatever party, but there can only be a maximum of a certain number of one party.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

5. Appointments:

5.A. Inland Wetlands Agency: Glenney

Hand moves to recommend to the full council to appoint William Glenney to the Inland Wetlands Agency for a new term to expire 9/15/2024. French seconds.

Discussion: Thomas reminded that all 3 Inland Wetland Agency candidates were interviewed by the Steering Committee. Kyer agreed and stated that they were interviewed on December 5th.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

5.B. Inland Wetlands Agency: Pearson

Hand moves to recommend to the full council to appoint Richard Pearson to the Inland Wetlands Agency for a new term to expire 9/15/2023. French seconds.

Discussion: Kyer expressed appreciation to Richard Pearson for stepping up to be on the Inland Wetlands Agency.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

5.C. Inland Wetlands Agency: Wierszchalek

Hand moves to recommend to the full council to appoint Stephanie Wierszchalek to the Inland Wetlands Agency for a new term to expire 9/15/2025. French seconds.

Discussion: Kyer also expressed appreciation for Stephanie Wierszchalek stepping up, given the importance have having this committee filled. French added to the appreciation, that it is great to have her especially given her vast knowledge in this field, Kyer agreed. Hand added that we continue to have skilled candidates step up to fill these vacancies, and appreciates having these interviews as they show reliability in the candidates.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

5.D. Eastern Regional Tourism District: Request For Coventry Representative

Kyer informed the letter attached on the agenda regarding this item was for informational purposes only, given that the resignation from Mike Sobol was already accepted at a previous meeting. The next agenda item (5.E.) is to appoint a candidate as a representative for Coventry on the Eastern Regional Tourism District.

5.E. Eastern Regional Tourism District: Mitchell

Hand moves to recommend to the full council to appoint Cathy Mitchell as the Coventry Representative to the Eastern Regional Tourism District for a new term to expire 12/1/2025. French seconds.

Discussion: Kyer stated that Cathy Mitchell has a wealth of knowledge and experience in this area, she was interviewed to serve on the EDC, and owns a business in town, and further stated she is a perfect candidate for this role. Thomas added that she currently serves on the Economic Development Commission.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

5.F. Planning & Zoning Commission - Alt. To Full: Burrington

At this point we have made a motion to recommend to the full council to reappoint Darby Pollansky to the Planning and Zoning Commission. Should the full council reappoint her at their next meeting, there will not be room on this commission for another full member. Kyer suggests this item be tabled to the next agenda, as an item for discussion or action, or being noted as a 'No Position Available', once there is a vote from the full council.

5.G. Planning & Zoning Commission - Alt. To Full: Murray

At this point we have made a motion to recommend to the full council to reappoint Darby Pollansky to the Planning and Zoning Commission. Should the full council reappoint her at their next meeting, there will not be room on this commission for another full member. Kyer suggests this item be tabled to the next agenda, as an item for discussion or action, or being noted as a 'No Position Available', once there is a vote from the full council.

5.H. Senior And Affordable Housing Alternatives Study Committee: Brand

Hand moves to recommend to the full council to appoint Richard Brand to the Senior And Affordable Housing Alternatives Study Committee for the life-term of the committee. French seconds.

Discussion: Kyer explained that they have previously had an extensive discussion around the charter for this committee and what kind of seats members are filling for this committee. Brand would be an at large member.

Thomas looked at what they currently have and listed the following members, Pattee (PZC Rep), Wilmot (Former member of the Senior Housing Committee Rep.), Pietro (at large), and Martin (at large). She stated this makes up 4 of the 7 members. She continued that they still need an at large member, Town Council representative, and a Coventry Housing Authority member, preferably someone familiar with the housing needs of people with disabilities. She added that they should also be looking for a contractor, as it is good to have on this committee, but it is not a requirement of the charge.

Elsesser informed that he recently spoke with Charlie Brown, and expressed to him he would be a good fit for this committee. He added that Mr. Brown did not say 'yes', but also did not say 'no'. They also discussed that Richard Brand has utility and infrastructure background, and would be a valuable asset. Kyer added that if Brand was appointed as an at large member, we would not have any more at large seats to be filled. Thomas also made note that we have not received any other statements of interest.

Thomas and Elsesser discussed contacting Al or Laurie Bradley to see if either of them could recommend someone to serve as the Housing Authority Rep., again preferably someone with the knowledge of people with disabilities. Thomas also suggested a Facebook outreach to recruit members for the remaining seats.

The contractor position was discussed. Elsesser informed that it was added to the charge because they have land that could provide opportunities, as there is not only one solution for the senior housing, there is multiple solutions. The fact that they have land though, could impact the price. He added that there is a water system, sewer connectivity, and that some of that land is already cleared. He explained that this land could be used for mixed use, not specifically for seniors as it is for the housing authority. He also stated, if we were able to get grants, there are more opportunities.

Kyer expressed that he will call Charlie Brown to see if he can serve on Senior And Affordable Housing Alternatives Study Committee as the Town Council Rep.

Vote: Unanimously in favor

6. Reports From Boards And Commissions - Schedule For Future Groups:

The Steering Committee discussed that they have already heard from the Economic Development Committee, and from the Veterans Memorial and Events Commission.

Elsesser explained he needs to check on the status of the forms going out, as staff was instructed to distribute them, but is unsure if that has happened at this point. He explained that some of the Boards and Commissions have town staff, but others do not. Kyer expressed the importance of getting these forms out and having them returned for review.

Elsesser added that Steering should hear from the Parks and Rec. Commission in the next 2 months, as they are working on the Miller Richardson Park development, and to get them scheduled to meet with Steering in that timeframe. Elsesser also added that any of these committees should be met at the Steering level first, and then can go to the full Town Council if needed, like the EDC did with their presentation. Elsesser informed that they can look at the member report that goes down the various committees, to see who they would like to meet with.

Elsesser joked that the Cemetery Commission is dying to meet with Steering, Hand added they probably have some grave concerns.

7. Discussion Of Implications: Connecticut Fair Employment Practices Act Amendments:

Elsesser updated that they are trying to start the process and figure out how to do it. He explained that Staff was supposed to get letters out to Boards and Commissions to have them report back if they have had the training through work within the last 2 years. If so, they could bring in their certificate, and we can mark them as completed. The letter also informed they are working to arrange group meetings to offer the training to members/volunteers who still need to complete the course. Elsesser also informed that he is trying to find out if the insurance company will cover the group meetings, as we have offered coffee and pizza as an incentive.

Elsesser explained that he had looked into and discussed with the software vendor ways of tracking the training. Kyer explained that it seemed like the vendor felt that this would not be a big deal to do. Elsesser agreed and added that there will be a modest fee for them to do this, but we will be able to have an accessible database and create the report(s) we need.

Kyer asked if it was known if any members have done the online training independently. Elsesser explained that no, we have not heard back from anyone, and that the training was not well received by a lot of the volunteers. However, he has been trying to express the need for it. He continued that they are trying to make it as easy as possible, and something that the volunteers can do independently or in a group setting. He made a point that this should stay on the agenda. Elsesser also added the CHRO has not made any announcements yet, or even answered any questions they have asked. He stated that they are hoping to have a schedule for group training soon. Thomas commented that this can remain on the agenda, and we can discuss it only if there has been a change.

This item is to remain on the Steering agenda

8. Discussion: J. French Concern, School Project - Renovate As New:

Kyer introduced the agenda item, however, several of the documents requested would not open from the agenda for committee review. Committee members used what they were able to access/review from previous emails and the agenda center to start this discussion.

French stated that he had all his documents and just had some questions to figure out how this all happened. He felt that Elsesser would be able to answer all of them. French discussed that the School Building and Energy Efficiency's charge was established in 2014, and updated in October of 2022. He added that we did that as we were going out to bond, and wanted to clean up the charge.

French read the charge and expressed concerns that there was nothing in there that clearly states for renovating as new. He read an excerpt from the charge that states if the committee feels there are more funds to be developed for plan costs, funds must be requested from the Town Council. Elsesser interjected and read that it states if the committee feels that additional funds to develop concept plans and cost estimates are needed, they may request funds from the Town Council. If appropriated, these funds may be used for uses such as, architects, engineers fees, committee clerk, materials, testing, printing, and advertising. He stated that the committee did not feel that they needed additional funds, as they thought they had adequate funds in the bonding.

French stated, "That is the point. That is a lot of the point.". French continued that there is a bond of \$1.3M, which is an open checkbook to the Building Committee, that has no authority, unless it gets OK'd from the Town Council. Elsesser informed that is not correct for the School Building Committee, and he is not sure where French is getting that from. French continued that the School Building Committee isn't even a standing committee and they are supposed to be doing research. Elsesser explained that they have a charge, and read an excerpt of the charge regarding their duties and responsibilities, including spending. He also informed that the Council and the Board of Ed, were invited to their presentation on the renovate as new. He also added, backing up, there were no HVAC grants at that time, and the only way towns were getting grants to do HVAC were if they were doing renovate as new. He continued that Quisenberry Architects informed that they could put together a renovate as new proposal, if we wanted them to. The Board of Ed Finance Committee talked about it.

French interjected and stated they did not talk about it, and it is not in their minutes at all. Elsesser stated that he is just telling him, what they told us. French informed that you can pull all the finance minutes from November to March, and none of the minutes have anything to do with build as new. Elsesser said that was what was reported to us, and he continued he does not staff the Board of Ed. French continued that Mary Kortmann was the one who said that it would be a good thing, and it was voted on, and there is nothing in any of their minutes that show they were on board with this. Elsesser stated that his issue then, is with the Board of Ed. French stated that his issue is both with Elsesser and the Board of Ed. French explained that the \$1.3M is not an open checkbook for the School Building Committee to use. Elsesser was confused where French was getting \$1.3M from. French stated the amount that was left over in the HVAC bond was approximately \$1.3M.

Thomas stated that this is going back to the bonding referendum, which is at the very beginning. Thomas read item number 7 from the School Building charge, that charges them with procuring various architectural/engineering firms, and utilizing the process established by the State Department of Education to ensure qualification for grant and aid. Thomas questioned whether that was part of their charge to go out and get these. Elsesser informed yes; it is.

French questioned, don't we have a procedure to go out to bid. Elsesser confirmed, and stated we did go out to bid, and we gave you the bid prices. French clarified, the bid for \$170,000, when they said they could produce this thing for \$170,000. Elsesser said that we already had an architect on board, that was selected to a

competitor price, we already had a mechanical engineer on board who was selected to competitor pricing. French expressed that you should still go out to bid. Elsesser explained that would be a waste of money especially when they already had the plans and specifications. French stated that you do not stick with 1 company to redo a whole school. French went into detail on the procedure he felt should be followed, stating you go out to competitive bidding, you come back with 3 or 4, and you investigate them. Elsesser interjected and explained that he wasn't going to argue, but wanted to put things in a timeframe. There was a rush, as the council was made aware of, and were made aware of this in every monthly agenda and every project memo that Elsesser sent out. He continued, the council was invited to the meeting with the presentation and no council members attended. He reminded that we were in a rush, which was discussed at the council level, and that we had to have an application in by June. He explained there was no time to bid, and have an application in by June. He explained we barely had the numbers by the end of May, but by that time, the state had come out with an HVAC grant, so it was all put on hold. It gave the Board of Ed costs that they didn't have, because they were getting criticized on the amount they put in for roofs. Elsesser told French that he is welcome to bring the School Building Committee in, and welcome to ask the Board of Ed to talk about this. Elsesser stated that he was open and transparent, and we were driving to get that June date. Quisenberry gave that price, and the School Building Committee accepted it under their charge because they had the funds available without using up all the funds that were made available to them.

French informed he is not against doing a renovate as new, but the procedures are nowhere in line with what they should be. He stated once again, there was no bid procedure. Elsesser informed we did go out to bid and selected the firm. French informed that Elsesser even stated in the School Building Committee minutes that we need more from the Board of Ed, and the Town Council. French said that this Town Council never made any official vote on anything. Elsesser stated he never said that the council voted on anything. French continued that Elsesser was going to get the blessing from the Town Council and the Board of Ed., which was in the minutes from November 4, 2021. French read the section of the minutes that stated this. Elsesser stated that this was in the School Building minutes, and asked if French looked at the Town Council minutes. French informed there is no official vote on this in any Town Council minutes. Elsesser clarified that he never asked for a vote.

Thomas mentioned that French is talking about a prior councils, and noted that the Building Committee has spanned several different councils. She explained they handled the walls and the energy stuff. She continued that the renovate as new came up later on as a potential thing to look at. French clarified that it was October 17, 2021. Thoms added he should speak with his caucus at the time, that was steering that ship, and he should talk to them about what conversations they were having with Elsesser as well. She added that the Finance Chair was Matt O'Brien Sr and the Council Chair was Julie Blanchard, so he should talk to them about what was happening at that time.

She urged that the renovate as new was looked at as it was the least expensive way to get renovations done at the middle school and high school, that needed to be done. This past Spring of 2022, when the study came back with things that we still need to deal with and priced them out, and are still in our capital budget, we still have all that information about all those costs and they are still things we are going to need to be addressed. She continued that when the dollar amounts came out from Quisenberry, she told Elsesser that there is no way that we can move forward, especially in this economy, as it is millions of dollars. She added what we did get out of that study is information that is helping us move forward with that HVAC piece and understanding our capital plan.

French explained that is not the issue, it was the procedure to get there. Thomas explained that it seems that what French is assuming is that a decision was made to move forward with the renovate as new, which never happened, and the whole thing was stopped due to costs. French explained that the town spent money to do a renovate as new cost. Thomas confirmed, but added that it was a part of the bond money that was already approved. French explained that money should not have been taken out, unless someone is overseeing that. Town Council should have been brought in, and been explained to that they are trying to renovate as new. He continued there is no Board of Education minutes stating that they were on board with renovate as new. Thomas explained that there was a presentation given to the Board of Ed. French said that was after the money was spent. Thomas asked what French would have liked to have seen done, and for him to explain the procedure.

French discussed that the Board of Ed should have been brought in with the School Building Committee, and asked if they wanted to do a renovate as new. Thomas asked for clarification, and French felt that the town was doing things backwards. Thomas explained that this is not Windham, and she understands that French is familiar with Windham but they operate completely different and are a different form of government.

French questioned if it was ok to spend the \$170,000, without the OK from the council. He added that it is in the charge, that it needs to be brought to the Town Council. He continued that the charge also says we would get a quarterly update from the Building Committee. French explained he has been on a year and has not seen the Building Committee at all. Thomas explained that we have all been invited to go to these presentations. French explained that they are supposed to come to Town Council, and that they have only had 1 presentation, after they spent all the money to get the \$64M deal.

Thomas asked what French would like done moving forward. French explained that the SBEEC should have had a special meeting, and addressed the Town Council and the Board of Ed explaining their thoughts on getting the most bang for the buck, and asked if we would want them to go that way. Thomas explained that did in fact happen. French asked when did the Town Council vote on that, and further explained that there is nothing from the Town Council that validates anything that was done.

Thomas clarified that this was regarding the renovate as new, French informed yes. Thomas reiterated that was put on hold. French explained that it is not about doing it, it is about the process that got us there. This process was done without our decision making, and without the Board of Ed.'s decision making. Thomas asked why this is not in front of the Board of Ed right now. French explained that it should be in front of both.

French also discussed that at the School Building Committee meeting, the chair of finance for the Board of Ed., said we are all on board with this at the Board of Ed. French informed there are 3 Republican members sitting on the Board of Ed., who did not know anything about this until the March presentation. So, the Board of Ed was not aware of the renovate as new, and Elsesser thought they were. French stated that there are no formal minutes or anything that show any votes were taken on this. Still, they hired 1 architect firm, instead of going out to bid due to time constraints, which should never be a part of the decision making. Since this was done, we handed over a \$170,000 check and asked them to provide us with plans. The procedure here is wrong and that is not how it should be done.

Thomas asked, moving forward, what would French like to see, and what does he recommend. French said he recommends, The Board of Ed be on board, as should the Town Council. The Building Committee should have come to us and asked us to address this. We then could have rectified the charge to have it directly state renovate as new. Thomas explained that wasn't the intent, and we did not want a charge that said renovate as new. French explained that if you were to renovate as new, and you don't have that indicated in the charge and

then you go to bonding, this whole thing is moot and wouldn't have been done legally. He added that it has to say build as new, because the bond council is going to look at it. He also stated we changed the charge of the School Building Committee on October 7th, so that it would fit for the bond council. French read an excerpt related to the HVAC and chilling. Elsesser informed that statement was for the grant application, not the bond council. French said, either way, it was for the money. Elsesser explained that there is a big difference. French stated that it still has to be legit. French explained whether it was for the grant or for the renovate as new, it doesn't matter, it's how we got there and this could be something that blows up and causes a problem throughout this town. We did not use the right procedure and there are no safe guards here, and due to the time constraints, there was no proper authority from either the Board of Ed, or Town Council. He continued we did it quickly as it was the cheapest way to get the HVAC, which he explained he understands, but you still have to do it properly, at least in his opinion. He explained when he was the chair of finance, this would have never flown.

Kyer explained that French just stated "at least in his opinion", and Kyer commented he is hearing a lot of "should be" statements in regards to the charter. French explained the charter states that anything over \$100,000 needs to go to Town Meeting, and referendum, and we did not do that. Thomas explained that is what happened with the bond, and this was bond money that was spent and was previously approved. French said that regardless of the money amount, they are saying that because that money was bonded, anybody could spend that money. Elsesser explained, not anybody, the Building Committee can. French continued, that any Building Committee could spend this money without any oversight, and there is no validation.

Thomas informed she is not disagreeing with French, but discussed the timeline from documents she was able to locate, as follows:

Jan. 3rd-Town Manager's project memo included with the Town Council agenda, states that the School Building Committee was exploring renovate as new.

Jan. 6th- School Building Committee approved using school energy bond funds to have Quisenberry provide a renovate as new study. At this point, Mary Kortmann stated that this was discussed at the BOE fiscal meeting, which consists of Republicans and Democrats. Thomas added she was not sure why the Republicans members, if this is where the concern is coming from, did not voice concerns at this time. French informed that was at the School Building Meeting, not the fiscal meeting. Thomas confirmed, but reminded that everyone gets those minutes.

Jan. 18th- Town Manager's project memo informs that there are signed contracts to consider renovate as new.

Feb. 3rd- The School Building Committee discussed it again, along with a potential joint meeting with the Council and the Board of Ed.

Feb. 7th- Town Manager memo provided another update on the renovate as new

Feb. 22nd- In the Town Manager's project memo again.

Mar. 22nd- A presentation was given to the Town Council.

French interjected that he was under the impression, that this was from the prior board, so he was rolling with it. That was until a Board of Ed member came up to him and explained we have to come up with the money for this, and French informed that he had not seen anything at that time. French explained he then started digging into the School Building minutes, and his perception is that the Building Committee does not have the authority

to just decide to renovate as new, hire a firm, and spend money. There was no bidding process, the Board of Ed Finance meetings have never been addressed regarding this, even though Mary Kortmann said they were all on board.

Thomas continued there was not a decision made to renovate as new, there was a decision made to make a study. Then on May 12th, at the Board of Ed meeting, the renovate as new project was tabled. French stated that is not the issue. It is how we got there without proper procedures, and there are procedures that need to be followed. Votes had, with a timeline, securing all this information, so that no one is on the hook for anything. Especially when, Mary Kortmann said that people were on board, and that was not the case and that happened at the January 6th meeting. Thomas felt the Board of Ed needs to be dealing with this too.

Thomas clarified with French that his concern was how money was used to commission a study. French stated to do the study and to commission it. Thomas clarified that he is saying that no committee, in no instance, that is tasked with overseeing a project that has gone to referendum, and been approved, and provided money toward that kind of work, that they should not spend any of that money, as they are formed as a committee to do, unless they go back to some other body first? French continued they should be going to Town Council, and that Town Council should have the ultimate authority of letting the money go. Thomas asked if it should be any amount, or money over the amount \$100,000. French felt that is something should be discussed, but off the bat, anything over \$100,000 needs to go to Town Meeting, and referendum. Thomas explained that this money did go to Town Meeting and referendum. French explained then it is the Town Council's job to watchdog those funds. Thomas explained that they spend bond money that was approved by the townspeople, and that money was intended to be used and overseen by the School Building Committee to carry out its charge. French explained that he does not feel they have the right to spend the money without other authority. Thomas commented that it was approved. French asked that because it was approved, you are going to let anybody with an approved amount, spend the money? They could spend all the money and not have any left to do the project. French questioned, who monitors the money, and stated there was no monitoring of their spending in this case.

Thomas asked how this has worked with other building projects. Elsesser stated that the Building Committees, when in power, have use of those funds. He explained, in his experience, they have never come back unless the needed more money. Their charge says, if they need more money, come back us. He explained the project they spent the money on was within the scope, obviously they could not have built a swimming pool, but it was to get HVAC. This was the only way the state was giving money, which would have been a net savings to the taxpayers. He explained that other districts have done that for HVAC projects, because there was no program for HVAC. This study provided a lot of other valuable information about the middle school, as a side benefit. Building Committees do not come back unless they run into some sort of severe obstacle. This situation was an opportunity, not an obstacle. Elsesser informed that once they are given the money, the \$100,000 issue goes away. Elsesser explained he felt it was a lot of money, because it is a lot of money but we got valuable information from it. The path they took was one that could have brought in millions of dollars of state aid.

Thomas felt that a discussion regarding the policy needs to go on a future Steering or Finance agenda so that they are all on the same page.

French added that he thinks the Town Council needs to consult their legal counsel to make sure that this was done legally, and have them sign off on it. If they come back and say everything was done right, then he said he will buy into it, other than that, he can't buy into this. Thomas asked what he felt the consequence of that would be. French explained, if everything is fine, then everything is fine. If not, we have a problem that needs to be

resolved, and we will know, through the gaps in the procedures, to have safeguards. French explained he is only trying to do this to protect the Town, and it is not a political thing, but this is not how it would have run through him. Thomas added that this should be discussed with the Board of Ed, and asked if someone is going to bring up those questions at their meeting. French felt that should happen. He added that after consulting legal counsel, he thinks that we should have a joint meeting with the Board of Ed to review the policies on how our funds are spent. That way we can safeguard the Town's money. We could have joint meetings to resolve things in one night. French was adamant on making sure that this is legit, that's all. Thomas commented that was fair.

Hand commented that there has been some fertile discussion, and seems to be a lot of airing of grievances. To make a point of order, to someone complaining about not following procedures, we are engaged in a discussion that he feels that we can't be having, since 6 of the 10 links on the agenda to documents that French is making detailed references to, are not accessible for viewing and not all Steering members have the materials. French interjected that isn't his fault. Hand agreed, but added it is still the circumstances that happened. He continued that this is not the proper procedure, and if that is a main point of French's concerns, then they should not continue this discussion nor had let it go on so long. French felt that it would be best to table this discussion then.

Kyer states that there seems to be a consensus to table until all members have access to the documents needed for this discussion. He asked that for the continued discussion that French separate the "should", opinionated statements from his concerns of not following procedure, as it would help him understand better where we are at. Kyer explained that French is talking about past experience, which sounds like it is extensive, but expressed that he needs French to separate the differences of what French thinks should have been done versus was the charge followed, because those are two very different things. Kyer continued that accusations have been made by French, and these are difficult to hear, especially when we have people who are volunteering their time to do what is best for the community. However, for the next meeting, we need to differentiate these things, which will be very helpful.

Motion:

I move to continue agenda item #8. Discussion: J. French Concern, School Project - Renovate As New, to a future meeting, when all materials for discussion are available.

By: Hand

2nd: French

Vote: Unanimously in favor

9.Adjournment

Hand moves to adjourn at 8:32 PM, French seconds. Meeting adjourned at 8:32 PM.

Submitted by,

Nicole Archambault

Nicole Archambault

Steering Committee Minutes Clerk

PLEASE NOTE: These minutes are not official until approved by the Steering Committee at the next Steering Committee meeting. Please see the next Steering Committee meeting minutes for approval or changes to these minutes.