

Minutes of the November 18, 2020 Meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee

The November meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee was called to order by Tania Vitvisky, Chair, at 7:05 on Nov. 18, 2020, on Zoom. Attending in addition were Gary Bean, Sue Rushfirth Treasurer, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Linda Hench-Gentile, Carmine Gentile Vice-Chair, Carl Offner, Ann Barysh, John McQueen, John Riordan, Aruna Pundit, Eva Fridman, Nathaniel Fridman, Jeanne Maloney, Jennifer Roberts, Henry Noer, Barbara Ryan, Marilyn Riepe, Hank Sorett, and Peg Espinola Secretary.

Carl Offner had a correction to the October 14 minutes, which was accepted by the secretary, after which the minutes were unanimously approved. Minutes will now be posted on our website once they are in final form.

Sue Rushfirth announced that we have \$896.71 in our account. However checks amounting to \$800 in donations to various Democratic political campaigns are outstanding. Sue stated that all but one member paid their dues for last year. She will send out reminders for next year's dues, which will remain at \$50.

Tania reported that there was no correspondence to the Committee aside from an invitation from the Framingham Democratic City Committee to attend their November meeting. (She did--see below.)

Report from State Representative Carmine Gentile:

The chair of the House Judiciary committee filed an amendment to the budget meant to preserve access to abortions in the event that the Supreme Court acts to restrict them. The amendment would eliminate the requirement that older teens--sixteen and seventeen-- get judicial consent to have an abortion, in lieu of parental consent. The requirement was kept in place for those fifteen and under. The younger children must still have a court hearing but under the amendment could attend remotely. The Senate acted on a similar bill, which now goes to a conference committee. Carmine described the budget as a "very good one," particularly as regards K-12 education. Local aid was fully funded. Strategies used to find the money included putting off the charitable deduction for state taxes for another year; using the capital gains tax revenue to pay bills rather than deposit it in the stabilization fund; and changing the way the sales tax is collected from credit and debit card swipes so that it gets into government coffers immediately. Once the budget is out of the conference committee, probably around Thanksgiving, the Governor will look at it. He generally vetoes around two hundred line items. The House will have till the first Tuesday in January to consider his vetoes; they are likely to override the ones involving money if state finances have not changed for the worse between now and then.

At the suggestion of John McQueen we applauded Carmine and his campaign manager, Linda Hench- Gentile, for waging a very successful reelection campaign.

Tania proposed that we congratulate Congresswoman Katherine Clark on her recent election to Assistant Speaker of the House. Peg and Carmine took on the task of writing the letter, which will also be sent to the Town Crier.

Report from Jennifer Roberts on the Select Board, and other local issues:

The Select Board has been conducting its business virtually since spring. They are also working with a new **Town Manager, Henry Hayes Jr.** Things are generally going well. **Town Meeting** on September 12 went off smoothly as an outdoor, Saturday, daytime event. Two major initiatives were passed which SDTC supported-- acquisition of the CSX rail bed, and construction of the Fairbank Community Center. (Both were again affirmed at the November 3 election.) The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail is scheduled to go forward with the final 75-100% design phase with the goal of construction to start in 2022. A design consultant has just been hired. Ultimately the CSX rail bed may be incorporated into the trail at a later date, bringing the trail to Route 20. Discussion of replacement of Fire Station #2 was postponed prior to Town Meeting in order to preserve cash for COVID contingency expenses. The new elder housing on the Post Road has given rise to an uptick in emergency calls, which has put pressure on that station. Jen noted that Fire Station #3 on Rte. 117 is very similar to Fire Station #2

The Select Board is engaged in goal setting in collaboration with departments of the Town. One of the Board goals concerns improving capital planning and funding. For example, the State Division of Local Services, which is under the Department of Revenue, has noted that Sudbury relies more than many other towns on debt exclusion to finance major capital initiatives. This is perceived as problematic.

The Lincoln-Sudbury Regional Agreement, which was established sixty-five years ago, is being evaluated with the aid of a lawyer hired by the Town. In response to a question and comment by Carl, Jen replied that money is not the only consideration in this re-examination. For instance, the Town is looking at how pulling out of the Minuteman system has worked out in terms of vocational education opportunities for our students. Also, the question has arisen as to whose purview vocational education falls under, the Town Manager or Lincoln-Sudbury.

Jen reported that the Town is in the second year of a three-year contract with the operator of the camp at Sewataro, the property the Town acquired at an earlier Town Meeting. The contract includes an option for it to be extended. The Board will be looking more closely at this issue going forward.

Gary brought up that the **Energy and Sustainability Commission**, of which he is a member, has renegotiated a new contract with the Town's electricity supplier so that the default contract calls for 100% renewable energy and at a lower price than previously. There is also an "economy rate," and a slightly higher rate for energy from all **local** renewables. Jen mentioned that she is grateful to Sustainable Sudbury and some high school students for their successful campaign to ban Styrofoam cups and plastic straws, as well as to initiate a charge for paper bags to encourage the use of reusable bags in stores. Hank was a voice of dissent regarding the desirability of the new bag charge.

We discussed the aftermath of the George Floyd homicide by police--the large Black Lives Matter protest in which many of us participated, and a pre-recorded forum on racial justice this summer in which Police Chief Nix played a role, along with representatives from the schools and other groups. A Sudbury Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission has been set up by the Town, which can accommodate up to thirteen members. We may wish to suggest people who might want to serve on the Commission. Ann Barysh mentioned that several groups in town, including the anti-racism group at Temple Beth El, could be more involved locally. She offered to discuss this with Jen offline. Peg mentioned that First Parish has a similar group, and Jen said there are others as well. John McQueen wondered if there has been any discussion of funding reallocation "from the diversity perspective" since the events of the summer.

Transfer Station: Henry pointed out that the Transfer Station is no longer taking some items that they used to take, presumably due to COVID 19. Yet the employees do not always wear masks.

Post-Presidential Election Political Action:

Protect the Results:

Tania reported on a national call she was on to review the decision to abort the official Protect the Results rallies planned all over the country for Friday following the election. There were two hundred people on the call, interacting with a panel including people from MoveOn, Indivisible and the AFL/CIO. People were unhappy with how it was handled--how the decision not to go forward was made at the last minute before people were to begin protesting, when it became clear that Biden-Harris had won. Our own local protest group chose to go along with this decision, while others -- including Boston and Concord, MA--held their demonstrations anyway. The organizers apologized for the manner in which the decision was conveyed. While Tania agreed that it was the right decision, she also agreed that continued vigilance is recommended in view of the response of the Trump administration to the outcome of the election.

Georgia Campaigns for the Senatorial Runoff Election, January 5:

Tania attended the first half of the Framingham Democratic City Committee meeting this past week. There has been an effort to coordinate volunteer efforts by various national organizations so that each Georgia voter is not getting calls from all of them. This is particularly unnecessary given the tremendous efforts of Georgians

themselves, notably Stacey Abrams and her two organizations, Fair Fight and the New Georgia Project. A different kind of initiative was described called Working America (workingamerica.org). It takes a longer-term perspective aimed at creating a connection to potential voters who are largely working class, non-college-educated, not well informed, and not highly political. The means used include phone banking and questionnaires, with the emphasis on asking people what their main concerns are and then connecting them to resources and information that may motivate them to become more active politically, and to incline them toward Democratic candidates.

Peg and Tania are both involved in another letter-writing initiative aimed at specific populations in three Georgia counties. There is also a postcard initiative to get registration applications to unregistered voters, which is already oversubscribed.

Many members of the Committee described their individual efforts to help bring about a Democratic majority in the Senate by donating to the two Democratic candidates, Rev. Raphael Warnock and Jon Ossoff, or to Fair Fight.

After a discussion of options, John McQueen made a motion, seconded by Carl, that we get our next year's dues to Sue Rushfirth by Monday, November 23, so that she can then send \$250 each to the Ossoff and Warnock campaigns, as well as \$250 to Fair Fight, on Friday, December 27. The motion passed overwhelmingly with one abstention.

Sudbury Democratic Group List: Carl has been going over the list and has only had to drop three names, due to faulty addresses or lack of response. There are sixty people on the list, which includes some Democrats in neighboring towns, just as some of us are on **their** lists. Gary moved that communications from the Committee be posted to the list, with the exception of the minutes of our meetings. These when finalized would go to Colin Warwick for posting on our website. The motion passed. The address of the list is sudburydems@groups.io.

Sudbury Protest Group update:

Though not officially part of the Committee, a kind of informal group that has been making decisions for the larger group includes several SDTC members (Tania, Peg, Carl, and Ann). It has been decided that our next demonstration (Friday Nov. 20) be a "nice" event largely dedicated to thanking our loyal supporters in their cars for their votes, their honks and their gestures of support, while we also hold our large Biden-Harris banner. We will take a break (possibly brief) and then have a Zoom call to discuss where to go from here.

Holiday party: We decided on **Wednesday, December 16 at 7:30 pm** as the date/time of our virtual Holiday Party. Participants will provide their own food and beverages.

The Transparency Project: Peg brought this up as New Business after she was approached by a member of Indivisible to become involved, and possibly to involve the Committee. Carmine has also been approached and explained it to us as follows: Representatives have been asked to take a pledge to see that all committee chairs make the votes in their committees open, and that representatives pledge to make public any votes that they take in a committee. Finally, should a representative co-sponsors a bill and someone else ask for a roll call vote on it, the representative will "stand up" to that roll call. Constituents are being asked to meet with their representatives to encourage them to take the pledge. Carmine explained the reason why he is not in favor of this project--that it would actually preclude movement toward positive outcomes for bills that are initially unpopular. He noted that the representatives who have signed on to this project are largely the less experienced legislators. They are trying to get the House to include this in their rules for the coming term, which will be voted upon in February. The Committee took no action on this proposal.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40 pm.

Peg Espinola, Secretary