

Minutes of the May 19, 2021 Meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee

The May 19, 2021 meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee was called to order on Zoom by Tania Vitvitsky, Chair, at 7:05 pm. Also present were Carmine Gentile, Vice-chair, Sue Rushfirth, Treasurer, Peg Espinola, Secretary, and members Carl Offner, Colin Warwick, Linda Hensch-Gentile, Tom Hollocher, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Henry Noer, John Riordan, Jennifer Roberts, Andrew Bettinelli, Hank Sorett, Ann Barysh, Marilyn Unger-Riepe, and Eva Fridman. Others present were Trina Zarski, from Sudbury, visiting for the first time; Janie Dretler, Sudbury Select Board member; Christopher Lorant, State Committee member; Dhruva Sen, from the Framingham DTC; and invited guest State Senator Jamie Eldridge.

Announcement of death of member Gary Bean: Tania informed us that longtime and beloved SDTC member Gary Bean had died unexpectedly the previous day, April 18, after a long illness. Funeral plans to be announced.

Minutes of previous meeting: The minutes of the April 14 meeting were accepted with one correction that had been submitted prior to today's meeting.

Treasurer's Report: Sue Rushfirth reported that we have \$917.87 in our account. The only outlay this month was a \$7.50 bank fee. One contribution of \$50 was received from a member. Two members have not yet paid. It was reported that the fee for our post office box is \$216 annually, and that given that most correspondence is now via email, very little arrives in the box. A motion was made, seconded and passed that we give up the box, and instead designate one person to receive Committee mail in their own mailbox. The Executive Committee will decide who that will be.

Communications: Tania has been in touch with State Senator Mike Barrett's scheduler regarding our plan to have Sen. Barrett speak to us about implementation of the climate bill he ushered through the legislature this year. The date has not yet been set. The co-chair of the Weston DTC has indicated an interest in co-sponsoring his talk.

Member Barbara Ryan has let us know that she is following our meetings but really cannot participate at this time.

Meetings: Tania reported that she has been attending virtual meetings of the State Democratic Committee's Women's Outreach Subcommittee. There is one scheduled for May 20 at 7 pm, featuring presentations by Senate president Karen Spilka, Congresswoman Lori Trahan and others on the subject of voting rights and voter suppression.

As COVID restrictions are being lifted on May 29, we are now in a position to determine whether we wish to continue to meet on Zoom, or whether we would like to return to in-person meetings. It was agreed that there are pros and cons to both approaches, including a concern that it was too early to meet in person. The possibility of hybrid meetings was also broached. We agreed to continue doing what we're doing for now.

Annual Report, SDTC 2020: A draft of the report was sent out with the agenda for this meeting. Henry Noer asked us to add to the section entitled Political Discussions that we engage in "vigorous debate about the primary and presidential elections," not just about abstract policy issues. This addition will appear in the final draft, along with enhancement of the graphics. The purpose of the report, in Tania's words, is that "people will know what we do." Once it is in final form we plan to distribute the report to chairs of local DTCs, state committee members, and our state and federal representatives as well as placing a link on our website. Other suggestions are welcome.

Update on the State Legislature, by member and State Representative Carmine Gentile: The House version of the **FY2022** budget was completed the last week of April. Unrestricted aid to cities and towns was slightly increased while chapter 70 K-12 aid to education was substantially increased. He questioned why Sudbury's Town Meeting warrant estimated a \$1.6 million decrease from FY2020 levels. Carmine indicated that revenues were substantially higher than expected, and that the House budget doesn't take into account an estimated \$4.5 billion we will receive from the Federal government's American Rescue Plan. There will probably be a supplemental budget in a few months to allocate the additional federal funds.. Next Monday the Senate will take up the budget and vote its version. Afterward a House and Senate conference committee will negotiate the final budget for both chambers to pass in late June or July.

Carmine also mentioned that he obtained \$20,000 in funds for Sudbury public safety communications and \$100,000 for the free medical clinics that are hosted by Congregation Beth El in Sudbury and a similar clinic in Framingham. The clinics are an invaluable resource for uninsured immigrants who live and/or work in these and other nearby towns.

Report on town government, by member Jennifer Roberts, Chair of the Select Board: Town Meeting is this weekend, on Saturday starting at 12:30 pm at the high school. Rain date is the next day. She reminded us that the weather will be very hot; we are advised to bring water.

Other town news: **The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Commission** has met and has elected its officers. SDTC members Sue Rushfirth and Nuha Muntasser are members; Nuha was elected co-chair. The Commission will bring forth a report by the end of the year. It will set forth its overall approach to the topic, including from a policy perspective.

The Board and other town entities continue to look at how Sudbury funds and manages capital expenditures, including the use of debt and Prop 2-1/2 overrides.

Reopening plans: As of June 14 town offices will accept in-person appointments of up to twelve minutes. As of July 6 town offices will be open in full. More ways to do things through a "virtual Town Hall" will be provided through an online link.

The Town Master Plan, the result of eighteen months of work, was approved by the Planning Board at the end of April. The Master Plan provides a blueprint for town development for at least the next ten years.

Presentation from State Senator Jamie Eldridge on "The case for progressive revenue to meet the needs of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts:

Revenues and budget: Sen. Eldridge began by noting the increase in state revenues this year. The budgets passed by the House and under consideration by the Senate do not take into account the \$4.5 billion expected from Biden's American Rescue Plan. Instead, the budget will be funded through the Rainy Day Fund. Some of the Federal funds could be used to replenish this fund. In the fall of 2021 the legislature will attempt to put the so-called Millionaire's Tax on the ballot--a 9% rate for income over one million dollars, versus the basic state tax rate of 5%. Half of that would go to transportation, half to education. Questions have arisen: Could we get to debt-free [state] college and university education with that money, as well universal childcare? Also, state Section 8 housing vouchers for low-income renters are still not at the year 2000 level. Sen. Eldridge said the legislature needs data from individual towns as to what they feel they are most in need of from the state. He mentioned the Next Generation Roadmap Bill--the so-called Climate Bill-- as an example of a multi-year approach to a goal.

Other initiatives toward which he is working include a bill (the Deed Bill) to double the fee when you buy a house, which could raise \$300 million split between affordable housing and climate resilience; a tax on unearned interest income; an act to tax university endowments over \$5 billion; and bills to close corporate tax loopholes that have not, in fact, been effective at keeping jobs within the state. Some of this added revenue could go toward reducing racial inequities in the state, among many other worthwhile projects. None of these and other tax-raising initiatives will come up in this session of the legislature except the Millionaires' Tax.

Responses from Committee members: Tania mentioned that the Sudbury Housing Authority, on which she sits, would like to see more money for rental housing, particularly housing appropriate for families. She noted that 40B housing is not really for poor people--rather it is for people of moderate income. Henry Noer wondered about the strength of the progressive voice in the state legislature. Sen. Eldridge answered in the affirmative, as evidenced by passage of the Rowe Act, the climate change bill and the eviction moratorium during the height of the pandemic. Hank Sorett had three suggestions: exempt the first \$250,000 income from any unearned income tax; exempt units under \$500,000 from the Deed Tax; and do not pass the Millionaire's Tax for fear of driving high earners and innovators out of the state entirely.

Colin Warwick made an argument for raising the long-term capital gains tax. Carl Offner pointed out that taxes were far more progressive in the 1950's "and they didn't hamper innovation one bit." Sue Rushfirth shared grim statistics regarding rates of poverty, income inequality and homelessness in the MetroWest area. She mentioned the need for single payer healthcare among other remedies. Carmine Gentile pointed out that both California and New York have much higher capital gains taxes than our 5% (13% and 8.8% respectively). He also mentioned the high amounts of food insecurity in minority groups during COVID, and the success of two programs in Chelsea and Cambridge that provided cash payments to low-income families. That cash was, in fact, used to buy necessities.

Lisa Kouchakdjian thanked Sen. Eldridge for his "vigorous support of public education." Citing the lack of beds for people suffering from mental illness in the state, she asked, "How can we get kids and older people out of ER's and how can we get insurance companies to cover these families?"

Sen. Eldridge replied that these are some of the issues that concern an umbrella organization, including unions, called Raise Up Massachusetts, which supports higher taxes on those who can afford to pay them in order to meet some of these needs. He said the problems that Lisa outlined constitute a good argument for single payer healthcare. Finally, he said that due to the leadership of Senate president Karen Spilka, the plans to create a comprehensive mental health expose during this legislative session.

Jennifer Roberts thanked the senator for helping to provide funds for public health at the municipal level with a multi-town grant of \$300,000. Towns need help to have hired staff for sustainable public health and other initiatives, as Acton does.

Preparation for the 2021 Sudbury Democratic Caucus: Tania reported on her participation in a Zoom call with other town committee and ward chairs, at which Gus Bickford, chair of the State Committee, and other important state leaders were present. It was announced that the upcoming caucuses for the State Democratic Platform Convention were supposed to be either virtual or hybrid. This was prior to the announcement that most COVID precautions will be lifted on May 29. Our committee caucus is scheduled for Saturday, July 17 at 10 a.m. After a discussion touching on a variety of possibilities, including an outdoor, hybrid or indoor caucus, a majority expressed a preference for an indoor caucus in a comfortably large, ADA-accessible room. The Executive Committee will be looking into various possibilities before our next meeting, if the Grange

is not available. The State Convention is scheduled for September 25, with several platform hearings taking place during August.

Getting Ready for 2022 survey results: Tania thanked Colin Warwick for assembling the results of the survey, which were sent out with the agenda for this meeting, and which are available online. A resolution drafted by Carl Offner, with a friendly amendment added by Henry Noer, summarizes the results of the survey, as described below:

The Sudbury Democratic Town Committee will continue supporting Democratic candidates in Massachusetts for local, state, and Federal positions. We will also continue supporting candidates and causes in other states. Based on the recent survey of our membership, we plan to do this by focusing support on three national organizations. Each of these has a proven record of effective support for Democratic candidates in swing districts: Force Multiplier, Swing Left, and Fair Fight. Of course we encourage our members to support these and other organizations and candidates as they see fit.

The Committee voted in favor of the resolution.

Our final agenda item was proposed by Hank Sorett, who has a strong objection to the manner in which the budget is portrayed in the warrant for Town Meeting. Hank plans to bring his concerns directly to the floor of Town Meeting on Saturday.

Before we adjourned it was noted that the Fourth of July parade has been cancelled as of this time.

The meeting was adjourned at or about 8:35 pm.

Peg Espinola, Secretary