

Minutes of the November 10, 2021 Meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee

The November 10, 2021 meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee was called to order on Zoom by Tania Vitvitsky, Chair, at 7:05 pm. Also attending were Carmine Gentile, Co-Chair, Peg Espinola, Secretary, Nuha Muntasser, Outreach Coordinator, and members Linda Hench-Gentile, Colin Warwick, Hank Sorett, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Jennifer Roberts, Barbara Ryan, Henry Noer, Marilyn Unger-Riepe and Carl Offner. Ravi Simon, Rep. Gentile's aide, attended as a guest. State Senator Diana DiZoglio was our guest speaker for part of the evening.

Announcements and Communications: The date for the State Convention has been set for June 4, 2022. It will be a nominating convention. The Caucus will be held between February and early March. As of this meeting Governor Baker had not yet decided whether to run for re-election. Tania stated that if State Atty. General Maura Healey should decide to run for Governor, Quentin Palfrey would run for Attorney General. (He was Assistant Attorney General under Obama.) Healey had a fundraiser set for November 15. Baker doesn't have to declare his intentions until February. He will be turning sixty-five later in November.

Acceptances: The minutes of the October meeting as sent to the membership prior to the meeting were accepted unanimously. Tania gave a summary of the Treasurer's Report, as Sue Rushfirth, Treasurer, had another obligation and could not attend. One member contributed \$100 in dues and one bill (\$7.50, bank fee) was paid, resulting in an increase of \$92.50 in the account. The report was accepted.

Legislative report by Rep. Carmine Gentile: The Massachusetts House of Representatives has passed a \$3.82 billion appropriations bill funding water infrastructure, health care, housing, leaving \$2.8 billion in funds in State coffers (from the American Rescue Plan plus surplus tax revenue) that have not yet been appropriated. Several billion in suggested earmarks did not get into this bill, including \$20 million for the Sudbury sewer project, which will be postponed to 2022. The Senate was voting on their appropriation bill on the date of our meeting. The two bills will then go to a joint House and Senate conference committee for reconciliation; a new version will be voted on again in each chamber, hopefully by next week, and presented to the Governor before November 17.

Features of the House bill include \$740 million for housing, at least \$200 million for community hospitals, \$365 million for education, and \$150 million for essential workers who worked through the worst of the Pandemic (checks in the \$500-\$2000 range). Only \$154 million went for earmarks, including \$250 thousand for Sudbury. This included \$150 thousand to the Water District to address the problem of PFAS; \$75,000 for the Sudbury Housing Trust to distribute for residents needing assistance with one or two mortgage payments and \$25,000 to help the food pantry move to a more accessible location and/or purchase equipment (e.g., refrigerators and/or freezers). Carmine reiterated that 2022 will provide an opportunity for Sudbury to receive more funding for vital projects such as the proposed Rte. 20 sewer system and treatment plant.

We applauded the announcement that Rep. Gentile got an award as Legislator of the Year from the Massachusetts Home Care Alliance for his part in obtaining \$70 million in extra pay for home health aides and working to establish a mechanism for their pay scales to be examined and updated at least every other year.

Holiday Party Planning: As of the meeting we were awaiting confirmation that the party could take place outside, at a particular private home, on December 11 or 12. Depending on the date, the party would take place in the late afternoon or early evening, and would not involve a meal--instead, potluck desserts and seasonal beverages such as mulled wine and cider and hot chocolate. Henry Noer suggested a fire pit would be welcome. Invitees would include our current State Senators, Jamie Eldridge and Mike Barrett. We discussed other possible invitees, including chairs of nearby DTCs, our State Committee representatives and others who have worked closely with us on campaigns.

Time to Act Week of Action: Tania brought up the subject of the Time to Act initiative, organized by a coalition of activist groups (Indivisible and Swing Blue, for two) calling itself the Declaration for American Democracy Coalition. Standouts have been organized throughout the week of November 7-14 nationally. Locally the Sudbury Protest Group, separate from the SDTC but with many common members, has organized a standout to take place on Friday, November 12 between 4:30 and 5:30 at its customary standout site, on the Common opposite Town Hall. Posters will be provided, but participants may also bring their own, in support of passage of two important pending voting rights bills. The Senate Democrats' proposal is the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, named for John Lewis, the legendary civil rights activist who died in 2020, that aims to restore the Civil Rights-era Voting

Rights Act that has been weakened by recent US Supreme Court rulings. It is narrower in scope than the Democrats' nearly 600-page Freedom to Vote Act, which focuses largely on setting uniform federal rules for elections, including voting by mail and in person. The John Lewis Act focuses more specifically on preventing discrimination against minority voters. During the standout participants will have an opportunity to sign a letter to President Biden (on a huge banner), which is being transported from one standout site to another throughout the week. Carmine Gentile added that Senator Markey has agreed to provide a short statement that may be read at the event; Senator Warren has also been invited to provide such a statement.

General political discussion:

We briefly discussed other initiatives by progressive groups, including Energize Massachusetts--which advocates for energy conservation, especially switching from fossil fuels to renewables. They meet at least monthly and are co-hosted by two people from Wayland. Some partisan, progressive activists have been beset by lethargy, but there is still an active group who are sending out postcards to encourage likely Democrats to vote in important State contests.

We also had brief discussions about the conflict between the Friends of the Library and the Library Trustees, and the question of whether the Justice Department has been aggressive enough in prosecuting "antidemocratic criminals." Members of the Committee expressed divergent views on both these subjects.

Presentation by State Senator Diana DiZoglio, Candidate for State Auditor:

State Senator Diana DiZoglio, State Senator from the First Essex District, gave a presentation related to her candidacy for State Auditor in the 2022 election. She described her background growing up in Methuen and Lawrence and attending community college before going to Wellesley College on a full scholarship. After graduation she worked for a number of years in nonprofits, started her own business, and also held a position as a legislative aide on Beacon Hill. While in that environment she experienced sexual harassment; when she reported it she was forced to sign a nondisclosure agreement to get a modest severance. As a State Senator DiZoglio has been a primary sponsor of bills banning such agreements. More generally she wants to see "transparency and accountability" in state government. She believes that as Auditor she could help to bring this about.

DiZoglio is a member of both the Gateway Cities and Manufacturing caucuses and is promoting the repurposing of old mills not only as spaces for artists, professionals, nonprofits and small businesses, but also for housing. She answered a number of questions on other issues, and received a ringing endorsement from Carmine Gentile, who has known her for seven years.

Jennifer Roberts' Report on the Select Board and Local Issues: (Jen Roberts is Chair of the Sudbury Select Board as well as a member of the SDTC.) Jen reported on a recent Select Board meeting with the CEO and founder of Flashvote, Kevin Lyons, with whom the Town contracted to survey the opinion of boards, committees, commissions, businesses and others in Sudbury on how they would like to see ARPA (American Rescue Plan) money spent locally. 815 residents responded to the survey. Any resident can also respond to the survey posted on the Town website via Constant Contact through November 30.

The Transportation Committee, with support from the Council on Aging and the Commission on Disability, is seeking ARPA money to continue with its very successful grant-funded pilot programs involving Uber and local taxi services during the Pandemic to allow certain categories of residents get to medical appointments, do essential shopping, get to work and even to alleviate social isolation in people who might otherwise be stranded at home. The Transportation Committee is working to put together a business plan to make this feasible going forward, under Town auspices. Ultimately the Town is may have to limit the service to meet the most crucial needs, especially medical appointments. A majority of users have been the elderly and the disabled.

Carl Offner raised issues about the way the Flashvote survey was worded. "It wasn't immediately obvious that the Survey wasn't just some spam or malware," he said. He added, " It wasn't clear what the intent or proposed use of the questionnaire would be. For instance, suppose that lots of people feel that the Town does a good job on education but needs improvement in other areas. Would that be used as a justification for cutting the education budget?" He also had concerns about the conditions of employment of Uber workers who are engaged in the pilot program.

Jen Roberts stated that the Health Department should be a good candidate for [ARPA] funding. The need for more support for the Sudbury social worker--perhaps even another full-time position--was mentioned as a possible use of ARPA funds and has support from many in the town, including some on the Commission on Disability and the COA.

Tania mentioned that the Sudbury Housing Authority has had the use of a part-time social worker, through a state grant, and that "she has been remarkably helpful" during COVID. Carmen stated that "there will be hundreds of millions of dollars available for grants in healthcare" and agrees that "we could really use a second full-time social worker."

The Select Board is also aware of the initiative of Sustainable Sudbury, a nonprofit organization focused on local environmental issues, to get a "climate emergency declaration" brought before Town Meeting in 2022. The Conservation Commission and the Energy and Sustainability Committee are also interested parties.

Speakers for Upcoming Meetings: Carmen suggested that Sonia Chang-Diaz, who is running for Governor in the Democratic primary, be asked to speak to us. Peg Espinola suggested that we have someone from Sustainable Sudbury speak with us about their proposed climate emergency declaration.

The meeting was adjourned at or about 9 pm.