

Minutes of March 9, 2022 Sudbury Democratic Town Committee Meeting [final copy]

The March 9, 2022 meeting of the Sudbury Democratic Town Committee was called to order on Zoom at 7:03 pm by Tania Vitvitsky, Chair. Vice-Chair Carmine Gentile co-hosted the meeting, as Tania was called away to give a speech at an Indivisible meeting for 20 minutes early in the evening. Also present were Sue Rushfirth, Treasurer, Nuha Muntasser, Outreach Coordinator, Peg Espinola, Secretary, members John McQueen, Linda Hench-Gentile, Hank Sorett, Jennifer Roberts, Aruna Pundit, Marilyn Unger-Riepe, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Eva Fridman, Andrew Bettinelli, and Henry Noer, and guests Janie Dretler, Ravi Simon, Laurie Ensley, Kevin LaHaise, and Eric Poch.

Announcements: Tania announced that a LSRHS candidate wrote to say she was sorry she had missed our January meeting. We clarified that we are not reaching out to candidates in contested races in the Sudbury election to present to us, other than Select Board candidates, as we as a committee cannot actually support a given candidate in a local race. As we have two candidates for Select Board who are on our committee and asked to make a presentation, we accepted the request of the third candidate for the two openings, Eric Poch, to present as well. On the other hand, anyone is welcome to attend our committee meetings as a guest.

Minutes of the January 12, 2022 meeting: Carmine had a correction to the some of the wording in his legislative report. The minutes were unanimously approved as corrected.

Treasurer's Report: The Treasurer's Report was accepted unanimously as amended by Sue at the meeting. Seventeen members have paid their 2022 contribution to the committee; eleven members have yet to pay.

Presentations by candidates for Sudbury Select Board: The presentations were made in alphabetical order and were limited to three minutes each, followed by up to five minutes for Q&A. All three candidates--Lisa Kouchakdjian, Eric Poch and Jennifer Roberts-- described their many years in Sudbury, their accomplishments as members of other boards and committees in town (including in Jennifer Roberts' case, the Select Board itself, of which she is currently chair), and their goals for the future of the Board. Mr. Sorett posed a number of questions to each candidate relating primarily to budgetary issues, the answers to which did not reveal strong differences between them.

Carmine Gentile's Legislative Report: Carmine's report summarized the accomplishments of the House in the past TWO months, as we had our Caucus in February rather than a regular meeting. The following bills were passed by the House but had not yet been decided upon by the Senate as of March 9: A bill involving appropriation of COVID-related funds such as free masks and testing, plus extension of special permission for remote notarization and municipal meetings to July 15, 2022; the Votes Act, allowing no excuse mail-in voting for all elections, as well as other improvements; the Work and Family Mobility Act, allowing all immigrants with valid passports or Consular certificates and birth certificates to receive driver's training and obtain licenses and auto insurance; the Offshore Wind and Clean Energy Bill, to upgrade our 1950's-era electric infrastructure so as to produce offshore power for Massachusetts and other states; a supplemental appropriation with \$100 million for Chapter 90 funds for municipal DPW work on our roads and bridges, as well as \$5 million more for the Low Income Energy Assistance program; and a \$1.6 billion appropriation bill focused on COVID-19 relief. Notably the House turned down a Republican-led amendment to the budget that would have paused the gas tax, were the price of a gallon to exceed \$3.70. Additionally Carmine mentioned that the State House reopened to the public on February 22.

Carmine also described traveling to UMass Amherst for a rally in support of debt-free higher education, which is available in many Western European countries but not in the US. He is also concerned about the absence of trauma teams for social workers employed by the Department of Children and Families, who are dealing with COVID-related mental health crises on top of their usual tasks. The result is social worker burnout. Committee members supported Carmine's plan to reach out to the Senate Chair and House Speaker and to the appropriate House and Senate committees to bring about legislation to provide such services. He pointed out that these services have been available to employees of police and fire departments for some time.

Jennifer Roberts' Report on the Select Board and Other Local Issues: The Select Board has been working on finalizing its budget and Town Meeting articles. Town Meeting will take place on May 2. It is currently planned as a weekday event, inside at the high school, with possible COVID safety measures in place. Jennifer stated that if there are those among us who prefer Town Meeting to take place on a weekend day, as we had the last two years, they can always send feedback to the Select Board and the Town Manager.

ARPA funds: The Town received \$5.9 million. The Select Board has allocated \$2 million in time-sensitive allocations for the schools, public safety and public health programs. On March 24 there will be a "Listening Session" from 7-8:30 pm at which proponents of various projects will each get four minutes to make a presentation.

Other: Jennifer acknowledged receipt of the letter from four of our members to the Select Board and the Town Manager requesting that the Town Hall be lit up in blue and yellow, the colors of the Ukrainian flag. The Board discussed the request on March 8 and approved it.

The Board is renegotiating the management agreement between Camp Sewataro and the Town. It is also finalizing the bidding process for construction of the Fairbank Community Center. There will be several articles at Town Meeting involving the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail to enable it to go forward in a timely fashion.

Report on February 12 SDTC Caucus: The following people were elected to be delegates to the Democratic State Nominating Convention on June 3-4:

Female delegates: Linda Hench-Gentile, Lisa Kouchakdjian, Sue Rushfirth, Eva Fridman, Jennifer Roberts, Laurie Ensley.

Male delegates: John Riordan, Jack Grosberg, Henry Noer, Carl Offner, Hank Sorett, Andrew Bettenelli

Alternative delegates: Mike Ferrari, Peg Espinola

It appears that the Convention will be hybrid--in-person and on Zoom.

[Subsequent to the Caucus Laurie Ensley had to withdraw as a delegate; Peg Espinola has taken her place.]

Report on the MLK Day of Service Project on January 17 to Benefit the Sudbury Food Pantry: Tania thanked everyone who participated in making this a highly successful event, despite heavy rain in the morning--especially the Kouchakdjian family, who made their garage and driveway available again and provided family members and a friend who drove, hauled boxes, etc. There were more banana boxes filled than last year--somewhere in the thirties.

Report on Sudbury Stands for Democracy's "Support for the People of Ukraine" Standout, Feb. 28:

Tania organized this stand-out by the group formerly known as the Sudbury Protest Group, which is not formally affiliated with the SDTC but which includes several members of the committee. The stand-out, from 4 to 5 pm in front of Town Hall, attracted Ukrainian-Americans and others from surrounding towns as well as regular members of the group, and got coverage in local papers and on television. Tania gave a speech as a member of the Ukrainian-American community herself, as did Carmine Gentile. Carmine said that the house has appropriated \$10 million for refugee resettlement in the Commonwealth. But Tania pointed out that there have been no changes to the visa protocols so far other than that Ukrainians already in this country have now received Temporary Protective Status. There was a general discussion of ways to support Ukraine materially at this time, including collecting relief items and medical supplies to be sent to a Ukrainian church in Boston for shipment to Poland. Tania also expressed a willingness to accept checks for Ukrainian relief.

A New Secretary for the SDTC: Tania announced that as Peg Espinola is moving out of state in June, a new secretary is needed for the SDTC. After a brief discussion Carmine Gentile agreed to accept nomination to this position and was elected unanimously.

Peg Espinola, Secretary