



## SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES OF AUGUST 14, 2023

Members: Judy Bickford, Don McDowell, Christopher Palermo, Laura Streets

Absent: Vacant

ADMINISTRATION and STAFF: Chief Jason Luneau, Interim Town Administrator; Judi Alberi, Administrator's Assistant; Kevin Barrows, Highway Superintendent; Tina Sweet, Finance Director; Paula Beattie, Human Resources Director; Sara Haskins, Town Clerk/Treasurer; Stacey Ferriman, Assistant Finance Director

PARTICIPANTS/GUESTS: Kathy Chaffee\*, Mary Lou Nichols\*, Yon Perras, Uwanna Perras, Gerald Throne, Evelyn Throne, Barry Russo, Richard Craig, Martin Green, Tom Cloutier, Cynthia Cloutier, Kristin Marriott, Bob Bortree, Barbara Percy, Dian Williams, Yvette Mason, Jamie Jaret, Rhonda Bedell

*\*participating via Zoom*

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### CALL MEETING TO ORDER

Moderator Shap Smith called the meeting to order at 5:35pm

### NEW BUSINESS

#### 1. Guest panel discussion relative to Town Administrator vs Town Manager

In order to provide information to the citizens, the administration invited Stowe Town Manager, Charles Safford (CS), retired Waterbury Town Manager Bill Shepeluk (BS), and Bristol Town Administrator, Valerie Caples (VC) to partake as guest panelist in a Q&A for Article 4 of the Town Special meeting taking place on August 29th. Article 4 asks the citizen: Shall the Town of Morristown adopt the town manager form of governance in accordance with the provisions of chapter 37 of title 24 of the Vermont Statutes Annotated? The Selectboard and citizens asked the following questions:

1. How do you think your experience as a town manager in your town has benefited your town's well-being and growth? (Laura Streets)

CS: I have 35 years of experience in Vermont municipal government with four different municipalities. It gives me a broad perspective and experience to draw on when facing challenges. Have a great team of department heads that take things one step at a time as appropriate.

BS: Waterbury has changed tremendously over the last 35 years. Consolidated the departments between the village and the town while I was there. Worked on a stable tax rate.

VC: Town Administrators (TA) can have a positive impact on growth just like a Town Manager (TM).

2. What as a Town Manager have you been able to accomplish that a Town Administrator could not accomplish? (Yon Perras)

CS: TA can be very successful, a TM has formal authority and responsibility to oversee daily administration. I have never been a TA and would not apply for a TA job.

BS: TA has a tough job and I would never apply for a TA job. I have a masters' degree in public administration, concentrating on state and local finance. TA is not recognized in state statute; TA has all the responsibility but no

authority. Authority lies with the Selectboard. TM has the role of hiring, firing, discipline. TA has 5 bosses, the Selectboard.

VC: Prefers being TA due to the personnel part of it. Prefers to punt to the Selectboard. Department heads are on collegial level with me. The Selectboard expects me to handle day to day stuff. The biggest disadvantage of TA that I see is things take longer to get input from Selectboard.

3. What issues with a transition from having TA to TM should the Town of Morristown expect to consider? (Judy Bickford)

CS: When I first arrived in Stowe, there were still some Department heads that wanted to approach the Selectboard directly with personnel and other matters. Fortunately, the Selectboard redirected them to me. At the end of the day, it is a dance and we hope to dance well together and move things forward.

BS: The biggest challenge is going to be for the employees. Encourage all citizens to read Title 24, Chapter 37 before you vote. Once a budget is adopted, the TM executes the budget. TM has the authority to hire all employees. The manager has operational control.

VC: ICMA has a code of ethics for TM's but not for TA's. Can not sign petitions, cannot donate money, must remain apolitical.

4. If the Town of Morristown went with TM governance, what would we be looking for in terms of education? What should we be looking for in a candidate? (Bob Bortree)

BS: There is no cookie cutter answer. I would encourage staying away from candidates with a specialty background as you can hire one offs for this, concentrate on strong analytical skills, financial skills, personnel management and etc. Aim for someone that has a good education and is unique. You could graduate top of your class and not be a good TA or TM.

CS: Needs to be a good fit. Managers must be adaptable to different boards over time. TM has a lot going on, so you need someone you can trust, be fair and objective, reasonable personable and can be objective. At the end of the day, it is hard to say no to someone, but difficult conversations are part of your job.

VC: The value of professional development is huge. Put money into your employees' development.

5. If the Town of Morristown were to adopt a Town Manager Governance what would we lose? What's the downside? (Don McDowell)

VC: Depends on what you have for a TM or TA. The Selectboard would forfeit a lot of their authority and responsibility. Frees the Selectboard up from a lot of day to day details.

BS: The Selectboard will lose a lot of headaches. Do not need to concern yourself with the day-to-day stuff. TM is responsible to the Selectboard. The public does not have any direct ties to the TM. A good TM is not leading the parade, the Selectboard is doing that. The Selectboard gets input from the voters and asks the TM for opinions.

CS: The Selectboard gives up power. The Selectboard decides what and TM decides how. The Selectboard is not the personnel manager and maybe doesn't know debits and credits, they are volunteers that have many other jobs and duties, so the day to day operations lie with the TM.

6. How do you manage the fast pace of social media and miscommunication? (Mary Lou Nichols)

CS: People have short attention spans these days. Remember, town governance is a deliberative process and we need to understand each others perspective. Try to do your job without getting in the muck.

VC: Some towns have a communications person that monitors social media. Sometimes I choose to correct the information. Other times I feel it will be forgotten about the next day.

BS: Social media and the demands of the public have increased. The time spent answering emails would not allow me to get my job done if I didn't allocate time in my day to specific items. The Selectboard should have a policy on social media. The public has high expectations for quick responses and usually have diametrically opposed opinions. This is all part of the job.

7. In developing budgets, do you engage the Selectboard early in the process or do you propose a finished product to be considered by the board?(Chris Palermo)

CS: While there is a concentrated time to advance a formal budget for consideration by the Selectboard, budget development doesn't just occur once per year, it is an on-going process of assessing community desires, Federal/State regulations, and organizational needs. A good manager will have a feel for this and where his/her board is in terms of expectations. With this being said, a manager also needs to inform the Selectboard about what

they need to know, not just what they want to hear.

BS: TM begins the budget process in the fall with department heads and presents the needs to the Selectboard and asks what their end goal is looking like? Would the Selectboard like to see growth, no rise in tax rates, and etc... so I get the Selectboard input and present it to the Selectboard when done.

VC: Very similar process as others, meets with department heads and presents to the Selectboard.

8: Does the panel feel TM would provide more consistency? (Kathy Chaffee)

BS: Depends on who you get as a TM. The selectboard can change every year, so you may not have any consistency. The TM accepts a commitment for 2 years when they take the job.

CS: There is a commitment of a TM of 2 years.

The take away from the discussions, there seems to be a key difference between a TM and TA: How much authority a community is willing to cede to a professional and how much of a say elected Selectboard members get over day-to-day town operations. TM have more: TA have less.

August 29th is the vote. Thanks to Shap for moderating the event and to our guest panelist, Charles, Bill and Valerie.

## **ADJOURN**

Meeting adjourned at 6:40pm

Submitted and filed this August 18, 2023 .

Judi Alberi, Scribe

*Please note all minutes are in Draft form and are subject to approval at the next Selectboard meeting.*