

**Special Wolcott Selectboard Meeting
Informational Meeting Minutes
July 10, 2019**

Present: Eric Furs, Kimberly Gravel, Michael Davidson, Jennifer Holton-Clapp,
Richard Lee
Employees: Linda Martin, Duncan Hastings
Reporter: Doug McClure, *Hardwick Gazette*
Public: Members of the Public

Eric called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Board Presentation on need for Town Administrator (TA) Position

Eric gave an opening statement. Among his comments: Given the additional responsibilities that fall upon Towns, it seems logical and necessary to have a Town Administrator to assist in the daily operations of the Town on behalf of the board. Such a position would help move the Town into the future, serve as a liaison with the public, and would strengthen the Town team. The board has held several special meetings since Town Meeting day, with citizen involvement regarding the need for a Town Administrator. Duncan, who has assisted other Towns in creating a new position, was hired to assist the board in developing a plan.

Three documents were made available to the public: 1) Why a Town Administrator?, 2) Comparison of Roles and Responsibilities of Clerk and Treasurer and Town Administrator, and 3) Wolcott Town Administrator Job Description. Copies of these documents will be available at Town Office.

Michael stated the Town Plan addresses consideration of a Town Administrator to assist the board. Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) encourages towns to have such a position. The statutory duties of the Town Clerk do not include helping the Selectboard run the Town. We are leaving money on the table by not obtaining grants.

Duncan stated he has served as a Town Administrator in two towns. In his opinion, the size of the town does not matter so much since town requirements are the same. He feels the administrative burden on towns, an example being road standards, are beyond the abilities of the Selectboard on a day-to-day basis. Duncan stated a TA can catch opportunities that would otherwise be missed, thereby helping the town grow and prosper. The TA can serve as a direct connection to people.

Jenn stated the board does not have time to invest in research. She would want the TA to be a researcher so the Selectboard can make informed decisions.

Comments and Questions from the Community

Q: What impact will the TA position have on the budget and taxes after this fiscal year?

At the last Town Meeting, a Capital Reserve Fund of \$20,000 was established for the maintenance of Town buildings. The Town will now ask residents to reallocate those funds to go

towards the expense of a TA. The \$20,000 had been assigned for repairs to the roof of the old Schoolhouse in the event a grant had been awarded, but we did not receive the grant. In addition, typically there is a fund balance remaining at the end of the fiscal year, June 30, 2019. \$40,000 of the reserve could go towards the TA position. Salary and benefits for the TA would be prorated for this fiscal year, which began July 1, 2019. As to the budget and taxes in the future, Eric stated there are ways to tighten up other areas of the budget and reassign monies. He cannot say there will be no tax increase due to the TA position. Eric feels the damage to the wallet would be worth it.

Q: What will be the costs for the position?

The base salary being considered for the TA is \$50,000. There would be an additional cost of \$24,000 for insurance if a full family plan is needed.

Q: Why is the board seeking funds from the Town now to create the TA position instead of at the next Town Meeting?

The Selectboard could have started the process before, but was hit with a big surprise the weekend of Town Meeting.

Q: Why did the TA position become an emergency right after Town Meeting day?

Linda and Belinda did a lot of work for the board outside their job descriptions. With Belinda gone, the board realized their responsibilities are more than they anticipated.

Jenn stated it will take time to find the right person for the position. The board wants to proceed in an orderly manner and do due diligence. The Town could not get grants because of staffing problems, since no one on the Selectboard or the Town has the ability to write grants.

Q: What impact will the TA position have on the budget and taxes after this fiscal year? Eric stated the board is finding money. Two options were considered: 1.) sending tax bills out late, or 2.) sending out an additional tax bill. Eric stated that Linda preferred to send tax bills out when they typically have been in past years. The Selectboard did not like the second option.

Q: The TA job description is very extensive with many areas of specialty. Can one person fill all those requirements? Who will train the TA? Will it be the Selectboard, or the Town Clerk?

Duncan stated that based upon a salary survey, the base salary offered will be \$50,000. It is not likely they will find someone to meet all the requirements immediately. The successful candidate will need to grab the bull by its horns, and be willing and able to learn. There is a lot of training available through VLCT. The TA will have to have a very good working relationship with the Selectboard and with Linda as Town Clerk, or it won't work.

Q: Why does the TA need to be a full-time position?

Eric stated the board wants the right individual right off the bat. The position can be filled this year or next year. Since the funds are available now, he can't see the purpose in waiting. The board won't hire just to hire someone. A TA would bring policy and governance to the Selectboard.

Jenn stated the position requires a higher level function and skill set. It is not a clerical position.

Q: Can the Selectboard speak to their statutory duties?

Eric stated the statute does not match reality. The Rules of Procedure are archaic. It is a cloudy, muddy mess, but it is not that the board is not doing their duties. Selectboard members receive only a \$500 annual stipend.

Q: If a full-time TA is hired, will the Selectboard reduce in size to just three members? A three-person board is a whole lot easier to manage.

Eric stated that five voices are better than three.

Bill Cotten stated that some time ago he had suggested to the board that an Administrative Assistant be hired to remove some of the burden from Linda and Belinda in assisting the board. Bill estimated the TA position may add five cents on the tax rate. That would be \$50 on a home with an assessed value of \$100,000, or \$100 on a home with an assessed value of \$200,000.

Q: Does the Selectboard have a Plan B if the Town rejects the Article at the Special Town Meeting?

Eric stated the Town needs a liaison. The situation has sucked out all the fun of serving. If there is no support, it will be hard to run again in March. He would question how the Town will function, and would question whether to run again.

In summary:

Dan Noyes noted the complexities of Town government have increased. In his legislative capacity, he deals quite often with the TAs in Hyde Park and in Johnson.

Kim feels a TA will be a benefit to the Town, not just the Selectboard. She added the board will nickel and dime the budget next year. It was suggested a TA could provide a sense of community and bring the Town together. Eric reiterated it is hard to say taxes won't go up, but it will be worth it. The TA will help with the preparation of the budget.

Motion by Eric to end the Comments and Questions portion of the meeting. Second by Michael. Voting: All in favor.

Next Steps - Special Town Meeting

The Selectboard has reviewed a Warning for a Special Town Meeting to be held Wednesday, August 14, 2019 at 6:00 p.m. at the Town Office. Article I is to authorize reallocation of the \$20,000 Capital Fund towards costs involved for the TA position. Motion by Eric to sign the amended Warning. Second by Richard. Voting: All in favor.

Duncan pointed out that the turning point will be the vote at the Special Town Meeting on August 14. If the Town votes yes, then the TA position will be advertised, interviews will take place, and the Selectboard will hire a person.

Adjourn

Motion by Eric to adjourn the meeting at 7:35 p.m. Second by Richard. Voting: All in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Deborah Klein.

The next regularly scheduled Selectboard Meeting will be Wednesday, July 17, 2019