

BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Minutes of May 14, 2013

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Phil LoChiatto, Selectmen Al Letizio, Kathleen DiFruscia and Roger Hohenberger were present, as was Town Administrator David Sullivan and the department heads. Mr. McLeod was delayed and arrived shortly after the meeting began. Mr. LoChiatto called the meeting to order at 4:10 pm and deferred to Mr. Sullivan to present the meeting agenda.

STRATEGIC PLANNING WORKSHOP:

Mr. Sullivan reminded the Board that the Town previously went through a full strategic planning training process, which also involved the School District, back in 2004. Since that time, multiple variations of strategic planning have come before the Board of Selectmen, however, the process has stalled. Mr. Sullivan noted that the Board can be involved in strategic planning as much or as little as the Board decides. The Board can have a high level role and allow the department heads to do much of the strategic planning on their own, or the Board can be involved in all three facets of the strategic planning process, including “Process and Control”, “Customer Consideration” and “Employee Consideration”. Mr. Sullivan asked that those present, regardless of their role as department heads or Board members, be honest in expressing concerns as well as have an opportunity to brainstorm on areas we can improve as a leadership team.

Mr. LoChiatto noted that he believes the Board’s role is from a “35,000 foot” level and that other items are handled from the department head level, down. Mr. Letizio noted that he believes the Board’s role is more visionary and that they are there to interpret what the citizenry wants and then forward that strategy to the department heads to implement. Chief Lewis commented that past Boards, in his view, have represented more of a vocal minority than the general citizenry, and that issues among individual Board members in the past have affected the department heads in their working relationship with the Board. Mr. Letizio followed up that, in his view, what the Board does not want to do is try to do the jobs of the department heads. Ms. Scott noted that she believes in her tenure there has been no vision for the Town at the Board level.

Mr. LoChiatto noted that it is difficult for Board members to connect with the citizenry as a whole, due to most communications being centered around “hot-button” issues. Mr. Letizio noted that the Board could look to utilize a survey, as was done successfully by the Economic Development committee in the past. Mrs. DiFruscia weighed in that most of the concerns she hears from citizens is that they don’t know what the Town is ultimately going to look like in terms of residential build-out and the effect of I-93, and she is concerned that we address what type of infrastructure and employees will be required to support the future.

Mr. Poulson noted that as department managers, we can oversee the tangible items such as budgets and equipment purchases, but it is the intangibles such as employee productivity, trust and morale that have lacked attention in recent years. Mr. Letizio noted that this direction comes from the Selectmen and noted that the Board could choose to be “an employer of choice”, but that would come at a cost. Mr. Sullivan noted that department heads have been working on team-building and that the Town mission statement notes that above all else, the health, safety and welfare of the residents and employees is paramount.

Mr. McLeod noted that while the Planning Board serves the true visionary role, and the Zoning Board is required to be reactionary in overseeing compliance with laws and regulations, the Selectmen and School Board fall somewhere in between that spectrum. He believes that in some cases the Selectmen need to be more reactionary than visionary because they are responsible for complying with laws and managing the prudential affairs of the Town. Mr. Hohenberger noted that the Board members hear most from residents at election time, and that he most often hears thanks for holding the line on spending on the Town side. However, he believes that if there is dissension among employees and/or department heads, that he would like to find a way to fix it.

He countered Mr. Letizio's comment that being an "employer of choice" may not align with the taxpayers wishes, and that this is what the School District has experienced in recent years. Mr. LoChiato summarized that in his view the Board should not offer an overall Town vision, but a vision and direction for operating the Town.

Chief Lewis, speaking on behalf of his department and Captains Caron and Fedele, noted that there should be expectations communicated between the department heads and the Board. He also believes that the Town has lacked investment in both its facilities and technology infrastructure, noting that the Police Station, at 16 years old, is still commonly referred to as the "new" Police Station. He also noted his view that there is a difference between management and leadership and wondered if the Town should be considering a new form of government, such as Town Manager/Council form due to our growth and complexity. Mr. Delong agreed that technology should be considered as part of our future tangible goals and that we currently experience both redundancy and failure points in our network infrastructure.

Mrs. Call noted that with future growth and potential additional employees, the Board has to consider the long-term cost of employee benefits. She noted that while the Board is struggling with the impact of decisions that prior boards have made in terms of Earned Time and Retirement liabilities, today's boards need to consider the effect their decisions will have on future taxpayers. Mrs. Call noted that we could have several more work sessions similar to this meeting to discuss these issues at length. In addition, she noted it would be helpful to have some sense of parameters from the Board going into each budget season, as this has been limited in recent years and if we continue to simply "hold the line" from year to year, what will we be sacrificing? Lastly, Mrs. Call noted that at the end of this fiscal year, the Town will have no long-term general obligation debt and that this would be the time to consider bonding some large projects and take advantage of the low interest rate environment.

Mr. Norman referred back to the Town management system and noted that at times it is not clear who is in control of the decision making or "driving the bus". Mr. Letizio noted that he hopes the Board members can combine individual philosophies on many of these issues and offer leadership with a consolidate voice. He also noted that we should be reviewing the state of our assets and liabilities, and re-capitalizing new assets at a rate equal to the depreciation of current assets. Ms. Scott agreed that in addition to having a long-term vision of what we are working on, it would be irresponsible to let our facilities deteriorate and not budget appropriately for what we need to operate. She reiterated that the Board can be fiscally responsible, but not put out such strict budget controls at the onset. She suggested the Board use the resources we have in our department heads.

Mr. Poulson indicated to the Board that the department heads are working on innovative procurement methods and asked that the Board be receptive to new ideas as brought forward, as well as adhere to equipment replacement schedules, even though they are guidelines. He also asked that the Board look at whether CIP parameters could be revisited. Mrs. DiFruscia noted that previous strategic plans presented by the departments seemed to be more of a "to-do" list and she would like to get a better understanding of department's future needs.

Mr. Hohenberger noted that he believes the Town is run well, but also has concerns about what it will look like in the future and that much of the outcome is controlled by the I-93 Project and the State Department of Transportation. He reiterated the Union contracts need to be resolved this year and that the earned time program needs to be revisited. Mrs. Bottai (fmr Merrill) noted that she is concerned that the Board does not see the day-to-day operations of the Town and what the department heads are facing. She noted that she appreciated this opportunity to meet with the Board in this setting and also asked that the Board provide department heads with questions or concerns prior to Selectmen meetings, so that all may be fully prepared. In addition, she noted that record retention is a priority for her and concern for the long-run in terms of facility storage space.

Chief Morgan noted that he understands the issues surrounding growth that the Town is facing and believes that with strong communication among all departments, we can continue to work well together towards a common goal. Chief McPherson reiterated that issues with the facilities continue to crop up and the affect of previous decisions to save money and cut corners, has come to the forefront. He believes that previous attempts at strategic planning have failed in part due to a lack of allocation of funding to accomplish department goals. He is pleased that the Board seems to be considering issues from more of a business sense at this point, but also notes that future staffing and mentoring of newer personnel to take over, will be an issue for the Board to consider. Mr. McCartney also noted staffing as a concern and indicated that in terms of the highway department, significant (80%) reliance is placed on sub-contractors, many of whom are aging and getting out of the business due to operating costs, and that adding staff is not about building a dynasty, but meeting the Town's needs. He noted that in his time overseeing building maintenance, he is concerned about the effect of "patchwork" fixes that are both inefficient and not sustainable.

Mr. McLeod agreed that the Selectmen have benefited from the relatively flat budget in recent years but noted that may not be sustainable and a focus on infrastructure is warranted. He also commended the Police department for the job that they do, as compared to what he sees from other towns, noting that he believes they are underpaid and the Board should focus on settling this Union contract and determining if their wages are comparable to surrounding towns.

Mr. Sullivan noted that the department heads are not looking to change our fiscally conservative approach to the budget, but that we do spend town funds effectively and with proper planning to in accordance with the needs. He believes that the average long-term tenure of the management group should be viewed as a positive and evident that compensation is not the only factor in working for this town. He noted that the items discussed tonight need to be addressed, but are over and above the day to day requirements of every department head's job. He reiterated that preparation is key and department heads are able to bring information to meetings so that the Board can make timely decisions.

Mr. LoChiatto closed by thanking everyone for attending and consensus of the Board was to hold the Board's goal setting meeting on May 28, 2013 at 5:00 at the Community Development department.

OLD BUSINESS: Mr. Sullivan and Mr. McCartney presented the Board a concern pertaining to the new roadway sweeping contractor, noting that after three days of sweeping, it is evident that the quality of work is not what is expected and that the Town has already received multiple complaints from residents. Mr. McLeod motioned to accept staff's recommendation to either work with the contractor to correct the issues or terminate the contract if there is a mutual agreement that the contractor step down with no cost to the Town, and to then contract with the next lowest available bidder to complete the sweeping work. Mr. Hohenberger seconded and motion passed 5-0.

Meeting adjourned at approximately 6:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana Call
Asst Town Administrator-Finance

NOTE: These minutes are prepared in draft form and have not been submitted to the Board for approval.