



# TOWN OF ELLINGTON

## Ad Hoc Government Study Committee

JAMES PRICHARD  
CHAIRMAN

HEATHER STAVENS  
VICE CHAIRMAN

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SANFORD COHEN  
ELIZABETH FELDMAN  
MICHAEL FRANCIS  
MARY PERCOSKI  
JOHN RIDZON

Ad Hoc Government Study Committee  
Special Meeting Minutes  
September 15, 2020  
Town Hall Meeting Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT: James Prichard, Sanford Cohen, Elizabeth Feldman, Mary Percoski and John Ridzon

MEMBER PRESENT: Heather Stavens  
via ZOOM

MEMBER ABSENT: Michael Francis

OTHERS PRESENT: Lori Spielman, First Selectman; Joseph Wehr, Board of Finance

- I. Call to Order: Chairman James Prichard called the meeting to order at 7:01p.m.
- II. Citizens' Forum [non-agenda items]: No one came forward.
- III. Approval of Minutes – August 25, 2020

MOVED (FELDMAN), SECONDED (COHEN) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 25, 2020 SPECIAL MEETING.

#### IV. Welcome Guest Speaker

Chairman Prichard welcomed guest speaker Michael Rosen, the Town Manager of Tolland. Mr. Rosen thanked the Committee for inviting him to speak and shared a bit of his background, currently serving as the Town Manager of Tolland for the last year. With ten years of experience in this industry, he stated that prior to his current position he had three years of Human Resources experience, received his Master's Degree in Public Administration, served for four years as an Executive Assistant to the First Selectman in the Town of Greenwich, and held the position of Assistant Town Manager for four years in Bedford, Massachusetts as well.

Mr. Rosen said over his 10 years in Public Administration he has experienced the full gamut in regard to different forms of governments. Discussion was held between Mr. Prichard and Mr. Rosen particular to Greenwich. Mr. Rosen stated they have a Full-Time Elected First Selectman, being the top vote getter in the election. There is also a three member Board of Selectmen, which causes a lot of quorum issues.

Mrs. Feldman asked if Mr. Rosen has an Assistant in Tolland; Mr. Rosen stated no, but they have a Human Resources Director, also known as the Director of Administrative Services, acting as his right hand and confidant. Mr. Prichard referred back to Greenwich asking if there is a Board of Finance. Mr. Rosen replied yes, they call it a Board of Estimate and Taxation (BET) which consists of 12 elected members.

Mrs. Feldman asked Mr. Rosen what he felt was the biggest difference between a Town Administrator form of government and a Town Manager form of government. Mr. Rosen replied that would vary by town and their Charter, but generally if you have a Town Administrator you will also have a Chief Elected Officer such as a First Selectman or Mayor, therefore the Town Administrator does not have all of the authority, giving some power to the other Chief elected officials as well. On the other hand, a Town Manager doesn't have a Chief elected official to work with; they usually have a Council or Board of Selectmen that doesn't have a Selectman to report to but instead report to the majority of their Board, versus a single Mayor or First Selectman. He stated when he worked in Greenwich the Town Administrator worked for the First Selectman. However, in Bedford when he worked for the Town Manager, he reported to the Board of Selectmen and basically answered to the majority. He also stated that in Massachusetts the Selectmen are not elected on a partisan basis; they are just elected with no party affiliation. In that situation, as the Town Manager, once the votes are taken you have to do what the majority wants you to do, which may cause conflict because you may have very opposing viewpoints and the minority may not like what you are going to do; however the role of the Town Manager is to enforce the policy that the policy makers create. It can be a bit of a tug of war so to speak between the minority and the majority but Mr. Rosen states that is alleviated a bit when you have a Town Administrator form of government because the Town Administrator is working for the First Selectman or Mayor and it's not as divided. Mrs. Feldman asked if the Town Administrator in Greenwich works at the pleasure of the First Selectman, meaning at any time they could be removed. Mr. Rosen said yes, however in theory if you are a professional, make good sound decisions and are reputable then there is no reason to turn over with the change of tide. Mr. Rosen mentioned that he as well as other Town Administrators and Town Managers all follow the International City Managers Association (ICMA) Code of Ethics which includes "Thou Shall Not Be a Politician" as a rule. Mr. Cohen asked Mr. Rosen what the time period on the contracts for these positions are. Mr. Rosen stated that it depends on the town. For example, to his knowledge the Town Administrator industry norm is three years but he does know of some with a five year contract. Some like himself have an indefinite contract, as does John Elsesser from Coventry, with a thirty day notice of termination if the Town chooses to let him go. In Massachusetts there is a three year maximum on a contract, unlike Connecticut.

Mrs. Feldman asked Mr. Rosen to share some information about Tolland. Mr. Rosen said that in his first year he has been enjoying it. The Town of Tolland runs on a Council/ Manager form of government with a Town Manager who the Charter delegates specific authorities to include the hiring, bonding and insurance and financial aspects. The Town Manager reports directly to the council, in turn having more authority than a Town Administrator would. The Charter for each specific town will state who is responsible for exactly what. The Town of Tolland has a seven member partisan elected Council; currently there is a five member to two member split with no Mayor or First Selectman. The Chair of the Council does not have any special abilities except they take on the role of the Chief elected official to sit in when there is a Governor call or make an appearance at public events. There is no Board of Finance; however, a few members of the Council have a financial background so that helps scrutinize budgets.

There is a Finance Director who works very closely with him. He stated their office is small and consists of four people, two being Administrative Assistants.

Joseph Wehr (155 Windermere Ave, #3102) asked Mr. Rosen if the Board of Education in Tolland has a separate Board of Finance office and Mr. Rosen said yes. They did apply for a CRCOG grant, which was tabled due to COVID-19, for regional incentive performance program where a consultant would come in and look at consolidating the two offices. This has been put on hold due to the current pandemic.

Mr. Cohen asked Mr. Rosen how many people he directly appoints. Mr. Rosen stated that he has fifteen department heads that report to him, noting all except one of those were in their respective positions prior to him taking on his role. In his year so far he has hired that one new department head, as well as numerous other vacancies in the town. Mrs. Feldman asked Mr. Rosen if he is the single person who does the hiring. Mr. Rosen said Department Head positions are blessed by the Council and he presents them with a final candidate. Unless they object that person is appointed. All other candidates for positions that are not managerial are appointed and hired at his discretion, working with the Human Resources Department appropriately. Mr. Prichard asked how many people are in Mr. Rosen's office. Mr. Rosen replied that there are four; himself, the Director of Administrative Services and two Executive Assistants.

Mrs. Feldman asked in terms of succession who has the authority if Mr. Rosen was to unexpectedly leave. He stated that he took over from a gentleman who had the position for fifteen years and retired. He stayed on working on a part time basis until Mr. Rosen took the position so there was some continuity in that position for them. The Director of Administrative Services took responsibility and oversaw everything in the meanwhile. That would most likely be who would take that lead, though in some circumstances he knows of some retired Town Managers that would fill in, if necessary.

Mr. Cohen asked Mr. Rosen what he sees as the advantages of a Town Manager over an Administrator in a town like Ellington with our current form of government. Mr. Rosen stated that the Town Manager would be a hired professional who would dedicate 40 plus hours a week, providing a good quality of work, as well as being held accountable for doing their job properly. He said it is not uncommon for some Mayors or First Selectmen to become Town Managers or Administrators after retirement. He also commented that depending on the Town's Charter that vacancy can be filled by someone other than a town resident, in turn opening up the range of recruitments unlike a First Selectman or a Mayor who has to reside in the town to get the position. For example he is from New York City and it is very political and there are not a lot of opportunities for a Town Manager. He said he is grateful for the way in which this happens because Tolland would not have had the opportunity to even consider him otherwise. He also feels when you have a First Selectman without a Town Administrator it is a lot of weight for one person to shoulder. In his career decision making he wanted to be a part of town government and hold a constant position other than having to bounce around every couple of years. In his opinion he feels it would be helpful for any First Selectman or Mayor to have a consistent and knowledgeable professional who is paid to keep up with trends and be held accountable for their work. Ms. Spielman commented that when you have a First Selectman there is a learning curve period every two years for the new Official, which could be avoided by having a hired constant non-partisan employee who can keep up with the Administrative tasks such as grants, hiring and payroll. Mr. Rosen agreed that in his experience it works best to leave those duties to the hired employee so that the hired elected official can concentrate

on the goals and priorities they campaigned for leaving the administrative tasks to the hired Manager or Administrator.

Mr. Wehr and Mr. Rosen discussed how it is determined who makes decisions for the Town, the Town Manager versus the Town Council members. Mr. Rosen stated that Town Charter in each town will dictate exactly what responsibilities the professional has for simple administrative decisions. He would not bother his Chair or Vice Chair with simple issues, however sometime it is a fine line between determining what is a simple, hard or potential policy decision in that case he will ask the leadership or Council if they would like to agenda an item for discussion. For instance, just recently there were a number of issues ran by Council due to COVID that needed to have policies put in place or give Mr. Rosen the authority to make decisions on behalf of the Council during this pandemic.

Mr. Wehr asked what Mr. Rosen thought the learning curve time period would be for someone coming into this position. Mr. Rosen stated that depending on the transition and if the employee is leaving on good terms, it depends. He stated that he was fortunate enough to have some overlap with the retiring Town Manager and was able to check in with him for a month or so to ask how things had historically been done. Shortly thereafter he was able to make his own decisions on how things would be done, regardless of past policies and procedures. To answer Mr. Wehr's question, he stated that in his opinion one full year would be the amount of time to see the full budget cycle and get to know the staff. He noted in his most recent review that in his first full year he attended 90 night meetings, making sure to sit in on every board meeting at least once, as well as being appointed to several of them. He also noted that he and the Superintendent of Schools took time to attend one another's meetings and answer questions and maintain that good working relationship, making a point to get to know staff. He also had an Open House for the public to greet him and present issues of concern to him, which was a success.

Ms. Spielman asked Mr. Rosen to explain what the process of purchasing a new fire truck in Tolland is. Mr. Rosen stated that the purchase is a fiscal decision made by the Council and Mr. Rosen only makes a recommendation to the Council on how much money they have to spend, being a neutral statement.

Mr. Prichard asked Mr. Rosen if he lives in Tolland and Mr. Rosen said he lives in Vernon on the Tolland line. He stated that residency requirement is not in the Charter but it does state that each individual Council has the right to decide whether the Town Manager needs to be a resident. His contract does state that the Council recommends he relocate to Tolland within a reasonable amount of time and he is currently looking into relocating to a condo versus a single family residence in Tolland fairly soon. The Council also has the ability to amend his contract on a yearly basis, however they negotiate.

The Committee thanked Mr. Rosen for his time and informative presentation, Mr. Rosen wished them luck in their decision making process.

## V. Unfinished Business

### A. Government Study Review

Mr. Prichard stated that the new meeting schedule will be presented next meeting on October 13, 2020.

## VI. Review Action Items

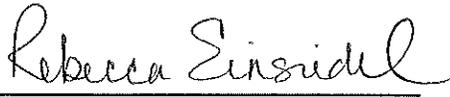
- A. Joshua Kelly, Town Administrator in Bolton, CT will be a guest speaker at the October 13, 2020 meeting.

Mr. Prichard stated that after Mr. Kelly visits the Committee they will need to have a more detailed discussion and draft up the specifics of what their recommendation will be. Mrs. Feldman suggested that the committee into doing some type of survey, such as Survey Monkey, stating this may be helpful to the Committee to compile some data on their thoughts. It was also discussed to possibly have a link on our website and social media to participate. Mrs. Stavens suggested that the link be publicized in our local newspapers or a hard copy survey for all residents to give their input without doing it electronically. Discussion was held on the potential of sending out the survey alert via school messenger. Mr. Prichard asked the Recording Secretary to look into Survey Monkey, as well as using our new website potentially for a survey. Mrs. Feldman said she will look into Survey Monkey and Google Forms as well.

## VII. Adjournment

MOVED (COHEN), SECONDED (FELDMAN), AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 8:06 PM.

Submitted by:



Rebecca Einsiedel  
Recording Secretary

