BOARD OF SELECTMEN
Monday, January 31, 2022
Nicholas J. DiCorleto, Jr. Meeting Hall
and via ZOOM Conferencing

BOARD OF SELECTMEN SPECIAL MEETING

MINUTES

SELECTMEN PRESENT: Lori Spielman, James Prichard, John Turner, Melinda Ferry, David Stavens*, Charlotte Ward*

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ronald Stomberg

OTHERS PRESENT: Douglas Harding*, Board of Finance; Sanford Cohen, Betsi Feldman, Michael Francis, Mary Percoski, Ad Hoc Government Study Committee; Peg Busse, Tom Palshaw

*Attended via ZOOM

I. CALL TO ORDER AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:
The Board of Selectmen (BOS) Special Meeting was called to order at 6:03PM by First Selectman Spielman. The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

II. CITIZENS’ FORUM: No citizens came forward.

III. AD HOC GOVERNMENT STUDY REPORT DISCUSSION:
First Selectman Spielman asked the attending Committee Members if they would like to contribute any additional information regarding their recommendation of hiring a Town Administrator. Mr. Francis noted that the information in the report speaks for itself and he is in favor of adding the full-time Town Administrator position, most importantly because this would still allow the elected official to run the Town. Mr. Cohen said he was surprised to find out there is no set of guidelines or detailed description of duties for the First Selectman’s position and feels there needs to be. He continued to say that the Town Administrator position would serve at the First Selectman’s discretion versus a Town Manager where the elected official would potentially have less control. Mr. Cohen stated that the addition of a Town Administrator
would keep the current form of government consistent and he believes this would not require a change to the Town Charter. First Selectman Spielman thanked the Members for all of the time and effort they put in to making this decision.

Mr. Turner stated that he fully supports the recommendation from the Committee and agrees that having a Town Administrator would benefit the citizens and the Town. Mr. Turner agreed that the residents would appreciate still having a vote and a say as to who serves on the Town Boards. Mr. Turner suggested that the first steps going forward should be to draft a job description that is consistent with the framework of the Town’s Charter and then draft a guideline as to how this would affect the First Selectman’s position when transitioning to part time. Lastly, Mr. Turner added that, as Mr. Cohen stated, there should be a general list of functional duties assigned to each of these positions. He stated that this would include multiple discussions, a collection of information from other towns, and possibly a public hearing before the BOS ultimately moves forward with this process.

Mr. Turner said that over the past few years it has become evident to the BOS that in the past many miscellaneous tasks and duties were graciously handled by the Finance Office and the BOS needs to clearly define who should now be responsible for these tasks. Ms. Ferry asked who would be involved in this process, the Board or a separate committee. Mr. Turner suggested that the First Selectman reach out to whichever employees she deems appropriate in the Town Hall to start the initial process; if she feels it is necessary to have a sub-committee, then that can be addressed at that time. Mr. Turner said that this is a good start and an opportunity to evaluate the current guidelines and what the future of the Town is.

Ms. Ferry asked how long it would take for the staff to complete this process and finalize the job descriptions. First Selectman Spielman suggested monthly meetings be held to keep this process moving forward. Mr. Turner said that an explanation needs to be put together and discussed to address the anticipated questions from citizens. Mr. Stavens and Ms. Ward agreed. Ms. Ward said that a tiered organizational chart should be made to reflect the First Selectman’s responsibilities and proposed changes to the position including any contingencies should the Town Administrator be absent or resign. She noted that this is important information not only for our current First Selectman, but for future candidates as well.

Ms. Feldman stated that there are previous and current employees that hold institutional knowledge that needs to be shared and put documented so that when that person is no longer present, things can continue from one person to the next with ease. Mr. Turner agrees that this needs to be done in order to create a foundational structure moving forward.

Discussion continued regarding the next course of action and the BOS decided that a special meeting will be held on Monday, February 14, 2022 at 6:30 pm in the Nicholas J. DiCorleto Jr. Meeting Hall to review the draft job descriptions for the Town Administrator and the First Selectman. Ms. Spielman will distribute both draft job descriptions prior to the next meeting.
Peg Busse, 37 Abbott Road, shared that more importantly than a job description, she would like to know the groundwork of how the positions would work together and who steps in in the absence of the First Selectman. Mr. Turner replied that the Charter specifies that the Deputy First Selectman would. Mr. Cohen stated the operations of the Town would not change; the only difference with adding this position would be that the Town Administrator would act as an advisor, taking care of the day-to-day operations under the supervision of the First Selectman and the BOS.

Tom Palshaw, 120 Pinney Street, shared that in his experience of having served as the Vice Chairman of the Charter Revision Commission, this issue has been previously addressed and there are several questions residents are going to ask. Mr. Palshaw stated that they will want to know how much this is going to cost the Town and why this position is necessary. Mr. Palshaw said residents are also going to ask what impacts, if any, there will be on the Town Charter, Town policies, ordinances, contracts and the First Selectman’s responsibilities. He strongly recommends having the answers to these questions, as well as detailed job descriptions for each and an organizational chart prior to presenting this to the public. Mr. Turner stated that there is not necessarily something broken or needing to be repaired, but rather something the Town can do to improve its future.

Ms. Ferry inquired how and when the BOS should communicate this topic to the public, saying she feels this should be done sooner rather than later. Mr. Turner replied that there would be a presentation with a public hearing once the BOS is comfortable with the details and specifics. Ms. Ferry would like to see some communication put on the Town website that the Town is in the beginning stages of potentially adding a Town Administrator. Ms. Spielman stated that the BOS should wait until they have a more concrete description prepared, to better answer the anticipated questions. Ms. Feldman suggested that at some point the Town should have a form on the website for residents to provide input.

Ms. Busse asked Ms. Spielman if the Board intends to include this position in the upcoming operating budget. Ms. Spielman said that there is some research and work that needs to be done, and Mr. Prichard added it is possible to have a placeholder, as they have done in the past. Ms. Ferry and Mr. Turner suggested that there be a salary range based on experience and credentials. Discussion was held on the growth of the Town. Ms. Spielman stated that it is important to know exactly what the needs are in Town. Ms. Ward asked for the BOS to clarify the next steps; Ms. Spielman replied that developing an organizational chart and job descriptions are the next steps. Mr. Turner said the BOS may have to build this as they go along.

Ms. Ferry asked if there is a specific date that this information would need to be ready by and Ms. Spielman stated that she would consult with Tiffany Pignataro, the Town’s Finance Officer/Treasurer. Discussion was held regarding how long it will actually take to have a Town Administrator take on the role; this will take a significant amount of time once the position is posted, including the interview and hiring process.
IV. Adjournment

MOVED (TURNER), SECONDED (PRICHARD) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN AT 6:47 P.M.

Submitted by: Rebecca Einsiedel
Recording Secretary

Approved by: Lori Spielman
First Selectman