



Town of Rowe
Board of Selectmen Minutes
Thursday April 23, 2020 –4:30 p.m.
VIA TELECONFERENCE

This meeting will be held via video conference, consistent with Gov. Baker's temporary modifications to Open Meeting Law.

REMOTE PARTICIPATION INFORMATION:

Video and/or audio

Meeting Host: zoom.us

Meeting ID: 288-065-7034

URL: <https://zoom.us/j/2880657034>

Telephone: 312-626-6799

Present: Chair Chuck Sokol, Vice-Chair Jennifer Morse, Ed Silva, Selectman and Executive Secretary Janice Boudreau

Audience: Joanne Semanie, Paul McLatchy III, Ellen Miller, Loretta Dionne, Rick Williams

Call to Order: The meeting was called to order by Chair Sokol at 4:32 p.m. via remote participation.

MOTION: Roll call vote to call to order:

Chair Sokol: _____ **yes**

Vice-Chair Morse: _____ **yes**

Selectman Silva: _____ **yes**

Announcement of recording devices: two

Meeting Minutes: 4/7/2020:

MOTION: Chair Sokol made a motion to accept the Minutes of April 7, 2020 as written. The motion was seconded by Selectman Silva. A roll call vote was taken:

Chair Sokol: _____ **yes**

Selectman Silva: _____ **yes**

Vice-Chair Morse: _____ **abstain**

Meeting Minutes: 4/9/2020: Vice-Chair Morse requested Executive Secretary provide more detail on the topic and it was agreed to review at next meeting.

Meeting Minutes: 4/14/2020:

MOTION: Chair Sokol made a motion to accept the Minutes of April 14, 2020 as amended. The motion was seconded by Selectman Silva.

A roll call vote was taken:

Chair Sokol: _____ **yes**

Vice-Chair Morse: abstain

Selectman Silva: yes

Citizen Comments:

Resident Joanne Semanie: Ms. Semanie requested that the Board table the agenda item related to the Town Administrator position be tabled until the state and town are out of the state of emergency.

Other points that were made:

- Ms. Semanie said that she has attended every Board of Selectmen Meeting for the past year and has worked closely with Executive Secretary and Administrative Assistant for over 3 years in her role as Treasurer and Board of Health Clerk. She said job duties were frequently revised and changed by the Board of Selectmen causing her to resign from the Treasurer position last August. She remained in the position until November when it was filled.
- Ms. Semanie said that Executive Secretary had been experiencing “what could be described as harassment from a member of the Board of Selectmen” and “the motive was clear that it was desired that she [Ms. Semanie] would leave her job”.
- Ms. Semanie said the Board requested an Administrative Review be conducted by the Dept. of Revenue (DOR) to confirm that the town would be better served by a Town Administrator. The DOR report concluded on page 10 that “Rowe seemed to have a working mode for its “point person” in the town coordinator position but chose to revert the select board’s office to a horizontal administrative structure”. During our visit, we also noted the existence of unresolved interpersonal issues that may have complicated prior decisions regarding office structure. We recommend that the board evaluate and fully resolve any such issues before committing to a course of action for the office. It will require leadership and careful consideration on the part of the board to formalize the duties of its staff, resolve overlaps, and determine how to best fulfill its executive role.”
- The job descriptions presented by the Executive Secretary and Administrative Assistant were ignored by the board.
- Ms. Semanie thought that changing the current structure and advertising for new positions was not in the best interest of the town at this time and asked that personal agendas be left behind.

Resident Rick Williams: Mr. Williams spoke as an Assessor who works at Town Hall and that through his wife who serves on the Finance Committee he became aware of the discussions about the town administrator. Points that Mr. Williams made:

- Mr. Williams felt the two administrative persons in Town Hall are professional, competent and dedicated.
- The town hall office is very well organized, much better than it has been in a long time.
- He has had fantastic communication with both the Executive Secretary and the Admin Assistant.
- He felt there are problem areas with the Treasurer and the Accountant and has not been receiving any response from them and felt that things were not being done in a timely manner.
- He felt that that if there was a problem with job performance that it should be dealt with under the normal process and felt the current approach was no way to treat employees.
- If there are organizational problems Mr. Williams felt that something like the Town Coordinator position emphasized in the DOR report would be a good approach since it worked in the past.
- He felt that it would be worthwhile to touch base with some local towns to see how they are set up to compare.

- Mr. Williams said that the Town Coordinator had been created in the past to take the burden of the Board and that a prior board member had a personality conflict with the existing Town Coordinator at that time and changed the position. He thought it was working and that it should be revisited.
- He heard that “there is chaos in town hall” and he felt any such chaos was not with the administrative positions but with the financial area and that those need to be addressed.

Resident Loretta Dionne: Loretta Dionne asked if there were problems with the administrative staff had those problems been addressed with them directly and she was told they had not. Ms. Dionne felt that employee performance reviews were the time to “iron out the problems”, not to make inflammatory statements.

Selectman Silva: Selectman Silva said he would like to discuss the letter that Executive Secretary sent to the Board this week. He prefaced his comments stating that it was difficult to discuss the future of job positions in open meeting with the persons being present. Selectman Silva made the following points:

- Selectman Silva said he voiced many times concern about appointed positions
- Selectman Silva disagreed with the points of the letter and that he felt that he in particular was being targeted and that the other Board members were in agreement with him.
- Mr. Silva took exception to the fact that Executive Secretary had incorrectly inferred that he was creating a job description that favored the Administrative Assistant
- Selectman Silva said he was trying to create a position for the town that would attract current and new candidates that would best serve the town.
- In closing Selectman Silva said that based on inaccurate statements made by Executive Secretary he wanted to be clear that he will no longer support her reappointment.

Loretta Dionne Response: : Ms. Dionne said that at the first meeting of the Board that Selectmen Silva attending he spent over 20 minutes making derogatory comments about both Janice Boudreau and Lance Larned and that she was very dismayed by that behavior and had never seen that behavior in the past. She thought that “it seems like you came with an agenda and are shoving it down people’s throats.” She further stated that “since an evaluation has not taken place, how do you base the merits of the positions?”

Vice-Chair Morse Response: Vice-Chair Morse said that the Town Administrator/Town Coordinator position has been discussed for two and a half years and felt strongly that the position is needed since the Board cannot perform the day to day operations. She asked that administrative staff reach out to Franklin County towns to see what they do regarding town administrative responsibilities. Vice-Chair Morse said the town needs someone to take the lead so the board members can concentrate on policy and not the day to day operations of the town.

Loretta Dionne Reponse: Ms. Dionne did not disagree that a lead person is needed, but she felt that the two people in place could have their job descriptions amended to fulfill the needs since they are currently familiar with the town and jobs.

Joanne Semanie: Ms. Semanie said that there are issues with the financial processes and that the current administrative staff are filling in taking care of the problems that are arising, which are not a part of their normal expected responsibilities. She is concerned that if the current administrative staff leave there are going to be serious problems with town operations.

Chair Sokol Response: Chair Sokol said he wanted to share some thoughts based on the discussion:

- Chair Sokol said that taking some of the heat off of the day to day operations, whether the position be called town coordinator or administrator, is needed and that we need to work towards that end.
- Chair Sokol said the Executive Secretary and Administrative Assistant have been doing a lot of additional work due to the Covid 19 virus situation and he appreciates their efforts.
- Chair Sokol said that he would like to wait until things are more stable regarding the pandemic , town financial order, and budget appropriation before moving forward with the town administrator interviewing and/or hiring process. He would like to see the two positions remain as is until those other issues are resolved for the sake of stability.
- Chair Sokol emphasized he is nervous about the pace of pursuit of the town administrative changes at the end of this fiscal year given the other issues the town is currently facing. He said that he would not want to move forward with any interviews before the annual town meeting, when money has been appropriated, a town administrator/coordinator bylaw is adopted, and, hopefully, the pandemic has subsided.

Jennifer Morse Response:

- Vice-Chair Morse disagrees with Chair Sokol and feels the need to move forward with the job description to be prepared and ready to go. In addition, to move forward with creating a bylaw so that it can be permanently set in place. Selectman Silva agreed with Ms. Morse.

Paul McLatchy Response: Mr. McLatchy III, speaking as a town resident, said he had attended most Board meetings for the past 5 months and would like to respond. He brought up the following points:

- While he agrees that there needs to be a "point person" the details of that are up for debate.
- The discussion for the position kept getting putting off until receipt of the Dept. of Revenue report because it was assumed that report would indicate a need for a Town Administrator. When the report came in, it was not discussed because it said the opposite, that the town did not need a town administrator, and the report had not been discussed at all at any Board of Selectmen meeting since it was received in January.
- Mr. McLatchy said that new administrative staff job descriptions seem to be being rushed through, with one Board member wanting to post the opening for the position in the next few weeks: He questioned whether it was to remove one or more of the town hall staff. He said that he feels that the comments made over the last year by members of the Board of Selectmen towards the Executive Secretary were derogatory, whereas the Board has praised him unnecessarily. He feels that the Board is resolved to remove Janice from her position as Executive Secretary. He said that he felt the town would be at a great loss if Janice were removed. He said the board has made it clear at the onset that the positions would be advertised. As a consequence, these actions have made morale in Town Hall very low. He said that he thought that it would be a grave injustice to rush this through on July 1st since it had not had a chance to receive a town vote, nor any Finance Committee recommendation. Mr. McLatchy said he thinks the goal is to 'get Janice out' and that if that happened he would not stay on as Administrative Assistant to the Boards and feels that there have been actions that are personal and mean-spirited rather than professional.

Chair Sokol Response: Chair Sokol thanked people for being mutually respectful, allowing comments to be heard and appreciated that people were taking turns.

Vice-Chair Morse: Vice-Chair Morse asked that administrative staff check out how other towns are currently operating, and to do research as to the administrative structure of neighboring and nearby towns to bring that information to the next meeting.

Executive Secretary: Janice Boudreau said that she would like to work with the Board and that she and the Administrative Assistant put a great deal of time into creating job descriptions for the Town Administrator and Assistant, although those job descriptions have not been discussed yet, but rather had been ignored. Ms. Boudreau asked if the Board was willing to review the reports regarding the administrative structures of surrounding town when presented and to discuss them. She felt that job descriptions were being created without speaking directly with employees to learn the details of the work performed in her position on a regular basis that is not part of what is seen at meetings. Ms. Boudreau asked that the Board consider hearing input from the people in the positions to better learn the details of what needs to get done at Town Hall. She expressed the need to work together, especially in this difficult time during this pandemic crisis.

Vice-Chair Morse: Asked that the board review the job descriptions provided by the Executive Secretary and the Administrative Assistant and review at next meeting. Also, Ms. Morse asked to review the draft bylaw for Town Administrator.

Unforeseen Business (within preceding 48 hours)

1. Fire Dept. Timesheets: There was an issue a firefighter had with getting paid. There was an issue with timesheets getting to the Treasurer. Following discussion, and trying to determine where the breakdown occurred, it was decided to have Fire Chief resend the timesheets and they would be printed out and placed in the Treasurer's box.

Selectboard Business

1. MTWP Survey Review: A survey from the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership (MTWP) was to be sent to the Board for review. It was one component of a grant project for a forestry management project for Pelham Lake Park. that was not received in time to accompany the Goal Post mailing. It was decided to authorize Walt Quist to review and approve the survey since he was MTWP representative for Rowe. In addition, it was decided to have the Park Commissioners attend the meeting with the forest management firm who was to meet with the Board next week.

Motion to Allow Survey Sign-off: Vice-Chair Morse made a motion to allow Walt Quist to sign off on the final version of the Mohawk Trail Woodlands Partnership Forest Management Survey to Rowe citizens. The motion was seconded by Chair Sokol.

Roll Call Vote:

Chair Sokol: yes

Vice-Chair Morse: yes

Selectman Silva: yes

Unforeseen Business (within preceding 48 hours)

2. Schedule Executive Session: Selectman Silva asked to schedule an Executive Session for the Treasurer. It was agreed to schedule at next meeting following sending out the letter

that was drafted with the Board's concerns. In addition, Selectman Silva asked for a list of bullet points detailing the issues with the employee.

Left the Meeting: Vice-Chair Morse left the meeting at 5:58 p.m.

It was agreed to meet next Thursday, April 30, 2020 at 6:30 p.m.

Adjournment:

MOTION: Chair Sokol made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 6:04 p.m. The motion was seconded by Selectman Silva.

A roll call vote was taken:

Chair Sokol: yes

Selectman Silva: yes

Vice-Chair Morse: absent

Respectfully Submitted,

Janice Boudreau, Executive Secretary

Approval Date: May 14, 2020

Approved:



Chuck Sokol, Chair

Selectman Jennifer Morse, Vice-Chair



Selectman Ed Silva

Documents:

1. Agenda 04/23/20
2. Draft Minutes of 04-02-2020
3. Draft Minutes of 04-07-2020
4. Draft Minutes of 04-14-2020
5. MTWP Survey
6. Job Description – Draft Town Administrator – Ed Silva edits ver. 4/16/20
7. Job Description – Draft Assistant Town Administrator – Ed Silva edits ver. 4/16/20
8. Town Administrator Bylaw
9. Job Description – Draft Town Administrator – JB edits
10. Job Description – Draft Assistant Town Administrator – PMIII edits
11. Administrative Review – Town of Rowe – DLS
12. Open Letter to Board of Selectmen – Janice Boudreau
13. MTWP – Letter to Goal Post
14. Emily Boss Update – re: Warner Hill Wildlife Corridor
15. Admin Asst. – email from Fire Chief
16. COVID-19 Meeting Notes 4-21-20
17. Executive Secretary Updates