

JOHNSON SELECTBOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JOHNSON MUNICIPAL BUILDING  
MONDAY, APRIL 10, 2023

**Present:** Selectboard members: Beth Foy, Duncan Hastings, Shayne Spence, Mark Woodward

Others: Brian Story, Lois Frey, Lydia Putvain

**Absent:** Eben Patch

**Note: All votes taken are unanimous unless otherwise noted.**

**1. *Call to Order***

Beth called the meeting to order at 7:02.

**2. *Review of Agenda and Any Modifications or Additions***

No changes to the agenda were needed.

**3. *Determine Means of Recruitment for Town Administrator Position***

Duncan said he and Beth met Thursday. They feel we probably are going to need help on this. He forwarded a couple of proposals. He has been trying to reach out to some recently retired municipal managers or administrators to see if anyone is interested in submitting a proposal for recruiting. We can probably lower the cost of hiring a recruiter if we do some things ourselves, like coming up with the job description and community profile.

Mark said it is not unreasonable to spend money on headhunting. Shayne said he likes the idea of limiting what we spend as much as we can.

**Mark moved to solicit proposals for town administrator recruitment services, Duncan seconded and the motion was passed.**

Duncan said some communities prefer to see every resume and some prefer to have the recruiter filter them and just send those that are recommended. That is something we can discuss.

Brian said some agencies include interim administrators or managers as part of their search terms. MRI does.

**4. *Determine Parameters of Town Administrator Recruitment Process***

Beth said a question to consider is whether we want the recruiter to provide all the services they can potentially provide or if we want to limit what we ask for in contract proposals. Probably it will depend on the cost. Do we want a committee for reviewing resumes? Or do we want the recruiter to filter resumes? She suggested asking them to filter resumes and send us up to 10 and no less than 3. Duncan said he thinks it is great to have discussion now but could we decide on the specifics when we review proposals from recruiters? Beth said yes.

Duncan said the biggest question might be the process for interviewing. A pretty common practice seems to be to have a committee do a first round of interviews. He would suggest that it would be important to have at least one selectboard member on the committee. Often a committee would include employees who would work with the individual or respected members of committees. When he helped with Cambridge's town administrator search the selectboard wanted a first round interview committee with members of the public and employees and any selectboard member who wanted to attend could. One or two selectboard members did attend.

There were a couple of employees and a couple members of the community for a total of 6 or 7 people. Some feedback he got from applicants was that it was like running a gauntlet. He would limit committee size to 5-7 people. He was hired by Cambridge to help with their search. They didn't have a job description and he helped to create that. He did the advertising. All the resumes came to the town clerk. He reviewed them and he and the selectboard recommended candidates for first round interviews. They did 4 or 5 first round interviews.

Mark said he recalls that Cambridge ended up hiring someone who was not experienced. Duncan said the person they hired had a master's in music education and was working in a private school but she was from Cambridge. He read her cover letter and talked to her and based on their phone conversation he recommended her to be interviewed. He hopes the recruiter we use will be open-minded with regard to diversity and skill ranges and not just looking for experience. Jericho hired a Jericho resident who did not have direct experience but interviewed well. The top 2 candidates in their town administrator search took positions with other communities. The person they hired is working out very well, according to the selectboard chair. He has been there a little over a year. A comment he made was that the first year was like drinking from a fire hose. Duncan heard something similar from the person Cambridge hired. There is some advantage to hiring someone with experience but it is not an absolute necessity in his mind.

Beth said she likes the idea of the recruiter doing the first round of screening. She fully supports Duncan's comment about wanting them to be open minded. For the second round she likes the idea of a hiring committee doing interviews. She doesn't care if a selectboard member is on the committee or not. She likes the idea of having at least one or two people from the office, Jason, Rosemary and maybe one or two members of committees. The third round of interviews will be done by the selectboard.

Duncan said he doesn't have an issue reviewing a dozen resumes. If we get 50, that would be a little more problematic. Beth said she thinks we are hiring someone to screen for a reason and they should. She doesn't want to see more than 10 resumes. She wants us to be clear with the recruiter that they don't need to exclude someone for lack of experience. The board agreed to that.

Brian said with some communities the first round of interviews is often on Zoom. The second round often includes a visit to town facilities. He thinks that is valuable for employees. Beth said she would do the first round with the interview group. After that maybe someone could bring the candidates around to town facilities. Brian said every good interview he has been part of has had that happen, usually for finalists.

##### **5. *Updates to Town Administrator Job Description***

Brian said he had emailed his input on the job description to Beth. When he was hired he was going to also serve as staff for the Planning Commission but that didn't work out for a variety of reasons and was taken out of his duties.

Mark asked if he thinks that makes the Planning Commission less connected. Brian said he thinks it does. He thinks the Planning Commission would be more effective if it had staff and a conduit to the selectboard.

Duncan said that was under the community and economic development component of the job. Lea did that as part of her job because at that time the Planning Commission was doing a lot of planning, like the Main Street plan. Some pretty large initiatives came from the Planning Commission. He is not seeing that as much anymore. He doesn't know if it is because they don't have the support. He thinks working with the Planning Commission would be a more appropriate task for the community and economic development person.

Duncan said he and Beth don't necessarily believe there has to be an in-person presence in the office 5 days a week. Some of the work could be done remotely. We should probably decide how many hours a week we want a physical presence. He would suggest having set hours when the public and staff know the administrator will be here. Beth said that could be in the offer letter. Duncan said allowing flexibility to do some work at home is pretty much a requirement these days.

Shayne asked Brian's thoughts on the balance between remote and in-person work. Brian said he works 9 to 5 rather than 7:30 to 4:00 because he can get more done after the office closes when he won't get phone calls or people stopping and he can concentrate. He doesn't like working from home. But there is a decent amount of work that needs to be done that is well served by concentrated, dedicated time with no interruptions. If someone wanted to do that from home he doesn't see why the board wouldn't allow it.

The board discussed wording for the job description and decided on "A regularly scheduled in-person presence is expected. A hybrid schedule may be accommodated at the discretion of the selectboard."

It was agreed to move qualifications out of the job description. Beth said she thinks terms of employment, compensation and benefits belong in the personnel policy, not in the job description. It was agreed that it should say somewhere that the terms of the individual contract supersede the personnel policy.

Beth said there are some minor formatting changes she wants to make to the job description. She will edit it and it can be approved at the next meeting.

**6. *Decide whether Town Administrator Should Be Full-time or Part-time***

Beth said she thinks the town administrator position should move to part time and we should create a full time economic development position because she thinks over the next 3 years we will have a lot going on with grants.

Duncan said he is not sure he disagrees but we haven't yet made a decision on whether to hire an economic development coordinator vs. contracting. He is in favor of hiring. He thinks we get the biggest bang for the buck and a laser focus on our community by having a dedicated person. He suggests dropping the town administrator position to 32 hours and hiring a community and economic development coordinator 3 days a week as an employee, not a contractor.

Mark asked, why not as a contractor? Duncan said he thinks we would pay more for a contractor and not get the continuity we want. With an employee he thinks there is an opportunity to coordinate with the selectboard and town administrator on critical projects. If we contract with someone it won't be the same as someone dedicated to trying to bring money to Johnson. A

good economic development coordinator can find grants, apply for them and manage them and part of the money from the grants can go to offset their services. He doesn't think we will get that with a contractor.

Beth asked if Duncan thinks 24 hours a week is hireable. Duncan said he doesn't know. When Lea was first hired she really wanted part-time work. Eventually she was able to work more hours. When she left she was working 24 hours. At 24 hours you get into the Vermont Municipal Employees' Retirement System and you are a little higher up the scale in terms of health insurance benefits. We have \$40K in this budget and \$50K next year for the economic development position. Duncan would be willing to spend ARPA money if that is what it takes to hire a good person. He thinks it would net us money in the long run.

Lydia asked, is this considered a commission-based position? Duncan said the idea is that they would manage grants and usually a grant has an administrative component. In the past we have used that as a town match. It was money the town didn't have to come up with for the match, so it was an offset to the salary. When we asked the voters to approve Lea's position he said he didn't expect it would bring in 100% of the person's salary; his expectation was that it might be 50% of the salary. Lydia asked if that was true with Lea. Duncan said he would say it pretty much was.

At \$50 per hour total town cost and 24 hours per week our cost would be \$94K. At \$40/hr it would be \$79K. At \$30/hour it would be \$64,600 and at \$25/hr it would be \$57,300. Duncan suggested that we aim for the \$60-65K range. Mark said the housecleaner he uses charges \$35/hr now. Lydia and Lois said some people will work just for the health insurance. Duncan said there are plenty of people working at the college who don't get \$25-35 per hour.

Duncan said he doesn't think the town administrator can possibly do the basic town level work at any less than 3 days a week. Brian said he thinks with anything less than 32 hours a week the board will see a real decline in service or will really be abusing the administrator because of how much extra unpaid time they end up working.

Beth suggested 4 days a week. Duncan said he would advocate that we start there and see how it goes. We can always reevaluate. Brian said he thinks if the board is aiming for 32 hours candidates will expect to work a little over that, but not much. He thinks it is manageable.

Shayne asked if we potentially reduce our ability to hire a town administrator by taking the position from 40 hours to 32 hours. In terms of priorities, the town administrator is #1 and economic development is #1A. There are a lot of things we need a town administrator for. He thinks in the long term more focus on economic development is probably beneficial but in the short term we need a town administrator.

Brian said if he were looking at a job like this and it said 32 hours a week, he wouldn't really believe it. He would look at the salary and consider whether it was acceptable to him for a full-time job. He wouldn't really expect to get a 3-day weekend every week but it would be a nice bonus if he did.

Duncan said he doesn't know the answer to Shayne's question. At 32 hours the employee will get the same health insurance benefits as if they worked 40 hours and that in itself is fairly significant. The significant factor is probably going to be the base salary. The fact that we say the position is 32 hours may at least indicate to applicants that it won't be 50 hours.

Beth said if we take 80% of the current town administrator salary plus all the benefit cost and double it under the assumption that the town administrator and economic development person will be paid the same amount and will both work 32 hours a week, then our budget shortfall would be \$25K. Duncan said he would not want to pay the economic development person the same rate as the town administrator, He would expect them to make less.

Beth asked if board members are okay with reducing the hours of the town administrator. Mark said he would like feedback from the recruiter about whether the loss of 8 hours is likely to diminish or increase the pool of applicants. Shayne said we could probably get information on similar towns and their administrator positions from VLCT. Duncan said we have that information in the wage survey. There are some town administrators that are part time, but not many. When he was both village manager and town administrator about 60% of his work was for the village and 40% was for the town. He would go for 32 hours for the town administrator. We have removed a lot from the job description. There might be an expectation from the public that there should be a reduction in hours. He thinks we could reasonably go to 32 and reevaluate in a year. The rest of the board agreed.

**7. *Decide the Need for Interim Town Administrator and Approach to Recruit if Needed***

Mark asked how long we think the search will take. Duncan said 4 to 6 months. He doesn't know how we can do without an interim town administrator. If there were a part-time employee we could assign those duties to he would be happy to do that, but he doesn't think we have that capacity. He doesn't see that we have a lot of choice.

Beth asked, should we ask about capacity in the office? Lydia said after May 10, when taxes are due, she is available. Brian said he could give Lydia some training and if everything works out well it could work to have her filling in part-time. If we get closer to the 6 month mark and still haven't hired someone, that gets more problematic.

Beth said she thinks we should discuss how many hours we need. Are we talking about a part-time interim? If there is availability maybe the work could be split between office staff and someone else. Brian said he thinks an interim could work fewer hours with the expectation that office staff would pick up some duties and some would just wait.

Duncan said if that much capacity exists in our current work pool, he has an issue with that. He is not sure he wants Brian to focus the rest of his remaining time on trying to train someone. We have better uses of his time. It is a lot to ask of existing staff. He thinks someone with experience, even if they were here just a day or two per week, could put out the major brush fires and keep things afloat. Another reason having someone from outside with experience would be good is that he really wants to hire someone that we think is good for the community, not just make a hire because we are desperate.

Beth asked if Duncan thinks there are interims out there. Duncan said he would like to think there are. There are some people he can make contact with. We could also advertise with VLCT.

Brian said a lot of the recruiting firms offer assistance in hiring an interim. Duncan said VLCT does not do that. MRI does.

Mark said he is in favor of hiring an interim if it can happen quickly, not if it will take 4 months. Beth agreed. Duncan said it would be great if Lydia has extra capacity. Chances are an interim wouldn't be able to have a presence here, so having some in-person presence could be very useful. We should talk to Rosemary before planning to use office staff. Brian said Lydia does not report to him.

Beth said she is supportive of an interim and of Duncan putting out feelers for people who might be interested. She is okay with advertising the position. It was agreed that Duncan and Beth will work on an ad.

**8. *Economic Development – Decision on Contract or Employee and Next Steps***

The board agreed to try to hire someone as a town employee for the economic development position. We will need to start work on the job description.

Duncan said he wonders if any search firms could search for both positions at the same time.

Beth said she thinks we should do some number crunching before deciding how many hours the position should be.

**9. *Selectboard Issues, Concerns, Recognitions, Reasons to Celebrate or Other Business***

Shayne said his in-laws visited Johnson recently. They stayed at an Airbnb and enjoyed our lovely area.

Mark said it appears we are having a good mud season. Others agreed. Brian said Jason has given us a good forecast.

Mark asked if the photos of the grader have been put on Facebook yet. Lydia said she sent them to Brian. Brian said he hasn't posted them yet. Beth said she can post them. Lois said she wants to make sure communication, including maintaining, managing and overseeing town websites, gets into the job description.

**10. *Adjourn***

The meeting was adjourned at 8:50.

*Minutes submitted by Donna Griffiths*