

BOARD OF SELECTMEN – TOWN OF NATICK

MEETING MINUTES

NATICK POLICE DEPARTMENT COMMUNITY ROOM

JANUARY 28, 2019

6:00 PM

PRESENT: Chair Amy K. Mistrot, Vice Chair Susan G. Salamoff, Clerk Michael J. Hickey, Jr., Jonathan H. Freedman, and Richard P. Jennett, Jr.

ALSO PRESENT: Town Administrator Melissa A. Malone. Elaine Ostroff joined the meeting briefly at the outset but departed after a few minutes.

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:12 p.m., noting that a quorum was present and that the meeting had been duly posted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

CITIZEN'S CONCERNS

None.

DISCUSSION AND DECISION

1. Discussion of FY 2020 Budget Process and Communication Plan: Ms. Mistrot revisited the Board's previous public meeting of January 22, 2019, during which she expressed frustration that Ms. Malone had not presented budget-related information in the manner the Board had requested. Ms. Mistrot indicated, however, that she intended to confirm that her understanding of the Board's request (and how she had relayed the same to Ms. Malone) was accurate. Mr. Freedman concurred that the Board requested information in the form Ms. Mistrot had described, and that we need a complete picture to help inform the public's knowledge of the overall budget constraints. Mr. Freedman reminded that Board, however, that it is not the "Board's budget"; rather, it is the TA's budget. Mr. Hickey suggested that the Board should confirm agreement amongst themselves, and with Ms. Malone, that the requested information will help foster a productive discussion. Mr. Jennett suggested that the community will soon need to decide whether it will take steps (such as an operational override) to maintain/improve current service levels, or accept the sorts of cuts that may be required to avoid such an override. Several members of the Board concurred that a long-term planning discussion was needed, and that the current budget challenges were seen by many as being limited to the Natick Public Schools when, in fact, there are significant challenges and constraints on the "municipal side" as well. Discussion continued relative to the kind of information that would be useful to present at the next meeting. Ms. Malone expressed to the Board that, despite certain criticisms and concerns being expressed, the budget was not done in a vacuum. Ms. Malone reminded the Board of the context of her arrival, and the Board's priorities, both of which shaped her approach to the FY20 budget.

2. Discussion of Open Positions and Coverage of Responsibilities: Ms. Malone provided Board members with a brief update on open positions:

Human Resource Director – Interviews conducted with two promising candidates.

Collector/Treasurer – Interviews have been scheduled.

Tax Assessor – Two or three promising candidates have applied.

Director of Facilities Management – Resumes are coming in at this time.

Ms. Mistrot expressed a concern to Ms. Malone that the numerous vacancies in key positions are absorbing Ms. Malone's ability to focus on the things that require the Town Administrator's attention. The Board concurred, and expressed strong support for taking the time necessary to fill such vacancies – with the assistance of senior staff as necessary/appropriate.

3. Discussion of Evaluation Process: Ms. Mistrot recapped the overall timeframe for preparing and completing Ms. Malone's performance evaluation. (Generally, the evaluation is to be completed by February.) It was confirmed that the evaluation would be based largely upon the consensus list of Board priorities and goals that Ms. Mistrot had provided to Ms. Malone at the time of her arrival. As a preview of the more in-depth discussions to come, the Board discussed with Ms. Malone general (high level) feedback it had been receiving regarding her performance. On the positive side, the Board cited numerous achievements in a short period of time, such as a largely successful Fall 2018 Town Meeting, two AAA bond ratings, and a very successful debt transaction. Ms. Malone has quickly established strong working relationships with certain key partners, such as Sen. Spilka's office. As far as constructive feedback, the Board emphasized that Ms. Malone must immediately take steps to 'reset' tone and relationships with a number of key stakeholders. The Board invited input from Ms. Malone as to how it could be more supportive and help her reach her full potential. Ms. Malone cited certain examples where the Board provided less than clear guidance as to its consensus. Board members expressed appreciation for Ms. Malone's candid feedback, and indicated that it was important to be reminded that the Board must provide clear, consensus guidance. The Board agreed to meet on January 31st (without Ms. Malone) to review the Evaluation tool, and also discussed the possibility of further evaluation sessions on February 7th and 21st. Discussion then turned to the Fire Chief's performance evaluation. Ms. Mistrot indicated that there was some confusion as to the respective roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Town Administrator in this process. Ms. Malone had sought clarification from Town Counsel as to the meaning of the so-called "Strong Chief" model which Natick has adopted. This model vests the Fire Chief with a substantial level of autonomy in running the Fire Department. At the same time, the Town's personnel bylaw (Art. 24) provides that the Town Administrator has a formal role in the Fire Chief's performance evaluation. The Board, however, sets compensation. The Board and Ms. Malone also revisited briefly the terms of the Fire Chief's employment contract relative to the timing of evaluations and decisions relative to compensation.

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR NOTES

None.

SELECTMEN'S CONCERNS

None.

ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Mr. Hickey, seconded by Mr. Freedman, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn the Board of Selectmen's Meeting at 9:15 p.m.

Michael J. Hickey, Jr., Clerk

Submitted by Michael J. Hickey, Jr., Clerk

January 28, 2019 Board of Selectmen Meeting Minutes Approved by the Board of Selectmen on _____.

No documents were used at this Board of Selectmen's Meeting.