

IN BOARD OF SUDBURY SELECTMEN

Thursday, December 17, 2015

Present: Chairman Patricia A. Brown, Vice-Chairman Susan N. Iuliano, Selectman Robert C. Haarde, Selectman Leonard A. Simon, Selectman Charles C. Woodward, Town Manager Melissa Murphy-Rodrigues and Jon Wortmann of Novel Communications

The statutory requirements as to notice having been complied with, the meeting was convened at 5:06 p.m. in the Goodnow Library Historical Room, 21 Concord Road.

It was stated at the beginning of the meeting that this meeting would not be recorded or videotaped. It was mentioned by Mr. Wortmann that the next meeting would have a camera recording the session.

The Meeting Minutes

Mr. Wortmann stated this meeting would involve a brief overview of the first two sessions. He asked about updates from each Board member as to how they were doing as a group during BOS meetings since their last session in September. During this session, Mr. Wortmann said they would discuss how long different parts of future Board meetings should be, how the Chair should keep the meeting moving and how the meeting should be moderated.

Review of the Two Previous Sessions

Mr. Wortmann reminded the group there are certain triggers that create tension. These could be an individual's tone of voice, a smell, or an image. The goal for the evening was to use a pressing issue that the Board was facing and to work through the session on this issue with minimal conflict, tension, and anger between members. He then reviewed the various communication styles: debater vs. pleasers, internal vs. external thinker, inductive vs. deductive, metaphorical vs. literal, fast talker vs. slow talker, and a communicator who uses few words or many words. Depending on each member's communication style these tendencies can create triggers which create tension in the group. When a trigger or tension is apparent during a disagreement, the group needs to show respect to one another. This is accomplished by stopping or pausing the conversation so the stress/tension can decrease and the meeting can continue in a productive manner. This is how healthy communication occurs.

The Session's Exercises

The first exercise for the evening involved getting feedback from each member as to what they believed were three important issues the Town of Sudbury was facing, and what the Board would like to accomplish in the next four months. Some important town projects and issues mentioned by the Board were a new Fairbanks Center, finding space for the Sudbury Public School administration, the limited Town Hall space, the 40B development projects, the Minuteman School issue, lack of work on the Rail Trail, the shortage of town playing fields and the Raytheon Development. All members mentioned the Raytheon issue was a very important one for the town.

It was decided for the next exercise, that a discussion about the Raytheon Development project would be used as an example of how the meetings should proceed which would result with a more positive outcome. Mr. Wortmann said he would be moderating the discussion and commenting on the group's communication and behavior that he witnessed during the session. He began the exercise by asking the Board where the work was presently on this project.

He asked the following: What meetings were needed to move forward on the project? Should there be an Executive Session or Open Session involved? Should one BOS member work with the Town Manager and act as liaison to the Board or in a negotiator role?

The Town Manager explained there were not many facts in yet about the project, and she was in discussion with the planners. The discussion continued and one of the members who was speaking was interrupted by another member before ending their point. Mr. Wortmann pointed out this interruption was a classic example of how the group communicates and that the speaker should be allowed to finish the statement before a heated discussion began. Mr. Wortmann also mentioned there were many different points being brought into this discussion and it was important that the Board focus on one topic at a time. He asked the Board how they wanted the discussion to take place in an actual meeting. He felt it was important that the Chair step in and decide where the points are, and the group should finish each point before moving forward to the next one. Mr. Wortmann reminded the group to be aware of where a member paused during a discussion in a meeting, to hear each person's view and stay with the point and not go onto a different point. He said when language becomes "hyperbolic", it's going to cause emotions and triggers and this is where the Chair needs to step in and re-direct the group. Mr. Wortmann also said it was important to talk directly to the person and not as though the person was absent from the room, or to refer to the person in the third person. For example, to say, " John, you mentioned this the other time and DO NOT say, " I heard John say this the other time". If you speak directly to the person, there is no misinterpretation of what is being said.

After the exercise, Mr. Wortmann asked for feedback about the practice discussion. He asked the group if during the exercise, they felt the following:

1. Was a participant's tone effective when making a statement or discussing a point?
2. Were you able to have a reasonable debate without setting off triggers and tension in the group?

The Board felt this exercise was very helpful. There was no yelling and the back and forth on the issue led to a very positive way of discussing the issue.

Mr. Wortmann then asked, "How should the Board handle a situation when a person gets frustrated or if something is unclear about a town project or situation?". He thought it was important to obtain clarity from the Town Manager about a town situation. If something is unclear on the agenda, or there is a change/addition to an agenda item, then the Chair needed to be contacted. It was very important the Board be kept informed of any items that are changed or

added to the agenda and to do this through phone calls or emails so that nothing new was slipped in during a meeting. If an issue needed more discussion, then an Executive Session should be called. Mr. Wortmann said there has been a long history of issues that have caused great problems with the lack of communication between the Board. This is where increased communication between all members is needed.

He also reminded the group, the desired behavior of the Board was to treat town employees and residents with respect during meetings, to not come into a meeting with hostility, to not interrupt while someone is making a statement or has a view point on an issue. Mr. Wortmann said going forward, the members need to be mindful and watch their tone and language during meetings.

Future Meetings with Mr. Wortmann

Mr. Wortmann feels the group is making progress, but they need to continue working on the group's present communication issues. He said each member, not just one member, needs to take the responsibility for increased communication and positive behavior of the group during the meetings. There should also be better personal communication outside of the meetings, either through phone calls or emails. The members said they felt mediation is important during BOS sessions. They would like Mr. Wortmann to be more involved and attend each meeting to mediate each session. Mr. Wortmann said he is trained as a communication coach and would not feel comfortable taking on the role as a mediator coach for the group. He asked the Board if they wanted another person trained in this area to help the Board. He also said he would be happy to begin a new contract with additional sessions, if the Board felt they needed this. Mr. Wortmann reminded the group he was available to meet with each member on an individual basis also.

It was decided the next session would be two hours long and would cover functional issues of the Board. The following topics would be addressed: What is the role of the Chair? What does a liaison do? What is the role of the negotiator? What do you want the role of Town Manager to be?

The Board and Mr. Wortmann discussed when the next meeting would take place. It was decided that either Tuesday, January 26, 2016, or Thursday, January 28, 2016, would work best for everyone. It was also agreed that the next session would be recorded and would either be located at the new Police Station or at the Goodnow Library.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 6:56 p.m.

Attest: _____

Melissa Murphy-Rodrigues

Town Manager- Clerk