

IN BOARD OF SELECTMEN
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2000

Present: Chairman John C. Drobinski, Kirsten D. Roopenian, and Maryann K. Clark, Selectmen.

The statutory requirements as to notice having been complied with, the meeting was convened at 7:10 p.m. by Chairman Drobinski at the Town Hall, 322 Concord Road.

Clerk Pro Tem

It was on motion unanimously

VOTED: To appoint Janet Silva as Clerk Pro Tem for the duration of this meeting.

Town Manager Interview (Second Round) – Mark Haddad

Present: Candidate Mark W. Haddad; Mark Morse, MMA Consulting Group; Pat Savage, Director, Park and Recreation; Ruth Griesel, Director, Council on Aging; William Cossart, Planning Board and Water District.

Chairman Drobinski convened a public hearing to interview Mark Haddad for the position of Town Manager for the Town of Sudbury. Mr. Haddad is currently employed as the Town Manager for the Town of Cohasset. Mr. Drobinski explained the field of candidates had been reduced to four, with the final decision being made very soon. He asked Mr. Haddad for a brief overview of his experience and any additional information he felt pertinent for the proceedings.

Mr. Haddad briefly recounted his interest in municipal government, beginning in grade school and continuing through college. After a college internship for the Town of Acton, he worked in Acton for two years. When the Town was immersed in a Town Manager search, he handled the duties of Assistant Town Manager. He was next employed in Brewster, where he gained experience in accounting and finance. After two years in Brewster, he became Town Administrator in Littleton, where he stayed for 9 years. While there, he established solid policies, which are still in use today. He then became the first Town Manager for the Town of Cohasset, effecting the transition from the Executive Secretary form of government.

Mr. Haddad stated he had interviewed for this position three years ago and felt this opportunity was too good to not pursue, even though he is not actively seeking a job change. He stated he has good interpersonal skills, works well with people, and is effective at working through difficult situations to reach compromises that work for all parties concerned.

Mr. Haddad responded to questions from the Board as follows:

He felt it important to have the Town Manager in the same building as the other staff in Town. He stated he enjoyed meeting Town staff who were willing to share concerns and issues with him. He stated staff meetings should be held when issues demand, but otherwise meet with department heads informally on a daily basis.

As to his management style, he described himself as laid-back and open, and not into “micromanaging” departments. He stated that it is important for the Town Manager to have enough trust in the staff to do their job without close scrutiny. He believes in having an “open door” policy for the public as well as the staff.

He stated the Town Manager has to build up the department heads so they won't feel they are being overlooked in favor of school issues and funding. He opined this could lead to a morale problem if inequities are perceived.

He stated he was surprised at the condition of the Highway Department building and opined ways must be found to locate funding to improve this building. He stated he loved Fairbank Community Center with the Senior Center located there.

He stated he has a good relationship with elected officials and representatives in his area.

Regarding the position of Assistant Town Manager, he indicated he was not convinced that position is needed, though he admitted he is not familiar with the day-to-day duties involved. In any event, he stated that individual should have strong skills and abilities in the areas where the Town Manager may not.

Regarding an Economic Development Director, he stated he would need to meet with the Chamber of Commerce to determine what involvement is necessary. He stated a citizen committee might be all the Town needs. He opined a Downtown Revitalization Committee might be of help, in order to attract new businesses to the area. Zoning changes for commercial growth pose a problem as residents like the "character" of a town which does not allow for progressive growth.

Cost-cutting measures he has implemented include changes in health insurance benefits (Littleton), increasing the operating budget by consolidating staff duties without reducing service to public, and most recently, eliminating the "call firefighter" program (Cohasset).

Dealing with a five-member Board of Selectmen is the only experience he has had.

He stated he handles morale issues by working closely with parties involved and maintaining open dialogue with everyone.

He stated that maintaining close relationships with department heads is one of his strengths, and coordinating departments is crucial.

The position of Town Manager in Cohasset was established by citizen petition, with the Board of Selectmen being 4-1 against it. Mr. Haddad stated he is proud of his achievements there, with everyone being very supportive of his efforts.

Outreach to the community is accomplished first by meeting with all the Town boards and committees, coupled with the open door policy.

He opined that, as Town Manager, he would not be comfortable in reviewing the Board of Selectmen. He stated his own review is presently conducted by two members of the five-member Board of Selectmen in an informal setting where concerns and issues are considered.

To eliminate or diffuse squabbles, he works hard to mediate situations to reach compromise and eventual solution. He stated holding a grudge is counterproductive.

He stated special education funding causes many problems at the local level and opined state officials need to redefine that funding formula. The operating budget is set in the spring while the state funding does not come through until much later, creating deficits.

He stated his job can be a frustrating one, but he enjoys what he does most of the time. He has little interest in politics, but completion of projects gives him a sense of accomplishment. He stated he enjoys meeting people and working in municipal government.

Mr. Haddad responded to questions from the assembly as follows:

With regard to a regional school system, he stated he would meet with both superintendents to discuss their concerns and issues. He stated giving each community equal opportunity to have their needs heard is important for morale within school staff.

His strong areas are in finance and personnel administration, with lesser skills in the planning and growth areas. He opined an Assistant Town Manager with those strengths would create a cohesive team.

He stated he tries to attend any outside meetings that are of interest to the residents of Cohasset or present helpful information, but his first priority is to Cohasset.

He stated he would want to be certain everything was ready to go for Cohasset's Town Meeting, beginning March 25, before he could devote much time to Sudbury.

Mr. Haddad thanked the Board for the opportunity to meet with them again. He stated meeting with the department heads was a wonderful part of the interview process. The Board thanked Mr. Haddad for his time and wished him success, whatever the outcome of the search process.

Town Manager Interview – Greg Balukonis

Present: Candidate Greg L. Balukonis; Mark Morse, MMA Consulting Group; Pat Savage, Director, Park and Recreation; Ruth Griesel, Director, Council on Aging; William Cossart, Water District; Lawrence O'Brien, Chairman, Planning Board.

Chairman Drobinski welcomed Greg Balukonis to his second interview for the position of Town Manager for the Town of Sudbury. Mr. Balukonis is currently employed as the Town Administrator for the Town of Norfolk. Mr. Drobinski explained the field of candidates had been reduced to four, with the final decision being made very soon. He asked Mr. Balukonis for a brief overview of his experience, his interest in the Town of Sudbury, and any additional information he felt pertinent for the proceedings.

Mr. Balukonis stated he has been working in municipal government since 1983, in a variety of communities. His preference is to work in a residential suburb. He stated he is seeking to advance his career, and the Town of Sudbury offers such an opportunity. Other communities he has worked in include Westborough and Hopedale, in positions of tax collecting, planning, and administration.

Mr. Balukonis responded to the Board's questions as follows:

He stated he would coordinate the departments by increasing publicity and awareness for those departments that may not be popular. He would meet with all departments and hear

their suggestions and concerns before making any determinations. Having all departments in one building as in Norfolk makes his job much easier.

He stated a feasibility study is the first step toward getting new things, based on input from the staff. He stated he would then bring the plan before the public so all questions can be answered and accurate costs can be offered.

A Master Plan and zoning changes enabled Norfolk to create a "town centre" by broadly defining the types of uses in that area. Loosening some of the restrictions has resulted in more businesses locating there.

He was instrumental in creating the operating budget and capital plan. Departments are encouraged to submit a "level service" budget with additional requests attached.

Balancing school needs with Town needs can be difficult, as revenue does not always cancel out expenses. Often budgets need to be pared down as higher priority items are requested.

He stated a Town Manager getting out into the community is crucial to working well with the residents. The community needs to feel that individual is working for them as an advocate for municipal programs. In Norfolk they are having some evening hours to accommodate residents who are employed full time during daytime hours. If chosen as the new Town Manager, he plans to get out as much as possible, attending all kinds of public functions and organizational meetings.

The key to avoiding "squabbles" is good, timely communication, and the Town Manager is the "hub" of that communication. It must be honest, open and forthright. People must also know what is expected of them in their duties.

Formal meetings with department heads and staff are important, together or separate. Issues can be aired to the most people that way. Transmitting information on to the public can be done via the press, mail, and web sites.

Mr. Balukonis responded to questions from the assembly as follows:

Regarding tax issues for senior citizens, he fully supports a senior tax relief program. Often the people who most need to participate in this program are the ones most reluctant to do so. The Council on Aging can help to encourage people to participate.

He stated the new Town Hall in Norfolk is one of his successes. He could not pinpoint a loss, as such, but admitted the public's perception of not getting enough information could count as one.

He enjoys his job, his Town, and feels much pride for what he has accomplished. He enjoys hearing people express appreciation for projects and progress in Town.

He stated he has a good relationship with the Planning person in Norfolk. That individual is not a Town employee, but an employee contracted for planning purposes.

With regard to reviewing the Board of Selectmen, he stated he would do it informally with some type of retreat or workshop.

The Board responded to Mr. Balukonis' questions as follows:

Selectman Clark stated her concerns centered around growth, increased school population, retention of open space, Route 20 development, and drinking water quality.

Selectman Roopenian agreed with Ms. Clark's comments. She stated funding constraints often create disparity in project completion.

Chairman Drobinski concurred, adding that economic sustainability is crucial, as well as public safety, municipal services, traffic issues, and other things affecting aesthetics and quality of life in Sudbury.

The Board thanked Mr. Balukonis for his time and interest in the Town of Sudbury. Mr. Balukonis thanked the Board for their time and the opportunity to learn about Sudbury.

There being no further business, this special meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.

Attest: _____
Janet Silva
Clerk Pro Tem