

IN BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2000

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

The statutory requirements as to notice having been met, the meeting was convened at 9:05 a.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 purposes of this meeting.

Town Manager Interview (Second Round) – Maureen G. Valente

Present: Candidate Maureen G. Valente; Mark Morse of MMA Consulting Group; Lawrence O'Brien, Chairman, Planning Board; Patricia Savage, Director, Park and Recreation; Maureen Hafner, Director of Assessing; Suzanne Petersen, Town Accountant; Mark Thompson, Technology Administrator; Jody Kablack, Town Planner; Ruth Griesel, Director, Council on Aging.

Chairman Drobinski asked Ms. Valente to briefly recount her experience and why she would like to be the Sudbury's Town Manager. She is currently employed with the Town of Sudbury as Interim Town Manager and Director of Finance. Mr. Drobinski stated there are four finalists being interviewed, and that the Board will make their decision very soon.

Ms. Valente thanked the Board for the opportunity to interview for the position of Town Manager. She stated this was the right time in her life and career to pursue this type of position. Her previous experience included as an educator in ethics and public policy, consultant for towns and agencies, as well as municipal experience in finance and accounting.

Ms. Valente answered the Board's questions as follows:

She stated long-term solutions may be the best way to balance inequity between costs associated with infrastructure or development and sources of revenue. Goals and objectives must be considered by priority and placed in sequence according to the best use of funds and staff abilities. She stressed that the public must be made aware that the Town is looking for new revenue sources in order to accomplish various goals.

Regarding health insurance for school employees, she suggested a budgeting item where funds are transferred from the school funds to the insurance benefits account so that the school is paying for their own benefits. She stated Town costs should be paid by the Town, and school costs paid by school funds. It would more accurately reflect the cost of services.

Within the community, the Town Manager should not be political. Outside the town, the Town Manager can act as a partner with elected representatives in working toward securing funding for the Town and raising issues that need attention.

Having served as Interim Town Manager, she has seen opportunities for change. For example, reorganizing budget responsibilities, ideally done by the Finance Department. It is difficult to create a single document when parts are done by different people. She stated some reorganization has been done in the Public Works Department.

She stated some departmental responsibilities could be modified in order to offer better service to the “customers”, i.e., the residents. She listed streamlining of duties, and eliminating duplication of effort as two ways to improve the Town’s image for service.

She stated she supports the goals listed in the Master Plan, such as affordability of housing, natural resources, economic development, historic structures and ambience, open space, etc. She stated the Town Manager should not be the person defining what direction the Town should go, but that the Board of Selectmen, along with Town boards and committees, should set those goals. On a daily basis, however, she has found the Town Manager is often the link between the Board, departments, and committees, facilitating the flow of communication.

Ms. Valente defined her management style as one of clearly set forth expectations. Staff needs to know specifically what is expected of them, not rely on intuition. She believes it is the function of the Town Manager to define those duties at employee hire, and revise or reinforce them at review time. Those department heads will in turn define expectations for their own employees. Misunderstandings must be dealt with as soon as possible to clear up disagreements.

With regard to weaknesses in Sudbury, she would like to see the Assistant Town Manager position focus more on personnel. Laws and regulations regarding hiring and collective bargaining continue to change, and someone specializing in that area is essential. A person skilled in grant writing or economic development would be a tremendous asset.

Ms. Valente stated she took interest in municipal government in college and is motivated by the type of work involved. It presents a variety of challenges, and she gets tremendous satisfaction from projects seen to completion. Her experience in Slovakia was particularly satisfying, helping these people find their way in establishing a local government system. She stated she has always enjoyed teaching and has found opportunities to educate people in her position as Finance Director or Interim Town Manager.

The Town Manager is responsible for the accountability of the department heads, and in the case of error, should take responsibility for that error. Regarding budget/accounting errors, this can happen because a number of people provide different pieces of the pie, and “one hand does not always know what the other has done”. Sometimes errors happen, which present an opportunity for changing the process and who is responsible for particular duties.

If selected as Town Manager, she would operate on three tracks: (1) preparing for Town Meeting so that opportunities are not missed, (2) moving from a “caretaker” Town Manager to a “proactive” Town Manager, and discussing goals and objectives with the Board, and (3) filling the vacant positions, which entails rewriting job descriptions and interviewing.

The Town Manager has a critical role in supporting residents who offer to serve on committees and those individuals need to be appreciated for their efforts. She has seen “the other side” in her time as Interim Town Manager when residents complain about various

things and discover they simply need to be heard, no matter how trivial their complaint may seem. She stated the office staff handles many things in a very quiet way and that reputation is important.

Communication between Town Managers is crucial to cooperating in joint ventures and solving common problems. Joining peer groups and professional organizations is very important for the Town Manager to connect with other networking groups.

Municipal government work takes an enormous amount of time, especially evening meetings, which generally discourages women due to familial obligations. She added that job requirements often prohibit women from applying for various positions, i.e., license to drive heavy equipment, something which would never be used in an administration job. As for minorities, she stated that is a reflection of the community makeup in that those individuals must feel comfortable in representing those residents. The personality of the person can be key to occupying positions not typically filled by women or minorities.

To eliminate “squabbles”, the Town Manager needs to set forth a “code of ethics” to lay the ground rules of performance. Diversity of opinion is not necessarily a bad thing, only the behavior associated with people expressing those opinions. Ms. Valente stated problems are generally after decisions have been made, rather than before.

Ms. Valente responded to the questions from the assembly as follows:

A Town Manager should have a good finance background, interpersonal skills, decisiveness, recognition from peers, network ability, and organizational skills.

She stated preparing a core curriculum about Town government for the elementary schools can be rewarding, and give children a clear understanding of how their Town operates.

Utilizing Mr. O’Brien’s tribal analogy, she stated aside from supporting the Board and committees, the existence of “tribalism” is not particularly the Town Manager’s responsibility. That is something that should be changed from inside each group, in informal settings and citizen groups or forums.

She listed her greatest victory to be creating a finance team and its subsequent accomplishments. Her experience in Slovakia was also tremendously rewarding, as well as the Town’s financial upgrade from AA to A1.

She opined the most difficult task is to have to discipline employees or terminate their service to the Town. She puts a lot of time and energy into working with people and when it does not pay off, it can be frustrating.

The components of her “motivational cocktail” would include real challenges with opportunity for long-term rewards, opportunity to find good people to work with, having people recognizing achievement, and clear communication as to expectations and goals.

The Board responded to Ms. Valente’s questions as follows:

A new Town Manager will have to combine skills and abilities to fit the job, drawing on all their experience. Collaboration with professional staff and user groups is key. As a good manager, support for the Board's goals and objectives will be critical. The Town Manager is really the "point person" for the community, and should be someone who will adequately represent the residents on the whole.

The Board thanked Ms. Valente for her time and interest in continuing to serve in the Town Manager capacity. Ms. Valente thanked the Board for the opportunity to interview.

Town Manager Interview (Second Round) – Christopher Rath

Present: Candidate Christopher Rath; Mark Morse of MMA Consulting Group; Lawrence O'Brien, Chairman, Planning Board; Patricia Savage, Director, Park and Recreation; Maureen Hafner, Director of Assessing; Suzanne Petersen, Town Accountant; Mark Thompson, Technology Administrator; Jody Kablack, Town Planner; Ruth Griesel, Director, Council on Aging.

Chairman Drobinski asked Mr. Rath to briefly recount his experience. Mr. Drobinski stated there were four finalists for the position of Town Manager, and stated further the Board expected to make their decision within the next week.

Mr. Rath stated he has worked as a professional manager for 12 years, currently in Auburn. He submitted reference letters from a variety of staff there. He stated he maintains high standards for himself and those he supervises, is hard working and honest, pleasant personality, good sense of humor and works well with others. Differences of opinions are not allowed to impact relationships, but the explanation of why those opinions may be different is important. He defined himself as a "jack of all trades" in that he is able to discuss things with all departments.

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

He stated he enjoyed meeting the department heads and hearing their concerns. He has an open door policy for department heads as well as monthly staff meetings. He likes to utilize teams or task forces for specific purposes.

Regarding a finance team, he stated it consists of the Town Accountant, the Town Treasurer, the Town Collector, Town Manager, and Town Assessor. They meet on a regular basis, more frequently during budget time. This team created a five-year capital plan for the Town.

Auburn participates in regional collaboratives for items such as fuel, paper/office supplies, etc. in order to reduce municipal costs. He stated they are considering procuring health insurance this way.

With regard to increased school expenses, he stated the school department needed to limit their operational growth in exchange for capital expenditures.

He stated he is an integral part of the operational budget planning, as it is his budget that is presented at Town Meeting. The process begins in the fall, with input from all departments; requests are justified, analyzed and adjusted. He stated at least a dozen pre-Town Meeting informational meetings are held for residents, shortening Town Meeting time.

Mr. Rath stated a good relationship with one's senator and representative is crucial, and that his relationships with those people are very good. He opined this close relationship has helped Auburn obtain funding and opportunities otherwise less available.

He stated he never makes a Board member or department head look bad in the eyes of the public. Differences of opinion are handled before any meeting. Information is the key to good communications. He distributes an update packet during the week there is no Selectmen's meeting.

He utilizes an "open door" policy for residents and staff. He lives in Auburn and tries to be as visible as possible. He has lived in all the communities where he has served as the chief Town official. He stated he would look into housing opportunities in Sudbury, should he be offered the Town Manager position.

Regarding squabbles among staff, he reiterated that communication is key. Disputes must be diffused as quickly as possible, by hearing all sides of an issue and weighing information.

To establish priorities for the Board, he runs a workshop in January for setting budgetary goals and objectives. Later in the spring, they address their annual goals. He stated his goals are pretty close to that of the Board as he views the process as a team effort. Departmental goals should flow up through the Town Manager.

People view Auburn as both a nice suburb and an urban center. Traffic is a major concern in the commercial and industrial zones. Recently they secured a federal grant to improve the roadways, including park areas, with business owners contributing as well.

Mr. Rath stated his areas of strength include ability to generate ideas, ability to listen to suggestions, and to effectively present those ideas and suggestions to the appropriate groups. Areas that need attention include keeping on task, managing interruptions, and learning how to judge how gregarious he should be in particular situations.

He stated he likes financial analysis because he views it as a tool for the future. Land use has been interesting as well. He stated he gets great satisfaction from solving problems. He cited their new Police Station as an example of problem solving, a task worked on for close to eight years.

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

Auburn uses Chapter 90 monies to design their roadways. He stated roads must be designed according to state standards, but with variations as needed. He stated the Town must be patient with the process, but use the time to plan the road, secure the funding, and be ready when the TIP approval comes through.

He stated funding for sewers could be obtained through the state revolving fund, which is currently at zero interest.

He suggested regional planning commissions will sometimes file grants with no upfront fees, but recoup those fees in the administration of the grant when awarded.

Auburn residents do not approve debt exclusions or overrides. Capital expenditures are accomplished within the levy capacity.

All departments are supported by each other. The needs of one cannot be favored for a long period without impacting the quality of life in town. Other departments' needs have to be considered, even if not always addressed.

He stated tiny things, like not being able to find a file quickly, can irritate him. He stated further he is motivated by his reputation, being innovative, hard-working, and honest. He values his reputation very highly.

Civic awareness in Auburn is promoted by a Community Day where high school juniors "shadow" department heads for a day. He stated department heads come before the Selectmen at a meeting to share ideas and concerns, broadcast over public access, in order to inform residents of things happening in their town.

School Committee and Superintendent should be supportive of all the needs of the community as it directly impacts the schools over time.

The Town Manager's role is that of a conduit, to funnel the information to appropriate individuals. The Selectmen should consider the needs of all departments as well.

Evaluation processes include a professional development component. This could be additional training, special conferences and meeting with peers from other communities.

He stated he wants to be in a community that offers challenges.

To make department heads more productive, he would encourage them to focus on their goals and objectives.

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

When asked about the five greatest developmental challenges for Sudbury, Selectman Clark stated land use is the most challenging, with water being the number one resource to protect. Traffic is an ever-increasing situation. Development adds stress to town services. Selectman Roopenian opined achieving a balance among the needs of the whole and utilizing outside opportunities. Chairman Drobinski stated the key is sustainability, and making sure growth will benefit the Town in numerous ways.

With regard to Town Manager attributes, Selectman Roopenian stated they are seeking someone with a lot of energy, a good manager, someone who can work with goals and objectives set forth to him, as well as getting along with department heads to accomplish those goals. She added that someone should be able to see opportunities and be willing to take some risk to take advantage of them. Selectman Clark stated a Town Manager has to be decisive, and not be everyone's friend. The magnitude of decisions can only be learned by first hand experience. Chairman Drobinski stated his ideal candidate is someone who is serving municipal government as a whole, not favoring any one group.

As to the Board's attributes, Chairman Drobinski stated the candidate should expect openness, candor, lively discussions, counsel and advice, and collective wisdom. Selectman Roopenian listed common energy, vision oriented, ability to bring diverse ideas to the table, and be able to direct Town Manager to act on those ideas. Selectman Clark stated she tries to bring all ideas collected at various outside groups back to the Board. The Board pointed out they are all active in many outside endeavors, bringing those experiences back.

Mr. Raths thanked the Board for the opportunity to interview for the position of Town Manager. He stated it would not take long for the Selectmen and department heads to get to know him, if selected. He stated it would take approximately six weeks for him to tie up loose ends in Auburn, finishing up budget issues in preparation for Town Meeting in May. He indicated he would take one day a week to get to know people and the Town. The Board thanked Mr. Raths for his time and wished him well in his career.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 12:35 p.m.

Attest: _____
Janet Silva
Clerk Pro Tem