

**TOWN OF ASHBURNHAM
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING - MINUTES
APRIL 13, 2009 – 6:00 PM
FAIRBANKS MEMORIAL TOWN HALL – UPSTAIRS MEETING ROOM**

This meeting was aired live on local cable television.

PRESENT: Chris Gagnon, Chair, Jonathan Dennehy, Member, Maggie Whitney, Clerk, Norm Thidemann, Interim Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator. Also Town Administrator Search Committee members present were Barbara Brown, Gail Dumont, Jeff Lawrence, John MacMillan, Joe Daigle, Dave Sargent, Dottie Munroe and Pixie Brennan. A few Advisory Board members were also present.

Gagnon called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and stated that the purpose of this meeting was to interview the two candidates for the Town Administrator position.

The first interview was with Douglas Briggs who spoke a little about himself and explained that in Rutland, he handled all the budgetary issues. Whitney asked what his main goal would be if chosen. He noted that his goal would be to put the Board of Selectmen at ease here in Ashburnham. He stated that in Rutland he handled the people, the processes, projects and problems as a Selectman. He stated that as a Selectman he did the budget working with the Department Heads, worked on projects, negotiated the Police and Dispatch contracts, negotiated sewer rates and use agreement with Worcester, acted as a procurement officer for the Town, handled human resource issues with the DPW as well as general day-to-day operations. He also noted that he would look to other area Town Administrator's for advice.

Dennehy noted that the residents of the Town need to know that they are part of any decision making and that he would need to be transparent. He inquired about Briggs management background and how this would help him as Town Administrator. Briggs responded that he learned union type skills and worked with all levels of positions. He also noted that he worked on union negotiations and also started the recreation program in the Town of Rutland.

Gagnon inquired if Briggs was familiar with Mass General Laws and whether he would keep the use of Town Counsel to a minimum. Briggs stated that he was familiar with the most common and that he would keep a book on things that occurred over and over. He stated that there was not much use of Town Counsel in Rutland.

Briggs also stated that he had worked with Senator Brewer on Water-Sewer issues in Rutland. He also noted that he had handled the issues due to the December Ice Storm expenses with the Water-Sewer lines. He noted that he had worked hard to keep costs down.

The road maintenance program was discussed along with the use of Chapter 90 funds.

Gagnon inquired if Briggs had any knowledge of ALS ambulance service and Briggs responded that Rutland did have this and he had done an analysis. He noted that their system works very well in Rutland.

Gagnon asked what his salary expectation was and Briggs responded generally around \$100k more or less.

Whitney asked about contact with citizens and groups and Briggs noted that as a Selectman he had 24 hour contact so that wouldn't be an issue.

The question was asked if he had ever terminated an employee and he noted that recently he had to terminate a DPW employee. He also stated that he has had to lay-off some employees as well.

Dennehy stated that they were looking for more stability, a higher confidence level and good communications from a Town Administrator. Briggs stated that he was looking for a place to end his career and Ashburnham was where he wanted to be. He noted he was looking for a place to settle in and that he was impressed with the process in Ashburnham and it was a lot like Rutland. Gagnon asked if he would move to Ashburnham and Briggs responded that it was only about a 32 minute drive to get here which is not much of a commute and that he would be here everyday. He added that he does enjoy meeting people and being with people.

Briggs stated that part of the process would be to help gather information for the Board of Selectmen in order to help them make policies. In response to a question on his experience working with a regional school system he stated that 58% of their budget in Rutland went to the schools and that he had worked closely with the School Superintendent. He noted that Rutland is 1 of 5 towns in their system.

Gagnon thanked Briggs.

After Briggs left the meeting, Jeff Lawrence stated that Briggs was very well connected at the state level and other towns as well.

At 7:00 p.m. the second candidate arrived. Chris Ryan was seated and Whitney asked him to explain his relationship with the Board of Selectmen. Ryan noted that in Ashburnham's Special Act, the Town Administrator had a lot of responsibility. He stated that his approach would be to communicate with my Board of Selectmen, giving them a lot of input.

Ryan noted that the three greatest challenges in the first year that he sees would be the Sewer, which he stated was the major issue, not funding for capital projects, which he stated was a very similar situation in Putney, and the issue with the staffing of the fire department.

Whitney asked how he felt about the importance of contact with citizens and groups in town. Ryan basically stated that it's what this is all about and that he had no problem working with citizens groups.

Whitney asked if he had ever had to terminate an employee and he responded that he never terminated anyone. He stated that he worked with them to resolve the issues.

Gagnon inquired about his MGL knowledge and if he had any experience as a Procurement Officer. Ryan responded that his MGL knowledge was quite broad and that he had experience as a Procurement Officer.

When asked about his experience with Water/Sewer Enterprises, Ryan stated that they had a brand new water system in Putney which was self funding and that it was a business enterprise similar to the one in Ashburnham. He stated that they saved \$30k the first year and the rate increase was minimal.

Gagnon asked about how he would deal with road maintenance and repairs in Ashburnham and he responded that he would develop a pavement management plan/study which should be done to head off some of the big costs. When asked about ALS Ambulance Services he noted that Putney had a regional service with a volunteer department which he added worked out very well.

Gagnon inquired if Ryan had experience working with regional school districts and the funding. Ryan stated that he had worked closely with the Superintendent in past communities.

He noted that his target salary was \$85k.

Dennehy noted that Ryan had worked in three communities in the past 10 years and inquired about the biggest similarities and differences with Ashburnham and these communities.

Ryan stated that in Putney he dealt with a lot of elected officials and he advocates appointed rather than elected positions. He stated that in Templeton there was a lot of resistance with his position as Town Coordinator.

Dennehy inquired how Ryan would deal with the Special Act in Ashburnham and he responded that he would work with the Board of Selectmen to set goals with the committees. He stated that he was comfortable with a small support staff as is the case in Ashburnham, adding that he has done a lot of things himself and would work with his assistant as he was not always organized.

When he was asked about residency he noted that the housing market right now was bad but he would consider talking about moving to Ashburnham. He noted that it was about a 40 minute drive from his home in Warwick to Ashburnham, which wasn't prohibitive.

Ryan was asked if he had any questions for the Board and he inquired how they would promote success of the person hired. Dennehy responded that they had learned from their mistakes and would have an open line of communication and stability.

Whitney stated that she wanted to see transparency and to keep the public involved with open communication. Gagnon agreed that communication was the key and added that there should be no surprises. Ryan stated that they would get together as a team and resolve any issues as he did not like controversy. At this time Ryan departed with a thanks from the Board.

Gagnon noted that he wanted a second interview with Doug Briggs and Whitney agreed. Thidemann stated that they should do a credentials check by a professional firm as well as a reference check. He stated that they should also set a time for a site visit and that the candidate would have to fill out a form for a CORI check. He stated that they should be able to do this fairly quickly. He also asked if the Advisory Board would approve \$500 to \$1,500 for the credential check.

Some discussion followed on how to proceed. Gagnon motioned to pursue negotiations for hiring Douglas Briggs and was seconded by Whitney. Motion carried. It was noted by Thidemann that the Board should have another formal meeting with Briggs.

Dennehy noted that they should put forward their proposal and work with Briggs and Gagnon agreed stating that the negotiations should be in Executive Session and then once things are settled then it would be made public. Gagnon stated that he would call him and offer the job tonight pending negotiations. Gagnon noted that he would call Ryan as well to let him know that their choice of Briggs would be pending negotiations. It was noted by Gagnon that it would take a few weeks to pull this together.

At this time Thidemann began the discussion on the FY10 Budget. Gagnon stated that Johnson's scenario to combine all in one ballot vote can't be done. He stated that they should put in an article as a 2 ½ override for the Safer Grant. The Board was unanimously in favor to place an article to go to a vote and they needed to come up with a dollar amount. Whitney noted that they still needed to fill the vacant position at the Fire Department and Thidemann responded that it was included and factored in the original budget and would need to be re-configured. Dennehy stated that if this was successful the first year was politically required and then legally required. He added that he had concerns that they would have to cut from other areas.

There was some discussion on the funding of this grant by the Town and the at-risk factor.

Thidemann stated that they should talk to the Fire Chief and reconstruct the budget and that the motion would have to contain a dollar amount. Whitney made the motion to place a 2 ½ override combined Safer Grant on the Annual Town Meeting warrant and was seconded by Dennehy. Motion carried.

Thidemann inquired about the School Department override article request and Gagnon stated that they had wiped out all of their accounts in order to reach their budget goal and he stated that he was very impressed with the work they had done. Johnson stated that he was absolutely against a school override.

Gagnon stated that the Board had to support all three override articles and Johnson then added that they should leave them on the warrant and put off their vote on whether they support this until the school has a definite number.

It was noted by Thidemann that they added three revolving funds, articles 11, 12 and 13.

Dennehy brought up discussion on the dam repairs' issue and the estimate from Tighe & Bond. Thidemann noted that the main thing to remember is that they need to meet the state requirements and that this ultimately has to go before the Capital Planning Committee. Some discussion followed.

It was noted by Gagnon that articles 12 and 13 were okay to keep on the warrant and that article 14 might be taken off or passed over at the Town Meeting. It was also noted that now that the Water/Sewer accounts showed some funds it would be possible to add significant funds to the Stabilization Fund per article 28.

There was some discussion on the possibility of combining the three override requests, but this was determined not to be feasible, or even democratic.

Nancy Haines, the Town Accountant stated that she had good news on the Water/Sewer revenues noting that they had \$190k more of retained earnings as they used the revenue estimates by Mark Abraham. She stated that the net effect was that this allows her to go back and level fund budgets. However, she did add the bad news which was that the Assessors overlay account is in deficit by about \$50k. Thidemann noted that the overlay account was also increased and they had removed the articles that were to be cleaned out to save for FY09. He stated that they would move \$35k into the Stabilization Account but also added that there was reduced estimated revenue from interest income.

Thidemann stated that he needed to go back to the Police budget as they have added the contract with Westminster for a regional animal control officer. He stated that he met with the Planning Board Chair and the Conservation Commission Chair. He noted that ConCom agreed to contribute \$20k from their fund towards the ConCom Agent salary with \$27k coming from taxation. He noted that they did not reclass the position. He also stated that the bulk of the \$20k in the Land Use budget would be available to the Planning Board services.

Thidemann then stated that he needed to start work on the FY09 budget to get this in balance. He noted that at this time they had a small cushion in the FY10 budget and that he would be discussing additional revenues with the Light Department as well.

There was some discussion on the Land Use budget for FY10 and the ConCom Agent working in this position. After much discussion both boards agreed that their vote to cut the ConCom Agent's hours to 20 hours per week should stand and this should be reflected in the budget. Johnson stated that the Advisory Board voted to make the ConCom agent position part time at 20 hrs. per week and that it should be shown as such in the budget. Both Whitney and Gagnon voted the same and were in agreement. Dennehy noted that he was not in favor.

At 9:07 p.m. Whitney motioned to adjourn and was seconded by Gagnon.

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator