

JOINT MEETING - BOARDS OF SELECTMEN
ASHBURNHAM AND ASHBY
MONDAY – OCTOBER 24, 2011 – 7:00 p.m.
TRAINING ROOM – PUBLIC SAFETY BUILDING

PRESENT: Ed Vitone, Chair, Gregory Fagan, Clerk; Ron Reed, Member, Doug Briggs, Town Administrator and Sylvia Turcotte, Assistant to the Town Administrator. Also in attendance from Ashby – Peter McMurray, Chair, Dan Meunier, Joseph Casey, and Jennifer Collins, Administrative Assistant.

I. OPEN MEETING

Ed Vitone called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and led everyone in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Ed Vitone asked for Public Input and Caitlyn Kelleher of the Community Journal noted that she would be recording parts or all of the meeting.

II. 1ST SEVEN WEEKS

Ed Vitone stated that the purpose of this meeting was to see how things were going with the sharing of Doug Briggs as Town Administrator in both towns. Introductions followed. Ed Vitone stated that they were looking to see what has been working well and what improvements were needed. He asked Peter McMurray to speak first.

Peter McMurray stated that he appreciated the opportunity to share the services of Town Administrator and noted that there has been a learning curve for their Department Heads in particular regarding the budget and capital plan. He did add that he thinks it's paying off. He stated that so far he has enjoyed working with Briggs and that in his opinion Doug Briggs brings a great set of eyes for Ashby. He noted that as he moves forward he will pay dividends for Ashby, as with the school and water issues. He added that it's a "new set of eyes".

Dan Meunier stated that he thought it was fantastic and that it's great to have someone there who takes the burden off of Jennifer. He also noted that he was pleased that Doug Briggs has spear-headed the capital plan for Ashby.

Joe Casey stated that he had always felt bad that the burden of running the Town fell on Peter McMurray and Jennifer Collins. He stated that he liked Doug Briggs' idea to discipline Department Head spending. He did note his concerns about whether Doug was taking too much of his time for Ashby.

Ron Reed noted that the story of this sharing venture has made this month's Beacon so a lot of eyes will be watching how this turns out. He added that he felt it was working well so far.

Greg Fagan stated that he felt it was a wonderful experiment, working well and paying off. He compared this experience to when Briggs first came to Ashburnham.

Ed Vitone noted that he has had the most interaction with Doug Briggs on this and stated that the last seven weeks has been a working experience and Doug has put in extra effort to make it work. He noted that one of the big issues is managing Doug's calendar. He added that it's important that he answers any issues in both communities and that there is a learning curve which will improve.

Doug Briggs thanked all present for the opportunity. He noted that this was actually his brainchild in collaboration with Nancy Haines who was serving both communities as Town Accountant. He stated that there was a lot of opportunity in Ashby and that he enjoys both communities. He stated that he has been working on the Capital Plan in Ashby and has been managing his time better. He noted that he has felt guilty about missing meetings especially with the Finance Committee, who meet so often. He stated that it seems to be working well and that there were a lot of regionalizing opportunities. He stated that it seems to be working a lot better with Jennifer and Sylvia's help.

Jennifer Collins stated that she was excited with this fresh set of eyes. She also noted that she has not had any issues reaching Doug and everyone knows they can reach him at any time.

Sylvia Turcotte stated that it was working well especially with the new schedule calendar.

III. NEXT FIVE WEEKS

Ed Vitone stated that they needed to discuss their expectations and concerns for the next five weeks.

Peter McMurray noted that his expectations would be that Doug stays on the same road that he's on with the Capital Plan, school roof, and water testing issues. He noted his concern is that this was only a test, and if this continues they would look at possibilities and would want to keep the momentum going.

Dan Meunier noted that his expectation is "having someone at Town Hall" that has knowledge and resources. He agreed with Peter's comments.

Joe Casey stated that he was extraordinarily optimistic and that this was the sentiment on the street as well. He noted that looking forward, they needed to accentuate the merit of this sharing scenario and show the State how well it works.

Ron Reed noted that it looked like Ashburnham and Ashby would have the same senator soon. He noted his concern that the true test would be during the budget season. He stated that it was a great opportunity and wanted to see it succeed.

Greg Fagan stated that they were creating an infrastructure and that this is a long-term type of thing. He noted his concern was that Briggs would get burdened down and get burnt out.

Ed Vitone stated that his expectation was that "it works". He noted his concern was the budget season in addition to his calendar and that they need a system. He stated that mathematically this should work. He also noted that they could borrow the best from both towns to make it work smoothly and to streamline the procedures. Greg Fagan agreed with Vitone. McMurray added that the report they had from the Collins Center could be shared with Ashburnham and would be very helpful in this process.

Doug Briggs stated that they need to establish procedures and that he has already used some Ashburnham formats such as wording of motions for Town Meeting, budget formatting with the hyperlinks and the Capital Plan spreadsheet. He stated that he is always looking for better solutions. He noted that he is teaching the Department Heads in Ashby the process and reasons for a Stabilization and Capital fund and to force them to live within their budget. He added that he values comments from both Jen and Sylvia and that he has already seen results like with the water treatment issue and the joint CDBG grant.

Both Jennifer Collins and Sylvia Turcotte agreed that there was tremendous potential.

IV. POST TRIAL OPTIONS

Vitone asked what the next step should be and McMurray stated that he wanted it to continue but that the workload may be an issue and that it was up to Doug to go to the Selectmen with any issues. He reiterated that he wanted to see this continue.

Meunier agreed with McMurray, noting that starting a new job is chaotic but that once Briggs gets things set it would be easier. He stated that he was in favor of continuing to move forward.

Reed noted that they should run through the budget cycle and see how it goes.

McMurray stated that he wanted to see more meetings like this one during the process.

Fagan noted that this was a long-term trial, an ongoing experiment. He added that he was also in favor of pushing forward with this agreement and holding more meetings as suggested by McMurray.

Vitone agreed that they should see how it works with the budget cycle. He noted that the first pass on the budget is in January and they would see how the process works to that point.

Briggs stated that the budget forms are all set to go to the Department Heads in Ashburnham and he wanted to get the same bottom-line budget format in Ashby. He also noted that he was working on the Capital Plan in Ashby and asking the Department Heads to prioritize their needs. He stated that he wants to see it work and will do what it takes to make it happen.

Vitone stated again that getting through the budget cycle would be the test and that they would work on the agreement to extend through the budget cycle, approximately mid February. He added that confidence would be high if it goes well through the budget cycle.

McMurray stated that they should plan to meet in February and Vitone agreed that by then they should have enough data to go forward.

McMurray noted that they should work on the meetings schedule with the Ashby Finance Committee and the Board of Selectmen.

Briggs did note that the budget effort/concern would be the schools as they will be a lot of work.

Vitone stated that he was optimistic and that they would extend the agreement for another 3 months. Briggs noted that they should also assess the work that the Assistants do as well.

Bill Johnson, Ashburnham Advisory Board Chair, stated that he sees that this is all very positive, like a dating process right now. He noted that the budget cycle would be the test but that since Briggs has been Town Administrator the budget cycle is operationally efficient and seamless in Ashburnham. He added that he sees nothing but good things.

Fagan agreed with Johnson and stated that they need to challenge ways of doing things and look at this as an opportunity.

V. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:07 p.m. Reed motioned to adjourn the meeting and was seconded by Fagan. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Sylvia Turcotte
Assistant to the Town Administrator