

*Town of Dunstable*  
**Joint Meeting of the Selectboard & Personnel Board**  
**March 15, 2016**  
**Town Hall, Dunstable, MA 01827**

**Convened:** 7:02 pm

**Present:** Kenneth J. Leva, chair, Daniel F. Devlin, Walter F. Alterisio, Board of Selectmen; Tracey Hutton, Town Administrator; Madonna McKenzie, Consultant; Jean O'Brien, chair, Frank Antonelli, Raymond Richardson, Peter Georges, Personnel Board; Ron Mikol, Advisory Board; James Dow, Police Lieutenant

**Wage & Classification Study**

Ms. McKenzie started off by explaining the various communities used in the study. The principle communities include Groton, Pepperell, Littleton, Merrimac, Harvard, and Essex. Previous drafts of the study used FY15 figures. The draft being presented to the boards at this meeting uses FY17 figures. The figures were drawn from various sources based on similar positions in each of the comparable communities and consider both publicly available data and contractual data which was gathered from publication and contacts within each community. Ms. McKenzie then elaborated on the grades and their corresponding minimum and maximums being proposed for Dunstable employees. She noted that some positions were harder to compare due to the uniqueness of the each community; Library employees in particular. Moving forward cost of living adjustments (COLAs), which are assumed to be 2 percent, will be applied to the grades. Employees will then move up on the grade system based on longevity. Employees who are paid more than they should be according to their current longevity will only see COLA increases until they reach the grade that corresponds to their existing wage. Employees found to be paid less than the grade they should be at will see increases, including COLA's, calculated to bring them up to the appropriate wage for their corresponding grades.

Discussion then revolved around the implications of the new system, the costs of adjusting wages for under paid employees, and sustainability. The Fire Chief's increase was looked at in particular due to it being the largest. Ms. McKenzie noted that these increases represent what would be necessary to make the town truly comparable in compensation to other similarly situated communities. The Board noted that the work done so far tells us where the community stands on this issue. For so long the town has operated at the level that it has and as a result there is now some divergence between Dunstable and other similar communities. But in order to truly understand the differences, and more importantly the "why" then we have to look beyond job titles and compare what each position actually does in each community. This also requires inquiry into determining where each comparable community has started and what the qualifications required for each position has been. Ms. McKenzie responded by noting that by and large each position does the same things. Discussion then revolved around the progress of the town in recent years including the hiring of a full time Fire Chief for the first time and the establishment and hiring of a full time Town Administrator. The Board took the position that change cannot occur all at once. Ms. McKenzie responded by reminding that the Personnel Board's proposal at this stage is to favor a three year period for the wage adjustments with any increases aimed at bringing employees up to the proper grade occurring in thirds.

Mr. Antonelli noted that the Personnel Board felt that the town could afford to do this if the cost was spread out over three years. It was suggested that the Advisory Board should be further consulted on the spreading out of the cost over time given the budget planning implications. The Board noted that this will need to be considered in light of the economics of the moment as well as other pressing budgetary matters like the school district. This lead to discussion relating to whether the town should consider putting the wage increases as one lump sum into an override vote along with the school districts requests. Ms. McKenzie noted that if an override vote has to happen for the schools, the town might have well consider the wage matter as well. Mr. Mikol returned discussion to what employees actually do, noting that with the Fire Chief example the town has to consider the fact that the chief goes to every call, puts in more than 40 hours a week, and other towns spend more on encouraging and supporting things like higher and continuing education. Things like education make a difference. Mr. Mikol continued by reminding the boards that greater education provides greater credibility, and that while the town has lacked structures in the past, with better established positions must come greater credibility. No one runs a business the way the town has been running things. Mr. Antonelli inquired whether

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the town has ever really compared itself to other communities before. The Board responded that this is really the first time.

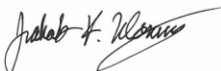
With the Fire Department example, the Board noted, the town has always had a volunteer department, aside from the position of Chief. And until the current Chief, even that position wasn't full time. Much of the town's government has been elected in the past and mostly part time or volunteer aside from clerical support. The town must consider where it began and where it plans to be. Discussion then centered around the issues of direction or lack thereof for employees in the past and the town's desire to see a professional government with responsive services. In the past the town has been able to run under the radar, but Dunstable is getting to big for that now. Ms. Hutton noted that now that the town has a Town Administrator, the town has the ability to do assessments of each position, formalize processes, and look at various positions as they exist in other communities. This led to further discussion about the uniqueness of positions in Dunstable as compared to other communities. Ms. McKenzie reiterated that the essence of the jobs are the same. The Board interjected that knowing what each of the comparable communities spends for their total budgets would be helpful for a true comparison. Dunstable's budget is around \$9.7 million. Many other communities, including those being compared to Dunstable have significantly higher budgets. What many of those communities also have that sustain those budgets are business entities to tax, in particular meals taxes. Dunstable has made a lot of progress, so much so that some in the community think the town is all set. It should not be forgotten that Dunstable was and still sees itself as a farming community.

Ms. McKenzie noted that the town has good employees, but in some cases employees do not appear to be paid enough to actually live in town. This brought discussion to the issue of revenue. The Board noted that so much conservation and preservation has occurred that revenue has decreased. Approximately \$90,000 a year in revenue since 2012 has gone off the tax rolls. Ms. McKenzie reminded the boards that another looming problem for the town going forward is retirement. A number of employees in prominent positions are getting ready to retire in the coming years and if the town doesn't grapple with wages now, it may be hard to find replacements, especially when the town also has out of date job descriptions for many positions. The town needs to consider these issues and how to incentivize through other benefits. This includes the adoption of an updated Personnel Policy to govern such benefits. The Board noted that in the past it was been what's good for one is good for us all. But the town needs to recognize that many different roles in town are equally important and cannot be neglected. Mr. Antonelli responded that we don't want to propose unrealistic ideas that don't get approved. What that does is force us to determine what is a realistic amount and how can we adjust for it. The Board agreed in principle noting that this has to be laid out and an open dialogue needs to occur regarding where we are at and where we want to go. The town needs, the Board suggested, to really sell the Master Plan and the concept of the big picture.

Discussion briefly turned back to the issue of education. Mr. Georges stated that it would be a shame if the emphasis on education discounted "the school of hard knocks" which is the same as higher education for some positions. Mr. Murphy noted that in the scheme of things with the budget, the issue of increased wages are not a budget buster, especially when compared to the requests of the school district. Ms. McKenzie noted that what is being requested is very small percentage wise for the overall town budget. The Board responded that there will likely be some pushback, but regardless the town needs to try to do the right thing and have a level playing field. Mr. Georges characterized it as a need to "bite the bullet." Lt. Dow interjected that if we don't do this all at once, there is the risk of it not being completed. The Board noted that this won't be easy regardless of whether it is done all at once or done in part. Discussion concluded on the fact that the next big step for this is Advisory Board and then determining strategy.

The Boards adjourned at 8:25 pm.

Respectfully submitted by



Jakob K. Hamm  
Admin. Assistant to the Selectboard & Town Administrator

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