

Ad Hoc Government Study Committee (Westborough, MA)
Minutes of November 29, 2006

Present: John E. Arnold, Christopher Senie, Thomas Shea, Brigitte Casemyr, Kristina Allen, Sue Abladian, Manohar Vichare

Chairman Shea called the meeting to order @ 7:08 pm.

Mr. Shea welcomed Lynn Watts, member of the Personnel Board and set the stage for the meeting by stating the objectives of the committee's work, which is to review the town's organizational structure. He then turned the floor to L. Watts, so that she could educate the committee on the Personnel Board's mission.

As L. Watts came prepared with notes to share with the committee, these notes are incorporated in these minutes as appendix A. The minutes will thus reflect the discussion that ensued following the presentation of these notes.

K. Allen asked how job evaluations were performed. L. Watts responded that the employee fills out a form and this is a way to encourage communications with the supervisor. The Personnel Board used to get copies of the evaluations, but now only receives copies for non-union personnel. L. Watts described how the Personnel Board reviews the evaluations when the employee is up for a merit step increase. She added that employees are provisional employees during their first year. All supervisors hire their staff at Step 1; if they want to hire someone at a higher step, they must go before the Personnel Board. She also noted that the town of Westborough does not train its supervisors. The town does not have a formal new employee orientation either. The Personnel Board had prepared a booklet but was informed that it did not 'fit' the union language. The town currently has 27 non-union employees (supervisors, part-time personnel and personnel with confidentiality requirements in their position), and about 200 unionized employees.

S. Abladian added that the Personnel Board administers the salary plan. She opined that the Personnel Board's duties needed to be re-written, as this board today cannot support the HR Director. L. Watts commented that over the past 10 years, the Personnel Board has suggested to review the need for an HR Director.

As L. Watts described the work of the Personnel Board related to the re-evaluation of jobs (every 3 to 5 years), the plan and wage and salary schedule, C. Senie commented that this appeared to be a lot of work on behalf of 27 employees.

K. Allen commented that other towns have opted for an HR Director and that Westborough seemed to be heading that way [referring to the Assistant Town Coordinator/HR Director position]. L. Watts said that the real advantage of a Personnel Board is its independence. S. Abladian commented that the Assistant Town Coordinator/HR Director is a unique individual who has spent many years at Chase Paper as HR Director, and that it was unlikely that the next Assistant Town Coordinator/HR Director would have similar qualifications to fill that dual role.

Another question posed by K. Allen explored a straight reporting structure, such as the Board of Selectmen or the Town Coordinator being able to appoint directors. The respective director's Board would have input, maybe even veto power. She solicited L. Watts view on this suggestion. L. Watts asserted that this structure would destroy the autonomy of FinCom and the Personnel Board. She said if the directors were to report to another body then the Boards would be rendered ineffective. J. Arnold added that if the directors that did not report to their board kept their board informed of ongoing activities in town, would it mean that they provided input for the board strategic planning because they really believed in it, or would it be because their respective supervisor [who would perform their evaluation] wanted it?

L. Watts explained the process of moving up a step each year. M. Vichare inquired about personnel evaluations, and more specifically, about an employee's motivation to perform at an excellent level. L Watts said that the job evaluation is the supervisor's opportunity to communicate with his employee, but that often, a supervisor does not know what an employee really does. There really is no mechanism to reward an excellent performance outside of the steps.

B. Casemyr mentioned the suggestion the committee had received to pull out the Plan and the Wage and Salary Schedule out of the Bylaws and to make them a separate a document. L. Watts said this was an excellent idea. C. Senie inquired if the Personnel Board had the authority to change the salary plan without Town Meeting to which L. Watts responded in the negative.

T. Shea inquired about the workload an HR Director would face in town, and whether this position should be full- or part-time. L. Watts believes that a part-time experienced HR Director could carry out the duties, however she questioned the town's chances of finding such a person interested in only a 20-hr/work week. The Personnel Board functions well today because it is composed of many HR executives.

T. Shea thanked L. Watts for her time, thorough and thoughtful explanations of the Personnel Board's mission and duties. He then informed the committee that the meeting with the Planning Board had not yet been confirmed.

T. Shea asked for comments on the November 1 meeting. J. Arnold made a motion to accept the minutes, C. Senie seconded motion and the motion was approved unanimously.

T. Shea then asked for comments on the November 8 meeting. C. Senie made a motion to accept the minutes, K Allen seconded motion and the motion was approved unanimously.

Mr. Senie made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Vichare seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 9:08 pm.

Submitted,
Brigitte Casemyr, Secretary

Appendix A. Notes prepared by L. Watts and presented at the November 29, 2006 meeting

Why a Personnel Board has Much Value

- 1) It is an outgrowth or little sister of the Finance Committee - the third leg of Town Government.

It is a check and balance on the other two parts of Government. Selectmen and Town employees are the executive branch. The Town Meeting is the legislative branch and the Personnel Board is perhaps similar to the judicial branch. We are appointed by the Moderator and therefore operate independently. The Selectmen are elected by and responsible to the voters, the paid staff are appointed by the Selectmen or Henry so they serve at their pleasure. The Personnel Board and the FinCom are structurally divorced from working for anyone or being beholden to anyone because of the wisdom of the current town government architecture.

- 2) Have prevented empire building when one or more departments simply want more people on board in order to do the same amount of work. As the town gets bigger, the Personnel Board demanded job descriptions and additional information before recommending that Annual Town Meeting vote to expand a department.

Article 30 last March. - One of the supervisors appointed by the Selectmen or Town Coordinator wanted to be on a contract employee such as the Town Coordinator, Fire and Police Chiefs are. Bad: it would be very prejudicial and inconsistent, as many supervisors are appointed by their boards. (Planning Board, Library Board, Recreational Director, Board of Health, Council on Aging, and Youth and Family) This was removed from the warrant because the Personnel Board pointed out the error.

- 3) Used to be stronger before all the unions and a strong Town Coordinator. During the early 90's, sat in on negotiations. Now excluded. We need to at least review contracts before they are signed as several times we have been asked to administer totally impossible contracts.

DPW contract does not offer educational reimbursement. Two people recently have put in for reimbursement. So The Town must pay, but nothing was gained in the contract negotiations.

- 4) Advice and help or consent

- DPW mentioned that it is necessary to privatize sewer clean-outs of \$150,000/per annum. Suggested that for the same amount we could hire three men who would be available year round for various jobs.
- Town Clerk needs another person. For the price of one benefited employee, she could have two or two and a half part-time employees. Don't know what she will decide.

- Detected personnel problem with rampant absenteeism every Friday and Monday unnoticed by others.
- 5) Worked with various supervisors over the years on personnel issues. They stayed in our employ and now are highly-rated supervisors. We are known to be discreet, offer unemotional advice, and are non-political.
- 6) First to use volunteers - Give a little to Get a lot. Put volunteers into many jobs. Taken over a few years later by Selectmen for real estate tax reductions.
- 7) The cost for Personnel Board is under \$4500/year. The remainder is obligated expenses such as educational reimbursement, new hire physicals, retirement packages, etc.
- 8) It is a very strange job as some of the time people want our advice and other times they totally ignore our advice. A larger role which is currently inconsistent would definitely be helpful.

Tried to advise Town Coordinator and Selectmen of illegal union activities:

- Founding of clerical union -
 - Informational meeting held at DPW. Excluded many opponents of union.
 - Voting for or against union illegal as Supervisor voted (Carolyn Delude)
 - Police Union, Fire, Clerical get one line reviews. Does this lead to the desired communication?
- 9) For over 10 years the Personnel Board has suggested to Henry that he make a proposal which would let the Personnel Board set policy to be carried out by a HR department. Nothing has been forthcoming. And it would be expensive.
 - Have rewritten Personnel by-laws in total one time and made revisions annually to specific sections to keep them current.
 - Set wages for Supervisors and part time employees.
 - Evaluated and rated all exempt positions every three years
 - Worked with various Supervisors on job descriptions and hiring practices
 - Taught Town supervisors how to administer Americans with Disabilities
 - Kept several departments from advertising jobs which would open them up to major adjustment possibilities if advertised a certain way
 - Establish the annual wage adjustment
 - Keep close track of the number of employees and their job descriptions.
 - Set pay rate for all non-union employees. and all new hires above a step one
 - Spent many hours untangling UMASS billing for physicals
 - Advised hiring by supervisors in a tight or open job market as to pay
 - Wrote job descriptions
 - Rated jobs and their pay every three years as to grade