

**TOWN OF WINCHENDON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES
WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2015
Town Hall, 2nd Floor Auditorium
109 Front Street, Winchendon, Mass.**

Present:

Michael Barbaro, Chairman
Barbara Anderson, Vice-Chair
Amy Salter
Austin Cyganiewicz
Audrey LaBrie

Bernard Lynch, Acting Town Manager
Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

- o Illegal Interview Questions Sheet (filed)
- o Community Paradigm Associates, LLC Memo dated September 29, 2015 (filed)
- o Town Manager Candidate Mark Ree's Letter of Interest/Resume (filed)

Chairman Barbaro called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America. The meeting aired live on local cable access channel 8.

Announce audio/video recording disclosure - When asked by the Chairman if anyone would be audio or video recording the meeting this evening, there was no response.

NEW BUSINESS:

Town Manager Candidate Interview – Mark Rees

Mr. Lynch introduced Mr. Mark Rees, long time Manager in Massachusetts and recently in Maine. He has 35 years' experience and is one of the selections of the Screening Committee to bring before you this evening. Chairman Barbaro welcomed him and said that Winchendon is a small community looking for a new manager. The Town was very divided earlier this year and that we were looking to bring closure with the appointment of a new Town Manager. He asked Mr. Rees to introduce himself.

Mr. Rees said he has been a long time local government manager. He enjoys the profession immensely bringing him a lot of personal fulfillment. His resume shows a record of steady growth and progression and professional management of communities. He started off with a Masters of Public Administration from the University of Pittsburg, with a concentration of local governance. His first professional job was as a Purchasing Agent in N. Carolina. From there he went to a Town Asst. Manager position in Pennsylvania where he got the nuts and bolts of financial management. Wanting to move back to New England, he became the first Town Administrator in Ashburnham. He helped Ashburnham get through some difficult times in terms of bringing professional management using an old style form of government by elected officials and silo making by departments. He was able to turn the community around bringing in more modern management practices, combining Dept. of Public Works, bringing the first computer system in and strengthening financial procedures. When he left the Town was in a much better state then when he first got there. From there he went north to the Town of Northbridge. They also were undergoing significant financial stress and miss-management. They were having revenue deficits, surpluses were dwindling, and there was a great deal of in fighting with officials. He was able to go in

and turn that community around as well by strengthening their financial procedures and being more realistic in their budgeting but also bringing in a more team oriented community. That community, as well, was left far better off than when he began there.

Mr. Rees continued saying he then took a detour to becoming the Chief Financial Officer of the Town of Framingham. This community was under some financial strain with revenue deficits, lack of long term financial planning or even a capital budget process. He corrected that and put teams together to put procedures in place. After this he went back to being a Town Manager in North Andover. He was the longest serving Town Manager they have had. Financial management wasn't the issue but there was a great deal of divisiveness in the community, a lot of strain between the Finance Committee, the Board of Selectmen and the School Committee. He was able to, over time, build a positive relationship between those groups. He then wanted to fill a lifelong dream of his to be a City Manager of a large community. He went up to Portland, Maine and has been there the last three years. He said that old adage, be careful of what you dream of, once he reached that high level of local government management, some of the negative things outweighed some of the positive things and he determined it best to leave that position and look for another. He said what attracted him to Winchendon was the opportunity to help communities turn around who are experiencing financial difficulties and management problems in to a far more positive and strong position. Bernie has started down this path and he'd like to continue and help make this community much more stronger financially and bring a commitment to stronger management as well working with departments and elected parties and appointed officials to help Winchendon reach its highest potential that it can.

Barbaro asked how he would go about bringing the community back together. Mr. Rees said one of the key things would be to work with Selectmen in setting goals that they would like to meet, working with them having community meetings and set community goals they would like to achieve, short term as well as long term. He would use those goals to work with departments to come up with objectives to work on achieving those more general goals. He would like to encourage people to come and give feedback on the future of the community. Based on that feedback then moving towards an action plan to achieve those goals and move forward.

Barbaro asked how he thought we could re-build the trust of the community. Mr. Rees replied it isn't going to be easy. It takes time and perseverance. Once you lose that trust it's hard to re-gain it. The way to do it is to put your best work possible that you can put out there; work that is at the highest level of things being done in terms of proper high level management issues as well as a strong budget. You need to build the confidence back by knowing what you are doing. He feels he's been able to do that in most of the communities he's worked at through professionalism and hard work and effective communication provide the evidence that people need.

Barbaro asked what his entry plan might be. Mr. Rees replied immediate short term he would like to meet one on one with the Selectmen, see the community from their perspective, have the opportunity to see what the challenges and possibilities in the community are and build that one on one relationship he feels is very important. Similarly he'd like the Dept. Heads to take him out and show him operations from their perspective in the field, see what their needs are and how he can help them to be successful. The third component is community outreach with civic organizations, with the Chamber of Commerce, with the School Committee, Boards and get feedback from where the community is going which will help you form community goals.

Vice-Chair Anderson said hello to Mr. Rees and asked him how to describe his management style and to give some specific examples. Mr. Rees replied his management style is one to have the people that work for him be in the position to succeed, making sure resources are there for them for their departments but he also holds them accountable for their actions. Along with community goals, objectives would be instilled to work towards achieving those objectives. He is not a micro-manager. He feels professionals are hired and he is not going to tell for example the Fire Chief or Police Chief how to do their jobs. He feels it's his responsibility to help them move their departments forward and also to hold them accountable for specific objectives. Anderson asked how he would hold them accountable. Mr. Rees replied through annual evaluations and explained an evaluation tool he used in North Andover. He added that you don't want surprises at the annual evaluation so you want to have constant feedback with Department Heads so they know on a daily basis how well or not how well they are doing. He mentioned quarterly evaluations that feed up to the annual one.

Selectwoman LaBrie asked about his open door policy and asked how he felt about citizens coming in wanting to speak with him. Mr. Rees replied he is fine with people wanting to meet with him but that he preferred appointments to prepare for meetings. Similar with employees he has an open door policy with them.

Selectwoman Salter said she has financial management questions and asked with the current financial crisis the Town is in what was his approach to financial management. Mr. Rees replied that he is conservative and realistic in terms of how you go about putting the budgets together. He likes to under estimate revenues and overestimate expenditures. He feels it very important to have regular accurate financial reports so at any time you can gauge where you are in terms to projections to your actual performance. Also important is to have long term financial planning in place to not only deal with the crisis but to see where potential problems might be. Capital budgeting is important and he has been successful in putting five year capital plans that have addressed serious infrastructure problems without a proposition 2 ½ override. A strong financial plan prioritizing capital is important.

Salter asked his interest and experience with grants. Mr. Rees said yes he has gone after state and federal grants for infrastructure. He gave examples of his past experience. He also spoke about the ability of non-profit organizations to provide assistance to communities. Salter told him the Town is partly under the Dept. of Revenue oversight to help us through this crisis and asked him if he had any experience with a municipal taxing state and how he felt about it. Mr. Rees replied that he has worked with the Dept. of Revenue for many of the years in Massachusetts. Mr. Rick Kingsley, who was and may be still the Director of Bureau of Local Services, is a hockey buddy of his. He feels dealing with regulators on the state level you want to build a positive relationship with them. If you access them, you benefit from them, they can help you. He said he read the report for Winchendon and they have done a good job in helping Winchendon get out of this.

Salter asked about his experience with collective bargaining and unions. Mr. Rees said in his career he has been the person that has done the research, being the one doing the negotiations across the table to the one that tells the negotiators how to approach it. He's done the whole gamut of it. The success he's had in collective bargaining is evident in not one of his grievances has gone up to arbitration. He has been always able to settle. The success is you have to have mutual respect across the table. One of the things he's been able to do is negotiate modest collective bargaining agreements by sitting down and explaining the financial situation of the community. He uses a more fact based approach versus an emotional approach and by developing that mutual respect that is critical.

Salter asked about his experience with technology mentioning we have software issues and if he was pro-technology. Mr. Rees replied whether pro or not it is here. If you want to have a good operation, you need to have good technology. He spoke about installing the first Town computer system when he was in Ashburnham all the way up to Portland where he had twenty people in the technology department. He knows enough about it to know whether or not a salesman is pulling the wool over his eyes or if he is getting factual information. He said he is knowledgeable enough to be able to determine fault between employees that might be blaming each other and be able to figure out what the problem is and assign responsibility to fix it. He is aware the Town has a Munis system here. He is familiar with Munis and was encouraged when he learned through the DOR report that they are willing to help with better usage of the software. Munis is big in New England for municipal software and they certainly put out a good product. If they can help in getting things working together in the system instead of past practice of manual walk-throughs and connections that isn't needed with the system being used and set up properly.

Barbaro mentioned there is a lot of talk about regionalization with small communities like Winchendon and asked his thoughts on it. Mr. Rees said early in his career in North Carolina he had experience with a strong county form of government. He gave examples of the benefits of it and thinks for New England an attempt of regionalization could be made but with small steps being taken.

LaBrie asked him how far he would look ahead when doing a long term financial forecast. Mr. Rees replied usually about five years feeling more than that would be based more on speculation. He mentioned we should be aware of each revenue source individually and their variations and similarly with expenditures mentioning snow and ice and veteran's services. He said you need to be conservative and take a look at what may go wrong or right in the future. A critical process is also capital planning.

LaBrie asked how he would present his budget to the Board. Mr. Rees said he usually uses a PowerPoint presentation, highlighting major areas of the budget. Before he gets to that presentation, the ground work would be laid out in advance.

Economic Development – LaBrie asked his thoughts on Economic Development for Winchendon. Mr. Rees replied that Winchendon can take advantage of things that make it unique and positive. You have a great deal of outdoor recreational facilities that could make a nice niche for a business, like outdoor outfitting. The Town has a significant number of underutilized mill space and try to reposition those properties for startup companies or incubators. There are also things you can do in terms of your land use planning, make sure zoning is appropriate and also to make sure your regulatory permitting process is more of an assistance to businesses as opposed to a hindrance. LaBrie would like to see us become a more business-friendly community.

LaBrie asked about our downtown mentioning the wonderful research project UMass conducted last year. She asked him his thoughts on how you revitalize that village feel. Mr. Rees said he did read the report saying it was well written. He thought it would be wise for the community to use that as a template and explore grant opportunities. He was curious how it played out with the public and if it was discussed with business owners and if they were for it. Everyone would need to be on board to be successful.

Selectman Cyganiewicz first thanked Mr. Rees for being here this evening. He asked him about his community leadership style and what his vision was as the Manager in the Town of Winchendon. Mr. Rees thinks the biggest role is to bring about the professionalism that people want to know that there

community is being well managed and that their hard earned tax dollars are not being misused or squandered. When they see their Town Manager, they see someone that is capable of building the confidence that their government knows what they are doing and that they are going to do it well. He see the Town Manager providing customer service with issues they may be facing with street lights going out or an ambulance not showing up, etc. The Town Manager needs to take a leadership role and responsibility to correct those situations. The vision focus is on good professional management that makes people proud to be living in the community and also a focus on the highest level of service provisions to the community.

Cyganiewicz asked if he finds himself working with different stakeholders in the community, such as the Selectmen, the citizens, the business community and with other departments such as the School Department. Mr. Rees sees his role as facilitator and coordinator and spoke of his past ability to bridge gaps between the Chairman of the Board of Selectmen and School Committee to do what is best for the community. He referenced other past work with the renovation of the town's common area he worked in. He said it takes time and effort and a willingness to explain for those who object and also to be willing to listen.

Cyganiewicz spoke of our good fortune to have great representation at the state level and asked his comfort in working with our state representatives. Mr. Rees replied he is very comfortable in calling them up to help advance the agenda for Winchendon and the region. He spoke of his past experience building a positive relationship. Cyganiewicz asked how he is with working and dealing with other communities. Mr. Rees replied that he always tries to build positive working relationships and mentioned when he was in Ashburnham, Winchendon was a partner in a new water line and the new water treatment plant. Professional managers work very well together in Massachusetts looking at ways to cooperate and help each other. He's relied on the Mass. Municipal Association and the Mass. Manager's Association for all sorts of assistance. It's nice to reach out to colleagues, like Bernie.

LaBrie said to Mr. Rees that it has been an interesting year this past year and a lot of discussion by citizens as to what type of Town Manager they would like to see. It is clear to her, they want someone who is hands on, perhaps someone who takes time and walks Central St. and talks to citizens and businesses. If hired, do you see yourself as that person to reach out and make that one on one connection and how he would do it? Mr. Rees replied that he does and spoke of his experiences and how he likes working in smaller communities enjoying the one on one interaction with the citizenry that is not possible in a large community. He enjoys getting out and meeting with the public on a regular basis. It's more of an attitude than a program wanting to be receptive and willing to go talk to people. It is one of the things that attracted him to Winchendon to be back in with that small town flavor and meet with people. Having said that, Mr. Rees continued, this doesn't take away the role of the Selectmen with their active role interacting with the public.

Barbaro asked Mr. Reese his take on funding for small towns, schools versus towns, and if he could talk about handling the balancing act. Mr. Rees said one of the things, and sometimes taken controversial, is a well-supported school system being important for the future of any community and even more so in a town like Winchendon. What makes a town attractive and for young people to stay is the quality of a school system. The quality of a school system is directly related to property values that go up with good schools. He has always driven to have a positive relationship with the Supt. of Schools and through the Superintendent the School Committee. He's negotiated budgets that were sometimes a little testy but has been able to come about with a solution that was acceptable to everybody. One of the things that can be

done to take some of the tension away is to develop a formula as how resources are allocated between the municipal side and school side.

Barbaro thanked him for coming. He said the next Town Manager that is appointed has a major task upon themselves to help us get through this thing; but it is also a unique opportunity. The potential for growth, business-wise, outdoor-wise is boundless. He will have the opportunity to put his legacy in place and set the Town for many years to come. The Board looks forward to hiring a new Town Manager and thanked Mr. Rees for coming. He asked him if he had any questions for them. Mr. Rees said he has been speaking with Bernie and knows of the financial programs that are making very good progress in that area. He mentioned the annual setting of goals and asked if there was a goal setting process in place. Barbaro replied, not yet but they are hoping to have that laid in with the new Town Manager. They have had two acting Town Managers since the Board was elected and the Board's first priority has been on getting the books straight. Mr. Rees understands the financial situation is the most important thing to them right now but he'd be interested in hearing what other challenges that were important to them.

Cyganiewicz responded two things; one to work on the trust with the whole community and second to rebuild the economic part. Winchendon has a lot of potential and sees the new Town Manager taking advantage of that and developing Winchendon into a nice little Town.

LaBrie said we are at a crossroads between small town where everyone knows everyone to needing to be more efficient with what we do running it more like a small business. She sees these next few years making that stride becoming more efficient and goal setting.

Salter said for her it's still the finances and to know that we can have someone that we are not going to have any big surprises and to have someone we can have confidence in and someone who has the answers that can make our budget work and hold people accountable for their departments and not looking for money constantly.

Anderson said she would like to see the Town grow as a whole unit; not just the Town side or the School side but for us to work together to have a much more exciting place and have a lot more growth and innovation in town.

Barbaro looks at the community as a unique opportunity. We need to grow in business and in residency. We haven't had new growth in a long time and have a high rate of vacant houses. Building trust with the community is one thing, but bringing community back to life is very key and trust helps that in getting the community to buy in. The challenges financially will always be there being caught on a bad curve but we have laid out the ground work to fix the problem. It's the long term success that we look forward to.

Mr. Rees thanked everyone for the opportunity to meet with them. He feels based on their comments he would fulfill the qualities needed to take Winchendon on to the next level. His financial management skills are above par, his economic development skills have been proven a success in other communities he's worked, and his ability to work well with people is also well documented. He believes he brings the personality, the experience and skills necessary to help the Board move Winchendon forward.

Mr. Rees was thanked by the Board.

LaBrie moved for a five minutes recess: Salter seconded. With a vote of all aye, the meeting recessed at 7:24 p.m. and was called back to order at 7:30 p.m.

Town Manager Candidate Interview – Andrew J. Sheehan

Barbaro announced to the public that the third candidate, Mr. Sheehan, found himself a job last night. Mr. Lynch said Mr. Sheehan called him last night to withdraw believing it would be fair to both communities to make a decision. Mr. Sheehan wished the Town the best of luck. Lynch said he has known Mr. Sheehan for many years and thought he would be a good fit here. He told the Board they had two outstanding candidates with Keith Hickey and Mark Rees.

Barbaro asked the Board how to proceed with just the two candidates instead of three. A question was asked about possibly calling in another candidate to interview. Mr. Lynch replied the Screening Committee felt these were the best candidates and he concurs with that. He said you could go back to the Screening Committee to put forth another candidate but that is time consuming and we have already lost one candidate. With the other two candidates, it could be a result of another job opportunity or it could be a message of sorts that you infer that you could be dissatisfied with their interview or their background.

Selectwoman Salter said she is satisfied.

Selectwoman Anderson said she was very satisfied.

Selectman Cyganiewicz said he was very satisfied.

Selectwoman LaBrie said she was satisfied but was a little concerned of the distance issue, but overall, very satisfied. She spoke about the email received yesterday suggesting a trial period and asked Mr. Lynch his thoughts on that. He did not think it was a good idea asking to leave a job opportunity elsewhere for a very short term expectation. He sensed from that email that a Manager might come in and leave after a short period of time. Both of the interviewees you had are members of International City Managers Association. The code of ethics for ICMA members is when they make a commitment to a community, they must remain for at least two years. The standard for a manager's contract is generally three years. Personally if he was going for a job, he wouldn't go for that type of arrangement. LaBrie mentioned she could see the pros and cons. Mr. Lynch stated the candidates spoke of the entry plan. That is a six month process and like it or not, it's a political environment and after that time you don't want politics to enter into it. These are professional positions. Barbaro mentioned an evaluation tool that will be in place. Mr. Lynch said managers will want to hear from the Board how they are doing. The contract that is offered to a manager should include or make reference to an evaluation tool.

Barbaro asked for a motion to accept the two candidates they interviewed as finalist for the position of Town Manager. LaBrie so moved; Salter seconded. By a vote of all aye, the motion carried unanimously.

Barbaro announced there is a candidate for the School Committee seat and that a Joint Meeting with the School Committee is scheduled on the 19th at 7:00 p.m. Also he informed the Board that they are looking to take up the warrant and recommendations on the same night on the 9th and not meet on Monday, the 16th. He mentioned the Finance Committee's public hearing on the warrant is going to be held on Nov. 17th.

Mr. Lynch mentioned the warrant articles saying that most of them were familiar with the articles. There are a couple new ones with a donation of land and a situation with the Fire Station roof needing an

additional \$20,000 for repair with some of the original funding needed for a new generator. With all the rain we've had the rough leaks seriously. Unfortunately, there are no other options but stabilization as a source of funding. The good news in terms to the reserves is that Special Legislation does require the Town to set aside money in a separate Reserve Fund for ten years. The good news is we have a \$1.2 million stabilization fund right now; a \$900,000 infrastructure fund and now we are going to set up this special reserve fund. The reserves will be growing so to use that \$130,000 for the Health Insurance and \$20,000 for the Fire Dept. roof, gets us over that hump and allows for the capital planning we have talked about, allows for the forecasting that is essential to ensure that money isn't touched moving forward. You want a good healthy reserve. He said we need to get those projects done. He will have a spreadsheet attached to his report that will outline where the budget changes were in the spring, where it is now and where it will be with the changes made to balance it. The Dept. of Revenue has signed off on all of the revenue estimates and expenditure needs we have. He said there are old bonds that have never been borrowed that will be on the warrant to rescind them. This will give us a better look for the bond agencies.

Barbaro thanked the Board for their work the last two nights doing a good job interviewing. We have a couple days to think about it. He thanked the candidates for coming and the Screening Committee for bringing to them outstanding candidates.

LaBrie asked that if anyone has an article on the warrant to be present at the meeting Monday night to present their case and speak to it and be there to answer any questions they might have. Mr. Lynch said we will reach out to the School Department, Planning and the Fire Chief.

ADJOURNMENT:

LaBrie moved to adjourn; Salter seconded. By a vote of all aye, the meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Daigle
Executive Assistant