

BOARD OF SELECTMEN & SEWER COMMISSIONERS'
MINUTES

Faulkner Room, Town Hall
November 14, 2007
6:00 PM

Present: Chairman Hunter, Selectmen Rosenzweig, Magee, Knibbe and Berry, Recording Secretary Maryjane Kenney

I. CITIZENS' CONCERNS

II. PUBLIC HEARINGS AND APPOINTMENTS

6:00 INTERVIEW OF CANDIDATE STEVEN LEDOUX TOWN MANAGER IN WESTFORD

Mr. Ledoux introduced himself and offered some background information. He has been a Town Manager for a total of 30 years, 23 of which he was a manager in Massachusetts. He was raised in Worcester, attended a Catholic HS, and in doing research for a civics assignment was so impressed he majored in Government and International Studies at Notre Dame and received a Masters in Public Administration at Cornell. He has found being a Town Manager rewarding. His skills are in long-range financial planning and structuring labor relations. Mediation and census building are strong points of his management style. His accomplishments are a major land acquisition and consolidating school and town personnel. He considers himself a hard worker.

Chairman Hunter asked what would be the single most important trait in a Town Manager. Mr. Ledoux replied the relationship with the Selectmen. He likes to start by leading the Selectmen through a goal setting exercise, then meet individually with them to learn what form of communication they personally like. It is important for the public that the manager be assessable and respond to email. He uses the cable channel to communicate bigger issues which has the manager taking phone calls at the end of the show. Another successful program for communication is the use of the cable channel to highlight a different department each month. The Chairman asked how he prepares for the budget. He will start with a goal setting meeting with the Board and set goals for 1 year and long term. Then will have a 2- to 3-day budget meeting with department heads and include the schools. It builds a collaborative consensus on priorities. The superintendent really needs to be present. Chairman Hunter asked what senior programs he has worked on. They have a Tax-work program for seniors and they have doubled the exemptions for seniors. The Lowell Regional bus service is working with Westford on a program to bring seniors a bus. He was asked what he does for staff training. He has two staff meetings a month and he brings in training for the department heads occasionally. Specialized training such as collective bargaining for certain departments would be done off site. Training for staff and the budgetary constraints in performance reviews continue to be a bit of a problem. How do you find the use of the website as a manager? The Acton site is a bit cumbersome. He hired a new young guy with a lot of energy that he really likes and has found it a big improvement in Westford's site.

Selectwoman Rosenzweig asked who do you admire and why. John Kennedy's energy and the passion; John Lennon had commitment to world peace. Bill Kennedy, the Town Manager of Holden, the one who helped him with his civics project, who he has maintained a relationship since high school. He took the time and mentored. She asked what steps you take to maintain staff. It is very important to be competitive. Westford has 20 similar communities that they call their Market Basket they use to compare their salaries and stay competitive. They try to maintain being above the average by quite a bit. Employees pay 65% on health so the effort is to be at the higher pay of the communities to which they compare themselves. It helps to keep good relationships with staff so that when issues arise they can be negotiated and cleared up. In hiring staff what would look for in an assistant and why? A knowledge base, of course, but someone articulate who can speak down to earth on the issues is a real positive. I base decisions on hiring on the strengths and weaknesses of the organization; someone that doesn't have a copy skill set so the organization is well rounded. There have been Master Plans that have not come to fruition. What could you do to develop an historic town center? My last three communities didn't have a single center. I like to utilize the common, a place for people to come together. We currently do a farmers market and the Library is at that location so it is picking up customers. What is your feeling about 40B developments she asked? They have a ton of 40B developments and even so are not near their 10%. They amended the building codes and only allowed 40 permits a year so that limited 40Bs. Neighbors not happy, but it has worked out well. They now have established a housing committee that sets guidelines so the buildings look like part of the center, or part of the rest of the area where they are developed. What they want is affordable housing so they have tried to really work with developers and the public on safety issues on the large developments. She asked how he sees the role of regional planning for water, sewer, power and the like. He stated it is really a New England phenomena - it is the only place moving away from regionalizing. It is very hard for people to associate with a town when there are rivalries and then feel comfortable regionalizing. But the benefits are good; we have really only just started. In Williamstown they regionalized trash. Some of the police and fire groups do it easier.

Selectman Magee asked how Mr. Ledoux would introduce green concepts into municipal operations. He stated their new use of hybrid vehicles, the considerations in renovating the senior center, and a re-activated recycling program. Not done much in the last few years. Selectman Magee asked what opportunities in Acton you see. Looking at school buildings with heat, is the first apparent opportunity. In Williamstown, they use to advertise to the community to make them more aware. He recommends an Advisory committee for municipal buildings. Towns need to deal with energy needs. What steps would he take for land acquisition and conservation? Land use is a priority. In Westford he created a Land Use Priority Committee. They look at all land on the market and when land becomes available it has already been studied and prioritized as to which to preserve for open space and which land could be used for municipal purposes. Their #1 parcel 300 acres came available. They had wanted to use the land for a camp and used CPA funds to complete the purchase. The land was owned by a private corporation and negotiations were weird in that the private party did not want its negotiations to become public. Mr. Ledoux became familiar with the Trust for Public Lands (TPL) and had the trust do all the negotiations. Then Westford bought it from the TPL. Selectman Magee asked what you would do if a Staff or Committee member were not in line with the Board's policy. He felt the Manager should sit down with chair of board and try to work the problem out, then as last resort go to board. He always tries to reach agreement. What is your feeling on having zoning regulations that might be more stringent than required by the state or federal government? I think it is a great tool and it helps preserve pristine property. Wetlands in particular need

protection. What is your experience with solid waste, recycling and transfer stations. He has capped a land fill and is very proud of the accomplishment. In Williamstown he got the College to help convincing them that they used 35% of sewer so they paid 35%. In Westford they have pick up contract service paid out of taxes. Still have monitoring issues with the landfill. He has worked with the EPA in recovery projects in Westford. Selectman Magee asked about his experience with toxic waste. Mr. Ledoux stated there was a leak at Abbot Elementary School which was cleaned up, but left a plume under the school that will require a deed restriction. He had to work through state representatives to get help with that item. Westford just got notice on Perchlorate. They had blasted for a Highway building three years ago and needed to put in an access road - now have found it in town water. They had to put a filter system in place in the nearest well. Another issue was near this 4th of July at the new campsite; they had transform blow and PCB clean up at the new camp.

Selectwoman Knibbe asked Mr. Ledoux about the modified Town Charter in Sudbury as to the role of Town Manager; how do you see the role of Manager. He said it made it easier to carry out the policy of the Board. She asked what happens when he disagrees with the Board. He stated that it is his job to implement whether you agree or not. You give the recommendations and materials to the Board as options for them to make their decisions. He disagreed with the Board when they wanted to increase the Town's percentage of Health Insurance costs. They voted yes, he was against it. He privately noted to the Board he did not agree, but that was it. Selectwoman Knibbe asked why you are considering a change. Simply, he has a list of communities that if the opportunity became available he would like to try for it; Acton is on the list. It is beautiful, good management and good charter. (He lives in Concord.) He divorced in the 90's so lived in Acton during that period of time. She asked how he would find working in Acton where the boundaries are different and need to be crossed; for example the schools, the unions and the water department are all separate entities. He stated Sudbury was similar when he worked there. A good relationship with the superintendent is very important. Constant communication and regular meetings help keep goals clear and directed. Could you tell us about a long term strategic project that you had part in bringing to term? In Williamstown our safe water drinking project was a strategic plan about compliance built around using water tanks as opposed to treating surface water. The land was owned by the Clark Art Institute. Director was opposed to a tank behind his institute; it was a visual intrusion. The engineers insisted that it had to go behind the art institute. Mr. Ledoux asked if they could bury the tank. They could but at a high price. He negotiated with art institute they paid the extra money it would cost to get the tank out of view. Selectwoman Knibbe asked about his expectations on email policy. He thought that Acton's policy is probably similar to Westford. He expects a 24 hours turn around of cordial and factual answers. She asked him to describe a complicated item in his budget. He described "M classified items" in the budget; it is a catch all and therefore it becomes difficult to define what is driving the cost of this bucket of expenses. Some things it is necessary to try to keep confidential such as salaries and negotiations, so it is a challenge to explain "M Classified Items".

Selectman Berry asked about Mr. Ledoux's experience with labor relations. He stated that in Westford they look at retaining employees. For wages they take the market basket approach and are aware that they need to be competitive. They make every effort to come up with a fair plan. In Westford they have never gone to arbitration. They have brought in attorneys with the police, but always negotiated it out as they understand that with the market basket approach the terms are fair. They have 6 unions in town. He is the main spokesperson in town. He was asked about his approach to health care saving. Mr.

Ledoux said it occurred to him that he could save significant monies if he consolidated to one vendor. Westford had gotten to the point where they were offering several vendors. He had to use a broker and labor counsel; the schools tried to break holes in the approach. It did not work. Then unions and employees became very loyal to the one card and when they actually started to bid out to a second vendor with equal benefits the employees would not change. Eventually the pricing became very competitive as even with a one vendor choice it becomes a good account and the pricing of the program is good. In Westford they have a combined Human Resource Department. As far as housing issues they have a full time planner for 40B issues. That person just left and went to Framingham. Currently Westford has a hiring freeze. But the Chelmsford housing authority is very knowledgeable. They made a request to share the person and Chelmsford agreed. So that solved a problem and cost them very little.

PUBLIC QUESTIONS – A Concord Road resident asked what he would do to eliminate toxic substances from the environment, pesticides, cleaning materials, idling of cars and plastic bags. Mr. Ledoux stated that he worked on integrated playing fields to make them safe with concerns to pest management; he is looking at environmentally safe ways to deal with pesticides, cleaning supplies and recycled plastic. Terra Friedrichs has had a good experience with the openness of his town hall. What percentage of his town is developed /conserved? His answer was about 70%-30%. A MIT paper referred to Westford as being pro-development; how much does Westford rely on cash from development. They definitely need influx of cash. They have been rugged and needed development but they do have a Route 110 Master Plan. Westford has allowed development but looked for green space and pedestrian friendly space. We do get some cash back from developers if they are going to affect the area. Terra asked him to explain Net Present Value. He explained his method to come to figure to cover infrastructure. She inquired if he had done much traveling outside of the country. He has traveled to Italy, France, Germany, Belgium, Luxembourg and Costa Rica. He was impressed in Europe with the way they integrate village trains and bikes as a culture of travel. She asked how he protects the Town character. He said that Westford has 4 distinct village centers. He replied that Westford is only at 2.7 % in affordable housing so they are trying to get 40B projects that will restore the mills and surrounding buildings to preserve the look and feel of the town. He is also trying to institute a long range financial planning committee try to have capital reserves for projects. She asked what he has done to show commitment to the true historic preservation of his town against 40B action. In Graniteville, a large development did not go in, the town was offered an alternative and it failed. So the 40B is going forward through the process. They are trying to make it more neighborhoods friendly. The Historic District has bylaws and they recently worked to renovate the old poor house. This was accomplished with CPA funds. They are at 3% of their CPA funds. They have moved Recreation to the building and it has been extremely useful. They do not need to attract businesses as they are right off 495 businesses find them. Ann Chang 17% is the Tax Levy, a single tax rate and a small commercial exemption. Terra asked what you like about Acton for your end game. It is well run and known for its great charter; it would be an excellent end run.

FINAL QUESTIONS –**Selectman Berry** asked with the pressure of development which result in more traffic and demand for more services; and the result of the drain on Town Hall. What share of tax levy is from the schools? In Westford they have a leadership group and they meet for a very informal breakfast meeting. They do a 5 year financial plan and they know what to expect and what to work toward. School budget this year increased 4.9%, the lowest ever. They have never had schools ask for more than their shared fair

amount. Once they raised fees considerably on buses and the School Committee said if they got the extra money they would use it for programs not buses. The schools hang tough and look to better balance.

Selectman Knibbe stated our big issues are around Town character, land use and the people that live in Acton has very old families, very new families and many international families. She would like to see openness for new families. Mr. Ledoux went to the International City Management Association and attended a diversity workshop can relate and told a story about integrating gypsies into Czechoslovakian culture.

Selectman Magee sees key issues to be the Town's ethic about energy being environmentally sound. If a building is not efficient it will affect us for 60 years, much longer than a car for example which may affect us for 10 years. Mr. Ledoux stated the Westford Public Safety Building has been an energy nightmare. It is just like ours. We need to get away from cookie cutter approach.

Selectman Rosenzweig stated the Master Plan and redevelopment of Kelly's corner and the villages are plans she would like to see brought to fruition.

Chairman Hunter asked how you would take the controls from a well known likeable figure. Mr. Ledoux stated that one on one time with staff to start, but noted he is much different than Don and they will need to understand that. He would meet weekly with the department heads. His role at first would be to develop a comfort level. Hold introduction coffees and do some cable exposure. The Temporary Town Manager is an internal candidate assuming he stays. How would you use his talents. Assure him that he is a good guy to work with.

When could you be available? 1 month give or take. Would you move to Acton? No, my wife is on fincom in Concord so she is grounded and she is Town Administrator in Sterling.

CLOSING – Thanks to everyone for taking the time and to the screening committee who has done a great job. Again, his strengths are building consensus, financial long term development, Committee and town character is important. Does the Board have a time table? The Chairman did not at this point in time.

III. SELECTMEN'S BUSINESS

Chairman Hunter would like to talk about verification of records. He has three of the four candidate's information. The board will designate an outside professional to do the background check and will not have police officers involved. Reference checks will be on all 4 at once, not just the final choice(s) as originally thought. It was discussed that the Board will divide the reference checks with 2 people on each candidate as it gives differing points of view. The Chairman will bring materials to distribute and confirm the person that will be doing the checks is removed from all candidates and staff.

Selectman Magee asked concerning a Fincom meeting for Tuesday night if the Board could we have more prep time for that meeting. This being Thanksgiving week they are begging for mercy. The Chairman stated he would ask to postpone, it is a reasonable request.

Terra Friedrichs asked if they could find the activist to speak about the candidate's policies and procedures. She has a list of people and questions that if the Board was willing to ask during interviews, she would share. The Chair asked her to send them in writing and he will take them under advisement.

OTHER BUSINESS

No Additional Business is expected to be discussed at this time

IV. CONSENT AGENDA

V. TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

No report at this time

VI. EXECUTIVE SESSION

There will not be a need for Executive Session.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Enclosed please find additional correspondence that is strictly informational and requires no Board action.

FUTURE AGENDAS

To facilitate scheduling for interested parties, the following items are scheduled for discussion on future agendas. This is not a complete agenda.

November 15, Town Manager Interview, November 19

December 3 – Special Use Permit, Rink Development, LLC, 10B Craig Road (HUNTER)

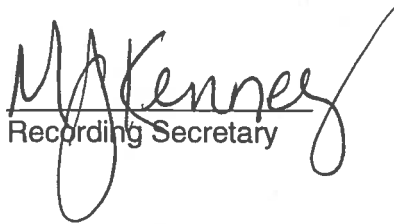
December 17

MINUTES PENDING VOTES

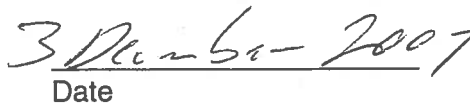
September 29, Special Meeting, October 9, Regular and Executive Session, October 11, 2007 Special Meeting, October 22, Regular and Executive Session

PENDING COMMITTEE APPOINTMENTS

Mike Fisher, TAC (still with VCC), Reshma G. Singh, ABCC to fill the unexpired term of Elaine Sisler who recently resigned. Barbara Estabrook, ABCC, Sumar Adishesu, ABCC. (*Ms. Estabrook and Ms. Adishesu's applications are at VCC for interview and recommendation*). Ryan Bettez, Associate Member of the Planning Board


Recording Secretary


Andrew D. Magee, Clerk


Date