

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR WORKGROUP
SPECIAL MEETING, July 24, 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBER, NEWTOWN MUNICIPAL CENTER
3 PRIMROSE STREET, NEWTOWN, CT

These minutes are subject to approval by the Work Group

MINUTES

PRESENT: Bill Brimmer, Maureen Crick Owen, and Ned Simpson

ALSO PRESENT: one member of the press

ABSENT: Pat Llodra

The meeting was called to order at 3:30 p.m. by the chair Mrs. Crick Owen.

VOTER COMMENTS – None

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Mr. Brimmer moved to approve the minutes of July 10, 2023, and July 18, 2023 meetings. Mr Simpson seconded.

Noted that the date in the heading of the July 18 meeting should be changed from the 17th to the 18th.

All in favor and motion passes.

OLD BUSINESS:

Discussion and possible decisions:

1. Recommendation

Mrs. Crick Owen indicated that it is now time to start development of recommendations. As Mrs. Llodra was unable to attend, today will be a discussion. Action will be after Mrs. Llodra has had the opportunity to participate in the discussion.

Mrs. Crick Owen stated her preference is for creating a position of Town Administrator as an employee reporting to the First Selectman. BOS, LC and BoF would be unchanged. She listed a number of things the Work Group heard in the course of meeting with local leadership and leadership in our reference towns. Comments from a number of towns that the First Selectman job has become too much for a single individual. The job has become so dense, that additional staff is needed to address economic development, planning, and thinking. She also stated her belief that small intermediate steps as best. Town Administrator conforms with business practices a CEO and COO or CAO. With possible change in leadership every two years, there are negative consequences to staff and the town. Newtown has enjoyed First Selectman and department head stability. A number of reference town leaders were cited for saying that adding a Town Administrator has made running for First Selectman more attractive to more people.

Addressing why she is not recommending a Town Manager she stated her preference for small steps. This was also cited by a number of voters and town leaders who felt Town Manager is a step too far. As First Selectman has stated, a Town Administrator provides a proof of concept without committing to a charter revision. Town Administrator can be a step or a permanent change.

Mr. Simpson stated that the question presented to the Work Group in the charge, “consider if alternatives would enhance the management, oversight and continuity of town government” led him to think of general layers of recommendations. It is clear that no change is, to him, unacceptable. Tweaking the current structure by changing the First Selectman term to four years, or adding staff in HR would yield benefits, what he believes is the best recommendation for the Town is to adapt a Town Manager – Town Council form of Government. Newtown is a \$50 million dollar operation. It needs professional and stable management. Mr. Simpson went on to say he sees engaging an executive search core to his Town Manager recommendation. Executive search firms bring project management, a wealth of experience and a repository of job descriptions. Mr. Simpson thinks it likely that the Town would not commit to the cost of executive search for an uncertain Town Administrator.

Mr. Brimmer started by stating that Town Administrator could be a good step along the way. He noted that across the discussions with other towns he was much more impressed by Town Managers than Town Administrators. He stated that with the coming future, a Town Manager is the way to go. He pointed to the downsides of starting with a Town Administrator then deciding to go to Town Manager.

Mr. Brimmer observed that across all town, he was unimpressed with how evaluations of Town Administrators and Town Managers was handled. A more regular process would benefit the town and the Town Manager/Administrator. Mr. Simpson commented that when we went back to read the minutes of all the people we talked to, he found HR management of the Town Manager/Administrators not well handled. Mrs. Crick Owen added that what we heard and what we didn’t like should part of our recommendations.

Mrs. Crick Owen indicated that she didn’t necessarily see change to BOS, LC or BoF for the Town Administrator alternative. It would just be an added employee. Discussion did turn to changes to those bodies under a Town Manager model. Elimination of the BOS, leaving LC and BoF unchanged would be an option. In the context of continuity and the recent experience of broad turnover on these bodies changing from 2 to 4 year terms was discussed. Aspects of the down side of voters selecting new First Selectman and Council members every two years and how to mitigate against negative consequences.

The financial impact of either Town Administrator or Town Manager was addressed. At previous meetings the impact has been described as a blip or drop in the bucket. Mr. Simpson would like to see quantification. Mr. Brimmer gave the example that in employee recruitment salary should not be discussed at the beginning of the process. Using a broad range for salary and benefits, Mr.

Simpson had done a back of napkin calculation showing the impact as a fraction of a percent. Each person will have to decide if that is a drop. Mr. Simpson went on to point out that all the towns that moved to Town Administrator or Town Manager found it produced savings that were multiples of the new salary.

2. Continue discussion of draft work group report

Mr. Simpson had provided a mark-up of the draft report. It included adding a Background section, a section on forms of town government in Connecticut, some text on how reference towns were selected, and an update to the reference table. Mr. Brimmer will provide write-up on what we heard about how towns evaluate and guide their Town Managers/Administrators. For the “Staying With the Current Executive Structure”, Mr. Simpson will elaborate on “challenges and concerns.”

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Next Steps

Calendar for the Work Group was reviewed.

- Monday August 7, 2023, 3:30 pm, Regular Meeting
- Tuesday August 15, 2023, 3:30 pm, Regular Meeting
- Tuesday September 5, 2023 Presentation to BOS

VOTER COMMENTS - None

Mr. Simpson moved to adjournment. Mr. Brimmer seconded. All in favor, motion passes. The meeting was adjourned at 4:34 p.m.

Recording available at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pVaJScuKJom2lpVL_rVKDEHQbwisG7RK/view?usp=sharing

Respectfully submitted,
Ned Simpson