

TOWN of NEWTOWN
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR WORK GROUP
REGULAR MEETING, MARCH 6, 2023
COUNCIL CHAMBER, NEWTOWN MUNICIPAL CENTER
3 PRIMROSE STREET, NEWTOWN, CT

These minutes are subject to approval by the Work Group

MINUTES

PRESENT: Pat Llodra, Bill Brimmer (4:00), Ned Simpson and Maureen Crick Owen

ALSO PRESENT: First Selectman Dan Rosenthal, and one member of the press

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

VOTER COMMENTS – None

DISCUSSION WITH TOWN ADMINISTRATOR MATT KNICKERBOCKER

Mr Matt Knickerbocker, Town Administrator, Wilton, CT and former First Selectman, Bethel, CT met with the Work Group via Google Meet. He started with a history of town government structure dating back to colonial times. Early on, Town Meetings were the typical town structure. This structure generally did not survive, outside of the Northeast. In the early 20th century, representative government, particularly Council and Manager became prevalent. Since the latter part of the 20th century, towns in the Northeast have been shifting to Council and Manger town governance structure.

Wilton did a lot of homework and developed, an organizational chart, job descriptions and contract before starting to interview candidates for their new Town Administrator position. Mr Knickerbocker started as Wilton's first Town Administrator in September 2022.

Describing the early experience he highlighted the benefit of pre-defining the Town Administrator role, the relationship of CEO, COO and CFO in managing the town, necessity to understand public sector operations and creating a collaborative atmosphere. Mr Knickerbocker responded to the following questions that the Work Group had sent:

1. Are your lines of authority and responsibility clearly defined?
Yes. Defined in Job Description, Organization Chart and contract.
2. How are you supervised/evaluated?
Supervised by First Selectman
3. What process is used to determine your work priorities?
Board of Selectmen has provided a list of areas similar to a set of goals and objectives. Discussion between the Town Administrator and First Selectman have used this list and identified other priorities.
4. Do town personnel understand your role? (Elected, appointed, and employees)

TOWN of NEWTOWN

TOWN ADMINISTRATOR WORK GROUP

Yes. Staff has been welcoming. Relationship has been productive. Staff perceive the Town Administrator as an ally.

5. Do you have supervisory authority/responsibility over staff?
Yes, for the areas defined as reporting to the Town Administrator. Human Resources reports to the Town Administrator. If there are HR issues or needed actions, Town Administrator can take them.
6. What challenges exist with the selectman/administrator model?
Given how new the position is, Mr Knickerbocker deferred answering this question.
7. What critical personal/professional attributes are needed for success in this administrator role?
Tough skin, strong management skills, seeped in the nature of public service driven to maximize service and value, and understanding what authority means in municipal government.

There were additional questions from the Work Group

What are his thoughts about what residents gain from converting to a Town Administrator model?

Mr Knickerbocker indicated that this was a very important question, and one heard a lot in the transition. First Selectmen are pulled in a million directions. Savings result from having a person with the time and capabilities to focus on operations. He pointed to cash savings from his work renegotiating the town's energy contract. Another example is the modernization of the permitting process. Further savings are expected from future contracting.

What responsibility does the Town Administrator have for budget, CIP and Union negotiations?

Those are responsibilities of the Town Administrator with oversight and final approval through the First Selectman and Board of Selectman.

How was interviewing and on-boarding handled?

As noted before, the town had done their homework, so the role was well defined and thought through. Mr Knickerbocker interviewed with the First Selectman and there was a three hour interview with the Board of Selectman. Once selected he had a number of meetings with the First Selectman prior to his start date.

Discussion with First Selectman Rosenthal

With an interest in not unduly restricting future action by the BOS on executive structure while not falling short of expected deliverables, the Work Group invited First Selectman Rosenthal to discuss the group's charge. Mr Rosenthal stated that the Work Group should evaluate the current First Selectman structure as a base line for assessing the benefits of change. If the conclusion points to a new position, high level statements of roles and responsibilities, along with organizational charts would be appropriate. Actual job descriptions would be done when and if the BOS decide to follow that recommendation. Similarly, the Work Group identifying important qualifications for positions would be appropriate, but actual job posting qualifications would be for after BOS action. The Work Group should describe, not define. Mrs. Llodra commented that the First Selectman job has become more dense. They get bogged down in doing with

TOWN of NEWTOWN
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR WORK GROUP

little time for planning. Noting that Wilton's justification for a Town Administrator highlighted the need for the First Selectman to increase participation in regional and state activities, Mr Rosenthal does not expect the Work Group to name specific activities.

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Mr. Brimmer moved to approve the minutes of February 21, 2023. Mrs. Crick Owen seconded. All in favor and motion passes.

OLD BUSINESS

Follow up to discussion with Mr. Knickerbocker

Monroe CT which converted to a Town Manager structure then converted back to a First Selectman structure was added to the list of towns the Work Group will seek to meet with.

Review of state statutes provided by Town Counsel

The Newtown council, Jason Buchsbaum, Esq, with Cohen and Wolf, has provided material on the primary statutes dealing with the powers of the first selectman/town manager: This has been circulated to the Work Group. It is likely that the Work Group will ask Mr Buchsbaum to attend a future meeting.

Review and approve list of questions, as revised

Motion by Mr Brimmer, to approve the list of questions for reference towns (Attachment A). Mr Simpson seconded. All in favor and motion passes.

NEW BUSINESS

Meeting with Reference Town

Mrs. Crick Owen reported that she has reached to all seven reference town. About half have responded, all favorably. She will continue to work to schedule meetings between the Work Group and reference town leadership.

Meeting with Individuals

The Work Group discussed individuals with pertinent experience and expertise relative to our charge that we want to talk to. The following were identified to be invited to meet with the Work Group.

- Herb Rosenthal, former Newtown First Selectman and former CCM Board member
- Jim Ritchie, former Superintendent in Plainville CT
- George Benson, former Newtown Director of Planning & Land Use

Meeting with Newtown Department Heads

The Work Group expressed interest in hearing from Newtown department heads. Initial invites will be to:

- Bob Tait, Finance Director
- Fred Hurley. Director Public Works

TOWN of NEWTOWN
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR WORK GROUP

- Amy Mangold. Director Parks & Recreation

Review of Current Newtown Executive Structure

Mr Simpson will develop a first draft review of the current Newtown executive structure regarding strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.

NEXT MEETING

Next meeting will be a Special Meeting, Monday March 13, 2023, at 1:30 pm.

The next Regular meeting will be Monday March 20, at 3:30 pm.

VOTER COMMENTS – none

Motion by Mr Brimmer, to adjourn the meeting. Mrs Llodra seconded. All in favor and motion passes.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Ned Simpson

First Selectman with Town Administrator

Fairfield, Greenwich, and Wilton

Materials request:

Municipal Organizational Chart

Job descriptions for First Selectperson, Town administrator

Questions for First Selectman:

1. Is the First Selectman restricted from holding another job?
2. What is the term for FS? How many FS have been in place during the past 10 years?
3. Does the Town Administrator have line responsibilities, or is it a staff position?
4. Is there a term for Town Administrator? How many administrators have served in the past 10 years?
5. What are the major steps in developing the town budget/CIP and when/how are the First Selectman and Town Administrator involve in the process?
6. What are the roles and responsibilities of First Selectman and Town Administrator in contract negotiations for unions as well as for products and services?
7. How is the administrator's role perceived in practice by elected officials? By department heads and line staff?
8. How is the work of the administrator evaluated/supervised?
9. What processes exist to address concerns with the administrator's work performance?
10. How are administrator work expectations/outcomes developed and assessed? Are annual goals developed? How and by whom?
11. How are administrator salary and benefits determined?
12. Do you consider your Town Administrator your Chief Human Resources Officer? (Not Fairfield)
13. If you were recruiting today for the role, what would be the most important experience factors you would be looking for in a candidate?
14. Is there anything that you feel doesn't work quite as well as you would like with the Town Administrator role?
15. How long has the community governance model been Selectman/Administrator?

Attachment A – QUESTIONS FOR REFERENCE TOWNS

16. What governance was in place prior to the current model?
17. What were the primary drivers in making the change to Selectman/Administrator?
18. What critical issues were raised by community members when considering the change to administrator model?
19. What are the major benefits of a First Selectman/Town Administrator model?
20. What challenges/obstacles are found in your experience with this governance model?
21. Are you planning to continue with this governance model or adapt to a different structure? Elaborate.

Questions for Town Administrator

1. Are your lines of authority and responsibility clearly defined?
2. How are you supervised/evaluated?
3. What process is used to determine your work priorities? Job description?
4. Do town personnel understand your role? (Elected, appointed, and employees)
5. Do you have supervisory authority/responsibility over staff?
6. What challenges exist with the selectman/administrator model?
7. What critical personal/professional attributes are needed for success in this administrator role?

Town Manager

Glastonbury, Manchester, Simsbury, and South Windsor

Materials request:

Municipal Organization Chart.

Job descriptions: Town Manager and other positions in TM office

Questions for Council Chair, members or other authority:

1. How long has the current TM served the community? How many TMs served ten years prior to the current office holder?
2. From your point of view, what is the primary role of the Town Manager?
3. In a broad overview, what percentages of the Town Manager's position are spent on different administrative responsibilities?
4. Who determines Manager salary and benefits?
5. Do you see partisan politics creeping into the everyday activities of the Town Manager?
6. What key words describe the relationship between the Council and the Town Manager?
7. How are Manager work expectations/outcomes developed and assessed? Are annual goals developed? How and by whom?
8. What processes exist to address concerns with Manager's work performance?
9. How long has the community governance model been Council/Manager?
10. What governance model was in place prior to Council/Manager?
11. Did the community make the change to Council/Manager in one step or was it phased in over time?
12. What do you perceive as the primary benefits of the Manager governance model?
13. What challenges/obstacles are found in your experience with the Manager governance model?
14. What cautions or advice would you share with a community considering the change to a Manager form of governance?

Attachment A – QUESTIONS FOR REFERENCE TOWNS

15. When filling the position of Town Manager, how much weight is given to a candidate's experience with Human Resources?
16. If you had a choice, would you remain with this governance model or adapt to a different structure? Elaborate.

Questions for Town Manager:

1. How long have you been in the Town Manger role?
2. What personal and professional attributes are critical for success in this role?
3. What key words describe the relationship between you and the Council?
Board of Finance?
4. Do you have sufficient and unfettered authority to perform the Manager role?
5. Is there clarity in lines of authority and responsibility?
6. How is your work as Manager evaluated/supervised?
7. Do processes exist to address concerns you may have regarding how you are supervised or evaluated?
8. Do you supervise and evaluate line staff such as department heads, union members, at -will employees? Elaborate.
9. Do you collaborate with any elected official(s) regarding the day-to-day management of the community? Is that an expectation?
10. How do you maintain communication with Council? Board of Finance?
11. How are your work expectations/outcomes developed and assessed? Are annual goals developed? How and by whom?
12. Who determines your salary and benefits?

Attachment B – VOTER COMMENT

From: Smith, Chris

Sent: Tuesday, February 21, 2023 1:51 PM

To: Ned Simpson <neds2124@gmail.com>

Subject: Wish I could attend today

Just giving you feedback and feel free to share.

I have been a 23 year resident of Newtown and have participated in several town governing bodies and commissions including Legislative Council and Conservation to name two.

From my perspective a town manager would be a great change for the town for several reasons:

1. My time spent on Legislative Council truly showed me how so much of the First Selectperson's job is simply involved in the day to day managing of people, budgets, etc. Having a knowledge of the town is HUGE. I don't see how anyone could come into the first selectpersons job and think they could simply pick up this very important role. Yet we are at this risk every two year's!! No one can argue this point.

To me there is too much risk to leave management of the town up for debate and voting every two years. Our town is a major corporation at this point.

Other points to consider:

2. The town manager would be non-partisan. The role would simply be for town efficiency and management.
3. Having a town manager would leave the Selectperson position to be political. They can stick to being the face of the town and dictating strategic objectives while also being oversight for the town manager.

Thanks

Chris Smith