

TOWN of NEWTOWN
TOWN ADMINISTRATOR WORK GROUP
REGULAR MEETING, APRIL 3, 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, Pat Llodra, Maureen Crick Owen and Ned Simpson

ALSO PRESENT: Two residents

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

VOTER COMMENTS – None

ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES

Mr. Brimmer moved to approve the minutes of March 20, 2023. Mr Simpson seconded. All in favor and motion passes.

DISCUSSION WITH Jim Ritchie, former Schools Superintendent in Plainville CT

Recording available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1n7goHD-tDdfJYPqlrwWRXIH4GqmBPG2j/view>

Mr Ritchie, a 48-year resident of Newtown, was Superintendent of Schools in Plainville CT for nearly 14 years. During his time as Superintendent he worked with the same Town Manager. Both started in the same year. With competence and mutual respect, Plainville enjoyed government stability through issues such as new schools and new fire station.

Plainville's budget roles and process were discussed. In Plainville, while consolidated, schools and municipal budget are developed and presented separately. He noted that unlike Plainville, Madison CT has one Finance Director responsible for both municipal and schools which he considered a good move.

Mr Brimmer asked about a scenario where a new Town Administrator or Town Manager is inserted into an established reporting relationship. In the case of Superintendent and Town Manager Mr Ritchie feels they should be considered as equals with one reporting to the Board of Education and the other to Council.

Regarding Newtown moving to Town Administrator or Manager, Mr Richie highlighted the complexity town government and increased complexity of the relationship with the State as reasons he supports considering a change. He is not sure it makes sense to look at Town Manager / Town Council form. Mr Richie highlighted the need for continuity and concern that a vote every two years makes it hard for setting and achieving long term goals. He also sees that it is increasingly difficult to get qualified people to run for First selectman.

Mrs Llodra prompted a discussion of community perception of Town Managers and Council's accountability.

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In commenting on what makes a good Town Manager, Mr Richie started with expertise. And in depth knowledge of school and town operations. Trust and reliability are key. Under a Town Administrator model, understanding of interpersonal relations is very important and it's tricky. Whether or not to get involved in political issues was discussed.

DISCUSSION WITH Bob Tait, Newtown Director of Finance

Recording available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pWuDbstNM07tUCC4ecZkXJDmyUVPINwH/view>

Mr Tait had provided the Work Group with written answers to the questions for Department Heads. See Attachment A. Mr Brimmer presented a scenario where a new Town Administrator comes in between a previous First Selectman reporting relationship. Assuming the hiring process yielded a professional manager and there was still access, Mr Tait would be ok with it.

Mr Tait indicated the important characteristics of a Town Administrator would be, skillful communicator, straightforward, and a good manager. Mr Brimmer asked about involving department heads in interview process. Mr Tait doesn't think department heads should pick their boss. An interview panel could speak to department heads.

OLD BUSINESS

Recording available at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dnnaMbjDbrsaFIicijNaeXZOyT3KMfad/view>

Meeting with Reference Towns, Newtown Department Heads and others

Mrs. Crick Owen described progress contacting and inviting leaders from the identified reference towns. She has not heard back from South Windsor and Glastonbury. Simsbury Town Manager declined our invitation as she is leaving that role. Fairfield has responded indicating that there are a number of positions within the First Selectman's office, and they would like to attend the meeting with this Work Group together. This would need more than the 30 minutes we have used to schedule other meetings. We could start at 3:00 pm rather than 3:30 for the May 1 meeting.

Mrs. Llodra expressed a desire to meet with more Town Manager towns. All agreed. It was also agreed that we should talk to Monroe which has cycled through a number of structures and Clinton which converted to Town Manager in 2019. Meetings will push out into June.

A tentative schedule:

April 17

- Fred Camillo, First Selectman, Greenwich, CT
- Wendy Mackstutis, First Selectman, Simsbury, CT

May 1

- Fairfield CT
- Mayor and Town Manager of Manchester CT

May 15

- 5:00 Meeting
- 6:00 Public Hearing

May 30

- Lynn Vanderslice, First Selectman, Wilton CT

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NEW BUSINESS

Work Group schedule, minutes and recordings

We can cut down on the detail in the minutes and meeting recording(s) will become the public record. Short term anyone interested in copies or recordings should reach-out to Mrs Crick Owen.

Draft document re: Why possible executive structure change

A preliminary draft document was prepared by Mr Simpson to articulate why change in Newtown's executive structure should be considered. Mrs. Crick Owen likened what she expects the Work Group's final product to be to the work product of the Eichler's Cove Sub-Committee she and Mrs. Llodra served on a number of years ago. There was a one-page recommendation with fifty some pages of supporting material.

Mr Simpson gave an overview of the draft document starting with identifying the intended audience being Newtown voters who have only casual awareness of the town structure. The first section describes the current structure, and would be part of the 50 pager. Recent History section highlights how fortunate Newtown has been with stability, competence and tenure in town executive leadership. The next section "What has Changed" presents factors making the First Selectman position denser. The last section "Staying with the current executive structure" highlights concerns and challenges presented with the current structure. There is an attachment that would define the four legislatively allowed types of town CEO. He noted that we have heard and talked about what has changed, but haven't talked as much about what it means to stay with the current structure.

Mrs. Llodra asked what type and level of feedback is wanted at today's meeting. Mr Simpson indicated that today he is most interested in agreement/disagreement on the basic concepts, much less on wording or sequence. He for example, the first entry in "Staying with the current structure": "Two year term. Takes at least a year to learn the job, even with past experience on town boards or committees" If there is agreement on the basic concept, clarifying the wording would be for another meeting. Mrs. Crick Owen pointed to the importance of first getting agreement on the concepts, then the wording and then review of the final document. It will be worked on over several meetings. Mrs. Llodra pointed to the statement that "Party politics has become increasingly polarized and rancorous." Doesn't seem to relate to our charge. Mrs. Crick Owen stated that if you run and if you get elected your goal should be concern for everyone in the community not just your political party. Mrs. Llodra suggested that we look at what is relevant. Work Group members should send comments to Mrs. Crick Owen. It will be carried on the agenda again in May.

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NEXT MEETING

Next Regular Meeting, Monday April 17, 2023, at 3:30 pm.

VOTER COMMENTS –

Bernard Malloy, 35 Tunnel Rd., Newtown.

Mr Melloy asked if Bob Tait's written reply would be part of the minutes of this meeting. Mrs. Crick Owen indicated that it would. He also suggested that recordings of the Work Group meetings be more publicly available than having to ask the Chair. Mrs. Crick Owen said she would look into making them available through a shared Google Drive. Mr Malloy was pleased that there will be an evening public meeting May 15 and asked if there would be a public presentation for the Work Group's final work product. Mrs. Crick Owen described a path where the Work Group would report to the Board of Selectman.

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

The meeting was adjourned at 4:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Ned Simpson

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Attachment A - Questions for Bob Tait, Newtown Finance Director

1. How many first selectmen have you worked for?
A: Fairfield - 3; Newtown - 3; Meriden - 1 Town Manager
2. What are your biggest challenges when there is a new First Selectman?
A: Educating them about municipal finance
3. What are your biggest opportunities when there is a new First Selectman?
A: Don't know if there are any? We have policies and practices in place. Maybe to change a practice?
4. When there is a new First Selectman, does the culture change or remain the same among town employees?
A: In my experience it has stayed relatively the same. I could see it changing based on personality.
5. Do you feel your goals for your department are impacted (positive or negative) when there is a new First Selectman?
A: No, not really.
6. When there is a new First Selectman, how does this affect your preparing the budget or CIP? Do you tailor your requests and presentations with that person in mind?
A: I think there is some direction from the Finance Director to keep to best practices.
7. If there was a Town Administrator or Town Manager, do you think communication and teamwork would improve, remain the same or be less?
A: In my 15 years communication and teamwork has been great. It could change (a)
8. In your opinion, what do you think would be the strengths and weaknesses of changing the town executive structure?
A: Strength would be that during the hiring process one would ensure that a professional would fill (b)
9. Should it change to Town Administrator or Town Manager?
A: Good question. I don't know.

(a) depending on the incoming elected first selectman. I would think a town manager there would be less of a chance of change (to the negative) because of the professional nature of the job.

(b) the position (again, Newtown has been lucky to have quality first selectmen). There is no guarantee that a professional would be elected. I would think that with a town mgr there would be no party affiliation (that really hasn't mattered in Newtown...it appears everyone wants to do the right thing for Newtown). I cannot think of any weakness as long as there are capable applicants willing to take the job. They do not have to live in Newtown. A professional will act as if they live in Newtown.