

**Town of Chester
Town Administrator Working Group Meeting
Tuesday, October 30th, 2018
Municipal Complex Meeting Room
Approved Minutes**

Present:

Heather Bowen
Andrew Hadik
Rhonda Lamphere
Erin Newnan (departed 6:48)
Jeremy Owens, Selectman
John Scruton, Barrington Town Administrator

I. Open Meeting

This fifth meeting of the Town of Chester Town Administrator (TA) Working Group commenced at 6:02pm.

II. General Discussion with John Scruton – Barrington Town Administrator

John Scruton, Barrington Town Administrator, met with the group to discuss various aspects of implementing a Town Administrator. Mr. Scruton is preparing to retire within the next several months; he has served in a variety of municipal positions, including Town / City Manager (Plaistow / Rochester), Support Services Administrator (Nashua), and Town Administrator (Goffstown & Farmington).

On a spectrum where Executive Secretary is on one end and Town Manager is on the other, most TAs are somewhere in the middle and Selectman Owens indicated that's where Chester's TA would be. Mr. Scruton felt that the beauty is that the law enables each Town to decide exactly where on that spectrum they want their TA to be. Barrington, for example, has their TA closer to the Town Manager end.

The functions and duties of a TA will depend on what the BOS want to delegate to the TA. Mr. Scruton emphasized that no single selectperson has authority; it's only when acting as a board in a properly-called meeting that the BOS has authority. Appointing a TA to carry out the directives of the BOS protects the Town. A TA analyzes the needs of the community, while the BOS can remain the face of local government in the eyes of the community.

Mr. Scruton explained the structure of various forms of local government. He strongly recommended the group peruse *Knowing the Territory*; a municipal law reference published by NHMA.

The less a board is willing to delegate, the longer their meetings and the more they end up micromanaging; the group was able to relate to this. "If a governing body wants to get into *all* the details," Mr. Scruton explained, "they will be buried by details."

Although a TA does not have the authority to sign invoices and manifests, s/he certainly would take an active role in examining these before they are given to the BOS for approval. Mr. Scruton noted that Shaun Mulholland (former Allenstown TA / current Lebanon City Manager) implemented "DocuSign" which allows documents to be signed remotely; saving selectpersons extra trips to Town Hall.

Mr. Scruton cautioned against individual selectpersons dealing directly with employees; he shared a copy of Barrington's Rules of Procedures for the Select Board and urged Chester to develop its own set of rules. Ms. Lamphere noted that unilateral decision-making is an ongoing issue with the BOS; Ms.

Bowen asked if such actions have ever been cause for legal action. Mr. Scruton confirmed that they have; and gave an example in which a town recently entered mediation for an issue and a statement resulted that all questions must be directed to the TA / Deputy TA; and that the selectpersons not act as individuals.

Mr. Scruton added that the role of the chairperson acting as a manager for the others on the board places all the selectpersons in a difficult position. Additionally, Chester is a rarity among other towns of its size (~5,000 residents) in that the select board directly manages department heads. Ms. Newnan has also come to notice that Chester is sorely lacking in its policies. Mr. Scruton felt that a town of this size most certainly needs stronger policies. He estimated that he brought at least ten policies to Barrington; most of which were borrowed from other municipalities. He added that it's important for TAs to have a support structure allowing the sharing of ideas and advice; online forums and listservs can prove to be very valuable.

Ms. Newnan asked what should be looked for in a candidate; Mr. Scruton said that depends on current staffing, the extent to which specific skills or areas of expertise are warranted, and how much personnel management is needed.

Mr. Scruton's most important considerations for selecting a TA are **character**, **chemistry**, and **competence**. *Character* boils down to trustworthiness, honesty, work ethic, integrity. The chosen candidate should embody what it means to be a true public servant. Character can somewhat be verified by background and reference checks. *Chemistry* is how well the person gets along with others. Do they really care? Are they really listening? In many cases, a municipality may not wish to enlist a "pot stirrer"; however, in some cases this is exactly what others want. Mr. Scruton gave an example of a city that hired a Manager to get rid of most of its department heads and start over. In that case, a pot stirrer was just the chemistry needed. Lastly, *competence* is the basic intelligence required to take in a lot of information and apply it properly. This includes the individual's education; personally, Mr. Scruton feels his Master's degree in Public Administration has been most useful in "opening doors". Furthermore, character and chemistry are not the easiest attributes to determine in the interview process; yet they are the most important in this position.

III. Moving Forward

Mr. Scruton felt that this group's current spreadsheet of TA duties was too specific, too long, and not organized well enough. As this is something that is being "sold to the public," it needs to be refined and presented in narrative form.

Mr. Hadik suggested that Selectman Owens first ensure consensus with the BOS about what they'd like to see presented to the public before finalizing the job duties.

Mr. Scruton presented his own job description to the group; Selectman Owens suggested using this as a template and the group agreed.

Mr. Scruton is happy to attend a BOS meeting; Selectman Owens will arrange this. Mr. Scruton emphasized that the biggest beneficiary of a good TA is the select board; and in turn, employees and of course citizens. The key is to hire a good first TA; with a strong focus on a person who is a team player.

Ms. Lamphere asked what Chester should expect to pay for an annual TA salary. Mr. Scruton felt that the \$65,000 to \$75,000 range would be appropriate to start (lower for someone on a "learning curve"); for a total of \$90,000 to \$100,000 including benefits, expenses & equipment. This would get the Town

someone who is perhaps a department head in another community, or a business manager with an interest in public service.

IV. Approval of Minutes: September 17th, 2018

The September 17th minutes were not discussed at this meeting.

Mr. Hadik, Ms. Newnan, and Mr. Owens, respectively, accepted the minutes of September 17th, 2018 and October 30th, 2018 via email; with no other comments or objections, both sets of minutes are considered approved.

VI. Adjournment

The next scheduled meeting of the Town Administrator Working Group is to be determined. Everyone is encouraged to attend and participate.

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 6:55pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Caroline R. Wilson, Recording Secretary