

APPROVED

**BOARD OF SELECTMEN/SEWER COMMISSIONERS SPECIAL MEETING**

**Wednesday April 3, 2019 – 5:00 PM – Richmond Town Hall, 1529 State Road**

**PRESENT:** Mr. Neal Pilson, Chair; Mr. Roger Manzolini, Selectman; Mr. Alan Hanson, Selectman; Mr. Mark Pruhenski, Town Administrator

**ABSENT:**

**GUESTS:** Ms. Claudia Ryan, Mr. Peter Cohen; Mr. Paul Lisi

Mr. Pilson opened the meeting at 5:00 PM.

**Discussion of Upcoming Meeting with the West Stockbridge Board of Selectmen:** Mr. Pilson noted that the meeting had been requested by the West Stockbridge Board, but it was unknown at this point whether West Stockbridge wants to go forward with creating a shared Town Administrator and Assistant Town Administrator for both towns, or not.

He felt that two issues needed to be discussed: (1) that the members of the Board develop a cohesive point of view. (2) Whether to proceed with filling a shared Town Administrator and Assistant position or an independent Town Administrator position for Richmond.

Once it becomes clear from the upcoming meeting with West Stockbridge whether they want to proceed with a Shared Town Administrator and Assistant with Richmond or search independently for a town administrator, Richmond will be able to decide how to move forward.

Mr. Pilson outlined the history of the proposal for a shared town administrator position for West Stockbridge and Richmond, which originally was based on Mr. Mark Pruhenski in the shared administrator position and Mr. Mark Webber, the current Town Administrator for West Stockbridge, remaining for an additional 4 – 6 months as the Assistant.

When Mr. Pruhenski accepted the position in Great Barrington, that plan was negated, but the concept is still on the table and would afford both towns the ability to offer a salary that would attract a more experienced candidate and avoid the two towns having to compete with each other in their search.

The Board members expressed their positions on the issues: Mr. Roger Manzolini felt that, without Mark Pruhenski in the role of shared administrator, he was not in favor of going forward as he felt a stranger to both towns would have a difficult time. He did not see the competition for candidates as a major obstacle.

Mr. Hanson said he felt it would be a bad idea for Richmond to be in competition with West Stockbridge for a Town Administrator. He thought it best that the idea of a shared administrator with an assistant for both towns be pursued, depending on what West Stockbridge has decided they want to do. He suggested that both towns advertise for an

independent town administrator, with the option to offer the possibility of a shared position with an assistant to the best applicants.

The two towns must agree on how they want to proceed, and perhaps the answer at this point is to meet in public session with the Board of West Stockbridge and have this same discussion with them. That will happen on Friday at 3:00 PM.

Mr. Pruhenski said he thought the two towns would be stronger together – they can offer a more attractive salary – there is more responsibility and that should attract a higher caliber applicant pool than the two towns competing. At the same time, he noted his understanding of the concern for a new administrator to have to get to know two towns, two sets of department heads and two very different town hall cultures.

Mr. Peter Cohen offered his opinion that, from a practical point of view, he did not see it working well at all. Mr. Pilson said that those same issues were raised in the Lenox-Lee discussions, but three years later every indication shows that Lenox and Lee are very pleased with the result of their going to a shared manager. Mr. Cohen responded that Lenox and Lee are much more complex towns and he sees Richmond as a big family, which is very different, and he feels that the analogy does not work.

Mr. Manzolini reported that the input from townspeople that he is getting seems to be divided about 50-50 between people in favor of the idea and those opposed to it. He saw the idea more as being able to acquire a competent administrator at a market-driven salary than as a money-saving proposition.

Mr. Pruhenski reported on Mr. Mark Webber's position on the issue as moderately concerned about the shared administrator being a stranger to both towns, but that he was reserving his judgment until after the scheduled meeting on Friday and the outcome of that conversation.

Mr. Manzolini asked Ms. Claudia Ryan for her opinion. She responded that she liked the idea when the plan included Mr. Pruhenski and Mr. Webber. She is less sure about it with two new people, unless the candidate being considered is a qualified, town manager whose experience was in a town as big as our two towns combined. She does not see someone with no prior experience as a town administrator for a good-sized community being able to try to pull two towns together.

Mr. Pilson expanded on that thought, noting that during the interview process, based on the people interviewed, a judgement could be made as to the level of comfort with X, Y or Z as a merged town administrator or that we want to hire separately. If we get a candidate with the right kind of experience and we feel confident in his or her ability to manage both towns – that would lead to one decision. Or if no one comes forward that would provide that level of confidence, we could decide to hire separately.

Mr. Paul Lisi made several observations about the unique quality of Richmond and voiced his concern that there was no clear benefit outlined in the shared administrator proposal and that

he had concerns with the logistics involved. He noted that Richmond residents like to see a familiar and consistent presence at Town Hall, which is less likely to happen with a shared administrator and assistant. There was a comment from the floor that noted that what was being discussed was the personal element involved in Richmond in dealing with the Town Administrator as opposed to the situation in a large city, where there is no personal relationship between the town management and the individual.

Mr. Hanson felt that the issue raised is rapidly changing since the younger generation does not share the need to have a personal relationship with the administration and is content to leave them to do the job. Mr. Lisi acknowledged that there has been a major change in the interactions between townspeople and management. It was suggested that a "Meet Town Hall" event be revised as it used to be years ago.

Mr. Pilson suggested that after the meeting with West Stockbridge, Richmond schedule another meeting, with adequate notice, for the public. Whichever way the final decision will go, independently or in concert with West Stockbridge, the Board is committed to creating a Search Committee.

There being no further discussion on the issues, Mr. Hanson moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Pilson and carried by unanimous vote.

Signed:



Neal Pilson, Chair