

BOARD OF SELECTMEN EXECUTIVE SESSION

(And return to Open Meeting)

Wednesday June 12, 2019 – 7:00 PM – Richmond Town Hall, 1529 State Road

PRESENT: Mr. Roger Manzolini, Chair; Mr. Neal Pilson, Selectman; Mr. Alan Hanson, Selectman; Mr. Robert Merkel, Town Administrator

ABSENT:

GUESTS: Mr. Peter Cohen, Selection Cte.; Ms. Jen Morse, Selection Cte.; Mr. Dewey Wyatt, Selection Cte.; Ms. Claudia Ryan, Selection Cte.; Ms. Poly Mann, Selection Cte.; Mr. John Mason, Selection Cte.; Mr. William Martin, Selection Cte. Chair

Mr. Manzolini opened the Executive Session of the Board of Selectmen at 7:30 PM.

The Committee interviewed seven candidates out of a pool of twenty-three. At their first meeting, they narrowed the field to a pool of seven to interview and then added one late entry. They have now narrowed the list down to the following four: Ms. Rebecca Stone, Ms. Angeline Ellison; Mr. Fred Ventresko and Ms. Daniel Fillio.

The resumes of those people will be distributed to the Board for their review. Each candidate was interviewed for about an hour, using a list of questions suggested by the Board. The interviews were fairly consistent in terms of the answers to the questions provided and it proved very easy to narrow the field down to the final four. Mr. Manzolini noted that he is going to assume that comments made by Mr. Martin have the agreement of the rest of the committee. The Committee members agreed.

Ms. Rebecca Stone is currently the Town Administrator in Otis and lives in Vermont, nearly two hours away. She has a place near the Otis Reservoir where she spends her weekdays. Mr. Martin felt that she seemed to be a very strong candidate, except that she has a two-hour commute from home. In addition, Ms. Stone has advised Mr. Martin that she may attempt to renegotiate her contract with Otis and Mr. Martin felt that possibly the purpose of her applying for this position was to strengthen her negotiating position. He also noted that she has asked if she can work four days a week. Mr. Martin felt that her skill set was one of the strongest among the candidates but questioned her ability to be committed to the community the way Richmond would prefer.

Mr. Martin advised the Board that Ms. Ellison is bright and articulate, with a great sense of humor and personality. She had an interesting background that included Associate Dean of Students at UMass Boston, worked in the Big City for a number of years and as the Town Administrator in Blandford. Then she became the Town Manager in Oxbridge, which is a position holding more legal responsibility than Town Administrator and she clearly did not relish being the one in the "hot seat." That was of some concern to Mr. Martin in addition to the commute from Sturbridge every day since she had no plans to move. Mr. Martin cautioned the Board that if they chose to interview her and do not hire her, the only reason they could have for ruling her out would be the long commute as her qualifications are excellent.

The weakest candidate, in Mr. Martin's opinion, was Mr. Fred Ventresko who he saw as a technical genius and an "odd duck" who would have a hard time in the position. There was some agreement with that assessment from people who know Mr. Ventresko.

Ms. Angie Ellison was the Town Manager during the time that Oxbridge was going through a very serious financial crisis and probably suffered some fallout from being in that position at that time. She had some excellent reference letters and was felt to be a strong candidate. Mr. Martin suggested that if the Board were to decide that they do not want to hire someone that has to drive long distances, that should be decided now.

Mr. Pilson noted that, although he thanked the committee for the detailed information they were providing, he would rather make some of those assessments himself from a direct interview.

Ms. Danielle Fillio, the current Town Administrator in Stockbridge – Mr. Martin felt that her interview was disappointing relative to his expectations from the recommendations she received from local people. She lacks an educational pedigree or experience in other communities; she started in Stockbridge as a clerk and has worked herself up with hands-on experience to become the Town Administrator in a town that has become a very difficult place to work. She is a local, born and bred in Berkshire County and was familiar with all the other Town Administrators and the political connections. She knew the mechanics of small-town government she just didn't interview with the kind of panache that Ms. Ellison had.

Mr. Pilson recalled that during her tenure as Town Administrator in Stockbridge there were criticisms of failure to oversee and supervise the activities of the Fire Chief and other things such as very sloppy audits and a lack of checks and balances. The question was raised as to whether an inexperienced administrator, used to working in a dysfunctional situation, could adjust to leading a hard-working and functional group that works cooperatively on issues. Mr. Martin's sense was that her personality was not strong enough to have dealt with the conflict among the members of the Stockbridge Selectboard. She was caught in the crossfire between people who do not communicate with each other and really dislike each other, and her leadership style was to avoid direct confrontation with her Board of Selectmen. She is smart, works hard and learns quickly and would be successful in a role as administrator where she sends information up to a Board of Selectmen who will make the decisions. She would not, however, function well as the kind of Town Manager whose job is from the top down. She can organize and coordinate but isn't going to be a Chief Executive type as she cannot control the people above her.

Mr. Manzolini pointed out that the only people above her are the Board members. He suggested thinking about what Richmond is looking for at this time to fill its particular needs.

There was a discussion about the issues facing Richmond now and going forward in the future and what type of personality will be compatible with the townspeople and the staff. It seemed that Ms. Angie Ellison and Ms. Rebecca Stone both were identifiable as that kind of leader. In addition, Ms. Stone was also noted to have come across as a strong team player and to have had the easiest manner.

Mr. Markel reported that during his time as Interim Town Administrator in Becket, he interacted with Ms. Stone in her role as Town Administrator in Otis on a regular basis. He felt that she seemed very competent in the sessions he attended with the Otis Board of Selectmen and he knows that there is a certain amount of push she feels because the Otis Selectboard is as dysfunctional as any other.

The consensus was that there are three candidates that the Committee are recommending that the Board interview: Ms. Rebecca Stone, Ms. Angie Ellison and Ms. Danielle Fillio. A further discussion, that included a sense of the candidates' level of commitment to the community, raised additional issues to be considered.

The discussion having come to an end, Mr. Manzolini moved that the Executive Session be closed. Mr. Pilson seconded the motion, which was approved by unanimous roll-call vote: Mr. Pilson, aye; Mr. Manzolini, aye; Mr. Hanson, aye.

Mr. Pilson moved that the Board return to the Public Session at 8:17 PM. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hanson and was adopted by unanimous roll-call vote: Mr. Pilson, aye; Mr. Manzolini, aye; Mr. Hanson, aye.

The Executive Session was adjourned, and the Board returned to the Open Session:

In the Open Meeting, Mr. Manzolini announced that the Search Committee had completed their debriefing and had recommended three candidates for interview in no particular order: Ms. Rebecca Stone, Ms. Angeline Ellison and Ms. Danielle Fillio.

He offered some brief background information on the candidates: Ms. Rebecca Stone is currently the Town Administrator in Otis; Ms. Angeline Ellison has prior experience as a Town Manager and a Town Administrator, and Ms. Danielle Fillio is currently the Town Administrator in Stockbridge. The resumes for those candidates are a matter of public record and are, therefore, available.

The candidates will be notified and interviews with the Board will begin in approximately ten days in open sessions sometime after June 24th when Mr. Pilson will return from his trip out of the country.

There being no further business before the Board, Mr. Pilson moved that the Public Session be adjourned at 8:20 PM. Mr. Hanson seconded the motion, which was passed by unanimous consent.

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:20 PM.

Signed:

Mr. Roger Manzolini

Chair