

**Town of Amherst**  
**Minutes of the Select Board**  
**Board Retreat**

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September 17, 2016 - 9:30 a.m. - Hitchcock Center, 525 South Pleasant Street

Members present: Alisa Brewer, Connie Kruger, Doug Slaughter, Andy Steinberg, Jim Wald

Staff present: Paul Bockelman, Town Manager

Others present: David Singer, Facilitator

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The meeting was called to order at 9:30 a.m.

Chair Brewer called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m. and asked for a moment of silence and reflection on the passing of Town Manager John Musante nearly one year ago.

The Board and Town Manager introduced themselves and Mr. Singer summarized his background and experience in facilitating and municipal government.

Select Board Meetings

Each member of the Select Board identified what s/he perceived as working or not working at Select Board meetings. Upon hearing brief summaries from each Select Board member, Mr. Singer said it was clear that all the members like and respect each other, and agree that they have a good working relationship.

The Select Board has a long list of responsibilities that are mandated by the Town Charter and state law. The responsibilities require a material time commitment by members, and a need for prioritizing and organizing how issues presented to the Board will be administered by the Board, and a delegation of duties which are in the province of the Town Manager. Members noted that the Town lost its Town Manager a year ago which has had an emotional impact on the Board and the Town. The management of the Town has been in a state of flux since then, requiring the Board to do even more work, such as hiring and naming Temporary and Interim Town Managers.

The lack of a Town Manager for one year put strain on the Board, and caused some micro-managing in lieu of having an active manager in place, which may have crossed boundaries but did give the Board insight into the workings of the Town Manager function. Now that Mr. Bockelman is on board, the Board was looking to return to the Town Manager much of the work and decision making that is appropriate for the Town Manager, and retain the work and decision making that is appropriate for the Board.

Ms. Brewer noted that the Board had taken on numerous additional responsibilities during this difficult year. Mr. Steinberg added that the Board should recognize that they did very well by the Town, given such a tough year.

The members sought to focus on what was not working and needed attention. Among the items that were identified by Board members were the following:

(a) Presentations before the Board by the public at the weekly meetings asking for resolutions and providing political messages, while important to democracy, take time away from deciding about the important items on the agenda.

(b) Significant time is spent summarizing each of the agenda items for the purpose of educating the public watching on television, which takes time away from deciding about the important items on the Agenda.

(c) The agenda for each meeting could be better prioritized, and it was recommended that the agenda setting meeting before each Select Board meeting be a time and place to focus on this issue.

(d) Long range issues come up to the Board at a meeting, are tabled, and then come back, and back to the Board on the agenda. Those issues are not discussed or resolved at a given meeting because they take time, or the meetings have more time sensitive issues, or the public at the meetings takes up much of the time with questions and requests for information. An example is remote meeting participation, which had yet to be decided but had been on the Agenda for some time.

(e) There was an in-depth discussion about the Town boards and the appointment process by the Board. Some observations were made that the process of choosing a candidate for Town boards needs to be studied and the Board draft a procedural structure for Town board appointments. It was suggested that a more usable database of information was needed and that Town staff needed to be consulted.

(f) The Board discussed the role of the Board's liaisons to each Town board and it was suggested that the role be better defined.

(g) There was discussion of the number of current Town boards and committees and that they should be reviewed, dissolved or consolidated. One member suggested that each Town board or committee should report to the Select Board in some manner each year, either in an annual report, or when confronted with an issue that is relevant or necessary for Select Board input.

After a lunch break, the session focused in the afternoon on the Board's relationship with the Town Manager.

Under the Town Charter, and state law, Amherst has a Select Board/Strong Town Manager form of government. One of the reasons for the retreat was to give the Board and Paul Bockelman, the Town Manager, a chance to speak with each other in a setting facilitated by a third party.

It was stated at the beginning of the discussion that the Town Manager administers the local government, and the Board provides the support and direction for the Town Manager.

During the past year of no permanent Town Manager, the Board was put in a position to manage not only through their statutory role, but within the role of the Town Manager, which gave the Board insights. This led to a discussion about roles, and the best way for the Board and the Town Manager, while maintaining roles, to communicate and give notice to each other so as not to undermine trust and confidence in each other.

Mr. Bockelman requested that the Board adopt a list of goals for the year, which then could be the basis for his evaluation at the end of the year. Besides goals, the Board would evaluate how Mr. Bockelman informed the Board of what he is doing, and how much he seeks consultation with the Board before acting on issues that may be policy mandates of the Board; on those issues the Board would like to give the Town Manager direction ahead of time.

This led to a discussion about the idea of the Town Manager sharing with the Board Chair confidential information to get the Chair's take on how to proceed, which then put the Chair in a position of asserting Board power without discussing with the rest of the Board, as any discussion would need to be in an open meeting. It seemed that all agreed, that if the Town Manager was working on something that would eventually come before the Select Board it was prudent for the Manager to discuss the issue with the chair even though the Chair may not share that information with the other members at that time.

A discussion also ensued about the Town Budget, especially a vision of the Town Budget over the next several years. A request was made for Mr. Bockelman to provide a vision before this year's budget cycle begins.

The Board also agreed that if a Town employee provides a Board member with a criticism about the Town Manager, then the Board member will let the Town Manager know of this discussion.

The Board noted that the Select Board's manual may be helpful in providing a blueprint for the functioning of the Board. It was discussed that this manual needed to be reviewed and updated. Board members Steinberg and Wald agreed to review this document.

Mr. Bockelman agreed to develop and present to the Board his list of goals for the year.

Mr. Steinberg moved to adjourn at 2:30 p.m. The motion was seconded by Mr. Slaughter and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Bockelman, Town Manager

Documents utilized during the course of this meeting:

- None