

**Board of Selectmen
April 21, 2022
Town Hall
Veterans Memorial Hall, Sturbridge Town Hall
308 Main Street, Sturbridge, MA 01566**

Present:

Mary Blanchard, Chair
Selectman Chase Kaitbenski, Vice Chair
Selectman Ian Dunnigan
Selectman Jamie Goodwin

Absent:

Mary Dowling, Clerk

Staff:

Robert Reed, Interim Town Administrator
Michelle Garman, Executive Assistant

**Chair Blanchard called meeting to order at 6:30p.m.
The Selectmen led the Pledge of Allegiance.**

Moment of Silence

All those affected by COVID and for all the people of Ukraine and Russia that are suffering.

Chair Blanchard advised that Selectman Dowling would like the record to reflect that she was not present due to religious reasons. Selectman Dowling did interview the three (3) candidates and she will be reviewing the tape of this meeting before the Board meeting again on April 22, 2022.

- A. Consideration and Possible action on the Town Administrators DPW Director Appointment Postpone for meeting on

Moved to April 22, 2022 at 10:00a.m.

- B. Interview of Town Administrator Finalists

Robin A. Grimm:

Robin Grimm gave a detailed description of background in municipal government. Currently Robin is the Town Manager for the Town of Stoughton, where she oversees all operations of the Town. She currently reports to a vice member Board of Selectmen, she has successfully lead the

Town of Stoughton through feasibility studies, designs and successful voter referendum passage of a new fire operations center after more than a decade of failures. Robin earned her Ph.D. in 1995 in English with specialty in Rhetoric and Composition.

Selectmen Dunnigan - Is there a project you worked on that you are proud of.

Robin Grimm - The project she would have to say she was most proud of was the new fire operations center in Stoughton. She put a team together and they finally got the project approved to get the fire stations for three million dollars less than any other study. They renovated the old fire station as a fire headquarters it also is a community health center.

Selectmen Dunnigan - You highlighted that you maintained and kept the Town Hall open during COVID.

Robin Grimm – Yes, she maintained an open Town Hall throughout COVID – never missing one day of business.

Selectman Dunnigan - How do you prefer to work? Remotely or in the office.

Robin Grimm - She loved working from home but she feels the interaction working directly with your team is important.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski - We have a town meeting form of government are you familiar with that?

Robin Grimm- Yes, she love the process of town meeting form of government.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski - You have no problem standing up at town meeting presenting.

Robin Grimm – She has no problem standing up and presenting at Town Meeting.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski - Do you see any challenges coming from a larger community to a smaller community?

Robin Grimm - She lives in a community similar to Sturbridge.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski - Is there an Economic Development project that you are proud of.

Robin Grimm – She would have to say in Garden City the outdoor walk along village.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski- How is you interaction with staff and residents.

Robin Grimm – She have open door policy she likes to meet people and talk with them. Her staff also will always have access to her.

Selectman Goodwin – What were the upsides working for larger entities?

Robin Grimm – The pace and excitement that is the best part of working for a big city. The learning that you get in a large community is tremendous.

Selectman Goodwin - Are you still teaching?

Robin Grimm - Not currently but if she had to the opportunity to teach an online she would.

Selectman Goodwin – What is challenging about living in Stoughton?

Robin Grimm – Stoughton is a wonderful town with old time politics are challenging its not partisan politics. She implements policy and its challenging to have residents understand she is not an elected official.

Selectman Goodwin - You started in Stoughton 2018 have you had good labor relations?

Robin Grimm – She has worked with eight labor unions and has only had push back from one. She takes pride in labor relations as she comes from a labor background.

Selectman Goodwin – Have you had any Human Relations lawsuits?

Robin Grimm - She has had nothing since she has been Town Manager.

Chair Blanchard – Could you go over your direct budget experience.

Robin Grimm - She has been working on budgets since 2009. She believes in performance based budgeting she does not believe you have to spend the same that you spent the prior year. She has done restructuring of positions if a position needs it. She believes all departments should be cross trained and she will not overstaff.

Chair Blanchard- How do you handle difficult employee situations, complaint made by citizens about employees?

Robin Grimm – She feels an open door helps a lot, that through informal communication many complaints can be resolved. Everyone has equal access to her, she hold weekly staff meetings.

Chair Blanchard – What do you think is a successful working relationship with the Board of Selectmen?

Robin Grimm – It is a Board decision not one member will dictate. She would like to have an open relationship with the Board; they are the ones that know the Town and Residents best.

Chari Blanchard - How familiar are you with the Town Charter and Bylaws.

Robin Grimm – She has some research and she is comfortable with a Town Administrator role, she has also sat on the Charter Review Committee in her own Town.

Robin Grimm asked the Board of Selectmen – What do you want in a Town Administrator.

Chair Blanchard – Stability, Experience with budgets and contracts

Vice Chair Kaitbenski – Experience, Drive, and someone who wants to work with the Board

Selectman Dunnigan – Experience, Drive, and someone who wants to work with the Board

Selectman Goodwin - Experience, Drive, and someone who wants to work with the Board

Rebecca Meekins:

Rebecca gave a detailed description of her background. She is currently the Assistant Town Administrator in North Borough where she acts as Human Resources Director and manages all stages of the hiring process for various Town positions. She manages all public procurement, oversees and manages the Town's Green Communities grant projects. She also assists in operating and capital budget development. She has her Master's degree in Public Administration.

Selectman Goodwin - What type of struggles have you had in Northborough?

Rebecca Meekins- One of the challenges in Northborough is figuring out how to maintain and sustain in years to come due to no more space to develop.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski - Are you familiar with Town meeting form of government.

Rebecca Meekins – Yes, very familiar both Grafton and Northborough have Town meetings.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski – Do you have any issues presenting at Town meeting?

Rebecca Meekins - She has no problem standing up and speak at Town meeting.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski – Do you have an Economic Development project you are proud of.

Rebecca Meekin - Grafton is similar to Sturbridge with open space and economic development. In Grafton, she collaborated with the state for a transfer of land of the old Grafton State Hospital and it was turned into a three-hundred fifty-unit apartment building.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski – How is your relationship with staff and residents do you have an open door policy?

Rebecca Meekins – You have to fine-tune your interpersonal skills when being a Town Administrator and working with staff, the board and residents.

Selectman Dunnigan – What have you taken away from dealing with COVID?

Rebecca Meekins – It catapulted us into the 21st century and we learned how to be flexible with our staff and residents. Some of the changes made and are here to stay she feels if we are looking to hire high-qualified individuals you need to be in the 21st century.

Selectman Dunnigan – What kind of work schedule would you like? Remote or in person.

Rebecca Meekins - She likes to be in person she values being there for her staff.

Chair Blanchard - What direct budget experience have you had.

Rebecca Meekins - Grafton does not have a Finance Director and it falls on the Assistant Town Administrator.

Chair Blanchard – Have you had negotiation experience directly or indirectly?

Rebecca Meekins – She was at the table, she drafted all the paperwork and discussion. While she was in Grafton they did not get to arbitration, they had mediation. She said it can get draining and you have to keep coming back to the table.

Chair Blanchard – What do you think is a successful relationship between Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator?

Rebecca Meekins - She is just the facilitator the Board are the authority she feels it's a collaborative between the two.

Chair Blanchard – How do you communicate with the Board and Employees?

Rebecca Meekins – She worked with two forms of managers, one that is never in his office and one that never left. She feels it's a balance she likes to be in the community and in her office. Her job is to make sure the Board is informed.

Chair Blanchard – Do you have regular meetings with Department Heads?

Rebecca Meekins – She has monthly meetings in Northborough but she would prefer them weekly.

Chair Blanchard - How do you handle difficult employee situations, complaint made by citizens about employees?

Rebecca Meekins – Through communication and proper training.

Chair Blanchard – Do you see any challenges that Sturbridge is facing?

Rebecca Meekins – She has reviewed the budget and sees that Sturbridge is struggling especially since COVID. Municipality's were affected by COVID by losing hotel and food revenue.

Rebecca Meekins asked the Board of Selectmen - What do you think the most important skill the Town Administrator needs to be successful?

Selectman Goodwin - Communication

Chair Blanchard – Experience, Communication

Vice Chair Kaitbenski – Communication

Selectman Dunnigan – Day to day management of the smaller issues.

Katelyn O'Brien:

Katelyn O'Brien gave a detailed description of her background. She is the Assistant Town Administrator / HR Director for the Town of Dover. She manages operations and executes projects focused on communication, community development and Town services. She is responsible for all the Town's procurement and oversees all the Human Resource related functions for the Town.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski – Are you familiar with Town meeting form of government?

Katelyn O'Brien – She is familiar Sturbridge is like the other Towns she has worked. Her experience has not been in presenting but she feels comfortable with presenting.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski - What is a project that you are proud of that you had a part of?

Katelyn O'Brien - I naturally leans toward Economic Development, in West Borough she created the small business grant program.

Vice Chair Kaitbenski – How is your relationship with staff and residents? Do you have an open door policy?

Katelyn O'Brien – She absolutely does have an open door policy. This entire business is relationship building.

Selectman Dunnigan - What is something you took away from COVID

Katelyn O'Brien – She took the health and wellbeing of her staff very seriously and people would come to her with health concerns. Showing people trusted her it was challenging at first. Public health wasn't on her radar. She had to adapt and services never stopped.

Selectman Dunnigan – How do you like to work? In-person or remote?

Katelyn O'Brien – She is in her office five days a week she is open into looking into things she thinks we have to start looking at ways to get staff. If it makes sense for the role and the Town.

Selectman Goodwin – What is your experience around Human Resources?

Katelyn O'Brien – She was a Human Resources Assistant and handled hiring and recruitment she is the Human Resources Director in Dover.

Selectman Goodwin – What ideas do you have regarding Municipal employee retention

Katelyn O'Brien – She has many ideas we do not have many people on the bench. She feels we could provide some flexibility, possibly merit bonuses. It's not common at all in municipalities where employees can move up. She is always looking for ways to energize people.

Selectman Goodwin – What is your experience with Labor Relations?

Katelyn O'Brien – Dover was her first time sitting at the table, in past she has prepared and handled all the research. She was lucky it was a great outcome.

Chari Blanchard – Were you the lead negotiator?

Katelyn O'Brien - She sat with the Town Administrator.

Chair Blanchard – What is your budget experience?

Katelyn O'Brien – Westborough was her first experience with budget. She also helped create a budget book. She reaches out to the department heads in having them get all the information to the Town Administrator.

Chair Blanchard - Do you have departments that do not report their budgets?

Katelyn O'Brien – she has four departments and do not report their budgets they report them to their own Boards.

Chair Blanchard – Do you have a Finance Committee?

Katelyn O'Brien – No

Chair Blanchard – What have you done with contracts and negotiations?

Katelyn O'Brien – She feels like she does a lot with negotiations but in an unofficial role. She deals with contract for procurement.

Chair Blanchard – What do you consider a successful working relationship between the Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator?

Katelyn O'Brien - Communication, trust, weekly and/or by weekly meetings with the Chair. Being approachable and it's import to have goals and agree upon goals.

Chair Blanchard – How do you handle difficult employee situations?

Katelyn O'Brien – Her first repose is to find out what is going on and from there she can determine we get more training work force development. There is always a situation that won't work out.

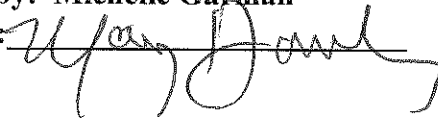
Adjourn:

Motion: To Adjourn
By: Selectman Goodwin
2nd: Vice Chair Kaitbenski
All in Favor
Vote: 5-0-0

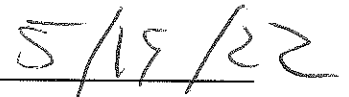
The meeting adjourned at 8:08 p.m.

Minutes prepared by: Michelle Garman

Clerk of the Board:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Michelle Garman", written over a horizontal line.

Date signed:

A handwritten date "5/15/22" written in cursive script over a horizontal line.