

ST. GEORGE SELECT BOARD & ASSESSORS

St. George Town Office

PUBLIC MEETING

March 11, 2021 – 7 p.m. via Zoom

Town Manager Tim Polky will be retiring on June 30, 2021. A meeting was held to receive public input on the qualities and requirements for a new Town Manager. Present were: Richard Bates, Select Board Chair; Randy Elwell, Jerry Hall, Wayne Sawyer, Tammy Willey, Tim Polky, Tara Elwell, Beth Smith, Megan Wallace, John Falla, David and Bonnie Percival, Charles Paine and Deborah Wheelock, Peta vanVuuren, Adele Welch, Margot Kelley, Susie Ellis, Sandra Roak, Lorrie Landsberg, Tom Judge, Terry Brackett, Kate Bourne, Mark Munger, and Kva129.

Chair Richard Bates welcomed everyone to the meeting. Bates explained the Select Board had engaged David Barrett, Director of Personnel Services at Labor Relations at Maine Municipal Association to guide and advise the Select Board in the hiring process for a new Town Manager. Chair Bates said tonight the Select Board will hear comments and thoughts from the public on the qualities and requirements they feel a new Town Manager should possess.

Chair Bates briefly reviewed the proposed timeline for the search and hiring process. The plan is to advertise this position at the beginning of April. In late April, resumes will be reviewed. In early May, the first interviews will occur and by mid-May, a second round of interviews will be done in-person. By late May, the hope is to offer employment. The St. George Town Charter states the Select Board will appoint the town manager. At the point they get to the resume review process and interviews, the Board will be joined by Town Manager Tim Polky as well as Office Manager Tara Elwell who will be representing the town employees.

Chair Bates explained Zoom mechanics and reviewed Zoom etiquette. He stated that the public could also write or email in their questions or comments and those would get incorporated into the minutes of this meeting.

Chair Bates: What we want to talk about tonight is what you see as the priorities and qualities for the new Town Manager.

John Falla: Does the Select Board have a list of criteria for the position?

Bates: The Board will be discussing that on March 22, 2021. It has similarities to the draft we had in 2016, but we hope there will be some comments tonight and in the next few days to add to that because things have changed. Right now, there is no published list.

Selectperson Elwell: One thing I have, and think is important is how will the new person fit in with our town, the good crew at the town office, and the dynamics of what our town is and our town government.

Bates: Continuity is good.

Roak: I think it should be someone who has had experience running a town and someone who understood the dynamics of having such a big summer population and some of those people in

the summer really want to feel part of the town, and I am not sure how we would do that, but I think it is something to be aware of.

Chair Bates: To what Sandra was saying, it was interesting when David Barrett talked to the Select Board and pointed out that in the current climate, there are a number of people who appear to be ready to move to Maine this year. Barrett gave an example of the number of applications the town of Corinth received. They expected around 30 and received 60 plus applications.

David Percival: Tim has handled the Emergency Management issues and the town has an emergency shelter. I think it is important the town manager who is selected be aware of this. That there is a team and we've spent money to buy a generator and it is located at the school. I think the manager should step up to manage the emergency management situation.

Chair Bates: That is a good point. Over the last several years, I think the town has benefitted from having many of the town employees including the town manager and when Tim was Assistant Town Manager, intimately involved with emergency operations and the fire department. That is an important part of how the town works and is an important thing to be looking for.

Mark Munger: Thank you for doing this. It is a good idea. Two things occurred to us. One is some of the current needs of town like affordable housing, support for local businesses, and somebody who is rooted in the connections that if businesses thrive, they create housing opportunities for people to come here. Someone who is imaginative that way and who has some entrepreneurial abilities. The second is climate change. We know enough that in the next 10 years the water levels are rising and there will be some temperature changes.

Chair Bates: Now that the state is moving on the topic of climate change, I think it is essential we are prepared to move in step with them. I agree with you. In the coming years, we are going to have to see how to get the town office to run on electricity and not heating fuel. As far as the sea-level rise issue that is something, we will have to figure out ourselves. We already have people in town thinking about this, but the new town manager is going to have to take a leading part in that.

Chair Bates: As to affordable housing, I would answer that every year the budget committee writes a letter of concerns. The last few years, the members of that committee have continued to remind the Select Board that affordable housing continues to be a major concern and will be something we will have to deal with. The advice seems to be in getting something done, an intermediate, not-for-profit organization that has more flexibility than a municipality is probably the better way to pursue that although the town must be engaged in some way and supportive of that effort.

Margot Kelley: One of my concerns dovetails on what Mark mentioned. I want to understand the relationship between leadership in the community and the significant social problems. During this pandemic that has been a question I have had, and it continues to be a question as we move forward thinking about climate change and future problems that are related to climate change into post-pandemic conditions.

Chair Bates: Post pandemic conditions are an important problem. All the good work the Community Development Corporation (CDC) does has helped the town in this last year. I

imagine there will continue to be a very important role for the CDC going forward. I am not clear how that best dovetails with new leadership and that is something we will have to explore. We welcome some ideas and suggestions on that.

Debbie Wheelock: I've been on the transfer station committee most of the years since the new one has been built. I am presuming that the new Town Manager will be coming to our meetings as Tim Polky did.

Chair Bates: I think the town manager will include the transfer station as one of their departments. But as you know, the town is also looking for a new finance director. It is quite possible some of the "hats" may change. I think we have to wait and see. Right now, there is a hiring committee including Tim Polky, Jerry Hall, and Tara Elwell who are about to look through the resumes of the new finance director. Depending on the skills they find, it could be that things might be a little different at the Transfer Station. We have to wait and see. You only have to look at the town's budget to see the transfer station is a very large part of it. It is approaching one-half a million dollars in the budget and that is a significant amount of money. It needs to be run efficiently. Tim has always kept a very close eye on that, and it is going to continue to be an important part.

Sandra Roak: I would be interested in knowing what both Tim Polky and the Select Board feel has been lacking or that they need more help with or should focus on. Where are the weak areas, Tim, that you felt you could not get enough done because you maybe were wearing two hats?

Polky: In a lot of small towns like ours, the Town Manager wears several hats. One of the things we did when John Falla retired was, we created the Finance Director position which dealt with a lot of the finances and left the town manager to manage and deal with other issues. I think one of the big issues I had while I was in the position was the change in personnel. It looked like we were always training, and we still are. We haven't really had a stable length of time to feel comfortable, but I think with the setup we now have, lots of employees are in place and have now been there for a while, I think things will run well.

Kate Bourne: We are still in a pandemic. Tim is the local health officer. Is the expectation that the new Town Manager be the local health officer? And if so, would that be part of the criteria that you would be looking at?

Chair Bates: I believe the local health officer position is specified in the Town Charter.

Polky: It is a position that the Select Board has always put on the Town Manager.

Kate: But that is not true in other towns. That is not an issue.

Polky: It is not something we have to do; it is just something that we have always done. That is all.

Kate: So, in that case, I think health expertise would be part (of it). This is not our last pandemic and there are other issues: opioid pandemic, we have lots of health issues in the town. We have mental health issues. I think this is a really important role and it would be important to include that expertise or at least an interest in and maintain that going forward.

Margot Kelley: I looked into what the statutes are around the local health officer. We could have a local officer who doesn't even live in our town as long as that person had extra (unintelligible). I would urge, particularly in this climate, to consider having someone who is incredibly skilled in that arena. Not that Tim is not a great emergency medical person, but we really need somebody who has public health awareness in the next five to ten years.

John Falla: As far as the type of person you are looking for, I don't think we need to be focusing on any one particular area. I am reminded when Richard Bates came on the Board and asked me (as the Town Manager) how many hours a week I worked. I said 24 -7. He said no, the town office is open 8 am. to 4 p.m., Monday-Friday. I said yes, but the Town Manager is responsible for all the different aspects of all the different departments no matter what is going on in the town. The way to bring that around is the person you are looking for is someone who can juggle all the tasks at the same time.

Chair Bates: It is a full-time job. If we are lucky, we will have a candidate who really wants to commit to the town like John Falla has and Tim Polky has. Let's hope we have somebody who is committed and not wanting to come in for a couple of years and move on or move out.

John Falla: I don't see it as something as far as a commitment. But I mean, that is the job of the Town Manager. To manage the town and to know all the different things that are going on. You hire the right person for the right position, and you make sure that the things that are required to be done are being done whether you are doing it or someone else is.

Peta vanVuuren: I think it is important the person be able to listen because of diversity and the challenge. There are diversity of ages. There are different socio-economic situations of the people living here, the people in the summer and people year-round. While it is important to have skill, as the manager it is important to bring people on who have the specific skills so that the manager oversees and makes sure everything is being done but not necessarily that the manager has all the skill sets. It is important that it is somebody who can manage.

Chair Bates: It is critical to hire the right people to fill the town's needs. It's a diverse town in socio-economic, age, summer, and year-round residents, etc.

Falla: Are all the applications going to David Barrett and his group at MMA, and will they filter those down to who they would recommend? Then will the Select Board go through the second round of the application process? Could you take us through that selection process?

Chair Bates: When David Barrett talked to the Select Board a couple of weeks ago, he did explain that they would be able to collate the resumes that came in. I think the exact details of the sorting will depend on the number of applicants and their qualifications. I think Mr. Barrett's office will help sort out the unqualified applicants. I think when we get to the second round of applicants, those who will come to interview in person, I think practically speaking we will be talking about a handful of candidates in mid-May.

Adele Welch said she would like to reiterate what Peta said about the Town Manager.

Roak: Will Tim or John or somebody be around when the person starts? Who will be around to help train the new person?

Chair Bates: The exact overlap will depend on the candidate. In principle, Mr. Barrett explained if the candidate is experienced in town government then the overlap could be short. Alternatively, it might be that they would want to start and have a few weeks overlap. We have to wait and see what type of candidate we have.

Selectperson Elwell: There are two or three staff present tonight. What is the staff's input on what they would like to see for a candidate? They are the ones that are going to work with the new hire and help train that person. They don't have to answer tonight. They can talk with Tara, but it would be great to have their input as well as the public's input in this process.

Chair Bates: It is of course critical that whoever becomes the Town Manager can get on with the staff and fit in with the way our town operates. When we get to the in-person interviews, staff will get a chance to talk to the candidate.

Debbie Wheelock: Does Mr. Barrett go through the candidates' letters of recommendation and does he "weed out" candidates that don't qualify for the job or is that the job of the Select Board?

Chair Bates: His office will help on that and do some filtering out of candidates. I think we should wait and see how many applicants we get. We take it for granted but this is a very attractive town, and I think we may get a lot of applicants. In which case, some help on filtering out by reading the letters of recommendation and most of the qualifications will be valuable but I think we will have to wait and see.

There were no other questions or comments.

Chair Bates: I think we have had some really good comments tonight. You can also email or mail in your ideas or suggestions. We will start advertising in April, and I hope by early June, the Select Board will be able to report that we have hired a new town manager. Thank you everyone for your comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Marguerite R. Wilson
Select Board Recording Secretary