

Minutes
SELECT BOARD

Thursday, April 22, 2021, 6:00 p.m.
Via Zoom

Present for Select Board: Robert Armstrong, Chair, Erica Goleman, Phil Kantor

Others Present: Tom Hutcheson, Town Administrator; Ross Perry, Interim Town Administrator; Louise M. Beckett, Assistant to the Town Administrator

Public Comments

New Business

6:10 p.m.: Interview Lou Bordeaux for the position of Town Administrator

Bob: Welcome to Conway, Lou. Tell us about yourself.

Lou: It's a pretty interesting past. They say you live in interesting times – I do. I spent my entire life in management. In 2010 I started to volunteer for the town of Bernardston. I rebuilt the town website. I never wanted to go to the town hall and mailed in my taxes to stay out of the town office. A few years later I served as selectman for three years. In the meantime I bought the Pro-shop in Greenfield. The town clerk asked me to continue on the website committee. During my tenure as a select board member, I discovered the TA position – which I didn't know existed. In the back of mind then was that would be the job for me. I'm comfortable with management, being in the public eye. Two years later I applied for job and three years later here I am.

Bob: Bernardston calls it town coordinator but it's exactly the same role.

Lou: I'm referred to by many names: administrative coordinator, mayor.

Phil: Tell me about your management style and describe your leadership style.

Lou: I'm pro-active – but I sometimes have to be reactionary. I believe it's important to be able to exhibit skills of critical thinking. To put yourself on both sides for proper and fair decisions to be made. I have had an interesting career as far as supervision. I think back to so many interviews and training sessions. You need to be understanding when it comes to staffing – it's critical to have the ability to listen between the lines if you will. If you're only hearing the way you want to hear you're not doing anyone a fair service.

Phil: What have been your worst and your best job.

Lou: The worst - after 20 years of grocery experience as a liaison between the team and upper management the economic downturn hit, Shaw's was signing their last contract and the handwriting was on the wall. With two children and a wife I needed to work and so ended up taking a merchandiser's job. I can't describe how awful it was. I stuck it out because that's what you do for your family. The best job? Frankly, this line of work. I can't adequately describe how much I like this work. My office has not been closed through the pandemic. I have given up weekends to be able to help our citizens; to be a stable force behind doing everything properly.

Phil: What aspect of your personality do you work on the most? And what is your strongest point.

Lou: Something I find myself having to work on is public speaking – it's weird because I have been doing it forever. There was a time when I was in school and I was working in a bowling alley and they told me I had to make announcements – what?? As life progressed I started to do stand-up comedy. I found it important to communicate and captivate your audience. but nowadays I do play by play for soccer. I'm my own worst critic. I'm most comfortable with public speaking. Speaking from the heart is my strong suit. And my ability to feature my integrity and shoot straight with people.

Bob: Chris Collins, who manages FCAT – loves doing play by play and has taught many of the Frontier kids how to do it.

Lou: I've done hockey play by play and had a wrestling show for five years in VT. I got asked to do it a few years ago and got to work with Chris a few times. He's a great guy, knowledgeable, and works with a great bunch of people.

Phil: Can you give us some background on your financial background and Human Resources.

Lou: As a regional manager I was tasked five years ago with creating budgets. At Shaws I was responsible for a large inventory - not like the federal government but you have to have an eye for it. When I owned Pro shop, you had to be cognizant about where the money was coming from and have a plan. All that experience and three years on the select board helped. I sat in on the finance committee meetings recently. 60% of budget is school and the rest is to run the town. You have to keep your eye on the dollars and where they're going.

Phil: Would your outside activities conflict with town Select Board duties?

Lou: On occasion the Bernardston Select Board has rescheduled meetings but I have been able to do some work-arounds. The hockey season is 11 weeks long. If I need to be at work that is the priority. I love being around hockey, but that's not what pays the bills.

Phil: Tell us about any confrontational situations you have been involved in.

Lou: You have to handle such situations very diplomatically. Ultimately the best that can happen is to find equal ground. Part of the concern is the school committee and frequently I find they are fractured on issues. It's challenging because Pioneer's finance director lives in Florida now and remains in the picture. In discussing this with the Select Board they are frustrated, so I need to be understanding of the differences between them. In the best case scenario you're never going to get everyone to agree but keep a level of respect. Offer the olive branch in such situations. That's what you look for.

Erica: Can you tell us about your experience with Human resources? - Supervisory Experience and the people you work with?

Lou: As far as the human resources aspect, like the budget that has been part of my life. I conducted interviews when I was 20. I have probably done 1,000 or more in my life. But it's different than what it was 20-30 years ago. It's important to find a good fit. Until you face it it's a challenge to find the right person for any position these days. Recently our highway superintendent and COA director had an issue: I'm pleased with the way it turned out. Day to day, I believe in having an open door policy. If you have an issue, come and talk to me. On the other side, terminations sometimes have to be done. Fortunately, the good of human resources far outweighs the bad.

Erica: How do you develop a working relationship with town staff who have been here forever?

Lou: The key is to get to know people. I have done my best to follow along on meeting minutes. I try to educate myself to be able to hit the ground running. This is an unusual time with the pandemic not really winding down and we need to be prepared. The best thing is communication. I would meet various department heads and get a feeling for what 'regular' business is day to day. We can't put our heads in the sand (as long as the pandemic is here).

Erica: Talk about your perspective about providing services to residents and give specific examples.

Lou: Ultimately the residents are the ones who pay the bills so it's critical to have a friendly ear, to be able to take on the difficult phone calls and be able to assist whenever possible every person who contacts us. Even with 1,000 other things going on, in that moment, their concerns are of the first importance. In Bernardston we have 20 miles of paved roads which means that in mud season people can't get out because of roads. Recently, we worried about our seniors' ability to get to the grocery store. The initial fear of pandemic was that people were afraid to be out in public. I sat down with the COA Director and thought of ways to do something to be helpful in a variety of ways. We settled on pop-up pantries. The COA had previous experience in the homeless environment and was fabulous in guiding the ship once the idea was developed. They're still doing it on weekends. They put together a fundraiser/food drive. The town got a random dump truck that collected 2,200 pounds of food that day. Even in a pandemic you can offer a friendly shoulder – to go the extra mile vitally important.

Erica: What about Conway is appealing to you – it's not that different than Bernardston.

Lou: I have loved the rural lifestyle, including NH back in the 90's. Why Conway, why now? Some things going on in Bernardston that might be a little difficult as years go by. I wouldn't be fair to myself if didn't check out an opportunity like this. I might wind up living in Conway. It has a rural charm. I believe I would have the ability to take my skill set and be able to use skills adapted to help improve another community. It's a challenge I look for. Conway is a fabulous town.

Bob: What are the advantages to having a town administrator who lives in the town where s/he works vs. one that doesn't live in town?

Lou: That's the \$64,000 question. There are pros and cons. Pros: it's easy to get to know everybody. Cons: I would be willing to give of my time to the point where I put my own personal business aside. I would find myself doing things around town. I simply do what I think is right – I don't watch the clock. Whatever tasks that are on my plate get done. Before I leave the office I have the next day's morning ready. My favorite thing is to walk to work. I have never been as close to where I work before Bernardston. I save a lot of gas money, but you're here all the time. By driving in to Conway to come to work, I would get to see what the roads look like, what's going on. As a taxpayer in the town, I listen to questions with the ear of a taxpayer. People accept what a Select Board or finance committee does because they're all volunteer. It's a lot of hard work for really no compensation. The goal is to keep taxes as low as possible, but I think I bring a degree of objectivity. Here in Bernardston there's a lot of table slamming and door slamming by people who pass through my office. To see that passion in one way, I would look at it objectively. It's very important to have the understanding of the situation.

Bob: One problem here and elsewhere is finding people to fill positions. They are expected to do important work unpaid. Have you found new ways to get people to volunteer?

Lou: I got started volunteering in Bernardston at the church and then at the school. Over the years it seems there's more and more work to be done and fewer people willing to do it. Many boards and committees all seem to have openings. I believe it's an issue that rural communities in particular face, and so what I try to do is as much outreach as I can – showing people that town hall is not a scary building. If someone has even an hour a month to give back to the town, it's certainly valued. There's always work to be done: the challenge is in finding the many hands it takes.

Bob: Tom started a Town Academy – he created a set of 10 weeks worth of presentations by various committees. And it was excellent and did pick up a number of people for committees. Would you do it, now that it's in place?

Lou: Absolutely. It's a great tool because you have the ability to put your best foot forward and let residents know it's not a scary place: it's where business for the town is conducted. Everyone has a gift: for example, showing how finance works or coaching soccer. There are so many opportunities.

Bob: Do you have any questions for us?

Lou: A July 1 start date is possible for me. But during budget/town meeting season there's a lot going on. I appreciate the time you have given me for the two sessions we have had.

At 7:00 p.m. the interview concluded.

7:00 p.m.: Interview Kevin Flynn for the position of Town Administrator

At 7:00 Bob welcomed Kevin Flynn and introduced everyone.

Bob: tell us about yourself.

Kevin: Thanks for having me. I have spent my adult life involved in local government either as a city planner, director of redevelopment - a multi-purpose agency and town administrator. Public service comes naturally in my family. My parents were immigrants but all became involved in government except for one generation. In the last thirty years I have been involved in local government particularly in small and medium communities. This has involved managing projects, managing grants, and I was city planner in Greenfield. In Marlboro I headed the community development authority. All powers of redevelopment, and housing authority. I managed housing, block grants, and had abandoned school properties. I spent time recently as Town Administrator in Phillipston. I can assist communities when they have grants issues, as I have knowledge of funding issues. I like working with small communities. In large communities it's more difficult to develop relationships.

Phil: Describe your management style and your communication style.

Kevin: As for communication, I try to keep close with department heads – we have regular meetings, now by Zoom. I like to rotate from department to department so each gets a chance to host a meeting. We talk about what they're working on. They go first and I go last. They tell me in advance what's on the agenda. A lot gets done by email and phone. The door is always open. I also like to drop in to see what people are working on. I don't mind getting my hands dirty. I encourage people to get together. We have a Town newsletter and a Town website. I got grant to replace individual emails so that everyone in town has a town email. It's sometimes hard to get people together. I believe in public transparency and make an effort to put things on the website. Every check that gets written is public information and we publish contracts. I do information sessions with the press and have good relations with them so we get good coverage. I make sure they have the information they ask for in a timely fashion. I introduced pre-town meetings so people could ask about warrant questions. I encourage conversation back and forth. I try to make numbers available to people. I also encourage people on the boards and in the town to respond to calls and emails by the end of the day. We're a service business and should be responsive to the public.

Phil: Can you describe your best and your worst jobs?

Kevin: The worst, or least satisfying was running a housing authority because it was so difficult to find resources to improve the facilities we had. I tapped into the Sheriff's department to get some work done and tried other sources. But the facilities had not been cared for in a long time. One building was o.k. but the two others had not been cared for. It was disheartening to see how they had been allowed to deteriorate. That was the toughest one. I have worked for nice people and awful people as all of us have. These people needed better housing than I could provide and I found that difficult. The best job is what I'm doing now as Town Administrator. It draws on all the other positions I've done elsewhere.

Phil: What is the personality trait you work on the most. And what's the one that's your strongest point?

Kevin: I'm a workaholic and a perfectionist I get that from my Dad. Sometimes I need to say "that's good enough" and that's hard for me. Somebody else comes after you and they can work on it too. I need to leave things at work. I think my strongest trait is that I have a sense of humor. I'm good at explaining complicated things to people. That and my sense of humor have gotten me through much in the past. Helps to de-stress the situation and helps people relax a bit.

Phil: How do you handle confrontations?

Kevin: I think of it as being with the employees. I take them seriously. I listen respectfully and expect them to be respectful as well: No swearing. If someone is having difficulty I advise them to take a breather and talk later. I ask them what do you want me to do, what do you think is the solution? I tell employees the same thing. If someone is abusive or using language we don't have to put up with that. In that kind of situation I let them know not to talk now – come back when you've cooled off. I have dealt with claims of sexual harassment and had reporters demand answers when an issue has not been resolved. I'm courteous in explaining to them not now – wait until I have an answer. Sometimes I can't solve the problem and I need to acknowledge that.

Phil: Why Conway?

Kevin: One thing that caught my attention and was different in last election was that in Conway there was 75% for Biden and 55% and in Phillipston it was for Trump. Trying to manage through COVID, the Select Board has become dysfunctional. Conway is a beautiful community, similar in size to Phillipston, It's very attractive to me. My wife is a minister and her colleague serves in the UCC Church It's a beautiful town and you can walk downtown to get lunch or go to the library and get to know people.

Erica: There are about 1,800 people in town. What is your role in providing services to residents? Give specific examples.

Kevin: Public service is a public trust. I'm here to serve. I have integrity and I set an example to employees. Little things like the parking spaces in front of the building are for guests. I had to remind people of that. Transparency is important: you have to be open and honest and above-board at all times. You also have to keep an open mind about the services we provide. It's important to think of different ways of doing a thing - looking for innovation, stream-lining government. Improvement is never-ending. I look for less costly ways, more efficient ways, better ways of doing things.

Erica: What's your experience with HR, and what is your supervisory experience?

Kevin: It's important to be clear with employees about your expectations. I have adopted policies and procedures where there weren't any so that employees knew the expectations of their jobs. Prior to that, there was a sense of favoritism. The same for financial policies and procedures. In past practice there was no standard way of handling things in different departments so we standardized them. We provided guidance in how performance would be measured. Now employees have a review every year, which never happened before. There was no way to measure employee conduct and disciplinary matters: it didn't exist so I created a procedure for the town. We haven't had to use it often but we have the process. I document everything. I use a checkoff form – everything goes in the file so a record has been created. For example, if you have a problem with attendance you tell the employee s/he needs to improve. We track it as it's important to have a record if it gets worse over time. I have had a couple of sexual harassment complaints. One was dismissed by the state. I interviewed the parties involved, wrote a report for the Select Board and shared it with MCAT. My thought is 'When hiring: hire slow; but fire fast'. Do the reference checks because it's better to avoid a problem up-front.

Erica: How would you develop a relationship with town staff who have been in positions for a long time?

Kevin: Developed Employee of the year award. Unsung hero – does a great job but we don't necessarily see it. Provided dinner as well. Tries to meet w/dept heads and members of boards/committees. Spend time talking what's important plans for. Another reason small town is preferred – get to know people as persons, not just as employees. Develop relationship so people don't just see you as the boss, but as someone interested in you.

Bob: getting people to join committees; finding volunteers; what has worked/not worked

Kevin: we overlap people on committees and also try to get new people to join. Whenever I find someone interested I try to recruit them. WE advertise in our community newsletter. Any time someone comes in to a meeting to ask a question we ask them if they would like to serve. Old-timers don't see that as a problem. Sometimes ask them to shift to another committee if something comes up where they could be helpful because of their experience in what the issue was about.

Bob: Town Academy – interested?

Kevin: That's a good idea. If I don't wind up in Conway I'll try it in Phillipston.

Bob: Administrator has financial mgmt. of the town – your experience there? Something meaningful you had to do.

Kevin: putting budget together is probably the most important thing. Finance committee was more involved than SB when I first came in. SB wanted to be more active. Auditor had said we needed to have policies in place. TA is responsible for a five-year. Capital planning committee: annual budget incorporates trucks. Created accounts for purposes that hadn't existed previously. Obtained grant money to replace computers, phone system. Couldn't transfer calls. Background in grants work been able to bring quite a bit of grant money to bear. Roadwork, other projects. Other grants for radio tower and other technology. Helped with the budget. I put budget together which comes to SB and then to FC. Generally our increase is about 75-80K over last year's property revenue. Essentially a stable tax base so grants important. Focus each year on one or two things. Will fund it from Mass Historic match, general funds for the balance.

Bob: Advantages and disadvantages of living in the town you work in. thoughts?

Kevin: Plus and minus to both. Depends on how the relationship with the town is. Some towns think it's very important way townspeople feel. Requirement. If he takes our money he should live here. If you're serious about the work you're doing it shouldn't make a difference where you live.

Phil: You're aware of the funding for this position?

Kevin: I don't ask the amount, but if the position interests me I would apply.

Phil: Conway is a member of the Franklin Council of Govts. We are a heavy user in the no of svcs. We use. Some people want to see those services back in the hands of the town. Your thoughts? In-house.

Kevin: we do the same thing – cost effective Use outside party for bldg. inspector. No. Quabbin veterans group. Health. Just not large enough to have full-time people doing that. Small stipends for taking minutes, etc.

Bob: Any questions for us?

Kevin: What's your schedule for start interim.

Bob: Ross here until July 1. Beginning of July or possibly earlier.

Kevin: that would work not a problem. How many interviews to you have left.

Bob: decide who to make an offer to and then work on contract negotiations.

At 8:00 p.m. the interview ended.

Discussion and vote

Bob: Where do we go from here? **Tom:** I encourage you to get as much settled as you can. If we need another meeting we can do it but if you want to come to an agreement now, or start discussing it that's fine. Go through the candidates and share your thoughts. **Bob:** At the end of yesterday, I liked Véronique better than Rebecca. She had a spark – passion and enthusiasm. **Erica:** Yes. Becky and Véronique were originally my first choices, but after yesterday, Véronique was my first choice. **Bob:** would like to have Véronique as TA yesterday, but today, I really like Lou. So Lou, then Véronique. **Erica:** living in the town: Lou wants to move to Conway and Véronique lives in the town. Struck me that Véronique wouldn't want to be the TA in any other town. **Phil:** Rebecca's interview did not go well. Didn't answer questions we asked. When asked for clarification, the question still wasn't answered. **Phil:** comment she made about hoping the SB would always have her back. **Bob:** all four candidates are qualified. **Phil:** Kevin as the best. Lou does not have that much experience. He's a town coordinator. Bernardston has the reputation of being penny-wise pound foolish. He didn't have good responses **Erica:** Véronique could step into this role and learn immediately. **Phil:** Where she's at in her professional abilities and where she would be in year 2. What would it cost us to bring her up to speed? **Erica –** that's my point, she could come in and do all the things to bring herself up to speed quickly. **Phil:** What does it cost for her to get her TA or procurement from UMass? **Tom:** procurement: total cost is about \$2,000 first time, then less for renewal. **Bob:** so Phil who is your top candidate? Véronique? **Phil:** I guess so, but Kevin is right up there. Véronique is a well-known and well-liked townie. **Erica:** the other three all have experience, but Véronique's passion and enthusiasm are unique. No doubt in my mind that she's qualified even without having been a town administrator. **Phil:** I did reach out to members of the interview committee for their opinion and was concerned about the opinion of the town employee representative. If there is a burden because of hiring a less experienced person, that would be the person who would deal with that. She said she picked Véronique. **Erica:** there was one person who did not want to put Véronique forward because of her lack of town administrative experience, and we had to take a roll vote to bring her forward. I would be satisfied to have Véronique. **Phil:** My second choice would be Kevin Flynn. **Bob:** I could agree with you on that. **Erica:** My second choice would be Lou. **Phil:** We have an amount budgeted for the position, but if you're taking someone who is going to require some hand-holding to get them caught up to speed, is it appropriate to offer the amount budgeted for the position, or should there be some kind of discount? **Erica:** I think that should be separate from the question of who we want to offer the job to. Then figure out the rest given the amount of funding we have for the position. **Bob:** She's joined the budget committee, the Board of Health, and it says a lot that people have good things to say about her. **Erica:** it comes down to who's best for the town. **Phil:** Give it to Tom for having made the position better than when he came in. **Bob:** sounds like we're in agreement. When we went through this a week ago, we voted for Tom to let the top choice know. It will probably be in the paper tomorrow, thank you Mary. **Erica:** If Véronique doesn't take the position what are the odds that Kevin won't either? **Bob:** worry about that if it comes up. **Tom:** is that a call you're going to make?

On a motion from Bob to select Véronique for the permanent town administrator and to start contract negotiations Phil said aye, Erica said aye and Bob said aye, and the vote was unanimous in favor.

Items Not Anticipated 48 Hours in Advance of the Meeting

Next Meeting: Scheduled for Monday, April 26, at 6:00 p.m., via Zoom: further TA interviews

On a motion from Bob to adjourn, Phil seconded, Erica said aye, Phil said aye, and Bob said aye and the vote was unanimous to adjourn.