

**TOWN OF WINCHENDON
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, APRIL 5, 2021
Town Hall, 109 Front St., 2nd Floor Auditorium
Winchendon, MA 01475**

Present:

Michael Barbaro, Chair
Rick Ward, Vice Chair
Barbara Anderson
Audrey LaBrie
Amy Salter

Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant
Taylor Tower, Admin. Assistant

List of Documents Presented at Meeting:

- Template for Interview Questions and Notes (filed)
- Prohibited Interview Questions (filed)
- Report of Town Manager Finalists and Their Resumes/Cover Letters (filed)
- Interview Questions (filed)

Chairman Michael Barbaro called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. All rose for the Pledge of Allegiance.

1. SELECTMEN'S COMMENTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS: Wishing to address recent communications the Board received and allegations on social media, Salter said that while she can appreciate and understand concerns, she cannot resolve them unless she is directly approached with all of the relevant information. She will not entertain any type of hateful comments about Mr. Lynch, the consultant for the Town Manager search, as she has worked with him for years and he has always been pleasant and professional. Anderson thanked all those who reached out with their concerns, and said the Town Manager will set the tone in our Town for many years to come. Referring again to the social media comments, Ward explained that he is here to do what is best for the Town and is going to make the best decision that he can. He said that we had an excellent screening committee and he is confident in the process thus far. Barbaro also expressed disappointment in the hateful and disrespectful comments on social media directed at the Board, the Town Manager Screening Committee and the Consultant.

2. NEW BUSINESS:

2.1. Town Manager Interview Processes: Bernie Lynch, Principal of Community Paradigm Associates was present to introduce the Town Manager Candidates to be interviewed by the Board this evening. The candidates were interviewed in a randomly selected order.

2.1.1. Candidate Justin Sultzbach –

Anderson: Thank you for your interest in Winchendon. Please take a couple of minutes to tell us what drew you to Winchendon and this position, and why you believe you would be successful here.

Sultzbach detailed some main things he is seeking in the next step of his career, including agricultural preservation, honoring the past, preserving historical structures and a community that he knows he can make a difference in. He feels he could communicate with and get along with the community of Winchendon. He feels that he could implement good financial practices and he could step in on day one and get to work.

Ward: I noticed that your cover letter was very detailed on things happening here in Winchendon. How well do you know Winchendon and what do you see as some of the issues that we have to deal with in Town?

Sultzbach said while he has not lived in Winchendon, he lived in the area and followed Winchendon closely. In terms of issues facing Winchendon, there is nothing too out of the ordinary. He noted the important Town documents that he reviewed, including the Master Plan, as an attempt to get to know

the community itself, the history and the local government and their history as well. In his research, he was interested in recent history such as the financial struggles faced six or seven years ago, but also the big picture that stems back since the beginning of Winchendon – such as the rise and fall of the industries in Town. He informed the Board that he watched the most recent Annual Town Meeting to get a feel for the citizens and the issues that face the Town, noting specifically the struggle to address the crumbling Senior Center. He applauded the Town for getting out of the financial crisis from 2014, but noted there is now a backlog of capital projects. He noted the long list of capital needs, such as the Fire Station and the leaking roof at the DPW and discussed prioritizing those projects and identifying the funding. He said he prides himself for bringing in 130% of his salary in grant funding in Tyngsborough.

Barbaro: Talk about your experience with municipal law.

Sultzbach said it goes back a while, and walked through his municipal career. He said he likes being on the frontlines, and working on the local level raises the accountability. He began in Watertown as a Clerk in the Collector's Office, moving from there to the position of the Assistant Tax Assessor for Watertown. From a financial standpoint, moving to his position as Assistant Town Administrator in Tyngsborough was eye opening. When it comes to municipal law, he said it has always interested him. Much has changed and made it easier for municipalities, however it is still a cumbersome process for transparency and accountability purposes. He said he works closely with his legal counsel to make sure they are crossing all the T's and dotting all the I's.

Ward: How would you describe your leadership style and how you work with others?

Sultzbach described his leadership style as a municipal leader, leading from the frontlines. He said all staff in Town Hall are specialists and he believes in letting them do their thing. He leads by example and to be out there with his staff, and he would never ask staff to do something that he would not do himself.

Barbaro: What are the core values that drive your work and guide your decisions? And, what strategies do you use to develop a workplace culture that includes shared values and priorities?

Sultzbach said he has always stood by hard work and that has worked since he was old enough to. He explained that in the municipal world, it can be easy for people to lose faith in the vision. He explained that as a leader, it is important to create a local government that people can believe in. He said the best way to do that is to make sure that it comes from the citizens. If you make that a priority for yourself, your employees will follow.

LaBrie: I like what you are saying about lead from the front and that you like to be on the frontlines. How are you at delegating?

Sultzbach said that if you are always at the front and going full-speed, you can burn yourself out, and to note that you are not a one-man band. It is important to delegate and have faith and confidence in your team. It is also a vote of confidence to your staff to send the message that you trust them to complete the task you are assigning to them. He noted that he likes to take on as much as he can and it took him time to learn to delegate important tasks.

Barbaro: Winchendon's newly adopted Master Plan will require changes; what is your experience (or viewpoint) on creating change?

Referring to a copy of the Master Plan that Sultzbach printed and brought to his interview, he described the Plan as impressive in how it talks about their product and enforcing it. He said that people are not usually resistant to change just to be difficult, rather, it can come from a place of fear or lack of comprehension of the situation. He emphasized the need for community outreach and input. He read aloud the Community Vision listed on page 2 that he felt jumped out to him, praising the can-do spirit of Winchendon. He described the 10% affordable housing that is required of towns in the Commonwealth, saying that Winchendon has 8%. He feels that section of the Master Plan might be controversial. Hitting the 10% threshold of affordable housing allows the Town some protection in developments. He described the open space and forestry in Town and said it could be a prime spot for a

developer to drop a new development on. Hitting the threshold for affordable housing would mean the Town could control the kind of development that went in there.

Salter: Tell me about your experience with municipal finance and budget preparation.

Sultzbach explained he got his start in municipal finance working for Senator Montigny and continued his career in municipal finance in various capacities. He got to see the state budget and how it is formulated and then in turn, how it impacts local communities. He noted the recent \$100,000 loss in state aid due to the pandemic and the impact that it had on the Town. He then got to see how tax bills were formulated and physically hearing the concerns of taxpayers. Becoming Assistant Town Administrator in 2017, he became the sole executor of capital plans and became involved in the operating budget. He said he has seen every square inch of a municipal budget.

Salter: what do you see as being key in maintaining financial stability, avoiding surprises and anticipating needs?

Sultzbach described transparency and communication as being huge in preventing surprises. Being abundantly clear in concerns or issues, and communicating those to the residents in time to formulate a solution, is very important. He said Winchendon did an excellent job rebounding from the financial process but there is scarring and lack of trust as a remainder. He praised the use of ClearGov on the website and said there is much value in that transparency.

Barbaro: Tell us about your experience in project management. We have a lot of projects on the burner right now. We sold two former schools to MVOC and they are going to invest \$21 million into veterans housing. We also have upgrades to the library on our capital plan this year and reconstruction of Central Street. We touched a little bit on the Senior Center, we have phase 1 without touching an override. Walk me through how you would handle these projects.

Sultzbach highlighted his love for problem solving. He would first determine if it is a priority for the citizens and then find funding. Right now, he has a historic restoration project that has taken two and a half years to get off the ground. He secured some grant funding for that project. He continued to detail several capital projects that he is currently overseeing in Tyngsborough and grant funding he has obtained for them. He described himself as the boots on the ground getting the projects done with limited funding. He drew comparisons from Tyngsborough to Winchendon. He explained that in preparation for the interview, he parked at the Winchendon Town Hall on a Saturday and walked around Town to research. The purpose of the visit was to obtain a good feel for capital assets and projects going on around Town. He explained at length the importance of capital investment and economic development and how they coincide. He spoke with Mr. Delaney about the warrant closing date and gave him a document that he described as the first step in getting historic funding. He said Winchendon needs to vote to authorize historic preservation restriction as an insurance from Mass. Historical Commission that you will keep a historic building intact if you receive funding.

LaBrie: You touched on the Master Plan and your walk around Town. Winchendon is a pretty much a bedroom community and the burden is on the taxpayer. Give us an idea of how you would approach bringing new businesses in Town. Talk to us about community development please.

Sultzbach said you can't spread out the tax burden in a less burdensome way, due to lack of businesses and industry in this Town. He described community development as the opportunity to bring in the kinds of businesses you would like to see. How often you update your zoning can affect this. He thinks the Central Street redevelopment is huge. He said he has the ability to step back and look at the big picture. When it comes to the Town of Winchendon, he said it is a postcard Town. He thinks businesses will be able to see it if you paint it in the right way. He said there are some exciting prospects coming to Town. He described these critical infrastructure and capita; updates as having to take time due to funding and said it's a long-term effort. He also explained it's a fine line to attract new blood to Town while still taking care of the people here. He praised past Town Managers that helped to piece everything together, and said it is crucial to have a good Town Manager in place to continue to piece everything together.

Anderson: I'd like to know what your idea is of the purpose of Town Government, and how do you envision your role in achieving that purpose?

Reciting the Master Plan, Sultzbach said the Board of Selectmen write the music, the citizens inspire the Board to write that music, the Town staff play the music and the Town Manager is the conductor. He said we all have dreams and visions for the Town, and he will get it done at the direction of the Board.

Do you have any questions for us?

Sultzbach said he has done a lot of research but was unable to find any information regarding community preservation in Winchendon. In terms of community preservation, he considers it to be a guaranteed grant from the State. He was not able to find much for it in his research on what the community feel is for this. He also asked when the Board is expecting a new Town Manager to be in place. Barbaro answered the goal was to have Mr. Delaney, Interim Town Manager, walk the Town through the budget at Town Meeting, but he would like to introduce the new Manager at Town Meeting on May 17th.

2.1.2. Candidate Nina Nazarian –

Anderson: Thank you for your interest in Winchendon. Please take a couple of minutes to tell us what drew you to Winchendon and this position, and why you believe you would be successful here.

Nazarian explained that first and foremost, as a resident of Leominster, she is attracted to Winchendon due to the close geographical proximity. She has worked in Central Massachusetts already, as the Town Administrator for Princeton. She has worked in large and small communities and while there is lots of work to be done in Winchendon, she finds the “quieter” aspect of small towns to be appealing. She said that her research on Winchendon has made her feel as though it would be mutually beneficial and successful for her to work here.

Barbaro: Please remind the Board the circumstances of leaving your current or last position.

As the Board probably knows from the Interim Town Manager interviews, Nazarian said, unfortunately the best thing she could tell the Board is that she did not expect her time in Littleton to end as quickly as it did. It was not a lack of dedication, hard work or competence on her part. She explained that there were fraudulent charges from the Town Accountant, stemming back over a span of ten years, way before Nazarian’s time as Town Administrator. The Town Accountant was no longer employed with the Town and when the Police Department began their investigation, unfortunately, the Accountant took her own life. This ended the investigation, and Nazarian implemented policies and procedures to reduce this risk in the future.

Ward: How would you describe your leadership style and how you work with others?

Nazarian said she leads by example and promotes collaboration with staff. Teamwork and communication are important, and she noted that she values her staff and the insight and information they might be able to bring to the table.

Barbaro: What are the core values that drive your work and guide your decisions? And, what strategies do you use to develop a workplace culture that includes shared values and priorities?

Highlighting her ambition, Nazarian said that there are many tasks that she would like to accomplish and much to be done. She said that prioritizing is key and coming to a decision is the first step. As far as strategies to develop workplace and culture, she said that you must be early to the table when you have those opportunities to set goals or to identify a need. She believes in trust with staff, allowing them to do their jobs effectively with her support as needed. Collaboration is important to improve whatever it is that you are working on.

Barbaro: Winchendon's newly adopted Master Plan will require changes; what is your experience (or viewpoint) on creating change?

Nazarian answered that she already has a fine balance of how to select those members that will implement change. As far as her experience with Master Plans in general, she has actually written some in part. She described Winchendon’s Master Plan as clear in the part that the Town Manager plays. She

feels comfortable delegating responsibilities to those appropriate parties to further the goals and implementation of the Master Plan.

LaBrie: How do you delegate?

Nazarian said that in the past, she has found delegating as simple as matching staff with a certain skillset to a task that would best allow such task to be accomplished smoothly.

Salter: What is your experience with municipal finance and budget preparation?

In most places she has worked, Nazarian said that there has been a designated staffperson responsible for finance. In Princeton, Nazarian was fully responsible for finance and did not have any staff to assist in that area. She said with the help of the Town Treasurer, she finds it important to make funds available for capital improvement. She stressed the importance of the process to monitor budgets and a supportive team in place, along with routine audits.

Salter: What do you view as a key point in sustaining fiscal stability, avoiding surprises, and anticipating needs?

Nazarian stressed the importance of long term financial planning, noting the indicators in free cash and close monitoring of potential large increases.

Barbaro: Tell us about your experience with project management.

Experience in project management is one of her greatest attributes, Nazarian explained, noting her roots as an engineer. She explained the need to find the most cost effective and sustainable solutions to address the needs of the community. Identifying stakeholders and understanding what the next steps are and who takes them are both important initiatives. She enjoys these types of projects.

LaBrie: You mentioned your background in civil engineering. How do you find having a background other than municipal governments helps or hinders you in the transition to a municipality?

Noting that one of the reasons she was hired in Tyngsborough was that they did not have a project manager, Nazarian said she found it easy to use that knowledge and apply it in the municipal world. She feels very comfortable in municipalities.

Anderson: What do you see as the purpose of Town Government and how do you envision your role in achieving that purpose?

Nazarian said that simply looking at it as the perspective of what she is today and what she can do today. She described it as an amazing opportunity to provide tailored service and needs to the community. She stressed good customer service and said if a question cannot be answered on the spot, she believes in telling the customer they will research and follow up in a timely manner.

LaBrie: How do you envision a relationship between the Town and the School?

Nazarian said that she certainly understands that the primary responsibility of the School Department is to serve the needs to the School system. It is important to work together to accomplish true goals and objectives and not to create a divide of any sort. Relationship building is important.

Barbaro: Do you have any questions for us?

Nazarian asked the Board what characteristics they would like to see from their next Town Manager. Salter stressed the importance of finances. LaBrie said she'd like to see someone personable enough to work with others and to be strong enough to hold everyone together. Anderson said to her, the most important quality of a Town Manager is one that can appreciate residents' concerns, listen to them and to serve the community. Ward looks for communication not just to the Board but to Department Heads and citizens. Barbaro would like to see someone progressive and take the Town in the direction that it needs to move.

LaBrie moved to recess, seconded by Ward. With a vote of all aye, the Board recessed at 7:46 p.m.

The Board reconvened at 7:52 p.m.

2.1.3. Candidate Thomas Guerino –

Anderson: Thank you for your interest in Winchendon. Please take a couple of minutes to tell us what drew you to Winchendon and this position, and why you believe you would be successful here.

Guerino answered that he has family ties in Winchendon and has spent significant amounts of time visiting. In preparation for his interview, he drove through the Town and looked at the schools and the roads. He stressed fiscal preparation and economic development that he could bring to Winchendon.

Barbaro: Tell us about your position in Bourne and how it came to an end.

Guerino noted that he spent fourteen and a half years in Bourne, fourteen of which were great, productive years. He had good relationships between the schools, Department Heads and the Finance Committee. In the last eighteen months, it became clear to him that he was not going to be able to continue to be successful with the Board that was in place at the time. With one year left in his contract, they agreed to part ways in the most amicable manner possible. He said he still has good relationships with many key players in Bourne, even keeping in contact with some at present time.

Ward: How would you describe your leadership style and how you work with others?

Guerino said he works best in a team setting, striving for expertise from Department Heads. He described his job as to support and direct them in accomplishing the goals established by the Selectboard.

Barbaro: What are the core values that drive your work and guide your decisions? And, what strategies do you use to develop a workplace culture that includes shared values and priorities?

Guerino described the core of anything in public service as just that – we have to serve the public, and how do we do that? Policies and procedures are important, along with human resources strategies to promote the best intra-governmental process as possible. Using Bourne as an example, Guerino said that when he was hired, they were \$800,000 over on health insurance and he had to work hard to bring the Town back from that deficit. Noting that the elected boards are responsible to the citizens, he explained that everything we do is what the Board decides is a priority.

Ward: Winchendon's newly adopted Master Plan will require changes; what is your experience (or viewpoint) on creating change?

Guerino explained that during his time in Bourne, it took time and patience to change the structure from a full-time Selectboard to a professional management staff with professional human resources, a Collector, Accountant and Assessors Office. Looking at the newly adopted Master Plan of Winchendon, he explained that one could start the process by finding the commonalities between different pieces and aspects of the Plan.

Salter: What is your experience with municipal finance and budget preparation?

Guerino replied that when he was hired in Bourne, the Town had a AA rating. Upon his departure, the Town had an AA+ rating, which took much hard work, financial policies and accrued savings. Capital Planning was established, line item adherence was taught and enforced, and the use of free cash in the budget was limited. When he left Bourne, they had about seven million dollars in reserves. Guerino met with Department Heads about three times per budget season prior to presentation to the Selectboard and the Finance Committee.

Salter: What do you view as key in sustaining fiscal stability, avoiding surprises and anticipating needs?

Communication with Department Heads, what is expected, what the budget will be and the anticipation of State aid were all explained as key by Guerino. He said that sometimes surprises are unavoidable, but good working relationships are important to help problem solve.

Barbaro: Tell us about your experience with project management.

Guerino noted that during his research on Winchendon, he kept hearing about the Robinson Broadhurst Foundation. This prompted him to conduct further research and thought it to be a very interesting story. During his time in Rockingham years ago, a wastewater treatment plant was built. He was responsible for the project management of that construction. In Bourne, there was a \$40 million override for the construction of a new police department. He continued to highlight his extensive experience overseeing large projects, such as the construction of a boat ramp, disaster mitigation, library renovations, street reconstruction, etc. Noting his experience with a Central Street reconstruction and economic development, LaBrie asked how he could apply that to the upcoming Central Street Reconstruction in 2022. Guerino said community development is a long view, and it took Bourne ten to twelve years to get it done. They started with an inventory of what they had and a walk through of the boarded up downtown. They brainstormed how to increase the visibility, such as second-floor apartment buildings. He worked with developers, citizens, commissions and the Commonwealth to determine what was needed/wanted and how to accomplish that.

Anderson: What do you see as the purpose of Town Government, and how do you envision your role in achieving that purpose?

Guerino answered that the role of Town Government is to act in the best interest of the citizens of the Town. One example he gave was Zoom, noting that while it is not his favorite, he recognizes that it is an important and valuable tool to use for citizen engagement. Public safety, education, library, counsel on aging and recreation are great equalizers of socioeconomic ability. There needs to be equal access to the public common good.

LaBrie: Tell us how you would ensure a good relationship with the School.

Guerino said that when he faced a problem in Bourne, he would have a cup of coffee with the other party to try to resolve it. He said Winchendon has a pretty good school system and it seems like there is good, dedicated staff behind that. In Bourne, he said they were losing enrollment to charter schools. They were able to turn that around over a four to five year period.

Barbaro: Do you have any questions for us?

Guerino replied that he did not, and in his research on Winchendon he had conversations with a number of different department leaders. What he learned from that, was that the staff here is dedicated and caring. The way they spoke about the Town made him want to come work here.

LaBrie moved for a five minute recess, seconded by Ward. With a vote of all aye, the Board entered recess at 8:41 p.m.

The Board reconvened at 8:46 p.m.

2.2. Town Manager Selection Discussion – LaBrie said she had been told that the Board was rushing things, and wished to express that she feels the right steps were taken. Regarding the alleged rejection of an applicant, she said that she wished that if a problem occurred with the application process, which was a month ago, the Board would have been approached directly so that the situation could actually be addressed. She takes exception to particularly one part of the letter that was used as a template for several emails sent to the Board. Specifically, “anything less than the above actions will give the appearance that our BOS members are putting expediency to fill this position above their duties to the citizens and the Town”. The actions described “I am requesting that the BOS immediately cancel the interviews for this Monday, April 5th, 2021 and reopen the search for Town Manager. I also feel strongly that the BOS should consider utilizing Mr. Lynch and Community Paradigm and consider pursuing the search ourselves. LaBrie said she is trying not to take this out of context and she is not trying to start a verbal back and forth, but she wishes that as a community we could be better at taking care of business. She is glad to speak with anyone who wants to regarding this topic. She feels confident in Community Paradigm Associates and thinks that we are on the right track for a new Town Manager.

Anderson said she is not comfortable discussing or voting on candidates tonight. She asked Mr. Lynch to provide the results of the citizen survey that went out. Mr. Lynch said he would be happy to provide the summary document, but noted that several residents used the survey as an outlet to direct profane and personal attacks on Town staff. That information will be redacted and the cleaned up report will be sent to the Board members tomorrow.

After some discussion, it was decided that the Board will discuss and vote on candidates at their meeting on Wednesday, April 7th.

3. EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Exemption #2 to conduct strategy session in preparation for negotiations with non-union employees and to reconvene into public session for the sole purpose of adjournment. The subject being the new Town Manager Contract discussions. This item was passed over and will be revisited at the Board of Selectmen Special Meeting on April 7th.

4. ADJOURNMENT: LaBrie moved to adjourn, seconded by Ward. With a vote of all aye, the meeting adjourned at 8:57 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Taylor C. Tower

Taylor Tower

Administrative Assistant