

**TOWN OF WINCHENDON  
BOARD OF SELECTMEN  
EXECUTIVE SESSION MINUTES  
MONDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2022 6:30 P.M.  
Town Hall, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Auditorium, 109 Front Street, Winchendon, Mass.**

Present:

Audrey LaBrie, Chair  
Rick Ward, Vice Chair  
Barbara Anderson  
Amy Salter  
Danielle LaPointe (8:44PM – 9:11PM)

Justin Sultzbach, Town Manager  
Linda Daigle, Executive Assistant

Documents Presented at the Meeting:

- Town Manager Memo dated 2.28.22 regarding the DPW Union Contract (attached)
  - DPW Salary Survey (attached)
  - DPW Budget Breakdown FY22-FY25 (attached)
- Town Manager Memo dated 2.14.22 regarding the DPW Director Contract and Salary Adjustment (attached)
  - DPW Director Salary Survey (attached)
  - Draft Contract (attached)
- Town Manager Memo dated 2.14.22 regarding Contract Negotiation (attached)
  - Justin Sultzbach Employment Agreement April 2021 (attached)
  - Keith Hickey Employment Agreement November 2015 (attached)
  - Town Manager Performance Evaluation Summary 4/14/2022-2/17/2022 (attached)

Chairman LaBrie called Executive Session to order at 8:37 P.M.

**Executive Session - M.G.L. c. 30A, Section 21(a): Subsection 3: To discuss strategy with respect to collective bargaining or litigation if an open meeting may have a detrimental effect on the bargaining or litigating position of the public body and the chair so declares; AFSCME Local 1887 DPW**

Mr. Sultzbach informed the Board he was going through the process of renegotiating union contracts, including the DPW Union. He explained the problem with a revolving door staffing with DPW with entry level employees coming in, getting training and then leaving for a higher paying community. He presented the Board with a wage study highlighting the disparity in pay between our DPW employees and those of comparable communities.

Member Danielle LaPointe joined the meeting remotely at 8:44 P.M. and noted that no one was present that could hear her. The Town Manager reviewed with her what was already mentioned.

Sultzbach continued stating he worked with DPW Director, Brian Croteau, to identify a way for a one-time adjustment to get the Dept. of Public Works on track without drastically affecting the budget. Mr. Croteau had an individual resign and rather than back fill the position he would rather spread the savings among the remaining employees in the form of a one-time rate adjustment. The drawback is being a man down impacting services but it is a challenge now maintaining staff. The solution is agreeable with the DPW Union. Director Croteau was present this evening. He reviewed the budget breakdown spreadsheet for FY22 through FY25 and the survey that was provided to them. He stressed retaining personnel so training isn't repetitive and wearing down his current staff. He also noted that the increase was not for everyone across the board as some are getting fairly compensated already. Sultzbach noted the increase would put them in the middle of the communities surveyed.

Salter noted there is a huge push in the private sector in getting good employees and feels it is reasonable to go up on the salaries ensuring quality employees and she trusts the DPW Department head with this recommendation for his department.

Ward offered that salaries are going up to hold good employees and the Town needs to offer market value or we won't retain employees.

Sultzbach then reviewed the eleven language changes in the proposed union contract which consisted of removal of the winter hour policy, changes to overtime, clarification of time for breaks, Juneteenth holiday, compensatory time, increase in protective clothing, change to longevity and an increase in the cell phone stipend.

Selectwoman LaPointe left the meeting at 9:11 P.M.

Mr. Croteau was thanked for the information he provided and for his time this evening. He left Executive Session.

**Executive Session – M.G.L. c. 30A, Section 21(a): Subsection 2: To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel; DPW Director.**

The Town Manager informed the Selectmen that Mr. Croteau is being underpaid for his work compared to his peers. He provided a list of salary information from other communities showing where Mr. Croteau is and noted that Winchendon is geographically large and his work is tied to road infrastructure. It was also noted that in the survey some of the Directors also had Assistants.

Sultzbach added that Mr. Croteau does not have a formal contract and that it would make sense to offer a good employee a 3-year contract for professional security. He is one of the big three departments in a municipality along with police and fire. There is no cost in offering a contract and will provide stability for him and his family.

Anderson asked about his qualifications never having seen his resume prior to his being hired for the position. Sultzbach replied he is qualified and was an employee before he had this role. He is a known entity having served in this role for over a year. He's been an exemplary employee constantly bringing up cost saving measures and services, which is rare in an employee. He explained his recommendation to the Board using the same mechanism for the Police and Fire Chief, allowing Mr. Croteau to maintain his base salary but provide an education incentive adding on 7.5% to his base salary for an associate's degree and 15% of his base salary for a bachelor's degree from an accredited college. His salary would be increasing but he has brought value to the Department thinking of ways to keep costs low and receiving grants.

LaBrie asked the Board about scheduling another Executive Session with the Board being provided with a draft contract to be reviewed, along with Mr. Croteau's resume and a list of grants and accomplishments he has achieved on behalf of the Town so they could get an overall picture of things. Salter confirmed with the Town Manager that the funds would be available in the budget.

**Executive Session – M.G.L. c. 30A, Section 21(a): Subsection 2: To conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel; Town Manager.**

LaBrie passed out the summary of the evaluation forms with information she had been provided with. There was discussion about the Town Manager's review being listed in his contract for the month of December possibly being an error as that month was listed in the prior Town Manager's contract. Mr. Sultzbach's one year anniversary date would be on May 17, 2022. With that being said, LaBrie apologized for not doing this in December as the contract stated and now with the budget season upon them, it has been requested from the Town

Manager an earlier review of compensation for the remaining years of his contract before the FY23 budget is set. Sultzbach suggested to reset his three year term with an effective date in February so they don't run into this each year to which the Board agreed.

Sultzbach reviewed the memo he provided the Board pertaining to his request of a salary adjustment. He stated he is a complete advocate for the Town and wanted to come here and is appreciative the Town choose him out of the three candidates they had. He had laid out a game plan through his interview process that he feels he has backed up and followed up on. He went into this position with a mutual understanding that he was young and that he had not held the role before. He was sensitive to that with Chairman Barbaro and agreed to \$130,000, even though it was advertised at \$135,000, as a "show me" contract. Reviewing his goals recently, they can see his productivity, his ability to not only move projects forward but to lead the staff. He acknowledged this was his first Town Manager position but he came in with a decade of experience with Mass. General Law, navigating Beacon Hill and over a decade of interactions with the DOR, DLS and countless other state agencies. He is also MCPPO certified. He understands how state budgets work, how to get bond bills through, and he was able to get supplemental funding through ARPA and noted his experience with grants and working with staff for MassWorks grants. He feels his salary should be what the prior Town Manager was earning but understands they are not able to do that. He is requesting \$139,750 and he is currently making \$130,000. Sultzbach reiterated he is appreciative that the town picked him, but he wants to make sure they know that he very much picked the town as well. He stated he wants to be here and genuinely loves the town and feels blessed he gets to do what he is passionate about. He is looking for fair compensation. He would like to have a long career here with a lot of work he wants to accomplish with the guidance of the Board.

Salter asked if this is a one year increase he is looking for or every year. Sultzbach explained he is looking to get up to speed with this one time increase and then get in to a consistent 3% to 5% annually as past practice.

LaBrie asked for final comments.

Ward offered that the Town Manager's request is a 7.5% increase and looking at the past 9 ½ months to date, the Town Manager has shown and proven that enthusiasm he had when he interviewed with all that he has done; he has a lot of projects up in the air and how they come down we will see with next year's evaluation. He looked at the job market right now with towns hiring a Town Manager with the same population and said offerings have been from \$140,000 to \$160,000+. He feels the request from the Town Manager is very fair and he supports it wanting to pay him for the skills he has.

Anderson added people look at salaries and what the town is getting in exchange and she wanted specifics to justify with taxpayers.

LaBrie said when Justin interviewed she was very impressed. He referenced the Master Plan and had talked of things she had never heard of before. He's on the ball, has been an Assistant Town Manager, has planning experience and has other things in his tool box; all of this being the main reason why she wanted him here. It hasn't been a year yet but with the review of his goals recently, it looks good to her. She feels that professionally, he is first rate in her opinion. She feels the Town Manager's request is reasonable, a little bit of a gamble with not seeing the budget yet but they could possibly make it contingent on a successful completion of the budget season. She ended saying she sees so much good in Justin and feels he is worth it.

Sultzbach offered making this contingent on a balanced budget at town meeting.

LaBrie asked if the Board wanted to continue discussion and make a decision or wait until a full Board is present.

Anderson replied there should be a full Board for this and also would like to be provided with a list of grants he has obtained for the town.

Salter concluded she wants to see a balanced budget and show them the funds he has obtained and she is sold. The Town Manager has done a great job, he is dedicated to Winchendon but they just need the hard numbers.

The Town Manager said he would provide the Board with a list of the funding he has brought in at the next meeting along with the accomplishments of the DPW Director.

**Anderson moved to adjourn from Executive Session; Salter seconded. With a roll call vote of all aye, Executive Session adjourned at 10:25PM.**

Respectfully submitted,



Linda Daigle,  
Executive Assistant