



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

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Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Select Board

Date: 2024-01-27

Time: 9:00 AM

Building: Reading Town Hall

Location: Select Board Meeting Room

Address: 16 Lowell Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: Interview Town Manager
Candidates

Version: Final

Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Chair Jackie McCarthy, Vice Chair Mark Dockser, Karen Herrick, Chris Haley,
Carlo Bacci

Members - Not Present:

Others Present:

Community Paradigm Associates Consultant Bernard Lynch, Human
Resources Director Sean Donahue, Nancy Docktor, Tom Mottl, G, Ann Mottl,
Barbara, KK's iphone, Austinantram, Kim

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Jackie LaVerde

Topics of Discussion:

Chair Jackie McCarthy called the meeting to order at 9:07 am. Consultant Bernard Lynch of Community Paradigm Associates, and recruiter for the Town Manager search, reviewed the search and interview process to date, and explained his process for today to ask lead-in questions designed to have a dialogue with each candidate.

Interview Town Manager Candidates:

Clancy Main

Community Paradigm Consultant Bernie Lynch asked the first candidate, Clancy Main, to explain how he got into municipal government and why he would like to come to Reading.

Clancy Main stated that he grew up in North Reading and went to Austin Prep. He is currently the Assistant Town Manager in Billerica, a community of approximately 45,000 residents, 400 employees, and a \$200 million operating budget. He helps the Town Manager with the day-to-day, is the personnel director, and handles personnel negotiations. He has overseen several projects including a fire station, a field complex, historic renovations, a senior center, and a DPW project. He stated that he was excited at the opportunity in Reading because Reading is embarking on projects that Billerica has already done.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main about his leadership style.

Mr. Main stated that he is very introspective and always trying to find ways to do better and be a better manager. He likes to be a team builder, to collaborate, to be there for his employees, and have regular pop-up meetings with department heads.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Main about his leadership in the community.

Mr. Main answered that he spends a lot of time in the community in Billerica, and thinks it is important for administration to be seen in the community. He attends events at the Senior Center, rode a float in the town parade, and will visit the coffee shop frequented by many residents to chat with them there. He enjoys a good relationship with the boards and committees. He tries to be a unifier and do what is best for the community.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main how he ensured collaboration and communication.

Mr. Main cited a time when residents, elected officials, and other board members could not come to a consensus on priorities. He and the Town Manager hatched the idea of a Capital Facilities Committee comprised of eight Chairs from various boards and committees with vested interest. The group was able to bring in a consultant and ranked needed and wanted projects in tiers. Those chairs were able to get the members from their respective boards and committees on board. Through this process, the town designed a Senior Center and Recreation Center.

Ms. Herrick asked Mr. Main to speak about the funding process and building consensus throughout the community to take on large capital projects when people are concerned about the cost of living.

Mr. Main explained the need to be transparent the whole way, including the cost to build, and future cost to staff and maintain. He noted that Billerica built up a debt stabilization fund, started in 2012, to act as kind of a piggy bank instead of using free cash, so such projects are not a burden on taxpayers.

Mr. Haley noted that Billerica's operating budget is significantly larger than Reading's and asked if a smaller budget would be a hindrance.

Mr. Main explained that Billerica is \$30 million under proposition 2 ½ and could tax the residents an additional \$30 million each year, but exercises fiscal restraint and does not, so as not to burden the taxpayers. They are conservative in the way that they budget. Mr. Main also explained Billerica's tax base is 70% residential, and 30% commercial. He noted that the town tries to drive people to small businesses and tries to ensure the businesses have a place to go. Commercial space is a mix of new developments and redevelopment.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Main how he envisions working with and supporting Reading's Economic Development Director.

Mr. Main explained that Billerica also has an Economic Development Director and had a conversation with her about what Reading could do to market Reading as the place to be.

Ms. McCarthy asked Mr. Main what his philosophy is on addressing some of the issues surrounding the changes on MBTA Communities.

Mr. Main noted that housing is tough in every community, as people just do not like the prospect of change. He explained that there needs to be a respectful dialog, and explanation that it is an opportunity and good for the community, that change will be slow, and neighborhoods will not be overhauled overnight.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main if Billerica was active in Green Communities.

Mr. Main stated that Billerica was not a Green Community when he started there, but he worked to get the stretch energy code passed, and eventually Billerica was designated a green community. They have received several grants from Green Communities for projects around town.

Ms. Herrick asked Mr. Main about his experience with the Community Preservation Act.

Mr. Main stated that Billerica gets approximately \$1 million per year from CPA. He has seen the funds used on two projects: a historical building renovation to become the cable access studio, and fields for the recreation facility.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main about his financial management, involvement with the budget, and assembling a GFOA budget.

Mr. Main recalled his experience as Chief of Staff to City Council and viewed the budget from the staff and the community perspective. They created a document that gave every department a section to tell their story, their goals, share pictures, and have narratives on how their portion of the budget would be spent. He spends time working with department heads on their capital and understanding their operations.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main to explain his role in personnel management and collective bargaining.

Mr. Main stated that he spends a lot of time with department heads to figure out language changes and put together an initial plan to offer to the union. He costs the contract, and negotiates along with the Town Manager. He cited recent contract negotiations to solve problems hiring water and sewer operators, and CDL drivers.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main how he handles performance evaluations.

Mr. Main stated that Billerica does not do performance evaluations, though they do give a lot of feedback to department heads.

Mr. Dockser noted that the Select Board conducts performance evaluations of the Town Manager and asked Mr. Main how he felt a performance evaluation of him would work.

Mr. Main stated that he always wants to get better and is always looking for feedback and constructive criticism.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main how he has demonstrated his commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Mr. Main explained that following an equity issue with an employee, he realized that he can add to the conversation and wants to ensure that everyone feels comfortable being involved and having a voice.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main about his involvement with social media with regards to interacting with citizens, making government more transparent, and communications.

Mr. Main stated that he did his capstone project on social media and local government. He cited his experience with a project that had misinformation circulating about it, so he started a Facebook page and spent time putting information about ongoing projects on it. He also created a newsletter and did a lot with cable access.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main how he would manage a relationship with the Select Board.

Mr. Main stated that in the early stages of getting to know the Select Board, he may overcommunicate, just to be upfront, and would expect the same from Select Board members. He would always be accessible.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Main how he would be engaged with the community in Reading.

Mr. Main stated that he grew up in North Reading, and currently lives in Derry, NH, but he and his wife want to move back to the area. He noted that having Fridays off is an opportunity to still come in, meet with people in the community, and meet with constituents and address their issues.

Mr. Dockser noted that Reading is looking for someone who will remain in the Town Manager position for a long time and asked Mr. Main how Reading might fit into his plans.

Mr. Main stated that he has spent a lot of time in the Reading community. It means a lot to him, and it is a place he would stay for a very long time. He would like to see projects like Killam through the process. He stated that Reading is a great community with a lot of opportunities, and a lot of challenges. He would like to be a part of the community and bring his family here.

Mr. Bacci asked Mr. Main how he felt about pickleball.

Mr. Main stated that he played pickleball once. He knows Reading is trying to build pickleball courts in Town, and suggested a public-private partnership might be possible with the golf course.

Matt Kraunelis

The second candidate interviewed was Matt Kraunelis, the current Assistant Town Manager, and only internal candidate.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis how he got into municipal government, why he is interested in the Town Manager position, and why he feels he will be successful.

Mr. Kraunelis thanked Mr. Lynch and the Select Board for this opportunity. He recalled his history graduating from Merrimack College and going to law school. He was interested in politics, policy, and government. He spent a few years after college practicing law in the public sector, then ran for City Council, won, and spent six years, reaching the term limit, on the Methuen City Council. He then became Chief of Staff to the Mayor in Methuen. When the Mayor reached his term limit, Mr. Kraunelis went to work for the State Office of Consumer Affairs. After some time there, he wanted to go back into town government, the opportunity as the Reading Director of Administrative Services arose, and he was hired in 2015. He was in the position for seven years before being appointed as Assistant Town Manager, and he is currently the Acting Town Manager. He stated that his passion is public service and wants to stay in public service in Reading.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis about his leadership style, and how his style would enable him to make changes that he deems necessary.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he knows everybody and helped to build the team. Reading has seen a lot of changes over the last few years, and he feels that he can provide stability and keep the team together. He acknowledged that sometimes change is needed, and he meets with employees and department heads regularly. He considers himself a servant leader, not autocratic, and likes to inspire and guide employees as they do their work.

Mr. Lynch asked how Mr. Kraunelis would assess the Reading organization, where change is needed, and how he would go about it.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he works in Operations and meets with employees and residents every day. He hears things, and hears when things need to change. He likes to lead by example and would demonstrate to department heads and employees how he can adapt and make changes, too. People can be afraid of change, but with communication skills, and ensuring everyone is heard, you can get the job done. For example, with the change in Town Managers, there was uncertainty, but things had to change. He talked and listened to people, letting them know that their opinions were valuable. During the financial crisis in 2008 in Methuen, they had to ask every employee to take a pay cut. It took a lot of work, but they did not have to do any layoffs.

Ms. McCarthy asked how he would approach mentoring and leadership of new, and senior department heads.

Mr. Kraunelis stated they all have different needs, and there is a level of trust you must develop with each of them. He allows them to work in their style, and is there to support when needed. Other department heads need a little more handholding. He makes himself available, troubleshoots when needed, and makes decisions when needed.

Mr. Dockser asked what other ways he would support staff with less experience.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that additional training is always effective, and has worked on training programs that include de-stressing and preventing burn-out. If there are any classes an employee wants to take, he is supportive, and proud whenever one of Reading's employees comes through public leadership and management training. It comes down to training and mentoring to deal with issues head-on.

Mr. Dockser asked how Mr. Kraunelis sees his role with the community outside of employees, such as resident issues, and volunteers.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that one of the benefits of his role as Ombudsman is he meets a lot of citizens, and he has found that they mostly want to be heard. He noted his appreciation for and importance of the many volunteers who take the time to serve on boards on nights and weekends, and that he has a good relationship with all the Boards and Committees. He makes sure that meetings are staffed when needed, and that they are also listened to and heard.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Kraunelis how he sees himself meeting the efforts of the many ongoing activities planned.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that the Town Manager must be a leader in those efforts. He cited the current Killam School Building project, and how he spoke with the Owner's Project Manager and architect to ask what they needed from him and brought additional staff members onto the project to ensure that all those needs are met. He has also been involved with the feasibility study for ReCALC and keeping it on track. He noted that every time he has asked staff to provide assistance, they have done it. Providing resources is what the Town Manager needs to do.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis about his experience developing a municipal budget, and his philosophy when developing one.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he has worked on both state and municipal budgets. He explained that the process in Reading begins in September and October with Financial Forums with the Finance Committee and getting guidance on the use of free cash. He has met with division heads to review the budgets historically, and decided whether changes were needed. Department Heads will then review with the Town Manager, which he has helped with as well. The budget he is working on currently is balanced, and he has a great relationship with the Chief Financial Officer and Town Treasurer. Any changes that are needed are made right away.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis about the Finance Committee process and whether he feels it is best practice.

Mr. Kraunelis explained that at the Financial Forum, the Finance Committee will consult with the CFO on the total finances of the Town and will suggest how much free cash to use to balance the budget. The Finance Committee has priorities and guidelines. He noted that the Town is in a good free cash position most years and free cash use just provides a little support.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis about his background with capital budgeting.

Mr. Kraunelis explained that he did a lot of capital budgeting for Methuen, but not as much in Reading. Technology, which was formerly a division of Administrative Services, has a lot of capital, and he worked collaboratively with the Technology Director.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis about his involvement with project management and managing facilities projects.

Mr. Kraunelis cited his experience with Methuen High School. While he was not the lead on the project, as the Chief of Staff, he handled all the paperwork with the MSBA. In Reading, he is currently working on the Killam School Building Project, with signing authority as Acting Town Manager, and is involved with the ongoing Senior Center feasibility study. He was also involved with the Library project at the end.

Mr. Lynch asked what issues he has seen and work he has done with the Senior/Community Center.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that the team working on the project has looked at what a lot of other communities have done and has visited other senior centers. He was involved with the procurement.

Ms. Herrick asked Mr. Kraunelis what he would love to see happen in Reading.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he would love to see the Killam School and Senior Center built. He would love to see more community events, and he is interested in arts and culture. He dedicates much of his spare time to arts in culture in Methuen. In Reading, there is an Arts & Culture plan with a grant to support it. He noted that the payback is big on such events and gives a sense of pride to the community.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis about his personnel management and role in collective bargaining.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he negotiated contracts with the Mayor in Methuen (he noted that the infamous Police contract happened after his time in Methuen). And in Reading, he was part of the team that former Town Manager Fidel Maltez assembled.

Mr. Haley asked Mr. Kraunelis if he has an internal candidate in mind to fill his position if he is appointed as Town Manager.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he can think of several internal individuals who could step into his role, some of whom have MPAs, and some who are working towards them.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Kraunelis what he envisions the role of the Assistant Town Manager should be.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he would be looking for someone who could do the job as it stands now overseeing all divisions of Administrative Services and Public Services.

Ms. McCarthy asked Mr. Kraunelis what he learned working with the State Office of Consumer Affairs, and how it would help him in the role of Town Manager.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he learned a lot about consumer protection and would make sure that consumers were getting the most for their money. In his time there, he reviewed many issues, and went to a lot of hearings regarding regulations.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis about his experience with land use and development, and how he would see his impact on the development of Reading.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he had experience in Methuen. The Economic Development Director left, and he was overseeing the Planning Department as Chief of Staff, and completed an updated Master Plan. In Reading, he also oversees the Planning Division, where there is the 40R Smart Growth District and the ongoing MBTA Communities mandate.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis if Methuen was a Green Community.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that Methuen was a Green Community early on and received an early grant.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis how he has demonstrated a commitment to diversity.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he was on the team that hired Reading's first Director of Equity and Social Justice. He has worked with the Human Rights Advisory Committee (HRAC) and Reading Embraces Diversity (RED), and hopes to continue working on diversity initiatives.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis about his thoughts on social media.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he believes it is important, as it is a main way many people get their information. Reading's first Facebook started under him and is currently maintained by two employees.

Mr. Bacci noted that communication about the impact of construction projects on downtown businesses was not handled well and asked Mr. Kraunelis what he would have done differently.

Mr. Kraunelis explained that the Town often did not get notification from utilities until the day of construction. They have been trying to build relationships with utility companies to get more advanced notice. For town contracted work, they try to get the word out as soon as the information is available.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis how he would like to see his relationship with the Select Board if appointed.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he has enjoyed a great relationship with the Board, even before being appointed Acting Town Manager. He does not want the Select Board to be surprised by anything and would communicate about issues right away. The Select Board sets the policy, and it is the Town Manager's job and staff's job to implement those policies.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Kraunelis about his relationship with the state delegation.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he has a great relationship with the delegation and has known them for a long time. Even as Director of Administrative Services, it has been part of his role to be active with the state government and delegation. He noted that former Town Manager Fidel Maltez did exceedingly well working with the delegation in securing state grants, and he would like to see that continue.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Kraunelis how engaged he is with municipal professional organizations.

Mr. Kraunelis stated that he attends the Massachusetts Municipal Association's Annual Conference. He also attends the monthly Manager's breakfast with a local group of Mayors and Town Managers. He is also a member of the Massachusetts Municipal Lawyers Association and plans to join the Massachusetts Municipal Managers Association if appointed as Town Manager.

Matt Coogan

The third interview was with candidate Matt Coogan, the current Town Administrator in Boxford.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan to introduce himself and explain why he is interested in Reading.

Mr. Coogan began by thanking the Select Board and the hiring committee. He stated that he felt that Reading has a good partnership between the Schools and Town, and after his experience with the Reading Immersion earlier this week, it feels like a good fit for him. He has worked in local government for approximately eleven years, and noted his background in Planning. He is currently the Town Administrator in Boxford, and while he is not actively looking to leave Boxford, he stated that Reading is one of those great opportunities that comes along that are worth exploring. He stated that he had an accident in 2022 that he wanted to be up front about. He was driving home, lost control, hit a phone poll, and had been drinking. He stated that since then, he has been trying to have accountability for his mistake by going through the process of continuation without a finding.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan what actions he would take in his first 100 days to illustrate his management style.

Mr. Coogan explained that he would get out in the community to meet people, get to know all the Department Heads and Boards and Committees, and work with the Select Board to figure out how they can work together. He stated that his leadership style is based on communication, and sees his management style as managing a team, like an orchestra, and the role of Town Manager is a supporting role, seeing the bigger picture and working with the Select Board to get multiple priorities balanced.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan about his leadership style with the Community as a whole.

Mr. Coogan stated that he likes to be approachable and available to residents. He noted that Boxford does not have a newspaper, so he instituted a newsletter. He also holds bimonthly open office hours, participates in community events, and attends weekly lunches at the Senior Center.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Coogan how he envisioned himself working with Reading's many volunteers.

Mr. Coogan stated that when he started in Boxford, his first 100-day process included attending at least one meeting of every board and committee. He introduced himself and set up time with each Board and Committee Chair to learn what was happening with their board. Beyond boards, there are local athletic organizations, Chamber of Commerce, and other community organizations, that he would reach out to and schedule a meeting to learn about their work.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan about his experience with budget development and his financial management philosophy.

Mr. Coogan stated that this is his sixth season overseeing the budget process. He stated that his philosophy is adhering to the financial policies and best practices of municipal finance. He tries to be proactive for budgets for the next several years.

Mr. Haley asked Mr. Coogan what Boxford's operating budget is, and if he could handle the larger demand with the amount of money that Reading has.

Mr. Coogan stated that the setup for the budget process is similar regardless of how much revenue there is, and the operating budget.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan about capital planning and funding.

Mr. Coogan stated that Boxford had the first draft of the capital plan when he arrived. It is funded with free cash, debt appropriations, Community Preservation Act, and state grant funding and earmarks.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan what his thoughts were on using free cash for the operating budget.

Mr. Coogan stated that it all depends on the system in place. He stated that he thought it was interesting that Reading uses an amount of free cash appropriated every year, and that it could be a slippery slope if it is not well maintained and managed. In Boxford, free cash has become like a stabilization fund in addition to the stabilization fund.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan about Green Communities.

Mr. Coogan stated that Boxford is a Green Community. He also managed Green Communities in Gloucester, Salem, and Newburyport.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan about his experience managing capital projects and facility projects.

Mr. Coogan stated that most recently he has been involved with the process for a new senior/community center and is currently working on the design of the DPW facility, and electrification of the HVAC system in one of the elementary schools in Boxford. In Newburyport, he was part of the multi-modal parking garage facility project, as well as street light conversions in Gloucester.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan about his background in grant writing.

Mr. Coogan stated that as administrator of Green Communities, it entailed a lot of grant writing. He also was successful in securing MassWorks grants for a bridge replacement, \$3 million for parks, and \$250,000 for the design of a rail trail.

Ms. McCarthy asked Mr. Coogan about his approach to addressing land use and development concerns at the local level, and how to help Boards and Committees work through them.

Mr. Coogan noted the importance of involving stakeholders early in the process, as well as working with developers before they get too far into the process.

Ms. Herrick asked Mr. Coogan what excites him about coming to Reading.

Mr. Coogan stated that given his planning background, he was excited about the development and taking advantage of the amenities in town, such as the train station, balancing the characteristics of the community, projecting what type of housing stock is needed for the next few years, and the new Killam School.

Mr. Lynch asked how the idea for an outdoor dining parklet came about, and the importance of the relationship with small businesses.

Mr. Coogan recalled his experience working for a small business growing up in upstate New York, and noted the challenges that local small businesses have. In graduate school, he worked for a non-profit that did Business Improvement Districts. He also cited his experience with Economic Development in Salem working with businesses to develop business plans to get funding.

Ms. McCarthy asked Mr. Coogan his philosophy on pursuing MBTA Communities, and what that entails with community meetings and Town Meeting.

Mr. Coogan stated that he and the Land Use Director in Boxford were able to secure outside funds to get technical assistance and provide data. They are working to determine what is in the best interest of the town, relying on the regional planning association, and getting grants for technical assistance, which has made the process less concerning for Boxford residents.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Coogan about his leadership with projects like MBTA Communities, Killam School, and Senior/Community Center, and how he envisions his role as Town Manager.

Mr. Coogan stated that he works by timelines, figures out how long it will take and works backwards. He brought in someone from the state to speak with the Planning Board and had the Land Use Director provide information to Town Meeting. He explained a current situation of dealing with underutilized town buildings and created a committee that consisted of members of other boards to go through the process.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan about his personnel management, experience with collective bargaining, hiring, retention, and succession.

Mr. Coogan stated that he was the head negotiator in Newburyport and Boxford, has negotiated about ten contracts in roughly six years, and is data driven in negotiations. He cited his process in Boxford to update the compensation plan. For succession planning, he tried to be creative in holding on to institutional knowledge as much as possible.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan about his commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Mr. Coogan stated that a speaker speaking about privilege left a lasting impression on him, and how privilege affects how one is perceived in the community and what doors are open to you. In the aftermath of the George Floyd incident, they created a DEI alliance designed to get people to work together and help everyone understand what the issues are.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Coogan how he would envision his relationship with the Select Board.

Mr. Coogan stated that his system in Boxford works well. He has bi-weekly meetings with the Chair, makes himself available to members as much as they want, and provides them with as much information as possible. He also stated that he tries his hardest to work with the Select Board Chair to keep meetings to two hours or less.

Mr. Bacci asked Mr. Coogan how he felt about pickleball.

Mr. Coogan stated that he has never played the sport but understands that it has become the rage.

Mr. Coogan concluded by stating that he has a lot of experience that makes him a dynamic candidate that he thinks the Select Board is looking for and has a lot of state partners that can help.

Antonio Barletta

Mr. Lynch asked the fourth and final candidate, Antonio "Tony" Barletta, to explain what got him into municipal government, why he is interested in coming to Reading, and why he feels he would be successful in Reading.

Mr. Barletta is the current Town Administrator for Nahant, MA. He thanked Mr. Lynch and the Select Board for providing him with this opportunity. He stated that he lives with his wife and two children in Beverly and grew up in Nahant. He has a little over six years of experience at the state level and six years at the municipal level. What drew him to the opportunity in Reading is the long-term relationships with prior Town Managers. He noted that Reading has a lot of community pride, and like Nahant, is a mostly residential community. The opportunity for downtown development is something he will not experience in Nahant.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Barletta to explain his management style.

Mr. Barletta explained that he likes to listen and engage, is team-oriented, treats his staff as family, and makes sure that members feel as much as a part of the team as he does.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Barletta how he would illustrate to the Board, the staff, and the community, what they would have with him as Town Manager.

Mr. Barletta noted that the timing is approaching Town Meeting, and MBTA Communities is a challenge that Reading is facing. He would sit down with the Board and staff to understand their priorities. He would do the same externally, by building relationships with the community, state delegation, and businesses in town. He cited his first 100 days in Nahant, where the community was in a shaky financial situation. But he learned of the situation, taught it, and got community support.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Barletta how he sees the role of the Town Manager with the community at large.

Mr. Barletta explained he sees the role of the Town Manager in any community is to keep the surface calm, and to make sure the community feels that the town is working on their behalf, while protecting the Select Board and Department Heads. The Town Manager needs to problem solve in a way that promotes the community's belief in its local government.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Barletta how he plans to work with individuals and groups in the community.

Mr. Barletta stated that being present, being available, and communicating is the foundation of building the relationship with the community, and not just attending community events, but also promoting them, or creating new ones. He would work with the Chamber of Commerce to understand what local small businesses are experiencing and being responsive to their concerns.

Mr. Lynch asked how he would communicate and build relationships with appointed boards and committees, and with the Schools.

Mr. Barletta noted that boards and committees are comprised of a lot of talented people who dedicate their time. He would be available to them, attend their meetings, and be supportive of them. He stated that in Nahant he has a close relationship with the Superintendent of Schools, and it is important to work with one another to solve any issues that arise.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Barletta how he addressed the financial condition of Nahant, what actions he took to solve the budget problem, and how he addresses the budget process now.

Mr. Barletta explained that the Town of Nahant received a report from the Department of Revenue in 2015 that laid out fiscal concerns. At that time, Nahant's bond rating was potentially at risk, and he wanted to protect the bond rating by increasing stabilization. He increased the stabilization to 5%, and it is on its way to 10%. He prioritized paying down debt, doing things with free cash, and using free cash effectively. Those actions solidified the bond rating, and the town is up over 3000% from when he started there.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Barletta what his capital planning process is, what his goals are and why, and how he would work with the community on their priorities.

Mr. Barletta explained that he starts by doing financial forecasting, coming up with financial policies, filling in the financial plan, working with financial advisors, Town Accountant and Department Heads to understand what the needs are for the next three, five, and ten years. He would approach financial management on community needs to make sure the town's needs come first, then make sure to have a sound financial basis to accomplish those priorities. He would learn what the priorities are, their expected time frame, and how they fit in with the financial forecast of the town.

Mr. Lynch asked what direct experience Mr. Barletta had with large capital projects.

Mr. Barletta stated that Nahant sends its wastewater to Lynn Water & Sewer, but that system had reached its end of life. He began by hiring an engineering firm through the procurement process and asked them to provide alternative analyses and their costs. Nahant was able to get SRF (State Revolving Fund) funding through the state, worked with consultants, and procured a contractor. He stated that he was involved and made sure that they were meeting the checkpoints. The project was completed last year, came in on budget at \$8.8 million, but slightly behind schedule due to being on the Lynnway, and having to deal with summer traffic. He worked with the state delegation, City of Lynn, and other state departments to get the job done.

Ms. McCarthy asked Mr. Barletta what he learned from his experiences in securing SRF funding, and how that makes him stronger in securing funding from outside sources.

Mr. Barletta stated that they brought on a contractor with experience with the SRF program and utilized their experience.

Mr. Lynch asked if Nahant is a Green Community.

Mr. Barletta stated that Nahant is a Green Community, though he worked for the Department of Energy Resources at the time Nahant was certified. In his time there, he worked directly with many municipalities on their compliance issues and worked with the department to develop legislation and increase the Green Communities budget to \$20 million.

Chris Haley noted that Nahant's operating budget is \$15 million, significantly less than Reading's, and asked what kind of advantage Mr. Barletta would have over someone who is managing a larger budget.

Mr. Barletta noted the important things are principles of municipal finance despite the size of the budget, how the budget is managed, understanding where there is flexibility, and where there are limitations. He noted that he has faced many challenges in his career and felt that his style of being a fast learner would put him in a position to be successful.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Barletta how he would balance meeting the needs, providing the wants, and maintaining the character of the town.

Mr. Barletta explained that first you need to understand what the needs and wants are of the town. For example, Reading must comply with MBTA Communities this year. The state is doing it to counteract the high cost of housing, but Mr. Barletta stated that he believes that municipalities should be able to determine their own zoning. The challenge is accomplishing what the state is requiring, while also satisfying the community's own wants and needs, finding the "sweet spot", and educating the community on how to accomplish it.

Mr. Dockser explained that Reading needs a new Senior Center, and there are only a few available potential locations. He asked Mr. Barletta what experience he has had with Senior Center projects, and how he would view that for Reading with limited land use, and town priorities in general.

Mr. Barletta noted that Nahant has an extremely active Senior Center located within the Town Hall, but it is antiquated, outdated, and undersized. They are currently going through alternatives analysis to determine what it would cost to revamp the kitchen at Town Hall, or move the Council on Aging to the elementary school. They are currently looking at the wants and needs for the Council on Aging, its programs, and the costs of either of those projects to decide which one they want to pursue.

Mr. Lynch asked about Mr. Barletta's personnel management.

Mr. Barletta stated that he entered an unsettled environment in Nahant, as there was high transition with the Town Administrator position. Also, going through the pandemic, many long-term employees who were old enough retired. He was able to rebuild the team with extremely talented people. Because the staff is so small, everyone must wear many hats, and collaboration is key. Mr. Barletta stated that he is directly involved with collective bargaining and has negotiated contracts twice with each bargaining unit. He works with the Finance Director to understand what the town can afford for the next few years and works to understand what will satisfy the bargaining units without burdening the town. He also noted that he has an open-door policy with the bargaining units, to try to resolve issues before having to go through a formal grievance procedure.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Barletta about his commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Mr. Barletta explained that those values were ingrained in him at the state level, especially with the Patrick administration, which included inclusivity trainings and events. He tries to bring those trainings to Nahant.

Mr. Lynch asked about Mr. Barletta's experience with social media.

Mr. Barletta stated that in his time in Nahant, the town instituted a Facebook page, and integrated it into the town's rebuilt website.

Mr. Lynch asked Mr. Barletta how he maintains relationships with the state.

Mr. Barletta cited his history and great relationship with Nahant's State Senator and their staff, Reading's Representative Jones on energy legislation, and Senator Lewis, in his work with DCR.

Mr. Lynch asked how he interacts with his Board of Selectmen in Nahant, and how he would interact with the Reading Select Board.

Mr. Barletta noted that Nahant's Board of Selectmen only has three members, and he has standing one-on-one meetings with each of them every week. He has built communication and trust by making sure they stay informed. At the state level, he found his role to be supportive of the elected officials, let them take a "victory lap" when things are going well, and protect them when things were not going great. He stated that he would do the same in Reading, and make sure that the Select Board is successful.

Mr. Dockser asked how he plans to work through having a larger staff, and not needing to be as much of a "player coach" in Reading.

Mr. Barletta explained that being a "player coach" was more of an asset, as having the experience to work on a lot of technical details with a lot of different departments and categories, gave him the understanding of what staff was talking about, and how to mutually problem solve. As a leader, he would also want to ensure that the team is developing for long-term success.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Barletta how he would help the Select Board set priorities and make recommendations to guide staff.

Mr. Barletta stated that every Department Head knows what is best for their department and team. But as Town Manager, he would know the larger picture of what the goal is as a community and put that into perspective to help the Department Head understand the long-term goals and what the team is trying to accomplish.

Mr. Dockser asked Mr. Barletta how comfortable he felt being a mentor to less experienced members of the team.

Mr. Barletta stated that he has benefitted from learning from many different mentors throughout his career, and often finds himself being asked for advice. He believes in helping team members develop themselves, and setting up a team that feels they have equal responsibility and equal investment.

Carlo Bacci asked Mr. Barletta how he felt about pickleball.

Mr. Barletta stated that he has been able to utilize Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to install pickleball courts in Nahant. He noted that the players are a very passionate group, and that the sport has a wide age range of participants.

In his conclusion, Mr. Barletta thanked the Board and Mr. Lynch for an enjoyable interview process, and reiterated that having a stable, long-term relationship is important to both the Town and to himself. He stated that in all his research, and all the people he has spoken with,

he has not heard anything negative about Reading. He noted that Reading had a solid foundation, and he would love to be a part of it.

On a motion by Mark Dockser, seconded by Karen Gately Herrick, the Select Board voted unanimously 5-0-0 to adjourn at 3:33 pm.