



Town of Reading Meeting Minutes

RECEIVED
TOWN CLERK
READING, MA.
2024 JUL 10 PM 12:31

Board - Committee - Commission - Council:

Select Board

Date: 2024-02-17

Time: 10:00 AM

Building: Reading Town Hall

Location: Select Board Meeting Room

Address: 16 Lowell Street

Session: Open Session

Purpose: General Business

Version: Final

Attendees: **Members - Present:**

Mark Dockser, Karen Herrick, Carlo Bacci, Chris Haley

Members - Not Present:

Others Present:

Acting Town Manager Matt Kraunelis, Town Counsel Ivria Fried, Executive Assistant Caitlin Nocella, Bill Brown, Mary Ellen O'Neill, Carla Nazzaro, John Lippitt, Genady Pyvlysky, Vanessa Alvarado, Carolyn Whiting, Marianne Downing, Bernie Lynch

Minutes Respectfully Submitted By: Caitlin Nocella

Topics of Discussion:

Vice Chair Mark Dockser called the meeting to order at 10 AM.

Herrick moved to enter into executive session to discuss an open meeting law complaint filed by Bill Brown on Feb 7, 2024 under executive session purpose 1 and to invite Town Counsel Ivria Fried and Executive Assistant Caitlin Nocella into the executive session and to return to open session to continue on with this meeting and a potential open meeting discussion on this topic. The motion was seconded by Dockser.

Haley noted that in the spirit of transparency, we should do this in open session and he will vote against going into executive session. It was noted that past practice has been to discuss this in executive session first before talking publicly about it. Town Counsel noted there is not legal reason this has to be done in executive session and it can be done in open session if the board wishes.

The board voted on the motion to go into executive session with the following roll call vote:

Herrick - yes; Haley - no; Bacci - no; Dockser; yes. The motion to go into executive session fails.

Dockser starts off by saying he did speak with McCarthy about the Town Manager search. He did not speak with any other members on the board.

Bacci then noted he also spoke with McCarthy about the Town Manager search. During their conversation, McCarthy noted she had spoken with Dockser about this topic however, they

continued speaking. Bacci apologized and noted he spoke with Town Counsel and will do whatever is requested of him.

Herrick noted she did not speak with any board members on this topic.

Haley also noted he did not speak with any board members on this topic.

The board needs to respond to the complaint. Town Counsel noted the board needs to commit to future compliance going forward which the board agreed to.

Herrick noted she would like to discuss how this breakdown in the process impacts the board going forward with hiring of a new town manager.

Town Counsel noted from her understanding and her legal opinion is, this does not taint the process. She noted she spoke with McCarthy and at no point did McCarthy share Dockers' opinions with Bacci or vice versa. On top of that, McCarthy recused herself immediately and the four remaining members had no insight into what the others thoughts were on this topic. Ultimately, she noted that she does not feel it compromises the process and from a legal standpoint she is not concerned with the board moving forward with the appointment; however, it is a policy decision by the board if they feel they need to restart the process or not.

Haley feels the board is not being transparent about this topic and asked Dockser if he has anything else he would like to say. He is worried the process of the town manager search has now been tainted.

Bacci feels the board should continue as they have been cleared legally from Town Counsel to process. He does not feel it was tainted based on the facts.

Herrick noted she shares some of the concerns Haley raised but is willing to discuss further.

Dockser felt if two members have concerns, that is a problem. He felt the process has integrity.

Herrick clarified she is worried about the transparency aspect and the perception/ and or concerns from the public about the legitimacy of a process during which an open meeting violation occurred. Haley agreed with Herrick.

The board felt they were stepping into a later agenda item and decided to table the current item regarding the Open Meeting Law complaint and move the agenda along.

Herrick moved to table the open meeting law complaint discussion item. The motion was seconded by Haley and approved with a 4-0 vote.

Public Comment

Bill Brown made a comment that Dockser should step down.

Mary Ellen O'Neill asked the board to please continue this process. She has faith in this board and the process.

Carla Nazzaro asked board members if they had a role in McCarthy's resignation. She also would like to the board to move forward with appointing Matt Kraunelis as the next Town Manager.

John Lippitt noted he would like to see Matt Coogan as the next Town Manager.

John Arena feels the public needs to know what happened with McCarthy.

Genady Pyvlyski hopes the board can move on from the McCarthy resignation and be more transparent with the town manager process.

Vanessa Alvarado feels the board needs to respect McCarthy's privacy and move on.

Carolyn Whiting asked the board to please continue with the process. She feels if they start the process over they will not get any applicants. She would like to see Coogan get appointed.

Marianne Downing wants to ask the board how John Lippit was able to write a letter to the editor that included information that was not made public yet. She wants to know which board member told him that information.

Discuss process to fill Select Board Vacancy

The board needs to hold a special election to fill McCarthy's seat or wait until the local election in April of 2025. It was also noted they could combine the election with the presidential election in the fall of 2024. The board agreed the sooner the better to fill the seat.

The board will take an official vote on this at their next meeting.

The board will have the reorganization discussion at their next meeting.

Discuss and Vote on Appointment of new Town Manager

The board went back and forth discussing if all members were comfortable moving forward or if there was enough doubt in the integrity of the process to start the whole search over again.

The members eventually decided they are comfortable moving forward with a discussion of the candidates.

Herrick motioned to proceed with discussions in regards to the Town Manager finalists. The motion was seconded by Haley and approved with a 4-0 vote.

It was noted that Clancy Main and Antonio Barletta withdrew their names from consideration leaving Matthew Coogan and Matthew Kraunelis still in the running.

Bacci and Haley explained their reasonings for going with Kraunelis while Herrick and Dockser did the same for Coogan.

Dockser then said he would consider giving Kraunelis a shorter contract while Herrick disagreed stating that Coogan's experience (as Boxford Town Manager) is a better fit for the Town's current goals, specifically noting the construction projects, Green Communities and Community Preservation Act initiatives.

Community Paradigm Consultant Bernie Lynch expressed his thoughts about the process and the candidates.

The board put together a motion that would give Kraunelis a 15 month contract with a list of goals to achieve in that time frame. If the goals were met to the satisfaction of the board, they would then entertain a discussion around a new contract.

Herrick Moved to appoint Matt Kraunelis to the position of Town Manager subject to a successful negotiation of a 455 calendar days employment agreement that includes the following:

1. The Town Manager shall function as either the lead or a lead or otherwise actively assist in the following projects:

- a) **Town side of the Killam School Project and the lead to MSBA**
 - b) **Sr Center/Community Center–Town Lead (like role of School Superintendent in leading new school effort, in partnership with SB and community leaders)**
 - c) **Community Preservation Act education process and presentation to community in time for Special Town Meeting and November ballot, upon board approval of committee**
 - d) **Green Communities development of reapplication and subsequent grant application activities upon State approval**
 - e) **Support for MBTA Communities program, approval and eventually implementation on approval**
 - f) **Management of new and existing projects**
 - g) **Strong selection of new leaders for community, considering both external and internal candidates**
- 2. and the Town Manager annual assessment shall include Community volunteer feedback assessment from the School building project and Senior center project, to be further defined**
- 3. and any further background checks as deemed necessary.**

The motion was seconded by Haley and approved with a 4-0 vote.

Open meeting Law Complaint

Herrick moved to authorize Town Counsel to respond to the Open Meeting Law complaint on behalf of the board. The motion was seconded by Bacci and approved with a 4-0 vote.

Executive Session

Herrick moved to enter into Executive Session pursuant to G.L. c.30A, s.21(a)(2) to conduct a strategy session in preparation for contract negotiations or to conduct contract negotiations with Matthew Kraunelis, the selected candidate for appointment to the position of Town Manager, to invite Ivria Glass Fried and Executive Assistant Caitlin Nocella and Bernie Lynch into the Executive Session, and not to return to open session. The motion was seconded by Haley and approved with a 4-0 vote.