

SELECT BOARD MEETING

July 27, 2023 5:30PM

Town Hall/Hybrid

Quorum noted

5:30 PM: Meeting called to order by Chairperson Donhauser.

Roll Call: Mr. Donhauser, Mr. Widi, Ms. Dow, Mr. Shapleigh, and Mr. Trott.

A. Pledge of Allegiance recited

B. Public Comment: There was none.

C. Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting(s) There were none.

D. Public Hearing: There were none.

E. Department Head/Committee Reports

5:31 PM 1. Town Manager's Report

Mr. Sullivan said that I talked a little about the Route 236 Water/Sewer Project. We acknowledge continued concerns about the apron; that the paving there is very uneven and we have been pressing the contractor to make sure those areas are smoothed out. This is not the final coat. They are working well with local businesses and traffic control was excellent. I also talk about the website update, saying that lots of training is happening amongst staff. Phone systems are working correctly but billing is not. I have let them know I expect the pricing to be reflective of what we agreed to back in 2016. Regarding PEG access, we talk with one more consultant and hoping to bring a proposal from one of them in August to the SB to be our liaison.

Mr. Widi said that you were going to tour Mainspring and asked how that went.

5:40 PM Mr. Sullivan said that I, the Planner, and the General Assistance Administrator went to the facility yesterday. They are going to have 6 units of permanent housing adjacent to the facility. They will be offering wrap-around services to the community, such as job training, food security, housing access, general assistance, etc. They wanted to thank the SB and citizens of Eliot to committing to \$50,000 this year for the project. Additionally, Senator Collins just secured \$1 million for the project. It is a very worthwhile project and I think, long term, it is going to be a great investment for Eliot.

Mr. Donhauser moved, second by Mr. Trott, that the Eliot Select Board accept the Town Manager's Report, as presented, and ask that it be published on the Town website.

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Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Donhauser – Yes
Mr. Widi – Yes
Ms. Dow – Yes
Mr. Shapleigh – Yes
Mr. Trott – Yes

Unanimous vote to approve motion.

F. Board and Committee Appointments/Resignations: Cabot Trott/BOA

5:42 PM Mr. Donhauser moved, second by Mr. Widi, that the Eliot Select Board accept the resignation of Cabot Trott from the Eliot Board of Appeals and thank him for his service.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Donhauser – Yes
Mr. Widi – Yes
Ms. Dow – Yes
Mr. Shapleigh – Yes
Mr. Trott – Yes

Unanimous vote to approve motion.

G. New Business:

5:43 PM 1. Personnel Policy Update.

Mr. Donhauser said that this is the first review and we don't anticipate any action tonight.

Mr. Sullivan summarized highlights from the update; that we are trying to simplify and adjust to the workplace that we're faced with now:

- Adjust probationary periods
- Update nepotism language, to include three-member panel review
- Mental health evaluations when hiring
- Attendance/punctuality language updated
- Remote work (sick leave adjustment considerations)
- Health/dental insurance (unions at 82.5%/Town at 85%/may recommend 80%)

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- Sick leave adjustments in language
- Minor adjustments for probationary employees (ex: physical move for their job)
- Grievance policy

I wanted to bring this in and let you know we're working on it. Hopefully, it will be ready for the fall and you will be ready to vote on and ratify the document. The original was written in 2006 and updated in 2014. It is on the website. There is no whistler-blower policy but I can add that to what we should be looking at.

H. Old Business:

6:02 PM 1. Project(s) Update

Mr. Sullivan said that I covered this under Town Manager Report. If anything comes to mind for either the SB or the public, please reach out to me.

6:03 PM 2. Town Manager Contract

November is the start of the last year of the Town Manager's three-year contract.

Mr. Donhauser said that I think it appropriate for the SB to begin some discussion among ourselves, or in public, or perhaps, even in executive session, with respect to compensation, what our expectations are, whether they've been met or not. In my personal view, they have been met.

Mr. Sullivan said that I want to make clear that I'm not seeking a raise or additional compensation. I didn't reach out to the SB to do this but I think it's important, both for the SB and public, to know where you are at. Your Charter requires you, for me to look at staff on an annual basis, to do the same for the Town Manager. I want to address this globally, not as Mike Sullivan. I think that the SB realizes but I think the public has to realize that this is a very complicated job. Here at Eliot, we don't have the staff or depth to take up a lot of issues; that a Town Manager might not be involved in a Route 236 project or be the go-to person to create a PEG access. I really enjoy it and appreciate the support you've given me, and I want to do a good job in those areas. But Mike Sullivan is not going to be here forever and I think it's important for you to know where you are in the market. Presently, my contract calls for \$108,000. You don't have to go very far; that you can go to South Berwick that is above \$130,000, Kittery is about \$150,000. These are all different communities and they all have different identities. So, with detractors, I would say that you get what you pay for and, if you put more money into the Town budget, you get a better Town Manager. You have to think ahead regarding what you have in your organization. Are there people in your organization that should be encouraged to work towards it. What's

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the going rate for drawing a properly experienced Town Manager from the outside of your organization. Then, having the Board and citizens having that discussion over the next year and a half will unveil what kind of role I could play. Do I stay for another year and act as a mentor. Do you have me participate in the search. Do I stay for another period of time and you tell me to mind my own business. Whatever the SB ultimately does, I want you to know that I'll support it. If you said tomorrow that you want to look for a new Town Manager, I would do whatever I could to help you.

6:07 PM Mr. Donhauser added that I think we're only fooling ourselves if we don't think that appropriate compensation is appropriate; that you can't fault somebody for moving to another job for more compensation. And, as Mr. Sullivan said, you get what you pay for. If you're getting more than what they are being paid, that person is going to leave. The other thing is what do we have within our own organization. Can we train somebody or would there be someone in our organization that might potentially be town manager-quality. I don't have a judgement on that, at the moment, but it doesn't hurt to look at that. I think we should look at compensation for all. If you look only at the Police Department, they are giving sign-up bonuses just by applying; that you get a \$15,000 if you sign up and transfer. Just in our local area, I would venture to say that other town managers are making more than our Town Manager. It's appropriate that we start looking and have a discussion with Mr. Sullivan; that we want to make sure that you are happy. The other thing I think is important is employee morale. There is no question in my mind that, since you've been here, the employee morale has been very good. So, I think you are doing a fine job. The question is that we want you to continue being happy and to be compensated.

6:10 PM Mr. Sullivan said that I appreciate that. I do think you find yourself in a unique position because I'm not climbing up the ladder of a career. I'm not likely to go to another community. But, if I look at my 42-year-old self, and I had the same kind of experience and I was performing well in Eliot and you felt it, it would be a threat to lose me to another community. You look around and the former Town Manager in South Berwick is still the Town Manager farther up in Maine at a higher rate, as I understand, than you are paying here at a much longer time. When I leave Eliot, I'm done with this. I thought I was done at the last place. But, I do really enjoy it and I want to make sure that people sincerely know that I love working with this Board. I love working with this Town. I know I ruffle feathers once in a while. I take stands that people don't like and I'm apt to tell you no when I think it should be no. So, I appreciate that it's not always easy supporting someone who is going to look at things differently than other people. Honestly, I just try to do the best I can for Eliot.

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6:12 PM Mr. Widi said, regarding the Town Manager/Select Board itself, that the passing of Steve Robinson should teach us something. If something unexpected happen, God forbid, and we said "Hey, new town manager prospect, salary is \$108,000.", we'd get laughed out of the room. So, we wouldn't have a town manager and that would result in us going back to paying way more than a Town Manager would be, just setting Mr. Sullivan aside. I also don't like calling it a lame-duck year. My preference would be a 2-year contract and, if he chose to leave early, so be it. So, my preference would be to raise his salary, add a year, and if he wanted to leave early at some point or figure something out, I think that would be my preferred course of action. I don't know how that hits you, Mr. Sullivan.

Mr. Sullivan said that I think that's a worthy conversation. I've seen boards where they've worked with their town managers, that they name the Chair and Vice Chair to have more in-depth conversations with other staff, talk to other town managers. There is a kind of issue where you're not seen in the same light of authority as much. Your directives, or the direction you're bringing the community is less affective in your final days. I can't reiterate enough that I am not looking for more money, necessarily, but I do think the Town and Board has to think about what it wants to pay for this position in the future.

6:15 PM Mr. Trott said that I have a unique view of Mr. Sullivan and the Town Manager's position from the Selection Committee. When we went through the process and with what we were advertising for income, it limited the number of applicants. We had people who managed tire stores putting in to manage the Town of Eliot. Mr. Sullivan knows that we wasn't my first choice but he came through the door and sat down for the meeting. One thing that struck me about Mr. Sullivan was one of three that actually looked at the personnel in this Town and pointed out people that he believed could come up from watching a series of meetings, people that he thought could come up and would like to have the ability to get training and move in-house. He saw Route 236 and couldn't understand why nothing had been done out there. And he has lived up to every aspect that he talked to us about in that meeting, But it is a big point that he makes. You want a better town manager, pay for one. We lot several applicants when they found that there was not going to be a chance. Mr. Sullivan almost volunteered to work for free but not quite. Last minute, we had a couple that pulled their applications, one of which was sent forward to see the Board for interviews, but when he saw that he would lose money, that was it. So that is a consideration that we need to think about, whether Mr. Sullivan wants to take it or not. That was one of the reasons I ran, as I was watching Town employees leaving for elsewhere for anywhere from \$10 to \$15 an hour more. As a local businessman, I can tell you right now that, since last December I've gone through six employees. The shipyard and post office were hiring and they were all tradespeople who just want that extra money.

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6:17 PM Mr. Sullivan said that I think Mr. Cabot really sees how expensive it is to replace help. It's incredibly expensive. Regarding the clerk's office, in the last six months that office has had a 100% staff change. That's unbelievable. Luckily, we have a very competent Town Clerk who has been able to, with grace, train people, to draw really talented people, and I think that the department is going to be stronger. But I've been asked by members of the Budget Committee, and other committees, about adding staff, and I have honestly said to them that I can't really tell you whether we need staff because I never had a full complement of staff here. I don't know what our true capacity is. We're getting much closer and that's exciting. But, I think Board members in the private industry can say how complicated it is to train people in those industries. With every job, you try to train them fully then lose those employees after you train them, it's so expensive. How do we stop doing that. I think we're making progress and this Board has been incredibly generous in understanding all that.

6:19 PM Mr. Donhauser said that, regarding one thing about your management style, when I think about management style I always think is the analogy of a string. If you push a string, it doesn't go anywhere. It just folds up in front of you. If you are out in front of the string, or pulling the string, or leading people forward, they're going to follow you anywhere. That's what I've seen happen over the past year-and-a-half that Mr. Sullivan has been here. It's a very complicated job and you have so many people that think they are your boss, and rightfully so. The constituents of the Town believe you work for them. We believe you work for us. And the Town employees think that you work for them, also. So, I believe you are out there pulling the string.

Mr. Sullivan added that I think I work for all those constituencies, and that makes it that much more complex.

6:21 PM Mr. Donhauser said that I think this is a good jump-off into going forward, talk again with Mr. Sullivan individually and among our Board.

Mr. Sullivan said that the Chair and I had discussed whether this should be in executive session and agreed we had nothing to hide. He was very willing to talk about it in the open. It's important for the public to understand. I'm pleased that, looking back at the history of Eliot, there's never been a time with things are more transparent.

6:23 PM Mr. Widi said that we had some turn-over at the farm and the time to train people is the #1 expense. It's not the actual dollars. The, you have to start that person slow to set them up for success. That position is less productive for months while you set them up for success. It draws management's time to deal with that. It is exponentially more to lose people than it is to just pay people appropriately. And

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that's for every position here. You can't compare the same title between towns or different responsibilities; that if somebody applies for a position, they may not fully grasp how much work is in that position. I know you've put out a lot of fires of stuff that didn't get handled prior to your arrival here and I know I appreciate you putting out a lot of that stuff. I think, with a little bit more time, it would really set us up for the next person. When we were doing the Zoom search meetings, it was asked what we were looking for, and I said somebody on the up-swing, not somebody at the end of their career, and I was wrong on that. There is a certain amount of maturity to understanding the job. If we have somebody who is willing to help us find the next person, you better than anybody knows what the next town manager should be like because you are in the day-to-day and we come in here for an hour or two every two weeks.

6:25 PM Mr. Sullivan said that one other point that you touched on was something that sometimes can be hard to understand is retaining talent within your organization but still allowing people to move up in the organization. With a real small organization, like the Town of Eliot, it is very difficult. We recently had someone who wanted to have a different experience, was really successful in one component part of the Town and that person's manager was really concerned about the move that person was making from one department to another until I explained that the organization is retaining that talent so, in an emergency, we can bring that person back to fill in where we need it. Over the course of this training period, we've done that probably ten times in three months. Hopefully, that turns out to be a long-term success story. Again, I appreciate it. I don't know if the Chair, Vice Chair wants to appoint somebody to meet and talk more about some of these ideas.

6:27 PM Mr. Donhauser said that, perhaps, if it's alright with the Board Mr. Widi and I could sit down and chat with you over different issues and then bring them back to the Board and the public for more discussion. There is no pressure at the moment and would be a good time to do it.

It was the **consensus of the SB** to let Mr. Donhauser and Mr. Widi have conversations with the Town Manager and bring that back to the full Board.

I. Approval of Warrant(s):

6:28 PM Mr. Donhauser moved, second by Ms. Dow, that the Select Board approve Payroll Warrant #03 in the amount of \$113,796.50, dated July 13, 2023; Payroll Warrant #05 in the amount of \$57,130.27, dated July 19, 2023.

Roll Call Vote:

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Mr. Donhauser – Yes
Mr. Widi – Yes
Ms. Dow – Yes
Mr. Shapleigh – Yes
Mr. Trott - Yes

Unanimous vote to approve motion.

6:29 PM Mr. Donhauser moved, second by Mr. Trott, that the Select Board approve A/P Warrant #02 in the amount of \$193,406.16, dated July 6, 2023; A/P Warrant #04 in the amount of \$1,003,351.51, dated July 13, 2023; A/P Warrant #06 in the amount of \$42,762.40, dated July 20, 2023; A/P Warrant #07 in the amount of \$850,357.46, dated July 20, 2023.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Donhauser – Yes
Mr. Widi – Yes
Ms. Dow – Yes
Mr. Shapleigh – Yes
Mr. Trott - Yes

Unanimous vote to approve motion.

J. Adjourn

Mr. Donhauser moved, second by Ms. Dow, that the Select Board adjourn.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. Donhauser – Yes
Mr. Widi – Yes
Ms. Dow – Yes
Mr. Shapleigh – Yes
Mr. Trott - Yes

Unanimous vote to approve motion.

The meeting adjourned at 6:30 PM.

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Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Lemire, Recording Secretary



Lauren Dow, Secretary

Date approved:

1/11/24