



MANCHESTER-BY-THE-SEA

SELECT BOARD • TOWN HALL
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MINUTES OF THE SELECT BOARD

July 30, 2022 9:00 a.m. Special Meeting: Workshop on Priorities
Hybrid Meeting: Room 7 and Zoom

MEMBERS PRESENT: Ms. Jaques, Chair, Ms. Harrison, Ms. Bilotta, Mr. Round and Mr. Sollosy

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT: Town Administrator, Mr. Federspiel,

GUESTS:

PRESS: Erika Brown, *The Cricket*

Ms. Jaques called the Select Board meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. with all members present as confirmed by a role-call vote. The sole topic of the meeting is to review the operations of the Board and to discuss goals and priorities for FY23.

Ms. Jaques started the meeting by noting the input on recommended priorities from four residents (Shane, Hill, Warnock, and Meahl.)

Board Function: Ms. Jaques suggested the meeting start off with an assessment of how the Board is functioning as a whole. Comments included a general consensus that the Board is a collegial group and that members treat each other respectfully even when there are differing opinions on a given topic. This level of respectful discourse is needed for all boards and committees. It was noted that there are residents who are displeased with the way the Board is functioning. The recent decision on dispatch has become a focus of this displeasure. However, there are also criticisms about how public comments are treated during Board meetings.

Mr. Round stated that he believes the Board often gets too caught up in the minutia of a particular topic and that the Board should leave operational details to staff. This would free up more time to spend on the bigger picture issues the town faces.

Mr. Sollosy agreed and stressed that the Board should let staff handle things, citing the example of a recent National Grid street opening request the details of which should have been left to the DPW to manage.

Ms. Bilotta commented that even though the Board is comprised of members from varied backgrounds, the group works well together. She expressed a strong desire to make sure the Board stays focused on policy and strategic planning. Setting expectations is important as is having complete information when making decisions. She sees the role of the Board as being an integrator of the work of the numerous Town boards and committees. Each board and committee should understand its roles and responsibilities and establish clear goals in consultation with the Select Board. She sees a need for better coordination of board and committee work. Toward this end she recommended that each board and committee state their mission/charter and identify their top goals and key projects.

Mr. Sollosy noted that not all boards and committees need to be monitored by the Select Board. Ms. Harrison volunteered to reach out to the boards and committees asking for their mission/purpose and their priorities for the next 12 months.

Discussion turned to aspects of the Board's interaction with the public. A consensus of the Board was that there is a need for more informal interaction with citizens with members of the Select Board. Ideas included regular "office hours" in Seaside 1, a table in front of the Post Office on Saturday mornings and a "booth" at the upcoming Festival by the Sea. Being present at events in town and just walking around and chatting with folks that you meet were also mentioned.

The Board discussed how to better to respond to criticism. It was agreed that it is not necessary to always respond with a rebuttal – often it is best to just say thank you for the comment. Regarding emails or letters that are sent to all members there is a need for clearer protocols for how best to respond. If there is a liaison associated with the topic, then that person could take the lead in responding. Each member can respond but perhaps should cc the others. And it can be helpful to redirect the person to the appropriate department leader for a response.

Ms. Jaques summarized the discussion on board functionality before moving on to a discussion on the current status of projects, operations.

1. Members are pleased with the collegiality of the Board; the preparation of meeting materials by staff and the guidance staff provide though department leaders should attend SB meetings more often.
2. Ms. Harrison agreed to reach out to committees and boards obtaining a mission statement for each and current projects/goals as applicable
3. Citizen engagement – establish office hours at Seaside 1; staff a "conversation table" at the Post Office and at special events.
4. Ms. Harrison and Mr. Round volunteered to draft a new communications policy including protocols for responding to emails, etc.
5. Ms. Bilotta volunteered to craft guidelines for presentations before the Select Board,
6. Action item follow-up - staff to create a tracking system to allow for an easy way to check on the progress being made on a particular project or decision. The project dashboard currently on the Town's website needs frequent updating
7. Meeting schedule – the Select Board will stick with regular meetings the 1st and 3rd Mondays with the occasional 5th Monday being used for unfinished business. The 3rd Thursday of the month will be reserved for single topic discussions needing more time.

Current State of Affairs:

Discussion next turned to the current “lay of the land” and project status. It was noted that the general public perception still seems to remain that town facilities are not being well maintained – sidewalks and fields in particular are often cited. Streets, while not as bad as they used to be, still are cited as not being maintained. There is a need to better communicate the repair/replacement schedule of various town facilities.

The Town’s tree policy needs to be better communicated to the public. There is a lack of understanding around town trees as well as heritage trees. Property owners should be informed if there is a heritage tree on their property. Further clarification may be needed regarding the extent of the tree regulations.

The practice of using 2.5% as the assumed acceptable tax increase may benefit from being revisited. Could there be an expansion of fees for services rather than using general tax revenue to pay for certain municipal services?

The current level of mistrust amongst some residents is a concern. Some feel there is a strong disconnect between residents and the Select Board and/or staff. Residents complain of not being heard, that change is coming from outside forces and that the Town is losing control over its own destiny. Social media is ripe with alleged conspiracy theories and misinformation. The Board agreed that there is a real need to restore trust and ensure transparency of municipal decisions and operations.

Ways to restore the trust include continual use of the various communication channels (Cricket updates, weekly “Tide”, quarterly newsletter sent to all households, social media posts and expanded use of town website.) Select Board members should seek out one on one meetings with constituents and be present at town events. Utilizing a “RACI” matrix (who is responsible, accountable, consulted and informed) might help here as well.

Lastly the Board discussed the need for stronger board/staff interactions. Department leaders should be giving more direct updates at Board meetings. Board members should stop in to chat with staff more often. The Town is fortunate to have excellent staff and the Board should get to know staff better.

With the allotted time for the meeting almost up, the Board agreed to hold another workshop in the coming weeks to focus on the remaining topic of strategic goals and priority projects

Ms. Bilotta moved to adjourn the meeting; Ms. Harrison seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote at 11:50AM.