

MINUTES

SELECTBOARD SPECIAL MEETING – TOWN MANAGER INTERVIEWS

TOWN HALL, 334 MAIN STREET

TUESDAY, MARCH 26, 2019 at 6:00 PM

PRESENT:

Selectboard: S. Bannon, E. Abrahams, D. Bailly, K. Burke

Bernard Lynch – Community Paradigm Associates

I. Open meeting and begin Interview of Finalists for Town Manager

S. Bannon opened the meeting at 6:00PM and introduced Bernard Lynch of Community Paradigm Associates. Mr. Lynch gave an overview of how interviews will be conducted, and provided an email address for the public to submit feedback which will be reviewed before a decision is made. Some additional questions have been added to the list of questions to be asked in each interview after feedback was received from the public. Each candidate has previously met with Town Hall staff, and will have an opportunity for a public meet and greet before or after their interviews.

II. Jonathan Edwards Interview

A. Q&A

- a. *Why did you apply for this position, and why do you believe you would be successful?*

Great Barrington is a unique town, and an anchor of the Southern Berkshires steeped in history, and offers many assets as a place to live, work, and play. The role of Great Barrington has an opportunity to be a calling card for those wanting to move to this area.

Mr. Edwards has been a Selectboard member for 15 years in Whately, MA, a small, 191 community-a small town with big town challenges. He sees himself as a good communicator, able to apply the visions of the Selectboard to the Community to see them through. He strives to find common ground and compromise to achieve goals. He is passionate about government service, and service delivery to residents.

- b. *What is your leadership style in regard to staff/community/selectboard?*

Staff: Mr. Edwards aims to empower people to tap into their skills and know that they are a vital piece of success. He looks to tap into the skill sets and experiences to learn and depends upon them for their expertise.

Townpeople: Mr. Edwards looks forward to participating in town events such as little league games and other places where he can meet and speak with them. He would also offer open office hours as much as possible.

Board: Mr. Edwards has experience being a Selectboard member, so he can understand what goes through their minds. Communication is important in learning from the Selectboard to talk about opportunities and challenges and learn from their experience about what is going on in town.

c. *Strengths and Weaknesses in Management Skills*

A weakness is a lack of patience at times with situations that he does not fully understand. He looks to just “get it done”, lacking patience with “process” and believes there is a certain benefit to figuring things out as you go.

Strength: Mr. Edwards worked with surrounding towns to regionalize the ambulance services-first in the state to be run by memorandum of understanding.

d. *Experience in Collective Bargaining*

The Selectboard handles collective bargaining in Whately schools – teachers, paraprofessionals, Franklin Tech, High School. He has been intimately involved with the schools.

e. *What do you bring to the table as a negotiator?*

Mr. Edwards says it is in his blood to negotiate and compromise. He has the ability to look to the center, look for common ground to bring all together.

f. *What tools do you draw on when you find yourself in a place of lacking patience?*

Mr. Edwards is good at recognizing his lack of patience, and stepping back from a situation. He is good at listening, and will take constructive feedback.

g. *Describe role in Financial Planning as well as management strategies for maintaining organizational stability.*

Whately's levy capacity is pushing 1M. 8M yearly budget, which is ½ school and ½ town operations. He does not throw money at challenges, preferring to weigh pros and cons prior to spending. Managed growth is important in maintaining culture, but keeping with the times. Great Barrington has seen growth, but surrounding communities have not. This can create a financial strain.

h. *What large municipal projects have you managed, and what did you learn?*

The Whately government offices were in two non-handicap accessible buildings. Mr. Edwards worked on the process to fix this issue. The Town Hall was repurposed into a social community center for arts/concerts/etc., a 1.5M project on top of the 3M project in relocating and renovating Town Hall offices.

i. *What did you learn from the failed project?*

Big changes take time, and there is not only one solution. Finding solutions that are palatable to all is important, there is always another way.

j. *Strategic Planning Skills and follow through?*

Mr. Edwards enjoys Strategic Planning the most. He looks forward to fulfilling the stated missions and ensuring funding is maintained and increased. Maintaining visibility is important, and understanding who needs to be at the table and how long it will take for them to “like each other”. Mr. Edwards assisted in winning the USDOE Award and USEPA Cleaner Excellence award due to fulfilling strategic parts of the strategic plan, increasing confidence and visibility.

k. *Economic Development – Experience in attracting?*

Economic development is about understanding assets, and what the Town has a stomach for. He worked with the ZBA, Building inspectors, etc. to create code to allow farm breweries to have tasting rooms in Whately. He has been a leader in introducing cannabis opportunities in the Town as well to assist farmers in developing this economic option. They will be expanding into retail and growing facilities.

A school was sold for \$1,000 to a developer who plans to turn it into affordable housing units.

l. *How do you deal with pushback?*

There are pros and cons to all, this is magnified in today’s society. Finding compromise is essential. Look at assets, how can you leverage and grow around your assets? Bringing young families to town is essential to maintaining the community. What are the growth goals? How can growth goals be matched to the expectations of the Town?

m. *What would you do to figure out the strengths and weaknesses of Great Barrington?*

Mr. Edwards always attends meetings of Town clubs – Rotary, Chamber of Commerce, Education Stakeholder groups, etc. He strives to understand people in all groups by meeting and speaking with them about their challenges. What are barriers vs. obstacles?

n. *What would you do to support the farm economy?*

There is more room to grow in the farm to table movement. Looking into the local schools’, restaurants, etc. locally sourced food to see if they are maximizing those potential relationships. Creating a regional approach to the farm to table movement can maximize the farmer’s success. Mr. Edwards is also friendly to crop diversification, and helping farmers understand the power of the internet, and how technology can be an asset to their livelihood.

o. *Selectboard Relations/Policy Development/Transparency in Government and Selectboard*

Mr. Edwards was key in making Whately a Green Community and the first collaborative solarized community in the state. Mr. Edwards pursued this, with the Town Administrator's assistance in facilitating the work. The relationship between the two was crucial.

Individual conversations are preferable to being "called out" in front of a group without a heads up, should disagreements arise. He prefers to be walked through a thought process, to understand and work together. He would work with the Chair, should an issue end up at the Selectboard table.

p. *How do you work with and support local libraries? Do you have a library card? What is the last book you've read? When is the last time you were in a library?*

Whately faced budget issues and looked to close the library. Mr. Edwards believes that libraries are key community centers. He worked with the stakeholder group to pass an override vote to save the library. He worked to help the Town see the benefits of the library for children, seniors, and parents. They can provide classes for seniors to learn technology and offer places to access technology, book readings, etc.

His wife is on the Board of Library Trustees, he does have a library card, and reads several books at the same time. He was last at a library around a month ago.

q. *Emergency Management and Procedures?*

Mr. Edwards was a founder of South County EMS, improving response time from 45 minutes to 7 minutes. He is the PR Person for Emergency Management. He met with the fire chief regarding response times, and believes Public Safety should be a regional approach. He has dealt with a microburst, a tanker truck spilling poisonous gas, and other public emergencies.

r. *Questions for Selectboard?*

i. What do each of you see as the biggest issue in Great Barrington?

1. S. Bannon-Strategic Planning
2. E. Abrahams-Housing Costs
3. D. Bailly-Long term sustainability
4. K. Burke-the next generation of Great Barrington-how do we support and move together.

III. Mark Pruhenski Interview

A. Q&A

- a. *Why did you apply for this position, and why do you believe you would be successful?*

Mr. Pruhenski's professional experiences show that he meets and exceeds the listed requirements – 14 years of experience in local government. 5 years as Town Administrator in the towns of Whately and Richmond. He is a current Chairman of the Berkshire Municipal Managers Association, a certified Public Procurement officer in the State of Massachusetts, and understands local government and the state. He is a lifelong resident of Great Barrington, and has worked for the past three Town Managers. He can offer and provide stability. His personal connection to Great Barrington and Housatonic makes him uniquely qualified. Long family history in Great Barrington. He raised his children here, and has served several roles in the town as Health Agent, Animal Control/Inspector, and in the fire department. He understands the challenges in the Town, and the benefits. He is at the height of his career – has enthusiasm, and a solid combination of education and experience.

How can you say no when appropriate, knowing a lot of the staff?

He is comfortable with separating his job from his personal life, using reasonable approaches.

- b. *What is your leadership style in regard to staff/community/selectboard?*

Mr. Pruhenski looks to create a real team. Communication between departments and boards is essential. He looks to maintain a respectful and professional work environment. Cross training and succession planning is important. He is not a micro-manager, department heads are specialists in their areas and need to be allowed to be just that. He likes collaborating with business owners, and strives to have an open door policy as much as possible.

- c. *Strengths and Weaknesses in Management Skills*

Weaknesses: He has drafted and managed five municipal budgets. He is still learning this process, and has been serving as the finance director in addition to other duties. He is still gaining confidence and learning in this area.

Mr. Pruhenski sees himself as a quiet, reserved person, has had to work on this as a community leader, being comfortable in the spot light.

- d. *Experience in Collective Bargaining*

Mr. Pruhenski is still learning in this area, has not had a lot of experience. He participates in union negotiations in Richmond. He is easy-going in these negotiations and helps bring town perspective to the table, and helps in keeping the conversations cool at the table.

- e. *Have you dealt with HR a lot?*

Yes, he has dealt with this quite a bit. Richmond has 83 Town Employees, as the School is owned and operated by the Town. There is frequent onboarding processes, personnel issues, etc.

- f. *Describe role in Financial Planning as well as management strategies for maintaining organizational stability.*

Mr. Pruhenski drafts and manages the budgets throughout the year without access to a Finance Director: Operating, Capital and Enterprise Funds. Maintains AA+ Bond rating in Richmond. Keeps reserves well funded, and OPED funded. Puts \$100,000 per year into OPED.

- g. *What large municipal projects have you managed, and what did you learn?*

In Richmond, he works on community outreach to combat misinformation regarding the solar panels on the school roof. He dealt with licensing, applications, etc. Now 89-100% of the School's electricity needs are met, saving the School approximately \$200,000 over 20 years. This contract required going before Town voters. A series of meetings were held, bringing in professionals to explain why this would be the right choice for the School.

- h. *Experience in Housing and Economic Development/Transportation/etc.*

Mr. Pruhenski serves as the Town Planner for permits, etc. He assisted in creating a brochure, website, etc. to brand the town and encourage people to move to Richmond. He spent seven years on the Development Review Team in Great Barrington as well.

As far as affordable housing, Mr. Pruhenski has worked with the Whately and Richmond Affordable Housing Committee. He would like to explore creative housing opportunities: using unused mills and buildings potential parcels that could be developed. A balance between short-term rental stock and residents seeking extra income is important. In Richmond, a bylaw was passed saying if the property is owner-occupied they are able to rent a room. If not owner-occupied, a special permit is required.

- i. *How would you support the local food economy?*

Farmers Markets and CSAs are vital. Zoning regulations to preserve agricultural lands are important as well. He seeks to help farmers accomplish goals to be successful.

- j. *Selectboard Relations/Policy Development/Transparency in Government and Selectboard*

There was no personnel policy in place in Richmond. He worked with the Selectboard for a year to draft an official bounded policy. It is helpful to work together to navigate complex matters. The policy aims to offer legal protection with a set policy.

Relationships with Board members are crucial. More is accomplished when you can work together.

A scenario where the Selectboard was moving in a direction that you did not agree with?

Zoning for marijuana establishments was a point of contention, so a moratorium was put into place. Mr. Pruhenski wanted more openness in the regulations, but the Board disagreed. Mr. Pruhenski recognizes that the Board was elected by the Town to set policy, so while conversations were had, he ultimately compromised with zoning regulations.

To improve transparency, Mr. Pruhenski steered an update to the Town website so that it is kept up to date with information, and strives to be user-friendly. They have an active facebook page for a social media presence, and use reverse 911 – CODE RED to communicate emergency situations. They also send out weekly newsletters, both electronically and via mail.

- k. *How do you work with and support local libraries? Do you have a library card? What is the last book you've read? When is the last time you were in a library?*

Mr. Pruhenski assisted in upgrading the town's IT structure with new computers and Voice over IP. Libraries are important community centers to host events. He visits Richmond's library every couple of weeks to check in. He does have a library card, attended a Historical Society Event in Great Barrington's Library. The last book he read was *Third Person Rural* by Noel Perron about rural life in Vermont.

- l. *Emergency Management and Procedures?*

Mr. Pruhenski spent several years on the South Berkshire Planning representing the Board of Health. Stormwater Management planning is essential with climate change approaching. He has experience in the Great Barrington Fire Department, and was proactive as the Health Agent in developing working documents for planning the future.

- m. *Use of Technology? Communication Tools? How can these tools be used?*

Mr. Pruhenski uses SoftWrite, social media, reverse 911. IT is very important, and he has worked to improve these structures in both Richmond and Whately. Change comes hard for many, and it is essential to present energy and enthusiasm to convince or sell the idea of updating the current technology, but it is often necessary.

- n. *How do you handle diversity in the community?*

The plastic bag ban was controversial during Mr. Pruhenski's time here in Great Barrington. He is able to see both sides, though considers himself to be more on the progressive side. He has a long history in Great Barrington and is able to connect with both newcomers and long-term residents.

How did you work with the plastic bag ban?

Mr. Pruhenski worked with Jennifer Tabakin part time in her office and held public outreach sessions, meetings with store owners and representatives on working together to prepare them for the ban. Conversations, open minds, and willingness to work together is crucial.

o. *Personal Spaces can be invaded in this position. How would you balance this?*

Mr. Pruhenski has been a public servant in Great Barrington before. He enjoys taking the time to listen to people-friends, family, community members, and actually feels disconnected in other towns, not being a resident of them. He enjoys taking time to get away to Vermont when he can to maintain work-life balance.

p. *Gentrification and Affordability-How would you address these issues?*

Mr. Pruhenski looks to be creative about using unused spaces for housing is an option. A balance on short-term rentals is essential. Cultural attractions and the vibrant summer life demands the short-term rental availability, but it must be managed.

q. *How would you address racial and economic inequities?*

Promote diversity in hiring practices. The sanctuary city designation was a huge step for the Town. This Trust Policy needs to be reviewed at least annually to be sure it is still serving the needs of the community. Working with community partners like BRIDGE and the WEB DuBois Committee is important. Having a consistent message from the Town Hall that we are open and inclusive is necessary.

r. *How would you address Climate Change, locally?*

Sourcing out renewable energy, and promoting zoning allowances to allow for solar/wind energy programs is important. He would work closely with sustainable and green communities and work toward utilizing LED lights, and weatherizing buildings. No capital was needed for the improvements he has spearheaded in Richmond. Competitive grants, and the Mass Department of Energy for Green Communities are resources as well.

s. *Questions for Selectboard?*

None.

IV. Adjournment: On a motion by E. Abrahams, and seconded by D. Bailly, the meeting adjourned at 8:28PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tabitha Brewer

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Recording Secretary