

Minutes of Selectmen's Work Session
July 18, 2019

Present: Mark Newman, Brian O'Rourke, George Riley

The meeting was convened at 6:00 pm. The purpose was to interview Michael Johnson, candidate for the position of Public Safety Officer. Mr. Johnson verbally reviewed his work history and training. When he became a full-time police officer in Monterey, he moved to Tyngham and lived there for 7 ½ years.

He was asked about the circumstances of his termination from the Monterey police force. He stated that he had no disciplinary record, but there were complaints about his stopping vehicles. The Monterey Board of Selectmen decided not to re-appoint him. He was also running for a seat on the Monterey Select Board, although the relative timing of this was unclear. He later filed a lawsuit against the Town of Monterey; that lawsuit is still ongoing.

About two years ago he began work as a part-time police officer in Sandisfield. He also helps with fire and ambulance calls. Brian asked him about his vision for the next ten years. Mr. Johnson wants to continue his service and training; he feels this new position could be a role model for the state of Massachusetts. He hopes to help with the public safety structure, and with the Police and Fire Departments. He would like to bring technology into inventory and preventive maintenance, and help get grants for equipment.

Brian stated that he now realizes that in some ways Mike Johnson has been filling the Public Safety Officer role for the past two years, without the title or recognition.

Mark asked whether the hours of work and on-call would pose any issue. Mr. Johnson stated they would not.

Brian has been told by some residents that Mr. Johnson has at times been over-zealous or aggressive in his dealings with citizens. Mr. Johnson responded that in a confrontation with a citizen, the police officer needs to be in control. He was trained to deal with situations by escalating, de-escalating and explaining.

It was pointed out as a concern that he was the only applicant for this position. Mr. Johnson remarked that this is a unique situation, with the intermingling of three roles.

Mr. Johnson was told that he would be hired, with a review of the position and of his performance in it, by January 15, 2020. In the meantime, as is customary with a probationary period, he can be dismissed at any time without cause. Mr. Johnson said that he understood this, and he was then welcomed by the Board into this position.

Meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

Mark Newman

Brian O'Rourke

George Riley