

Select Board's minutes of Executive Session August 3, 2021

Members Present: George Riley, Alex Bowman

Called to order at 8:38am

**1. To discuss the reputation, character, physical condition or mental health, rather than the professional competence, of an individual.**

Bethany Perry requested this meeting to discuss Jacki Bitso's plan to submit a resignation letter. Bethany expresses concern with this because she believes Jacki to be a great asset to the town.

George explains he spoke with Jacki about the reasons why she is considering resigning. One of them being a recent article in the Berkshire Eagle claiming the Town Manager may have left their position due to uncooperative employees. The article ended with a quote from George stating they would be looking for new employees. George explains this search for new employees did not mean replacing current employees, but rather filling the vacancies.

Jacki would like to add her letter states she would be retiring as of September 30, rather than resigning. Jacki is concerned about the reputations of the town in general and other staff members including Mary Kronholm and Margaret McClellan.

When the article first came out, Jacki suggested George make a statement explaining that the article was inaccurate and did not mean any staff member would lose their job. However, George forgot to do so at the following Monday meeting.

George would like to apologize to Jacki because George failed to conduct her performance review properly due to a lack of a job description. He was uncertain of the expectations for each of these jobs. It was decided that the Town Hall employees would get a performance review, but all would receive the same "Meets Expectations" bonus. One of the goals moving forward is to create job descriptions for all the positions.

For the performance reviews, employees were asked to fill out a questionnaire to rate themselves and their work ethic. Jacki rated herself "exceeds expectations" in almost every category, and while the Select Board agreed that was accurate, they already decided to give everyone the same bonus amount.

Jacki provided a job description for the Principal Assessor. This was one of her goals agreed upon as part of the performance review.

George agrees that Jacki was justified in feeling neglected. Explains that he is focused more on fixing problems, rather than applauding employees for doing well. George states he is grateful to have Jacki as an employee and apologizes for never actually saying it.

Bethany applauds Jacki for always being helpful and on top of all her work. She's frustrated with the Select Board for failing to conduct these performance reviews and give Jacki her deserved bonus rating. She believes that the Select Board needs to make more effort to show appreciation for their employees, especially Jacki.

Jacki recalls issues with the previous Select Board and their attempts to take advantage of employees, which included the firing of employees and asking other employees to work more hours with no pay increase.

Alex Bowman expresses condolences for not showing enough appreciation for the employees. He wants Jacki to stay and hopes the board can make Jacki feel more confident that they will try harder to be more fair.

George believes the town hall should conduct monthly staff meetings because it's important that the employees have time and space to share what they're doing and receive feedback or assistance. Alex agrees and hopes to schedule one by the end of the month.

George also mentions a Christmas party, which was unable to occur due to COVID last year. Jacki mentions a "gift fund," and suggests asking Margaret how Tolland conducts these things. George explains the town cannot legally use funds to benefit an individual, these funds will have to be collected privately.

Alex questions about "fear of asking for a raise." Jacki and Bethany state there is a fear and recall the struggles of getting money for a necessary computer in previous years.

George asks if giving Jacki a raise would fix the situation. Jacki has been an Assessor for around 30 years, and currently makes \$31.37/hr. George proposes that Jacki should receive a 10% raise in her hourly rate. George commends Jacki for her flawless work, her attentiveness to those who ask for help, and her problem solving skills.

Alex agrees with the raise for Jacki, but asks if there's anything else they can do to prevent her leaving. The proposed 10% raise would be about a \$3/hr raise and Jacki states she would like a higher raise. Bethany states that a \$10/hr raise would be more reasonable. Bethany explains it would be more expensive to hire temporary people to take over for Jacki, should she retire.

George asks if a raise from \$31 to \$35 and a commitment to create better working conditions would convince Jacki to stay at her position. Jacki asks what the high end of her pay is for surrounding towns. George states between \$31-\$37/hr. Jacki asks if those numbers take into consideration whether those people are certified or not. George is unsure.

Alex and George state a town meeting will need to occur in order to go over a 10% raise, for fear of town criticism otherwise. Bethany asks for a plan for the future. George explains performance reviews will be done in March or April and then employees can receive bonus in May before the end of the fiscal year. This would become an annual occurrence.

The Select Board can single-handedly raise Jacki's pay to \$35/hr, but continue to do research for further raising her pay and go from there.

The Select Board should come to a final decision moving forward by Thursday. A town meeting will be necessary to go over \$35/hr for a raise and the Select Board and Jacki will need to justify before the town why she should receive this raise.

Meeting adjourned at 9:55am

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George Riley

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Alex Bowman