

MINUTES

Brandon Planning Commission

June 2, 2014

Present: Anne Bransfield, Jeff Guevin, Marty Feldman, Tracy Wyman

Anne Bransfield called the meeting to order at 6:02 pm. She promptly moved, without opposition, to enter into executive session for the purpose of interviewing respondents to the Municipal Planning Grant RFP. See 1 V.S.A. § 313(1).

The Commission exited executive session at 7:06 pm. Present were Maria Ammantuna, Select Board Chair, and Robin Bennett, Town Manager.

Maria Ammantuna opened the discussion, querying how the Planning Commission views the process of nominating and hiring a Zoning Administrator. Jeff Guevin responded that because the statute gives the Planning Commission nominating power, we believe that necessarily implies the power to advertise the position and drive the process of selecting candidates. Anne Bransfield mentioned concerns over FEMA grants and other pressing issues.

Maria Ammantuna explained that the Select Board understands there's no room for delay, but that Tina Wiles had been assigned many duties on an ad hoc basis that were outside of her responsibilities as Zoning Administrator. The Select Board is currently looking at all vacancies in the Town staff and is considering the possibility of a combination position of ZA and other responsibilities. This would have the advantage of having a set of well-defined responsibilities at the outset, without adding on more from time to time. She said that that would necessarily change the way the advertisement read.

Maria Ammantuna mentioned that we need to clean up the role of the ZA insofar as to whom he or she reports. Jeff Guevin stated that he thought the Planning Commission was in agreement that the ZA reports to the Town Manager as the Select Board's representative, not to the Planning Commission.

Building trust was something everyone felt was important – and that this process could be a means for building that trust. Maria Ammantuna felt that the Planning Commission's credibility had been spoiled by its relationship with Tina Wiles. Anne Bransfield mentioned that Tina Wiles was the best ZA she has had the pleasure to work with in Town.

The budget line-item for the position was discussed, as the amount of that line-item is not yet known. The Select Board is meeting next week in the hopes of resolving whether and how to combine positions. Robin Bennett emphasized that the process should be a community effort engendering buy-in from different groups in Town. She expressed concern that there could be no worse outcome than if someone – a good

candidate – were nominated by the Planning Commission but not approved by the Select Board.

Marty Feldman agreed that we should not alienate people, and that we desire community and group involvement.

Maria Ammantuna questioned the pay is commensurate with experience, worrying that that locks us into someone with little experience or dynamism. She then asked about the usual town hiring process. Robin Bennett said that applicants (applications?) should come to the town office, where their resume could be kept on file for the required number of years, and where it would be kept confidential. She mentioned that she has used a panel process in the past, including for the ZA position, and that they have always been successful because they involve a cross-section of interested groups: business, the DRB, etc.

Maria Ammantuna asked who was on the interview team. The Planning Commission unanimously responded that it was the Planning Commission.

Tracy Wyman said he did not have a problem with bringing others into the process, especially since the Select Board ultimately has to approve the nomination.

Maria Ammantuna asked about the last time there had been a vacancy – had there been a panel? Anne Bransfield responded that there had been a panel and that the process took forever – several months – and was ineffective and wrought with a lack of communication. She noted particularly that the Planning Commission was unable to get the information it needed to make the nomination.

Maria Ammantuna responded that the Select Board had no desire for this process to drag on – that this is an important position that we can fast-track, and that it's critical to overall town health that we do so. She feels the panel is imperative because of the angst of the people. Robin Bennett noted that the opportunity to combine positions should not be missed.

Maria Ammantuna said that we need to offer Town employees an opportunity to apply. Jeff Guevin responded that he didn't think the prior advertisement precluded us from further refining the position description, but that it was important to start garnering interest. Robin Bennett disagreed.

Maria Ammantuna said she would like to have a conversation with the Planning Commission and others about what went well with the prior ZA, what did not go so well, and what we'd like to see in a future ZA. Tracy Wyman agreed in part but said we need to put the past behind us, too.

Maria Ammantuna committed to pushing for a decision on the combination ZA - ? role and an answer to the question of how much money would be allocated for the position. She feels we need to attract a "hotshot" with a 21st-century mindset. Tracy Wyman was

concerned that we might not attract the “hotshot” candidates with small hours and wages.

Marty Feldman asked for clarification of the next steps. Maria Ammantuna said that Robin Bennett could work on a draft job description that the panel would review and approve. Ms. Bennett would then advertise the position, with a time limit for applications, and if a sufficient pool were not had by the limit, the position would be advertised again. Maria Ammantuna emphasized the importance of behavioral questions during the interview process. Marty Feldman lightened the mood with a reference to an NPR story on that subject.

It was decided that the timeframe would be that by mid-week next week (the week of June 9), a panel could be established, with advertising to follow the week of June 16. The same channels as previously used will be employed, as well as internal and newspaper notice, and possibly others.

A general discussion ensued about the upcoming Town Plan process and further cooperation in making it a living document that guides policy.

Maria Ammantuna and Robin Bennett exited, and the Planning Commission recommenced its executive session at 7:54 for an interview.

The Planning Commission exited executive session at 8:54. Anne Bransfield moved, Jeff Guevin seconded, and it was unanimously voted to offer Kristin Kingsbury Smith a contract for services paid for by the state Municipal Planning Grant.

ADJOURNED at 8:55 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Jeff Guevin,
Vice Chair