



**BOARD OF SELECTMEN MINUTES  
SPECIAL MEETING  
Monday, July 26, 2021**

Members Present: Shana M. Shufelt, Chair  
Steven J. Ouellette, Vice Chair  
Richard W. Brewer, Clerk  
Ann E. Boxler (5:10 p.m.)  
Brian Valcourt

Also Present: Timothy King, Town Administrator

**1. Call to order & Pledge of Allegiance**

The Chair called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. with above members present, and announced that the meeting was being recorded.

**2. Bid Award for \$10,000,000 BAN for Westport Grade 5-12 School**

The board met with Treasurer/Collector Susan Brayton to discuss the proposed sale of General Obligation Bond Anticipation notes for the final \$10 million needed for the new school construction project. Ms. Brayton indicated this would be the final note needed for the school project until the final MSBA reimbursement is paid out; the note includes funds for landscaping and construction of athletic playing fields. She advised the Board that the recommended sale is at a good rate, and only \$9.945 million is needed rather than the \$10 million earlier anticipated.

**MOTION** by Mr. Brewer to approve the sale of \$9,945,000 1.00% General Obligation Bond Anticipation Notes (the "Notes") of the Town dated August 3, 2021, and payable August 3, 2022, to Piper Sandler & Co. at par and accrued interest, if any, plus a premium of \$85,725.90.

Further Voted: that in connection with the marketing and sale of the Notes, the preparation and distribution of a Notice of Sale and Preliminary Official Statement dated July 13, 2021, and a final Official Statement dated July 20, 2021, each in such form as may be approved by the Town Treasurer, be and hereby are ratified, confirmed, approved and adopted.

Further Voted: that the Town Treasurer and the Board of Selectmen be, and hereby are, authorized to execute and deliver a significant events disclosure undertaking in compliance with SEC Rule 15c2-12 in such form as may be approved by bond counsel to the Town, which undertaking shall be incorporated by reference in the Notes for the benefit of the holders of the Notes from time to time.

Further Voted: that we authorize and direct the Town Treasurer to establish post issuance federal tax compliance procedures and continuing disclosure procedures in such forms as the Town Treasurer and bond counsel deem sufficient, or if such procedures are currently in place, to review and update said procedures, in order to monitor and maintain the tax-exempt status of the Notes and to comply with relevant securities laws.

Further Voted: that any certificates or documents relating to the Notes (collectively, the "Documents"), may be executed in several counterparts, each of which shall be regarded as an original and all of which shall constitute one and the same document; delivery of an executed counterpart of a signature page to a Document by electronic mail in a ".pdf" file or by other electronic transmission shall be as effective as delivery of a manually executed counterpart signature page to such Document; and electronic signatures

on any of the Documents shall be deemed original signatures for the purposes of the Documents and all matters relating thereto, having the same legal effect as original signatures.

Further Voted: that each member of the Board of Selectmen, the Town Clerk and the Town Treasurer be and hereby are, authorized to take any and all such actions, and execute and deliver such certificates, receipts or other documents as may be determined by them, or any of them, to be necessary or convenient to carry into effect the provisions of the foregoing votes.

Seconded by Mr. Valcourt. The motion passed on a 4-0 vote, with Ms. Boxler not present at this time.

### 3. Authorization to borrow \$500,000 for Westport Septic Replacement Program.

Ms. Brayton indicated this is the borrowing authorized by Article 29 of the Annual Town Meeting.

**MOTION** by Mr. Valcourt to authorize the Treasurer to borrow \$500,000 for the Westport Septic Replacement Loan Program. Seconded by Mr. Ouellette. The vote was 4-0 in favor.

### 4. Town Administrator Interviews

Mr. King was excused from further attendance at the meeting. Bernie Lynch (BL), CEO of search consultants Community Paradigm Associates, reviewed the application and screening process, and the screening committee's selection of six semi-finalists from 27 applicants for interviews. The process resulted in the committee's recommendation of three finalists for interviews with the Select Board. He indicated that finalist Sonia Alves-Viveiros had withdrawn her name from consideration, leaving James Hartnett and Gregory Barnes as the two candidates to be interviewed. He said he would facilitate the interviews by posing the same general questions to each candidate, giving Board members the opportunity to follow up with individual questions. Ms. Shufelt said she had no intention of calling for a hiring decision at this meeting, and the board could discuss next steps in the hiring decision after the interviews.

### **5:15 PM - James Hartnett**

Mr. Lynch asked for a career overview, a motive for applying here, and Mr. Hartnett's expectations for the job. The candidate noted he is a South Coast native, born in Fall River, and a longtime Westport resident who has raised three children here; he and his wife have been active in youth athletics and the public schools. He has a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering and a master's degree in business administration. His career path included Assistant Planner in Fall River; Town Planner in Swansea; and Director of Planning in Fall River before becoming Town Planner in Westport, for a total of 27 years in public service. Mr. Hartnett noted he has considerable administrative and project management experience, as the Planning Dept. in Fall River included licensing, building inspection services, conservation, affordable housing, engineering, and the highway repair and sewer divisions under his supervision. In Westport, in addition to planning department supervision, he has helped coordinate the MS4 permitting process; the targeted water resource management plan; and wrote and managed the Seaport Economic Development grant for improvements to the Head Landing. As for motive, Mr. Hartnett said he has a good understanding of the town's municipal operations, and what needs to be done; he feels professionally qualified to do the job, and eager to take on the challenge of the position.

Asked to describe his management style and ability to create an effective municipal team, Mr. Hartnett said he is a quiet, low-key person who is able to be tough when required; in general, he maintains an open door policy, is a good listener, and usually able to build consensus among people of differing opinions. He believes he can work effectively with the dedicated staff of town employees who traditionally perform their jobs well with minimal resources. Mr. Lynch followed up with questions about conflict resolution, and asked for examples of collaboration with others. Mr. Hartnett said his career has included many



examples of resolving conflicts with contractors, vendors, and consultants as a project manager and planner. In person meetings and open dialogue are the best approach in such situations, he suggested. He advocates promoting good collaboration by getting all parties involved early, and letting them know their opinions are being heard and considered.

Asked about budget preparation experience, and management of limited resources, Mr. Hartnett said his 25-plus years of municipal employment in various capacities have all involved budget planning and development, especially in Fall River, where he managed a department with five separate divisions. He feels Westport has done a good job on budget planning and financial management, but expressed concerns about the practice of using 100 percent of revenues each year for operations, etc.; to maintain current services with limited resources in the future, some difficult decisions on spending priorities have to be made, he suggested. Mr. Lynch followed up with questions on how he would start the budget planning process; Mr. Hartnett said his first step would be to review the past four or five years of data on revenues and expenditures, and set some basic priorities for the next fiscal year.

On the topic of financial policies and the use of Free Cash, Mr. Hartnett said the restrained use of Free Cash, and earmarking it for capital needs, should remain the official policy of the town; he does not favor using it for recurring operating expenses, or balancing budgets. He felt it important to update financial policy often, and distribute the information to department heads to help guide their budget planning; quarterly finance meetings with department heads to review expenditures was suggested by the candidate. Mr. Lynch asked for examples of finding alternative revenue sources, or creative financial thinking. Mr. Hartnett noted that Fall River tried a storm water connection fee that helped the city budget substantially; there are few opportunities for alternative revenues in small communities like Westport. He noted the town is more likely to find low-cost options for potentially expensive tasks, such as the MS4 permit process, where he and other town employees contributed time and effort rather than using outside consultants; the result was perhaps \$40,000 in direct costs for a project other communities spend up to \$300-\$400,000 to complete, he noted.

Asked for the keys to good project management, Mr. Hartnett said his considerable experience showed the importance of getting early public buy-in on the project, a focus on producing good bid specs, and the effective use of qualified consultants. A follow-up question on building public support prompted the example of his leadership of the Fall River BioReserve creation project, where support had to be obtained from community groups, environmental organizations, and state agencies to protect the 14,000-acre reserve. When the city proposed a bio-tech park, with its own \$30 million highway interchange, a similar public-private-government coalition had to be organized to make the project a reality. Asked about municipal water and sewer service, Mr. Hartnett suggested it is one key reason why Westport has a small commercial sector; the possibility of extending municipal lines from Fall River is a relatively inexpensive way of providing limited services to the primary commercial zones along Route 6, and the science and technology district, where over 300 acres could be used for new business and industry. He said municipal water and sewer could bring new business there, or fuel an upgrade of existing businesses in existing commercial zones.

Asked about economic development experience, Mr. Hartnett indicated he recently completed a \$380,000 economic development grant application for Route 6 improvement designs and plans; administered a storefront improvement grant program in Fall River; and coordinated and managed the Seaport Economic Development grant for the Head Landing project. He believes some federal economic stimulus funds or



infrastructure aid bills will be able to be used to help finance further efforts in Westport. He noted the need to “balance” encouragement of economic growth to boost the tax base with the expressed public desire to preserve the town’s rural character. PILOTs from solar farms and potential cannabis taxes and fees are bringing in some new revenue, but there are not many other opportunities to increase revenues and reduce the current burden on the residential taxpayers, he suggested. With a high percentage of elderly residents, the town needs more alternatives to single family homes, he noted; he supports continued use of CPA funding for land conservation, affordable housing initiatives, and historic preservation efforts.

On questions about personnel management experience, hiring decisions, and collective bargaining negotiations, Mr. Hartnett noted he supervised 25 employees in Fall River; set clear expectations based on budgeting and staff levels; and maintained good dialogue with department heads and workers. Whether hiring staff or consultants, he looks for a good attitude, and commitment to high performance, he said. His collective bargaining experience with unions is limited, but he is a veteran negotiator of contracts with engineers, consultants, etc. Asked about open government, he said full transparency is a longstanding policy at the Planning Department, where every effort is made to provide information about plans to the public, and collect their input on projects, policy, or zoning proposals. He makes every effort to have information scanned and publicly posted or easily provided to the public.

Asked what relationship he expects with the Board, Mr. Hartnett said he endorses the philosophy that “the Board makes the policy, and it’s the Town Administrator’s job to carry out that policy.” He noted he has worked with many boards over the years, and has worked well with all of them. He sees the position as being one where the TA helps the Board make good decisions, and avoid bad decisions, calling in experts if needed.

The Chair asked for goals and priorities for the first 60 to 90 days, noting the absence of two staff members in the Selectmen’s Office. Mr. Hartnett said it would be a challenge to take over with so much institutional knowledge absent, and said it would take time to rebuild the staff and restore efficient operations, but it would be a priority. Mr. Brewer asked about first year goals, and was told priorities would be to rebuild office staff and restore operations; help bring about a decision about the current high school; develop plans for the campground property; support development of public infrastructure projects; and plan for efficient use of economic stimulus and recovery aid. In closing, Mr. Hartnett said he was happy with his current position, but feels he would be a good fit for the TA post. It will be a challenge to succeed in the position, but he has accepted similar challenges in the past and has always succeeded, he said.

#### **6:15 PM - Gregory Barnes**

Mr. Lynch introduced Mr. Barnes to Board members, and asked about his interest in the position. Mr. Barnes said his 26 years of government experience made him an ideal candidate, and detailed his work history, starting with his student internship as Solid Waste Coordinator in Westport. He served as Assistant Town Administrator in North Attleboro; three years as Town Administrator in Swansea; six years as Town Administrator in Townsend; and 11 years as Director of Budget & Finance and/or Treasurer in Dartmouth. Personal skills include being a good communicator; team-oriented; analytical; and a good project manager; as a Westport native, he knows the town well. He cited his master’s degree in public administration, certification as a municipal Treasurer; graduation from Leadership SouthCoast program; and special training in procurement practices, personnel matters, and municipal finance. His interest in the job includes a desire to contribute to his hometown, where he owns property and has family relations.



Asked about his management style, Mr. Barnes said he likes to be a “team leader” who encourages consensus building, using the example of his role in resolving Swansea’s fiscal crisis when he first arrived there. Budget cuts, layoffs, special legislation authorizing deficit bonding, and securing approvals from Town Meeting for those initiatives were all part of his first year on the job. In Dartmouth, he noted his great relationship with school department administrators, which helps keep the town in a healthy financial position. He was proud of Dartmouth’s AAA financial rating and the policy of keeping seven percent of the operating budget in reserve; cited his roles in building the town’s annual operating budget and capital plans, as well as financial policies and procedures. In response to Mr. Brewer’s questions, he noted the policy of first using Free Cash to fund stabilization accounts, then dedicating available funds to capital needs. If Free Cash is not available, capital projects are deferred; debt is kept to a minimum so borrowing can be used for important capital needs if necessary. Mr. Barnes noted a priority is capital spending to improve government efficiency, reduce energy and operating costs; employing technology to improve productivity; and maintaining public facilities to prevent unexpected emergency expenditures.

Asked for examples of project management experience, Mr. Barnes indicated he was part of Dartmouth teams managing the replacement of Town Hall roof; construction of new police station, maritime visitor center and library; MIS and telephone system upgrades; and in Townsend, planning and procurement manager of a \$25 million library and senior center built with donated funds. He described himself as “persistent and determined” to accomplish assigned tasks, building a team and working hard to accomplish the mission at hand. On the topic of economic development, Mr. Barnes noted the town’s commitment to balance the preservation of open space and a rural character with needed economic growth; he recommends taking steps to build the commercial/industrial tax base, currently only eight percent of tax revenues, compared to Dartmouth’s 15 to 20 percent of total tax base. He suggested a focus on infrastructure improvements to promote good development, noting Westport is the only Buzzards Bay community without substantial municipal water and sewer systems. If the Board wants to encourage economic development, he would pursue supporting policies and planning, using state grant funds, Clean Water Trust Fund monies, TIFs, and capital spending to make that happen; also recommending streamlining permitting processes, and promoting development of an industrial park.

Regarding questions on personnel management and collective bargaining negotiations, Mr. Barnes indicated he served as the chief personnel officer and the chief bargaining agent in both Townsend and Swansea, and currently handles personnel management and bargaining duties for the five departments he oversees in Dartmouth. He cited considerable experience handling employee discipline issues and Human Resources matters, and noted that he negotiated significant changes in health insurance coverage with Dartmouth employees while serving as interim co-Town Administrator there. He now evaluates four department heads annually.

On the issue of transparency in government, Mr. Barnes indicated he has always advocated getting as much information as possible to the public, using the town web site and other available media. He also uses public forums and community surveys to collect input from residents and other town officials on matters of importance. On his past relationships with Select Boards, and his expected relationship with this Board if hired, he said he had good relationships with the Boards in Townsend and Swansea, citing his use of members of Select Boards in both towns as references on his application for this position. He indicated both towns had only one or two administrative aides working in the Select Board office, and he doesn’t mind being in a position where you have to handle multiple tasks because of the lack of support staff; the multi-tasking makes the job more interesting, he suggested. The Chair asked for 60-90 day

priorities if hired; Mr. Barnes noted his experience gives him the ability and knowledge of the town would help him make “a quick start” in this position, as he has a good understanding of the key issues Westport is dealing with. His first priority would be to review financial policies and operations and recommend changes if needed; secondly, he expressed concern about the use of Free Cash for operating expenses, noting this is not good policy; thirdly, he said he would cultivate a closer relationship with the Superintendent of Schools and school administration. Mr. Barnes said he knows about the staffing shortage in the Selectmen’s Office, and would personally do whatever was needed to restore operational efficiency there. Noting he has temporarily served as an interim Highway Department director, Town Clerk, and Waste Department manager over the years, he sees the lack of support staff as a challenge to be overcome, and an opportunity to be a hands-on supervisor handling a diverse workload on a daily basis.

In closing, Mr. Barnes expressed a willingness to work long hours and do whatever tasks needed to get the job done. He cited the depth of his municipal government experience, and suggested it would be a privilege to take on such an important job in his hometown. He indicated he has always hoped he would have an opportunity to work in his hometown again.

#### 5. Discuss next steps in Town Administrator Hire Process

Mr. Lynch detailed the Board’s options for next steps, indicating the Board should take time to review the applications and interview notes before deciding whether to follow-up with one-on-one meetings, seek more information, or schedule meetings between candidates and key department heads. The Chair suggested the Board should be ready to make a hiring decision at its Aug. 2 meeting; she did not want to rush to a decision because the post is such a critical job in town government. Mr. Ouellette was surprised neither candidate asked to meet with department heads or the Finance Committee; Mr. Valcourt said slow, careful consideration should be undertaken by the Board because both finalists were strong, qualified candidates. There was consensus that further discussion would wait until the next meeting; Mr. Lynch explained that once a decision is made, a Board representative should be appointed to negotiate a proposed contract with the assistance of town counsel.

#### 6. Other Business

Under the 48-hour emergency rule, the Chair noted the resignation of Town Hall custodian Wayne Collins, with two weeks’ notice given. Mr. King recommended acceptance of the resignation and immediate posting of the position to expedite the hiring of a replacement.

**MOTION** by Mr. Ouellette to accept the resignation. Seconded by Mr. Valcourt. The vote was 4-0 in favor.

**MOTION** by Mr. Valcourt to post the position immediately. Seconded by Mr. Ouellette. The vote was 4-0 in favor.

#### 7. Adjournment

**MOTION** by Mr. Ouellette at 7:45 p.m. to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Mr. Valcourt. The vote was 5-0 in favor.

Respectfully submitted, Robert Barboza, Recording Clerk

APPROVED: \_\_\_\_\_  
Richard Brewer, Clerk, Select Board Member