

BOARD OF SELECTPEOPLE - TOWN OF MACHIAS

SEPTEMBER 28, 2020

A meeting of the Machias Board of Selectpeople was called to order at the Machias Tele-business Center and via the Zoom platform at 6:09 PM by Chairman Josh Rolfe. In attendance were Board members Paula Johnson-Rolfe, James Whalen, James Jackson, and Leslie Haynes; Secretary Cathy Lord; Town Clerk Sandra Clifton; Finance Director Meghan Dennison; Public Works Director Mike Schoppee; Mary Angarola, Sandi Malagara, Brian Swartz, Chris Gardner, Bill Kitchen, Wayne Wood, Christine-Whitman Day, Joan Carter, Denny Farley, Barbara Koch, Brandon Merrill, Sarah Craighead Dedmond.

1. TOWN MANAGER DUTIES DESIGNATION

Mr. Rolfe noted that Town Manager Christina Therrien had appointed Public Works Director Michael Schoppee as an interim town manager in her absence. He noted that the Board had assigned duties to other employees during the absence of the town manager and had checked with the town's counsel who advised the Board that this was appropriate. Mr. Rolfe noted that state law outlines that the Board has to confirm the Town Manager's appointment of Mr. Schoppee to carry out the duties and responsibilities of the town manager during her absence.

On a motion by Leslie Haynes, seconded by James Whalen, the Board
DISCUSSED THIS MOTION:

To confirm the Town Manager's appointment of Michael Schoppee as interim town manager.

Mr. Whalen asked how long this appointment would last? Ms. Dennison commented that the appointment would last until Ms. Therrien is able to resume her duties as town manager. Mr. Rolfe explained that the Board does not know how long the Town Manager's absence will be but that the Board has no information to indicate that this will be an extended leave. Ms. Johnson-Rolfe asked Ms. Dennison about the Public Work Director's responsibilities and she noted how difficult it would be for Mr. Schoppee to perform the responsibilities for both positions.

Mr. Schoppee told the Board that as the head of the Public Works Department he has many duties and responsibilities to perform; he added that Public Works is preparing for winter and that he is concerned about the additional responsibilities he would incur as an interim town manager. Mr. Schoppee noted that he also has other responsibilities in Jonesboro where he lives that he need his attention. Mr. Jackson asked if there was another person to rely on when the Public Works Director is absent and Mr. Schoppee said there was another person he turns to for assistance. Mr. Jackson noted that Mr. Schoppee would be needed to concentrate on major projects of the town manager such as that of the recreation area. Mr. Schoppee noted that he has already taken over much of that project in the absence of the town manager. Mr. Jackson suggested that the Public Work Director's duties should be delegated to other employees. Ms. Johnson-Rolfe noted that there are questions on responsibilities and compensation of an interim town manager. Mr. Schoppee noted that it is so very important that the town's governing board unite as "one working force".

Mr. Rolfe noted that there is still the question as to if Mr. Schoppee is willing to accept the duties and responsibilities of an interim town manager. Mr. Schoppee pointed out that the position entails many different aspects and that he is confident that personnel in the Machias Town Office would be of valuable assistance. Mr. Schoppee said that he has thought about this at great length; he noted that he does not want to get overwhelmed and accused of not "doing the job properly". He noted that at this time he sees his own limitations and "a hornet's nest" and at this time he does not want to step into these responsibilities since he has a "pretty good load right now".

Mr. Rolfe thanked Mr. Schoppee for his honesty and the consideration he has given to taking on the additional responsibilities of an interim town manager. Ms. Johnson-Rolfe noted that the Board does need to know if the department heads are doing okay during the absence of the town manager. Based on Mr. Schoppee's comments, Mr. Haynes withdrew his motion and Mr. Whalen withdrew his second to the motion.

2. FACEBOOK POST BY MR. WHALEN

Mr. Rolfe noted that the Board is not trying to limit free speech and he noted that members of the Board do have rights to express their opinions. He also noted that members of the Board do have the right to defend their actions. Mr. Rolfe said that in his opinion Mr. Whalen's facebook post was inappropriate, insensitive, inflammatory, and accusatory and that a person should really consider what affect this kind of posting has. Mr. Rolfe said that it was his opinion that the post was in very poor taste and inconsiderate to the fire victims. He also noted that one member of the Board does not speak for the entire membership of the Board.

A concern voiced by an attendee was over the running of the driver/dispatcher department. Mr. Rolfe explained that there is one driver/dispatcher working for the Town who takes the fire truck to the fire scene. He noted that dispatch is being provided by the Washington County Regional Communication Center. Mr. Schoppee illustrated what occurs when the WCRCC dispatches for a fire call in Jonesboro and he noted that there is no lapse in response time. He added that minutes can seem like hours in these types of situations. Mr. Rolfe noted that as an administrator at the WCRCC he does know procedures followed by the dispatching center and he outlined the operations of the regional communications center and the procedures followed during a 911 emergency call. Mr. Schoppee described the operations when fire departments are dispatched to fires along with calls issued to mutual aid fire departments. He added that all departments help each other. Mr. Schoppee commented that the Board has to unite and work together for the Town.

Mr. Brandon Merrill, Machias driver/dispatcher, explained that he was the first to respond during the recent fire and there was a fifteen minute response time to this fire. Mr. Farley commented that "the fire was not the town's fault and it was not the fire department's fault". Mr. Jackson said that there are lot of unknowns and variables with a fire and "it is beyond time to do something" since it is not known how the fire started, how long the fire had been burning, and other variables.

Mr. Rolfe said that the Board is dealing with many concerns such as the assignment of town manager duties, the grievance of an employee, and filling the position of a part-time driver dispatcher. Ms. Clifton advised the members of the Board that town employees "do what needs to be done" and continue to perform their jobs. Several members of the Board said that they appreciate these efforts. Ms. Johnson-Rolfe added that the Board will compensate employees if they need to put in additional hours.

On a motion by Paula Johnson-Rolfe, seconded by Leslie Haynes, the Board voted to adjourn the meeting at 7:15 PM.