



TOWN OF NORTON  
SELECT BOARD  
MUNICIPAL CENTER  
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NORTON, MA 02766

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Select Board  
Meeting Minutes  
EXECUTIVE SESSION  
June 10, 2021

**CALL TO ORDER**

The June 10, 2021 Executive Session of the Select Board was called to order by Mr. Jack Conway, at 9:58 P.M., held remotely (Web: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6389291060>; Phone: +1 646-558-8656; Meeting ID: 638 929 1060).

**ROLL CALL:** Mr. Jack Conway, Mr. Michael Toole, Ms. Megan Artz and Ms. Christine Deveau were present. Mr. Michael Yunits, Town Manager, was also present.

1. To conduct negotiations with non-union personnel, i.e. Town Manager pursuant to G.L. c. 30A, Section 21(a)(2).

Mr. Conway started by saying the Select Board is following up from the last meeting with the Town Manager. He would like to have an open dialogue and give the Town Manager a chance to craft the message.

Mr. Yunits began by asking why the renewal is being questioned. He stated that it irks him when people use the term "management style." He has been managing since he was 26 years old. There has been little turnover in Town Hall. He has appointed almost all employees except the Chief of Police, Highway Director, and Conservation Commissioner. Mr. Yunits continued by stating that he cannot talk about employees who are not being treated right outside of open session. He did state that some employees might not be getting raises, more benefits, etc. because they are not doing their job properly with multiple errors. He has helped with adding new directors to certain departments, increased cash flow, increased stabilization, and increased new growth over the past few years. Mr. Yunits shared a document with graphs and data supporting the above claims. He was able to achieve all this through a conservative budget, cost savings, and economic development. The solar panels have saved the Town money along with converting street lights to LED, and health insurance savings. Because of the economic development, he was able to get a full time planning director to work with the Chamber of Commerce. He helped with the Blue Star Business Park for development and is working with Paul on the Master Plan. Mr. Yunits is also working on bylaw provisions and online permitting for the Town, which came in handy this year. He worked with advertising on billboards and the Route 123 sidewalk project. The Town's bond rating changed from AA rating to AA+. Mr. Yunits expressed that he needs to get his points across and believes that the Select Board must have a good reason to not renew for someone who has done so much for the town and brought in a great group of employees. He believes that it should be fun coming into a job and thinks that he has brought that to the Town.

Mr. Conway invited the rest of the Board to add their input. He started by stating that he never disagreed with the technical ability that the Town Manager has brought to the Town. He believes the Town Manager is incredibly smart, knows the system, knows the players, and knows how to get things done. For the management style, it's not about the money side, but the about the style in which folks in the Town Hall are treated. Mr. Conway would like to push for a Human Resources department in order to get someone outside the Town Hall to address behaviors that cannot be safely addressed now. He said that it is not necessarily the Town Manager that is causing these problems, but could also be the staff that he brought in. Part of the challenge is the contract for the Town Manager having a one year notification period. He would like to have a discussion about what the Board could have done regarding goal setting and expectations for the Town Manager. The contract only gives two options, but would like to find a middle ground.

Mr. Toole added that the Town Manager has left his fingerprint on the Town. He is concerned, however, about employee complaints and the pattern of complaints. He also noticed that certain complaints after brought up seem to disappear with no resolution. He has had multiple individuals search him out for help with these issues as well as going to other members, past and present, about what to do. Mr. Toole continued to state that the Town Manager is operationally solid, but his managerial style is the problem, including not setting goals for himself or employees. He said it is very hard to explain why he is leaning in one direction or another, but if he has to choose why he is leaning one way, he is doing so because of the risk for the Town.

Mr. Yunits addressed the fact that if an employee comes to the Select Board for help, but never comes to the Town Manager about the issue, how does he know it is an issue?

Mr. Toole responded that individuals have withdrawn issues because they do not want to confront the Town Manager. He stated that they have no safe place in Town Hall and even if the Board was to renew the contract, he doesn't know how to fix that issue.

Mr. Yunits reiterated that if someone has an issue, how is he supposed to respond to it if he doesn't know about it?

Mr. Toole asked Mr. Conway if he has been in a similar situation with any employee who sought out assistance from him with an issue about the Town Manager.

Mr. Conway responded that employees are concerned about retaliation from the Town Manager or someone else. He understands that it is really hard to know if this is a valid claim or just their perception of the situation. This speaks to the culture of Town Hall and believes that Human Resources would be the mediation.

Mr. Toole stated that he has been claiming the drum about Human Resources for a while and believes that the Town will end up in litigation over an issue without one. He felt that he owed the Town Manger this information based on their professional working relationship.

Mr. Conway also stated that communication is one of the problems with the Town Manager's managerial style. He feels that the office is a black hole sometimes, where some things get solved immediately and other items need to be actively followed up on, including resident issues directly from the residents, which led to some residents giving up on an issue due to lack of communication.

Ms. Artz said from the beginning she is abstaining from making a decision because she is new. She has not had a meeting at Town Hall to discuss her role and has no true value of evaluating due to length of tenure. She is listening to the other members, but does not feel comfortable about adding to the conversation.

Ms. Deveau also agreed that she is listening to other members about issues they know about. She continued that she would like to meet formally with the Town Manager and be introduced to different department heads. She also encouraged Ms. Artz to do the same.

Mr. Conway said that after some soul searching, he has an appetite for adding a three month extension to his contract, move the notification for nonrenewal date to nine months out. This would allow the Board to work with the Town Manager on active management style and goal setting, allow more time for Ms. Artz and Ms. Deveau to make more of an opinion, and allow for the Board and Town Manager to work better together. This would also allow for the current board to make an informed decision rather than any new board members, if elected, to make an under informed one.

Mr. Toole reiterated that the Board would propose to have an agreement outside the Town Manager's current contract to extend nine months and have a three month period for review.

Mr. Conway explained that the agreement would extend the contract until the end of September 2022 and move the notice of renewal or nonrenewal date to six months prior, giving nine months of active time commitment for both the Board and the Town Manager to work together.

Ms. Artz asked if in nine months the Board would revisit the renewal of the original contract. That is confirmed by adding a contract amendment for March 2022.

Mr. Yunits agreed and would like to work with Mr. Conway on the wording of the contract amendment.

Mr. Toole asked Mr. Yunits if he is happy in the Town. Mr. Yunits replied that he loves the people and the Town. He said there is a lot going on right now in the Town he wants to be involved in.

Mr. Toole continued to state that he wants to sit down with the Town Manager to go over his observations. He stated that he sat down with every department to find out what was going on. He understands that outliers with issues might be difficult situations, where neither side is able to change. He changed the subject by stating that he would only want to agree to the contract extension if the Board is looking to renew.

Ms. Artz asked how the Town Manager would feel about considering an extension.

Mr. Conway confirmed that they are not asking for an extension to only eventually kick out the Town Manager. He cannot imagine what the Town Manager goes through by having a rotating Board with different backgrounds so frequently.

Ms. Deveau stated that she has only learned about the Town Manager's experience and knowledge through the three tenured Select Board members and the few months she has been here. She said that she would like to see the Town Manager continue with the major projects occurring in the town.

Ms. Artz said that setting goals and what the Board and Town Manager can all get from the town is necessary and would be useful to both parties as well as the Town.

Mr. Conway said that the Board and Town Manager will reconvene for Executive Session next week. Mr. Conway and the Town Manger will meet tomorrow to discuss the amendment. He believes that working together is for the better of the Town and thanks the Town Manager for being open for an extension of the contract with the amendment.

Mr. Yunits left the meeting at 10:37 PM.

1. To discuss strategy with respect to negotiations with non-union personnel, i.e. Town Manager pursuant to G.L. c. 30A, Section 21(a)(2).

Mr. Conway said that the Board needs more time to make a decision and that as a Board, we did not provide the necessary support to the Town Manger.

Ms. Artz stated that she wants the Town Manager to be successful. She also stated that if the Town Manager is well informed and the Board is well informed, no one can feel bad for making any decisions.

Ms. Deveau asked what the process would be to get a Human Resources specialist into the Town soon.

Mr. Toole want to work with the Town Manager for one. Ms. Artz brought up the idea of having a Human Resource specialist for both the school system and Town Hall. Mr. Toole added that it will be a \$125,000 or so charge to the Town and the Board should look into charging a percentage out of each department's budget for the cost.

Mr. Conway stated that having a Human Resources would put tools into place to have the Town Manger become a better employee. Mr. Toole would also like to reorganize Town Hall by possibly adding an assistant Town Manager. He thinks Town Manager's time management is a problem and is picking which issues he would like to address and which ones he would like to ignore.


Mr. Conway ended by thanking the Board for working with the Town Manager on his contract. The data he provided is clear as day, but needs to continue to do better in other aspects.

### **Adjournment**

**MOTION was made by Mr. Michael Toole to adjourn 10:50 P.M. Seconded by Ms. Artz Vote: Ms. Deveau – Yes; Ms. Artz – Yes; Mr. Toole – Yes; and Mr. Conway – Yes. MOTION CARRIES.**

Respectfully Submitted by: Christine Deveau, Clerk

**SELECT BOARD  
EXECUTIVE MINUTES OF MEETING  
JUNE 10, 2021**

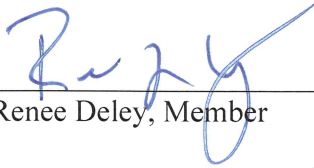


John Conway, Chair

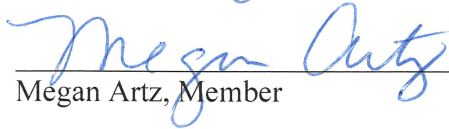
Michael Toole, Vice-Chair



Christine Deveau, Clerk



Renee Deley, Member



Megan Artz, Member

Minutes Approved by Board on: April 27, 2022