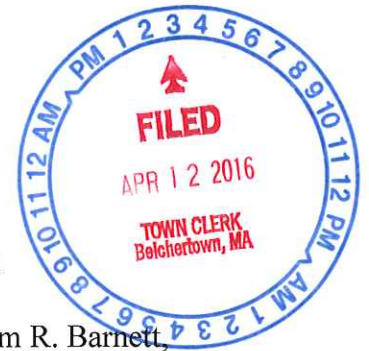


**TOWN OF BELCHERTOWN
BOARD OF SELECTMEN'S MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, MARCH 21, 2016
Selectmen's Meeting Room, Lawrence Memorial Hall**



Present: Ronald E. Aponte, George D. Archible, Brenda Q. Aldrich, William R. Barnett,
Nicholas O'Connor

- 1) **Call to Order:** Chairman Aponte called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. Aponte called for a moment of silence for State Trooper Thomas Clardy who was killed while on duty.

2) **Sign Documents:**

- a) Warrant #1638 was signed for \$1,765,425.62.
- b) Routine documents
- c) Approval of Minutes: None.

- 3) **Additions to the Agenda:** None.

4) **Appearances Before the Board:**

- 7:05 p.m. Gerald Grasso, Chairman and Members – Police Chief Candidate Search Committee: Mr. Grasso, Chairman of the Police Chief Candidate Search Committee presented the details. There were 32 applications received for the Police Chief that were screened by the committee. Some of the applicants were not a fit.

The Committee decided that they would interview 12 applicants. They interviewed what they believed were the top six applicants. They then moved to the next six applicants and out of that group one applicant withdrew his application. The remaining five applicants were reviewed.

The Committee felt that three individuals deserved to be finalists in the search. They are Christopher Pronovost, Mark Saloio and Robert Powers.

Mr. O'Connor asked the Committee members to introduce themselves. Each member who was present did so.

Mr. O'Connor questioned if the three finalists were selected by a unanimous vote. He was told they were.

Mr. Aponte questioned how the Committee came down to these three finalists. Mr. Grasso stated it was by reviewing resumes, the initial interview and the vote of the Committee.

Mr. Barnett questioned why only three finalists and not five? The Board has asked for three to five candidates. Mr. Grasso responded that at the beginning of the

process the Committee decided it would choose the top three finalists to be interviewed by the Board of Selectmen. It was a Committee vote.

Mr. Barnett questioned if all three of the finalists received a unanimous vote. He was told that they had received all nine votes while the other applicants had not received all nine votes.

Mr. Barnett then questioned if any of the remaining applicants were close to getting nine votes. He was told they were not.

Mr. Archible questioned if the internal applicant received a fair shake. He was told that he did. Mr. Archible stated there are rumors that Sgt. Pacunas did not get an honest chance due to the conduct of the former chief. Mr. Grasso stated there was no truth to that statement.

Mr. Aponte thanked all the Committee members.

Mr. Aponte opened up the questioning to the press.

Eric Goldscheider from *The Gazette* asked Mr. Grasso to explain the “spirited” discussions. Mr. Grasso stated the Committee members are intelligent, spirited in their discussion over the candidates.

Jim Russell from *The Republican* questioned why it was decided to interview Sgt. Pacunas in the initial rounds. He was told that Sgt. Pacunas was always on the list to receive an initial interview but that he was in the second round of applicants.

Mike Seward asked if the Board of Selectmen will consider interviewing more than the three finalists. Mr. Aponte stated that it remains to be decided.

Jim Russell questioned what factors were considered when deciding who to pass on as finalists. Mr. Grasso stated that info is confidential – executive session material.

Sgt. Steve Henn questioned if the rank of the three finalists decided who was passed on. He was told not necessarily. Sgt. Henn continued that the internal candidate has served as Chief, Sgt, etc. The Police Department here does not have a captain, lieutenant, etc. He questioned if Sgt Pacunas’s ability to fill in a larger capacity was taken into consideration. Andy DiNapoli, Search Committee member responded that yes it was in addition to budgeting, etc.

Sgt. Henn continued the Committee should compare Belchertown to Ware, Palmer, etc and not larger Towns. There are no documented problems with Sgt Pacunas. He questioned how it is ok that he is not even being considered.

He went on to question the scoring system. Why wasn’t any credit given for Sgt. Pacunas’s service, contribution and knowledge of the community.

Howard Mann a resident of Belchertown questioned why the Board is wondering why the residents are challenging the Committee – it’s because they do not want the Chief of Amherst – a member of a huge department.

Mike Lavigne a resident of Belchertown questioned what criteria the Board of Selectmen gave to the Committee, He questioned if being a part of the community was part of the criteria.

Casey Dembowski a resident of Belchertown questioned how the Chairman of the Committee was chosen. The Committee voted on it. She stated that Kevin Pacunas has put his blood, sweat and tears into this community. He should be a finalist.

Al Roberts a resident of Belchertown suggested that Mr. Grasso had some bias toward Kevin Pacunas.

Don Hess a resident of Belchertown stated he has seen all former Belchertown Police Chief's move up from within the department. He also did not agree with not putting Bob Knight a former Belchertown Chief of Police on the Committee.

Chris Pacunas a resident of Belchertown stated the process has been passionate. The residents want what's good for Belchertown. What could be better than someone who has 10 years on the job in Belchertown. He feels something was missing from the process. He feels the Board should figure out if Kevin Pacunas will get an interview or should the process be re-started.

Jeremy McBride, part-time Belchertown police officer stated that all 30 Belchertown police officers feel they have been slapped in the face.

Mr. Mann questioned if Mr. Grasso has had a personal vendetta against Kevin Pacunas. Mr. Grasso replied that he does not.

Steve Henn questioned why no additional value was given to the Belchertown officer by the Committee. He feels the charge is flawed. No other candidate has the qualifications of Sgt. Pacunas. He also questioned why Sean Gallagher was on the Committee when it was his department that has gotten the Town to where it is right now.

Mr. Aponte advised Mr. Henn to be very careful in his comments. Mr. Gallagher clarified that he did seek an opinion from the Ethics Commission before he submitted a letter of interest. He was told there was no conflict of interest; however, to put an active town officer on the committee would be a conflict.

Mr. Aponte stated to the Board that the Committee has given three names; he questioned if the Board wants to add names?

Mr. Barnett feels we should add names that there is no harm in doing so.

Mr. O'Connor felt it would not be fair. The Board does not know where Sgt. Pacunas came in with the Committee. He could be fourth or fifth on the list or he could be last. Mr. Mann feels it doesn't matter where Kevin came in on the list – he should be a finalist.

Ms. Aldrich felt the Committee was given a charge and they did their job. She feels the Board should accept the Committee's list.

Mr. Archible feels he is torn. He knows Kevin personally and thinks the Board might consider adding an applicant.

Mr. Barnett feels it would not hurt us in any way to add a name. Mr. O'Connor questioned how this might impact others who were interviewed.

Chris Pacunas feel the Committee did not recognize the community. Mr. O'Connor feels the community was covered by assembling the committee that the Board appointed.

Ms. Aldrich moved to accept the three names given to the Board by the Police Chief Search Committee. Mr. O'Connor amended the motion to start with the three but to leave the door open for additional interviews if the Board is not satisfied. Following a discussion Ms. Aldrich moved the Board interview the three candidates presented to the Board from the Search Committee. Seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Mr. Barnett moved to amend the motion to include Sgt. Pacunas. There was no second. Amended motion fails. The vote on the original motion to interview the three candidates presented to the Board by the Search Committee passes 3- yes (Aponte, Aldrich, O'Connor), 2 – no (Barnett, Archible).

The Board took a brief recess to allow the room to clear following the vote.

Mr. Aponte stated that in talking with the Board members, Friday, April 8, 2016 was the first date that all five Board members could come together to interview the three finalists. He suggested that all three interviews be conducted on Friday, April 8th with interviews scheduled at 6:30pm, 7:30 pm and 8:30 pm.

Mr. Aponte asked the Board to come up with as many questions as possible. Members will send their questions to Ms. Aldrich prior to the interviews. She will let Board members know if they have the same question and if so they will come up with alternative questions.

Mr. Aponte stated the next date the Board can get together following the interviews is Friday, April 15th at 7:00 p.m. which gives the Board a week to deliberate.

The office staff will call to schedule the interview times with the candidates.

Mr. Aponte moved the Board hold the interviews on Friday, April 8, 2016 beginning at 6:30 p.m in the Selectmen's meeting room. Seconded by Ms. Aldrich. Motion passes 5 – 0.

Mr. Aponte moved the Board convene a meeting tentatively for the appointment of a new police chief on Friday, April 15th at 7:00 p.m. in the Selectmen's meeting room. Seconded by Mr. O'Connor.

5) **Discussion/Action Items:**

- a. **Zone Change Application:** Mr. Brougham presented the details to the Board. the application is for amended zoning and special permit criteria proposed to amend our current cell tower regulation. Customarily when the Board receives these they are referred back to the Planning Board to begin the procedural aspect of getting this ready for Town meeting. With no questions from the Board, Mr. Aponte asked Mr. Brougham to refer the application to the Planning Board.
- b. **Review Special Permit Application and Site Plan Approval Application – Spellacy, 147 Bay Road:** Mr. Brougham provided the background information to the Board. About eight months ago there was an application to sell cars at the former Harris Milk location. The property is zoned industrial and the sale of cars is not allowed on industrial zoned property. Initially it was thought to change the zoning but after further consideration and since there is very little industrial zoning in Town it was decided to change the zoning to allow the sale of cars in an industrial zoned area with a special permit. The amended zoning was presented at the Special Town meeting of February 22, 2016 and it passed.

The applicant for the used car license is moving forward with his application. The Planning Board is reviewing the special permit and site plan zoning to allow the use at this location. With no comments from the Board, Mr. Aponte asked Mr. Brougham to refer it back to the Planning Board.

- c. **Endorse DPW Truck Master Installment Purchase Agreement:** Mr. Archible presented the details. At last year's annual town meeting approval was given to enter a five year lease purchase for a new heavy service vehicle at DPW/Highway Division.

Mr. Archible moved the Chairman of the Board endorse the DPW Truck Master Installment Lease Agreement. Seconded by Mr. O'Connor. Motion passes 5 – 0.

Steve Williams, Director of Public Works indicated the truck was delivered last week. Residents are welcome to stop in and see it.

- d. **Miscellaneous Matters:** None.

6) **Town Administrator's Report:** None.

7) **Review of Weekly Mail:** Mail held.

8) **Individual Board Members' Reports:** None.

9) **Questions from the Press:** Jim Russell from *The Republican* would like a copy of the resumes so he at least has a spelling of the name, their rank, where they live, education and the community they are coming from. Mr. Aponte informed him that the Board does not have that information available at this time. The list of names with their spelling and the Town's they work in was given to Mr. Russell. Mr. Aponte will touch base with Town Counsel to see what information can be released to the reporters.

Aimee Henderson from *The Sentinel* questioned if the candidates would be contacted the following day to schedule interviews. She was told that they would be contacted. She questioned if the new chief is selected on April 15th what the start date would be. She was told the Board would then have to enter contract negotiations.

Eric Goldscheider from *The Gazette* questioned the salary range for the chief of police position. The Board did not have the salary range available.

Mr. Russell questioned if the Board had any comments on the vote the Board took as it was not unanimous. Mr. Aponte stated that three members voted the way they thought was best for the Town and the other two voted the way they thought was best for the Town. Mr. Archible stated he didn't want to pick an additional person to be a finalist if he wasn't the next person on the list. He would have liked to know where each of the candidates interviewed scored but that information was not available to them. Mr. Aponte said that it stood out to him that the Committee unanimously voted on the three finalists. Mr. Aponte reiterated that Kevin Pacunas is a good cop and serves the community well; however he did not rise to the same level as the three finalists.

Ms. Aldrich commented that the residents who were in support of Sgt. Pacunas kept stressing community. She noted that the Committee that was chosen were all from the community. The community was represented with this committee.

Mr. Russell again questioned why Mr. Grasso failed to vote to appoint Kevin Pacunas to sergeant when he was on the Board of Selectmen. Mr. O'Connor stated there were nine people on the committee. He trusted that the other eight people made the right decision. Mr. Aponte commented that all nine people on that committee are strong willed individual thinkers who are not going to be bullied by another committee member.

10) Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 8:55 p.m.

Minutes submitted by Gary L. Brougham, Town Administrator

Board approved/endorsed: _____

Board of Selectmen - Town of Belchertown


Endorsed by a majority:



Ronald E. Aponte, Chairman

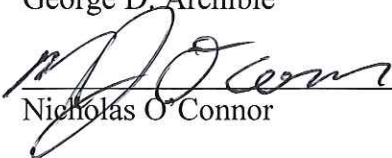


Brenda Q. Aldrich



George D. Archible

William R. Barnett



Nicholas O'Connor