SELECT BOARD

Minutes of the Meeting of June 4, 2024. The meeting took place in person at the Meeting Trailer at 131 Pleasant. Members present were Brooke Mohr, Thomas Dixon, Matt Fee, Dawn Holdgate and Dr. Malcolm MacNab.

Also present were C. Elizabeth Gibson, Town Manager; Gregg Tivnan and Rick Sears, Assistant Town Managers, Julia Novak of Raftelis, Facilitator and Strategic Plan Advisor Janet Schulte.

I. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order at 8:30 AM.

II. ANNUAL SELECT BOARD GOVERNANCE RETREAT

Ms. Novak reviewed the agenda for the meeting. She said the agenda is geared toward a focus on community values, as well as communications with each other and Town Administration. Each attendee spoke on their hopes for the summer. Ms. Novak reviewed a publication entitled “Bridging the Gap”. She spoke about the “drivers of disruption” with respect to municipal governance; the conveyance of information and communications to the community; and social issues that impact governance. Ms. Novak played a video (https://youtu.be/S8pcUeuYHkY?si=2NabKS9TnmBefdPW) of a professor (Dr. John Nalbandian) of public affairs and public administration discussing values, decision making and choices and the foundational concepts of making difficult decisions. The attendees commented on the video and what their “take-aways” were. Ms. Novak displayed a photo of a large tree taking up an entire sidewalk. Chair Mohr spoke about the photo as an analogy for some of the challenges the Board faces in its decision making, noting that may decisions are much more complicated than they look with respect to consequences, impacts and other factors. Chair Mohr spoke about an idea she has to initiate a “value-based big picture conversation” with the community, using established techniques for community engagement. Dr. MacNab asked what the outcome would be. Chair Mohr said that a better understanding of different community perspectives so that communication, problem solving and engagement can be more focused and effective. Mr. Fee said that a similar effort preceded the Comprehensive Plan of 20 or so years ago. He spoke on his recollections of that process, as well as his observations of what has happened since then. Chair Mohr commented that her idea is an opportunity for people to express “why they want what they want”. Discussion followed about how to address Chair Mohr’s idea. Board members spoke on what they hear, generally, from the community as to various issues, levels of engagement, lack of engagement and the number of competing priorities the Board and Town Administration are addressing. Dr. MacNab and Mr. Fee expressed concern about the amount of staff time an effort such as described by Chair Mohr would involve. Discussion followed as to the Board holding more regular meetings to “answer questions” from the public and other ways to publicly engage people and be more transparent about decision-making. Chair Mohr said her idea would involve the engagement of a consultant to run the process she is proposing. Discussion commenced about the differences between “trust” and “transparency” and how these relate to decision-making. Mr. Fee said he hears from people in the community who feel they are not being heard and that leads to mistrust and division. Ms. Gibson said that often when people say they are not being heard, it seems as though it is because what they want is not happening, for a variety of reasons. Discussion followed on this concept. Mr. Fee noted that open and honest discussions are difficult to have at public meetings that are televised. Ms. Holdgate commented that one of the purposes of the Board’s Strategic Plan was to use the goals of the Plan for decision-making. Ms. Novak asked the Board if it has next steps. Dr. MacNab said with respect to Chair Mohr’s idea, he is not sure that is worth the time and effort; however, he said the Board could sponsor its own “community forum” perhaps twice a year. Ms. Holdgate agreed. Chair Mohr said if forums are something the Board is interested in, it needs to make sure there is sufficient outreach to underrepresented groups and hold the forums at times that work for different populations of the community. Chair Mohr suggested that the Board could introduce values-based decision making to other boards when it meets with them jointly, as has previously been discussed. The Board was generally in agreement with this concept, and some discussion continued about it. Ms. Novak suggested the Board have some discussion about its communications, with each other. Mr. Dixon said that perhaps more outreach as to what the Board's role and responsibilities are, by Charter could be of benefit. He said the Board highlighting achievements of community members at its meetings would be meaningful. Mr. Tivnan noted there is a survey out right now about the Board's Strategic Plan and read some of the responses, which he said in some ways indicate racism and lack of understanding of how the Town government works. Chair Mohr emphasized that if any Board member wants an item on the agenda, they should let her know. Mr. Fee asked if "visioning" is something Chair Mohr would like from the Board. She said yes, and that "visioning" in her opinion arises as a result of a discussion as to values. Some discussion followed on this. It was suggested that visioning and values be worked in to the Board's Strategic Planning process. The meeting attendees each spoke about their thoughts about this meeting's discussions. Some discussion followed as to ways the Board could outreach more to the community to increase transparency with its decision making. Ms. Gibson spoke about collaboration with the Board and Town Administration and the roles of each, per Charter. Mr. Sears spoke on the risk when too many complex projects and issues are at play at the same time, with not enough resources readily available to analyze them and present well thought-out recommendations or options to the Board. Some discussion followed on this.

III. ADJOURNMENT
The meeting was adjourned at 10:36 AM.

Approved the 12th day of June 2024.

List of documents used at the meeting:

II. Memo from Julia Novak of Raftelis; Governance and Values presentation