

May 24, 2006

The Special Town Council meeting was called to order by Heidi Rogers at the Town House, 181 Howard Hill Road, Foster, RI at 5:32 p.m.

The following members were present:

Heidi Rogers, President
Steven Bellucci, Vice President
Ralph Berkowitz
Colette J. Matarese
Harold R. Shippee, Sr.
Bradford Gorham Esq., representing Town Solicitors

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Ralph Berkowitz introduced Peder Schaefer, Chief Budget Analyst from the Office of Municipal Affairs, Department of Administration from the State of Rhode Island. Ralph Berkowitz noted that Mr. Schaefer will try to help the council solve the situation in the treasurer's office by trying to find someone for the Treasurer's office.

Peder Schaefer said that he did speak with some municipalities and a few Treasurers are elected and some are also the Personnel Director. He believed that there are people out there that have the experience.

Bradford Gorham explained that the council had advertised several times but the money available was in the \$40,000's and the people available were in the \$60,000's. Peder Schaefer said that he understood the council has approved a salary in the low \$60,000 and for a small town that was not out of line and it was not too low or too high. Bradford Gorham asked Mr. Schaefer if he had a good way to get good candidates. Colette J. Matarese remarked that in a recent letter a search committee was discussed. Peder Schaefer believed it should be done the way it was normally done to be advertised and a search committee should be made up of council members or other staff members of the town to interview the candidates and to make a decision.

Mr. Schaefer noted that some municipal treasurer's have contracts and maybe that could be offered. Colette J. Matarese informed Mr. Schaefer about the Foster Town Charter and how that it could not be done that way.

Ralph Berkowitz noted that the Town of Foster has had treasurers for a long time and the only reason for leaving was for health reasons or better money. Mr. Berkowitz noted that the previous treasurer only worked for \$38,000 and that it was peanuts compared to what the duties were for the Ten Million Dollar budget. Mr. Berkowitz believed that there was a better ball field to pick from now that the salary is \$62,000.

Mr. Schaefer noted that he would assist on a search committee and he also believed that Chris Der Vartanian from the Bureau of Audits would offer his assistance to the Town. Mr. Schaefer did say he had a weakness as his background was not in accounting. He believed that a candidate for Foster would have to have a broad range of skills as the Treasurer in Foster does everything and someone on the search committee should have an accounting background.

Colette J. Matarese asked if a Treasurer from another community may be willing to help. Peder Schaefer said that he had made contacts with some people and he believed that there were people that may be interested. He said that the best way was to post the position on the web page and that would give people the opportunity to send in resumes. He noted that he spoke with the Warren Treasurer and she noted that she would get the word out through her association.

Colette J. Matarese remarked that with the Tax Collector's history in the office she should work on the search committee. Colette J. Matarese believed that someone with the knowledge of the office, knowledge of the Phoenix System and the knowledge of the workings and Pamela Fontaine has the most longevity in that office. Colette J. Matarese noted that it was near the end of the year and things need to be cleared up in the finance department and asked Mr. Schaefer if he had any suggestions.

Peder Schaefer answered that he had not spoken with Lisa Mills in over three weeks and he had the impression that she felt she was making real progress in getting up to date. He noted that she was more comfortable with the Phoenix system which did not take a rocket scientist to use the system.

Ralph Berkowitz noted that Mr. Schaefer was supposed to get a few people from other communities and have a meeting with Lisa Mills and what was he going to do. Mr. Schaefer did mention that he was not from a small community and he wanted to get someone that was and to spend a morning in the treasurer's office to identify where the real problems were. He said that Lisa really felt she was only backed up. Mr. Schaefer did remark that the town still has not made their contributions to the state retirement system on behalf of its employees both the employee and employer share and he was concerned of that. Mr. Schaefer explained that the State Treasurer can hold state aid and it was important that the town catch up on that.

Colette J. Matarese said that all the salaries are still at the same level on the expenditure reports as they were in October. She said it was hard to know where the town stands. She noted that a lot of the employees' contributions have not been done.

Heidi Rogers noted that she spoke with Lisa Mills about the retirement and there are a few issues in 2001 retirement and Lisa Mills was working on that because a dispatcher wants to retire. Colette J. Matarese said that that does not mean the town shouldn't be paying it now. Colette J. Matarese asked if the people Mr. Schaefer suggested were available on an hourly rate. Mr. Schaefer answered that it would be better to focus on something like the retirement issue as an assigned task and to take care of it.

Ralph Berkowitz said that there is a lot of catching up to do because the 5 ½ months that the individual that was in there did absolutely nothing in that office. He said that there are a lot more fires in there that people realize. Ralph Berkowitz said that he felt comfortable when Mr. Schaefer first sent a letter and said he was going to come to Foster with two individuals to review everything. He said that he did not know that the meeting was cancelled and he asked if those individuals came back in to see what fires are in there and what are out of control and get to them first and then go forward. Mr. Schaefer said that the individual he had in mind was now not available and he would go back and try to find someone. He said that the state should not get involved in some of the concerns that Ms. Matarese forwarded to him such as regarding bid contracts or litigation but the retirement contribution he was very concerned about that. He said that if the council was saying that they are not getting updated monthly reports when all the expenses have been posted previously that is a concern also. He noted that the biggest expense was payroll for the school and the Foster Gloucester School so it would be hard to be too far off on a municipality budget.

Mr. Gorham remarked that why didn't Peder come back to the council with a name of somebody that can come out and work. Ralph Berkowitz said that if he had to he would meet with that person also. Heidi Rogers asked if that was for some one to actually work or just look at what needs to be done. Mr. Gorham answered that it would be helpful for someone to organize the priorities somebody with municipal experience to say look as Peder says lets catch up on the contributions to the municipal retirement system. Mr. Gorham said that if someone came in

with experience would say that this is 1, 2, 3 and 4. Mr. Gorham said that then Lisa could put herself and her part time accountant to work.

Mr. Schaefer believed that someone could come in and help Lisa as well as himself or someone from his staff and get back together and see where the problems were and report back to the council. Colette J. Matarese asked if the people would also be available to do the work.

Mr. Schaefer asked if the council had a problem if the person also might be a candidate for the position. The council did not.

Patricia Fountain, a member of the School Committee asked if the school could be on the list of priorities.

Colette J. Matarese moved to advertise for a treasurer on the website and the Providence Journal. Bradford Gorham said he did not know if advertising would bring in any more candidates and it would be better to get in touch with people like accountants. Mr. Schaefer noted that it was the government finance officers association. Colette J. Matarese said she did not know how there would be candidates if the council did not advertise. Peder Schaefer said he could let the GFOA know about the website and the focus was to get someone with municipal experience and there are accountants who have not done any municipal work. Colette J. Matarese asked Mr. Schaefer if he believed that there would be resumes from only the GFOA and the website. Mr. Schaefer said he believed so.

Colette J. Matarese then moved, Steven Bellucci seconded and it was so voted to advertise on the Website that the town is looking for a town treasurer with municipal experience and list salary and benefits and email the link to Mr. Schaefer so he could send it to the GFOA.

Heidi Rogers aye, Steven Bellucci aye, Ralph Berkowitz aye
Colette J. Matarese aye, Harold R. Shippee, Sr.

Colette J. Matarese moved that the Town of Foster initiate communication with Mr. Ernie Almonte, State Auditor and the Bureau of Audits. Mr. Peder Schaefer said that he could bring that back to them. Steven Bellucci asked if it was still a motion and Ms Matarese answered no. She did say she hoped the committee could meet as soon as possible.

The council had a discussion on who should be on the interview committee.

Ralph Berkowitz moved, Steven Bellucci seconded and it was so voted to have Peter Schaefer, Pamela Fontaine and someone from Peder Schaefer office as well as Ralph Berkowitz to be on the search committee for a new Treasurer.

Heidi Rogers aye, Steven Bellucci aye, Ralph Berkowitz aye
Colette J. Matarese aye, Harold R. Shippee, Sr.

Three bids were faxed by the Treasurer for accounting services to the following:

Acct Temps	Kennedy Personnel Services	Management Services
274-6410	846-0810	273-5573

One proposal was faxed back from Acct Temps for \$30.15

Colette J. Matarese suggested waiting until the State people give a report before the council spends more money. She asked to delay the bid award until after the meeting to prioritize the finance department has taken place.

Heidi Rogers disagreed and believed that leaving only one person in the office would put the town further behind.

Harold R. Shippee, Sr. also commented that more money should not be spent until the council finds out what needs to be done. He commented that if Lisa Mills worked a full day maybe the job could get done. He noted that it was a 35 hour a week job and that was not being done.

Heidi Rogers remarked that an accountant can reconcile bank statements and someone with municipal experience is not needed for that. Colette J. Matarese answered that the town does not need to pay someone \$31.00 an hour to reconcile bank statement either.

Ralph Berkowitz said that the office needed to catch up. Colette J. Matarese asked where the money was coming from to pay it. Mr. Berkowitz said that not all the money from the deputy line item was used and there is contingency fund. Colette J. Matarese explained that the salaries have not been entered into the expenditure report since October and now it is May.

Steven Bellucci moved, Ralph Berkowitz seconded and it was so voted to hire Account Temps at \$30.15 and hour for hours needed by acting treasurer until June 8, 2006.

Heidi Rogers aye, Steven Bellucci aye, Ralph Berkowitz aye
Colette J. Matarese nay, Harold R. Shippee, Sr.

Heidi Rogers reported that the Chief of Police advertised for an additional police officer and requested the council to form a search committee.

Steven Bellucci said he spoke with the Chief of Police and the Chief did indicate that he would like one citizen, one council member and the Lieutenant to be on the search committee on the first round and the Chief would be involved on the second round of interviews.

Heidi Rogers remarked that she had a conversation with Chief Robert E. Coyne regarding Keith LaFazia and he would be a good candidate to be on the search committee.

Ralph Berkowitz moved, Colette J. Matarese seconded and it was so voted to appoint Steven Bellucci, Keith LaFazia and Lt. Rollinson and Chief of Police to a search committee for a new police officer.

Heidi Rogers aye, Steven Bellucci aye, Ralph Berkowitz aye
Colette J. Matarese aye, Harold R. Shippee, Sr.

The meeting was recessed at 6:45 p.m.

Steven Bellucci moved, Ralph Berkowitz. seconded and it was unanimously so voted to go into executive session according to 42-46-4&5 (2) for the purpose of discussing collective bargaining police officers and to reconvene for the purpose of adjourning the meeting and further to keep the minutes of said meeting closed and the minutes of all executives sessions held previous to this meeting be closed and remain closed pursuant to provisions of General laws of Rhode Island 42-46-4.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:25 p.m.

Submitted by,

Anne M. Irons

An electronic tape is made a part of the record for a complete account of the council meeting. This tape is on file in the vault at town hall.