

**WOODSTOCK SELECT BOARD
BOARD OF VILLAGE TRUSTEES**

February 18, 2020

4:30 PM

**Woodstock Town Hall
SPECIAL JOINT MEETING**

Draft Minutes

Draft subject to approval.

Present: Chair L.D. Sutherland, Mary Riley, Jill Davies (via phone), Ray Bourgeois, John Doten, Chair Jeffrey Kahn, Cary Agin, Ana DiNatale, Keri Cole (via phone), Frank Heald, Nikki Nourse, Michelle Sutherland, Allan Stein, Chief David Green, Joe Swanson, Elijah Lemieux, Jess Ryan-Leblanc, Lynn Beach, Zoie Parent, Ken Vandenburgh, Mark Donka, Wayland Lord, Charles Degener, Beth Fish, Carol Wood, Michael Brands, Jennifer Raymond, Beth Finlayson, Tim Lynds

I. CALL TO ORDER

- a. Select Board
 - i. Chair L.D. Sutherland called the February 18, 2020 joint meeting to order at 4:30pm.
- b. Village Trustees
 - i. Chair Jeffrey Kahn called the February 18, 2020 joint meeting to order at 4:30pm.

II. PERSONNEL POLICY DISCUSSION

- a. Lieutenant Swanson thanked the Select Board and Trustees for hearing the employees out. He stated that the employees were told one or two years ago that any changes to the personnel policy would be for future employees. They were told that the current employees would continue with the same benefits package. He believes the changes being made are setting the new town manager up for failure and that the new town manager will be walking into a beehive. This process is creating distrust among current employees who do not feel trusted or valued and that the boards should wait until the new town manager is settled before the new policy is established. He stated that changes forced upon employees is creating a situation that is going to cause conflict between the boards and employees and the current town manager. It is important to have employees have a stable workplace. The boards should consider input from employees and the new town manager.
- b. Officer Ryan-Leblanc stated that one of the changes that will have the biggest affect is the inability to accrue sick time. It is important to have the sick time in order to take care of oneself to provide for the town. It is one of the benefits that the Chief and the Town has been able to take to potential employees. This benefit is important especially when competing with larger agencies that can offer more money and benefits. Accrued sick time is one of the benefits that make Woodstock a competitive workplace.
- c. Ms. Riley stated that the personnel review has been taken up by policy the Select Board and Trustees in response to a citizen inquiry at Town Meeting. This draft policy has been written in response to that concern. A committee has written this policy and has spent a lot of time on it conducting comparisons with other towns in Vermont. They are presenting what they feel is a fair proposal. Nothing has been adopted yet and the policy is still under consideration. The sick time accrual was what was brought up specifically at Town Meeting and that is why it is being addressed in the new draft policy.
- d. Officer Ryan-Leblanc suggested allowing accrual of sick time but putting a cap on it for new employees.

- e. Ms. Riley stated that there is short term disability available for every employee after eight consecutive days, which will give the employee 2/3's of their salary until the employee either returns to work or becomes eligible for Long Term Disability which would then cover the employee until retirement.
- f. Ms. Parent stated that with Short Term Disability the check the employee receives does not come from the Town. It instead comes from the company the Town is using for the Short Term Disability. The benefits then would not continue while on Short Term Disability. The Town does not pay for healthcare during this time.
- g. Ms. Riley stated that there is a balance of banked sick time for those who have it. If an employee has exhausted all other sources and needed to get to their banked sick time, there will be something in place that will be adopted by the Board and the individual. They are still trying to figure out how the employee will be able to access it. This is still a draft policy. The banked sick time will not have to be used before Short Term Disability comes into effect.
- h. Corporal Donka stated that the Hartford Police Department allows employees to accrue as much sick time as they want. However, they do not get a payout when they leave. They do get health insurance after they leave until such time they qualify for Medicare. It took over eight months to hire someone for the Police Department. There is a lot of competition out there. Woodstock does not pay as well as other departments in the area, and if the benefits are changed quality people may be hard to find and keep.
- i. Ms. Riley stated that the Boards understand the need to stay competitive and that is one reason they changed some things like the vacation time. They moved it back a little so employees earn more vacation time faster. Also, the health insurance is not changing.
- j. Ms. Parent suggested that when an employee retires keeping the benefits at the rate the Town is paying. The premium could be payed for a period of time when the employee retires for health care.
- k. Mr. Vandenburg stated that his highway staff has been in an uproar over the potential changes. Employees asked right away to be involved in the process, but that did not happen. This has caused distrust between the employees and the Boards. He understands the need for the change, however, every employee in the town was told they would have this benefit if they came to work for the town, but now it is getting taken away. They realize it is not going to be grandfathered for employees. One consideration would be to cover the costs of health care while an employee is out on Short Term Disability or Long Term Disability.
- l. Ms. Riley stated that she understands and that every member from both Boards are in agreement that the employees are big assets and do not want to lose anyone over this policy. She asked for patience while this draft is worked on. The Boards will meet again on Thursday morning.
- m. Chair Sutherland also stated that the employees are valued. It is not anyone's desire to have any employee leave. This issue was brought up at Town Meeting and now the Boards are obligated to look into it. This is the result of citizens' concerns. The Boards are listening to suggestions and will take them into consideration.
- n. Ms. Fish suggested the policy allow accrual to a certain point. She stated that employees should be able to accrue it for when it is needed. However, the Boards should maybe stop the payouts. Accruing hours can be more beneficial than a set number of days per year. Some years you will need to use more than others.
- o. Ms. Parent stated that she is the HR person for the Town, and she works with the employee benefits. She is upset that changes to the policy were given to others before herself. She looked at other towns and the State of Vermont's policies. She suggested possibly a payout for some of the sick time but a much smaller amount. An example given could be a payout of a week. Another consideration

could be a wellness discount a stipend for wellness that can be used at the rec center or athletic club. This could be a good incentive.

- p. Ms. Riley stated that a lot of people could take advantage of it but is concerned with possible waste of funds due to lack of commitments.
- q. Ms. Parent stated that with an hour lunch break that time can be utilized and therefore employees would not have to take away from their home and family time. This allows employees a mental and physical break.
- r. Lieutenant Swanson stated that if employees have to pay their own benefits while out on Short Term Disability then it is not enough to live off of. Accrual allows employees to rebuild and not have to start from scratch. Short Term Disability only gives employees 2/3 of their salary and if they have to pay for health insurance and other benefits while on this leave, they are only making about 50%.
- s. Ms. Parent inquired about Bill Kerbin's comments to the draft of the personnel policy?
- t. Mr. Heald stated that Mr. Kerbin had indicated that the process was well under way and did not want to weigh in from a distance.
- u. Ms. Parent stated that the new manager should be given the opportunity and time to share his inputs. The Boards can tell the citizens at Town Meeting that they are working on it.
- v. Ms. Riley stated that the Boards are hoping to adopt a new personnel policy soon. It was stressed to the Boards from the League of Cities and Towns in October that the policies are to be established by the Boards and the Town Manager works with these policies.
- w. Mr. Lemieux thanked the Boards for the 457 Retirement savings plan and suggested they consider some kind of employer match. This would encourage employee participation.
- x. Mr. DiNatale stated that the Boards do establish the policy and the Town Manager manages based on the policy created. However, the new Town Manager is coming in with different experiences. His suggestions might be worth listening to. His input may be valuable and might help the process.
- y. Mr. Brands stated that the employees were not involved in this process. There seems to be a rush so this can go through for the Town Meeting. However, the Boards should wait until the new Town Manager comes for his input. He is concerned for future employees. Woodstock is a high rent district. Benefits are the only thing keeping employees here. There have been only 4 applicants for his position. If benefits change, they may lose some of these applicants. Keeping benefits is important for the future of the town and for gaining and keeping good employees and with a use it or lose it sick leave policy, there will be a lot of people taking time off in June which is not beneficial for the Town.
- z. Mr. Vandenburg stated that there are vague statements within the policy he would like clarification on. Article VI Conflict Resolution; in Step 2 it mentions 'the Municipal Manger will attempt to resolve the complaint within a reasonable period'. What is that period of time? In Article IV, Step 3, it states, 'a hearing shall take place as soon as practicable'. This is very vague. He suggests that an actual time frame be written for this.
- aa. Mr. Lynds stated that a year ago he was able to take care of his sick mother for three months with the accrued sick time. Later, when diagnosed cancer he used more of this accrued sick time. With the new policy, Short Term Disability would not have covered this. The sick time was extremely beneficial when needed most.
- bb. Ms. Davies stated that this is the second time that employees have been consulted with the draft personnel policy. The first time occurred with the department heads and they took their responses into consideration as well when creating this draft.

cc. Officer Ryan-Leblanc stated the blue flu is a real thing. It is terrifying for employees that will have to make up coverage for those taking time off to use up their sick time.

dd. Chair Kahn thanked the employees for all the work they do. It is appreciated. They will be taking the comments made in tonight's meeting very seriously.

III. OTHER BUSINESS

IV. ADJOURNMENT

a. Village Trustees

Motion: by Ms. DiNatale to adjourn the Joint Meeting at 5:30pm

Seconded: by Mr. Agin

Discussion: None

Vote: 4-0-0, passed.

b. Select Board - Recess

Motion: by Ms. Davies to adjourn the Joint portion of the meeting at 5:30pm

Seconded: by Mr. Bourgeois

Discussion: None

Vote: 5-0-0, passed.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nikki Nourse