

TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE

A JOINT MEETING OF THE D.P.W. SUBCOMMITTEE and TOWN COUNCIL THURSDAY JANUARY 26, 2023 at 5:30 PM VETERANS ROOM (Minutes)

1. Call to Order 5:30 PM

2. Roll Call: DPW Members: Councilor/DPW Chair Michael Marketti - Councilors Joseph Daou, Gus Steeves. Citizen Members: Steve Lazo and Kevin Splaine.

Also in attendance: Councilor Lazo, Council Chair Daniel, Council Vice Chair Adams, Interim DPW Director Butch Jackson, Town Manager Michael McCall, DPW Operations Manager Phil Harding, DPW Director candidate Richard Benoit, Citizens Derek Julian, Lara Thibault, Kory Chenier, Maureen Doyle.

3. Consider and approve Joint DPW/Town Council Meeting Minutes of January 4, 2023. Motion made by Steeves, second by Splaine. Vote 4-0-1 approved. (Lazo abstained)

4. Citizens Forum: Citizen member Splaine asked for an update on the Construction Inspector position. Councilor Adams provided an update. HR Director Adriana Robaina said she is scheduling interviews.

5. Review/Discuss the Town Manager's appointment of Richard Benoit as DPW Director for 3-year term effective immediately through January 30, 2026, pending the successful completion of pre-employment physical and background screening and State Ethics. Entertain a motion to recommend to Town Council for confirmation. Motion made by Daou, Second by Splaine. Vote 3-2 approved. (Marketti, Steeves, Splaine yes; Lazo, Daou No)

Discussion: Interim DPW Director Butch Jackson recommended Mr. Benoit. Spoke about his background which is similar to his own. Councilor Steeves asked the candidate if he had any background in Water and Sewer? Mr. Benoit said he did not. When asked to comment further, Mr. Benoit said the Water and Sewer Departments have good managers and didn't feel it would be required.

Kevin Splaine asked the candidate his reason's for leaving as DPW Director in Thompson CT? Mr. Benoit said COVID was the main reason he left. After spending 2-1/2 years redesigning the Highway Dept. in Thompson so that it functioned properly, people stopped going to work everyday. As he took on more of the workload, the pressure became too much so he left.

Councilor Steeves asked what his first priority would be in Southbridge? Mr. Benoit said his first priority would be getting to know the town. Getting to know the workers, projects, direction and shape of the Public Works Department. He likes organizing the department without making major changes. Steeves also asked if he had any experiencing with Rail Trails? Mr. Benoit said Thompson CT has a trail, and has experience working with the Rail Trail Committee in that town. Also spoke about the possible influx of people from large cities looking for rail trail activities. Steeves also asked the candidate what kind of background he had working on Stormwater issues? Mr. Benoit said he dealt with MS4 in Thompson and explained the work in progress they were doing.

Town Manager McCall spoke about the road opening problems in town and the experience Mr. Benoit had with that issue. Mr. Benoit spoke about his experiences with road opening projects. He said he is a big fan of not running past October for paving, and making sure there is specific language in contracts concerning weather caveats. He considers himself a huge paving fan and wants longevity and things done correctly. Wants to set up a preservation plan.

Kevin Splaine spoke about the candidate's past experience in the public sector, then switching to the private sector. Asked why he wanted to come back to the public sector? Mr. Benoit said the short answer is boredom. His private sector job is basically babysitting, and he likes the broad arrangement of responsibilities in a public sector job.

Chair Marketti spoke about the Candidates experience with budgets, capital planning and curbside garbage collection. Mr. Benoit spoke about single stream and the future of refuse and recycling.

Steve Lazo asked the candidate what current licenses he holds? Mr. Benoit said he has a Class B license, but he does not have a hoisting license because it wasn't needed in Thompson.

Maureen Doyle asked about his surname and if he was related to any other Benois in Southbridge? Mr. Benoit said none of the Benois know each other.

6. Adjourn: Motion made by Splaine, second by Lazo. Vote 5-0. Meeting adjourned at 6:52 PM

Respectfully submitted by Subcommittee Chair, Councilor Marketti