



MINUTES
of the
TOWN COUNCIL SPECIAL OPEN MEETING
TOWN OF SOUTHBRIDGE
February 6, 2023
7:00pm

CALL TO ORDER The Southbridge Town Council met on February 6, 2023, in the Town Council Chambers of the Southbridge Town Hall. Chair Daniel called the meeting to order at 7:00pm.

AGENDA ITEMS

- 1. Pledge of Allegiance:** Chairman Daniel led the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance.
- 2. Roll Call:** Councilors present: Adams, Daniel, Daou, Lazo, Marketti, Montigny, Rivas, Ryan, and Steeves. Also Present: Charles Blanchard, Candidate for Interim Town Manager.
- 3. Vote to approve the appointment of Charles Blanchard as Interim Town Manager for a period of six months starting February 13, 2023 and ending August 14, 2023 pending successful completion of state ethics and successful contract negotiations.** *A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to vote this item.*

Chair Daniel spoke about the process that brought Mr. Blanchard before the Council.

Mr. Blanchard spoke about his experience working for municipalities for over 45 years, and explained why he was interested in the position. He spoke about his experience in Palmer and the similarities it has with Southbridge and how that will help him in the position.

Councilor Adams spoke about his experience interviewing Mr. Blanchard and some of the items they discussed.

Councilor Steeves asked what Mr. Blanchard learned about his experience with the casino question in Palmer. Mr. Blanchard outlined the situation and said learned to negotiate with a large entity and how a town could benefit from this type of relationship.

Councilor Steeves asked the casino issue changed his way of approaching the public on this type of issue. Mr. Blanchard explained how he approaches the community for big issues.

Councilor Steeves asked what the key differences are between Palmer & Southbridge, and Mr. Blanchard provided some examples of similarities and differences.

Councilor Steeves asked what Southbridge's strengths and weaknesses are as compared to Palmer which Mr. Blanchard outlined. He highlighted the difference in how the Town Manager and Council work together, and that having department heads, residents, and others participate in subcommittees is a strength.

Councilor Lazo discussed how the interview process helped him to really know Mr. Blanchard as a person including his integrity, strength, and honesty and that he feels he's the right person for the position.

Councilor Rivas asked how Mr. Blanchard would attract people to positions in Town. Mr. Blanchard explained that every municipality is having trouble hiring. He thinks Southbridge has done well with diversity which is important and that overall, the Town is doing the right thing. Mr. Blanchard expanded on what he believes is the right path to take with hiring.

Councilor Ryan asked Mr. Blanchard about his budgetary style. Mr. Blanchard responded that it's important to start with capital needs in the fall, send out requests to department heads in December, sit down with the Select Board to discover their priorities, and have a good handle on what the revenue will be and ensure that it balances with the budget.

Councilor Ryan asked how Mr. Blanchard would work with the State Receiver. Mr. Blanchard said his role is to have a good relationship to understand what the school needs are and find an agreement on what can be funded. He would like to meet with the current Town Manager about working with the Receiver to fully understand the relationship.

Councilor Marketti outlined the concerns he has for the Town including the roads, capital planning requests, and the end of curbside trash collection. Mr. Blanchard explained what steps he would take to learn about the situations and what experience he has had with some of these issues.

Councilor Steeves asked what Mr. Blanchard's approach would be to recruiting citizens to fill positions on Boards and Commissions. Mr. Blanchard said every community is facing this issue and suggested creating a "pool" of possible candidates and explained that simply talking to everyone they encounter works. He will be doing whatever he can to help fill the positions.

Councilor Steeves asked what experience Mr. Blanchard has implementing stormwater management. Mr. Blanchard said they were discussing a fee in Palmer, and he will look into what ended up happening to see if it can be applied to Southbridge.

Councilor Montigny talked about how Mr. Blanchard's experience matches many of Southbridge's needs. He asked if Mr. Blanchard has experience renegotiating agreements for cable TV, and Mr. Blanchard explained his experience and knowledge in this area.

Councilor Rivas asked what Mr. Blanchard has done in his other interim roles to make the transition smooth for staff so there are no employee losses. Mr. Blanchard it's important for the Town Manager to get to know the staff and understand what their issues are and to support them. He shared his experience in Williamstown, and how he approached the staff to support them and share positive action with the public.

George Chenier, Theresa Ave, said it is a pleasure to see Mr. Blanchard applying for the interim role, and talked about why he supports Mr. Blanchard. He talked about some of the challenges facing the Town including the LNG and Amazon facilities. He asked Mr. Blanchard if it was too late to get impact funds from these businesses. Mr. Blanchard said he will try to negotiate something and discussed his experience with this type of thing in Sturbridge. Mr. Chenier asked if Mr. Blanchard would reach out to those struggling to pay their cable bills and talked about the rise in tax bills.

Councilor Daou said he hopes that Mr. Blanchard moves forward on issues when he has the chance and not wait for a permanent Town Manager.

Councilor Steeves asked if Mr. Blanchard has any experience with electricity aggregation and if this type of arrangement was possible for things like cable, etc. Mr. Blanchard said he has not been involved municipal electrical aggregation, but he will do his best to learn the facts.

Councilor Steeves asked if he has any experience with municipal ownership of utilities. Mr. Blanchard said he has experience with shared ownership of a solar array and that Paxton does have a Municipal Light Plant and is looking at municipal broadband. He outlined his experience in those areas.

The motion passed unanimously by a roll call vote.

4. EXECUTIVE SESSION

Vote to Enter into Executive Session, Pursuant to MGL Chapter 30A §21, (A)2 to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel or to conduct collective bargaining sessions or contract negotiations with nonunion personnel – Interim Town Manager. A motion was made by Councilor Lazo and seconded by Councilor Ryan to go into Executive Session. **The motion to enter into Executive Session passed unanimously by a show of hands vote.**

The Southbridge Town Council went into Executive Session at 7:55pm.

The Town Council returned to open session at 8:35pm

ADJOURNMENT

Motion: Councilor Lazo moved to adjourn the Special Open Session of the Southbridge Town Council. Councilor Ryan seconded, and the motion passed unanimously by a show of hands vote. The meeting was adjourned at 8:36pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Susan Peghiny
Recording Clerk