

**Town of Haverhill
Select Board Work Session
MINUTES
Monday, August 8, 2022, at 6:00 PM
R. E. Clifford Memorial Building
65 South Court St.
Woodsville, NH 03785
Or on ZOOM**

SELECT BOARD WORK SESSION / Public Relations Policy

CALL TO ORDER: Chair Fred Garofalo called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM. Chair Garofalo announced that this is a Work Session to discuss public relations policy.

Select Board Attendance: Kevin Knapp (Here), Mike Graham (Here), Vice Chair Steve Robbins (Here), Chair Fred Garofalo (Here), Katie Williams (Here). A quorum was met.

Town Employees Present:

Town Manager (TM): Brigitte Codling
Assistant Town Manager (ATM): Jennifer Boucher

Members of the Public Present

In Person:

Howard Hatch

Online:

Katie Williams
Joanna Bligh
Joanne Young
Jim McKinnon
Aprille Paradise
Rick Henson

DISCUSSION

Chair Garofalo introduced the materials from the Haverhill's *Personnel Policy Handbook* related to social media and documents sent by Katie Williams as she was researching public relations policies in other New Hampshire towns – Lebanon, Windham, and Keene. Chair Garofalo asked the Board what they are trying to accomplish.

- Graham noted that the *Personnel Policy Handbook* only deals with social media, which is current. Graham noted that TM Codling has prepared a policy for Haverhill. TM Codling noted that she prepared a draft policy for discussion.
- Chair Garofalo asked how the Board makes sure that the Select Board and Town Administration do not create problems in the media and to make sure statements to

newspapers are factual. Chair Garofalo read from the presented documents and asked how a policy would be managed.

- ATM Boucher noted that the document from Lebanon addressed responses to editorials and Windham addressed sensitive subjects. TM Codling addressed responses to editorials and how the public is not aware of the corrected information.
- Chair Garofalo talked about the need for clarification statements to come from discussions at the Board meetings, which is public, and from the minutes of the meetings.
- Williams suggested adding Section 7 of Windham’s policy to add to Haverhill’s Social Media policy as General Media Guidelines. Williams noted that all “bigger” issues are brought to the Board before the public release. TM Codling noted that it would be difficult to determine ahead of time what news release would become controversial.
- Graham suggested before a press release of public information on Facebook or to newspapers to copy the Select Board members.
- Chair Garofalo stated that he recommended getting rid of Facebook. TM Codling noted that Facebook has become the number-one place residents get Town information. Graham noted that many older residents do not access Facebook. Vice Chair Robbins noted that Parks & Recreation advertises on Facebook. Graham stated that the Board is “limiting Town Administration from making Facebook posts.”
- Chair Garofalo discussed public relations or press releases and noted that anything that is going into the papers should be brought before the Board. Discussion continued. Vice Chair Robbins stated that if the media submits questions in writing and the responses are in writing, then that could be more positive. TM Codling noted that after most Select Board meeting the press calls her for background information.
- TM Codling stated that her office has made the effort to be transparent and disseminate information to the public, and past boards have agreed that if information is not protected, they provide it. Williams stated that it is about becoming more transparent and disseminating facts and not opinions. Graham suggested that the Administration not involve themselves with the reporters, and he stated that he does not like what the reporters write about Haverhill. Vice Chair Robbins noted that a retraction to incorrect reporting could be made at the Select Board meetings.
- Graham suggested a policy document should focus on Windham’s Section 7 and add a statement about news releases. Vice Chair Robbins added Lebanon’s Section C. Discussion continued.
- TM Codling read from a draft policy she wrote:
 - To ensure factual information, void of opinion, consistent with the Town’s mission, vision, and leadership’s known position on the subject, an official public statement shall be developed by Town Administration and shared with leadership for their input prior to distribution (verbal or written).
 - Under no circumstance shall any employee share the Town’s position, perceived, implied, or known, until and unless an official statement has been publicly made by Town Administration or Town leadership.
- Chair Garofalo noted that even positive news releases can be approved first by the Board. Williams followed Lebanon’s document stating a copy of the news release shall be provided to the Select Board prior to publication. Chair Garofalo noted that individuals seeking information can submit a 91-A request.

- The Board reached consensus on reviewing all documents at home, including TM Codling’s policy draft with the addition of Windham’s Section V, F, and Section VII. Chair Garofalo invited TM Codling to put together the text of the policy. The Board decided to plan another work session to review the draft to be determined.
- Chair Garofalo presented an email correspondence from Roger Newman to the Board:
 - Holiday greetings can be an important part of a PR program. I noticed that on the official Haverhill Facebook page has wished its residence a Happy Easter for the past 2 years. These are nice thoughts, but I’d like to recommend the Select Board consider including other major religious holidays, for example, Ramadan and Passover, to be inclusive of all of Haverhill residents when sending religious holiday wishes.

MOTION #1: Chair Garofalo made a motion to eliminate the Town’s Facebook page completely with the exception of the Parks & Recreation Department’s Facebook page as of September 1, 2022, seconded by **Graham**.

- Chair Garofalo expressed that the Board has decided that there are many problems created by Facebook, and it should be eliminated as “gently as possible,” and that the website will be the alternative for information.
- Vice Chair Robbins requested amending the Motion to include September 1, 2022.
- TM Codling noted that at the Municipal Managers’ Conference, Facebook was a hot topic, and towns either restricted Facebook, eliminated it, or left it alone. TM Codling stated that the Haverhill Facebook is a group page that does not allow comments.
- Knapp noted that Facebook is a free platform for posting information, and would like to see a strict Facebook.
- ATM Boucher noted what was recently posted on Facebook from the Town:
 - Dangerous heat warning.
 - eWaste instructions, costs, and date.
 - An announcement of the Select Board’s two public meetings.
 - Request for bids for winter sand.
 - Motorists beware of work on Brushwood Rd.
- TM Codling stated that Primex and NHMA have focused their recent session of managing Facebook.
- Williams Commented that Facebook is what the residents want and gets their information from, and she prefers to keep Facebook for now.
- The Board, ATM Boucher, and TM Codling discussed alternatives for disseminating information, including newspapers, Vital Communities ListServe, and the animated sign.

Roll Call Vote: Williams (Opposed), Graham (In favor), Knapp (Opposed), Robbins (In favor), Chair Garofalo (In favor). The motion passed with 3 in favor and 2 opposed.

TM Codling noted that the Facebook page will be archived in case the Board retracts their vote.

Religious Holidays

Discussion:

