

SPECIAL MEETING SEPTEMBER 16, 2002

The Wethersfield Town Council held a meeting on Monday, September 16, 2002 at 5:30 p.m. in the Town Manager's Conference Room of the Town Hall.

Present: Councilors Cascio, Fitzpatrick (6:00), Flynn, Hemmann, Morin, Sassano (6:10) Deputy Mayor O'Connor, and Chairperson Czernicki. Absent: Councilor Gardow.

Also Present: Joseph Swetcky, Interim Town Manager, Roy Pinette, Human Resources Director and Dolores G. Sassano, Town Clerk.

Chairperson Czernicki welcomed all in attendance and said the purpose of the meeting was to review proposals from the search firms for the Town Manager position. Roy Pinette, Human Resources Director, had contacted 10 search firms who provide these services, five responded. He presented a spreadsheet with what they are willing to do, the cost associated with it and a time frame. She invited them to review the packets from the consulting firms: Maximus, HR Consultants, Management Search, Bennett and Mercer.

Mr. Pinette commented that most of these consultant firms do the same things, the approach to recruiting is pretty much the same. Look at their track record, how much experience they have in recruiting somewhat similar positions, look at the approach, the cost factor and distance. A long distance relationship can be burdensome. Maximus is now only in CA.

Deputy Mayor O'Connor asked if we were charged for them to fly here, if the company itself charges the municipality to fly out here. He responded they do. On the spreadsheet, if you look at fee it is standard, \$17,500, under the column, reimbursable expenses, these are: their phone calls, travel expenses, and the advertising. Could the expenses be more? Their estimates are very good, so if they allow \$8500, that is what it will be, they will not go over that amount.

Councilor Cascio asked if the warranty is on the candidate. Mr. Pinette responded They guarantee their work, if that person does not work out, then they will start the search all over again, without costing the Town another fee, only reimbursable expenses would have to be paid. Councilor asked if, of the five firms, they have all had experience in search for a Town Manager or similar position. Mr. Pinette responded HR Consultants provided the least information and he could not glean that information from the proposal. Therefore question marks are used to indicate unknown.

Chairperson Czernicki asked if Councilors had any other questions before reviewing the proposals.

Councilor Cascio asked if job references are on the proposal. Mr. Pinette responded in the affirmative, with the exception of HR Consultants.

Deputy Mayor O'Connor asked who covered the candidate expenses if we wanted them to come here. Mr. Pinette said whatever it cost for those candidates to come for an interview the Town pays for it. He then asked if the number of candidates we are going to interview has been determined and do we have a rough idea of that cost. Not yet, it is up to Council but the average number of candidates is usually between 3 and 5. Yes, they estimate, anywhere from \$750 to \$1000 per candidate.

Chairperson Czernicki asked if Mr. Pinette had any comments on the firms. The two recruitment firms he thought were reasonable are the Mercer Group and Bennett Associates. Maximus is more expensive by \$6000 and thought the others could do just as good a job. Management Search, from East Hartford charges \$25,000. Councilors wanted to know who did the Hartford search and were told it was Maximus. She asked if each of the firms has had experience in fields other than municipal and if he would accept applications through his office. He would but would forward them to the search firm.

Councilor Cascio asked when they are expected to make a decision. Chairperson Czernicki said she would like it as

soon as possible, which is why she asked them to meet tonight, and would appreciate some decision this evening. After we making this decision Council would have to be able to present to the chosen firm what it is looking for in a town manager, parameters, criteria and they would meet with us to discuss how the whole process. Councilor Flynn asked if they would be doing interviews with the different firms. Deputy Mayor O'Connor stated he thought there would not be any charge to Council if they came for an interview since they were looking for our business. Chairperson Czernicki asked if Council could glean from the proposals which firm they would want to go with. Councilor Flynn stated that in the course of an hour it would be difficult, not impossible. Deputy Mayor O'Connor said the only one with a Connecticut presence is Bennett, looking at the list of towns they have done, they are comparable in size etc.

Chairperson Czernicki asked if they agreed to remove Maximus. No one had any objection. Councilor Hemmann asked if they had a copy of an RFP and was reminded these proposals were requested by telephone. Councilor Cascio also suggested Management Search Councilor Flynn suggested that if they wanted to talk with candidates, it would be Bennett and Mercer. The Chairperson suggested looking closer at Bennett and Mercer and Council agreed. Councilor Cascio asked if it mattered if they company was located in Atlanta. Human Resources Director Pinette said he liked the Mercer Group but that they did not have a lot of experience in the Northeast. The Northeast would have a different set of problems than other parts of the country. They probably have networking in the south. New England firms like Bennett have more experience and network up here. Chairperson Czernicki said whichever firm is chosen, the expectation is a national posting. Deputy Mayor asked if it is common in these searches for the firms to take their 20%. Mr. Pinette stated they would not lose any money if the candidate leaves. We would have to pay expenses again but not the flat fee. Councilor Fitzpatrick said that Mercer was a benefits firm. Councilor Cascio asked if Mr. Pinette had a network with other towns as to firms they use and the experiences they have had. He stated he does not have a network with other towns. Councilor Cascio was concerned the candidates could look good on paper but not in personal interviews. Chairperson Czernicki said it would be up to us in the final analysis to ask the questions to get the answers we would like. Mr. Pinette said, if Council decided on any of these firms, he would call and check with other clients. Chairperson Czernicki asked him to find out the strengths and weaknesses, even if they went with them. Councilor Cascio questioned the advertisement on the search for Darien, and if they had hired anyone yet. He was told it is in process now. This is the profile they used based on what their Council had provided. This is what they would do with our Council, sit and develop a profile and publish it. Some of it is straight-forward but the challenge of it is what the ideal candidate should look like.

Councilor Fitzpatrick wanted to know if, we find and hire the candidate what happens If the candidate does not come through them. Mr. Pinette said we would still have to pay. Councilor Fitzpatrick thought we were not going strictly with a consultant. We will accept applications here and forward them to the Consultant. They will be doing the advertising, most will go through them. Councilor Fitzpatrick wanted to know if we had received any applications yet. No. They do everything for us, advertise, screen, and interview candidates before they come to Council for interviews. Chairperson Czernicki said we would interview top 3 or top 5, we would have to decide. Councilor Fitzpatrick wanted to know Mr. Pinette's role in this. He said he would coordinate and facilitate with them, arrange to have meetings with them here, establish interviews through him and he would talk to Council. Councilor Fitzpatrick said Mr. Pinette would not get involved in the selection that would be done by the consultant.

Mr. Pinette walked through the process with Council. First, position analysis, is one of the most important steps, is developed by talking with myself, with Council, Department Heads, to find out what the Town of Wethersfield needs for a manager, this will decide the type of person they will look for. They will do the job brochure, all the advertising, all the interviewing. They do not only receive resumes but they will go out and solicit people that have the desired qualifications Council is looking for and call and ask someone, already in a position, to consider applying. They have the ability to network and look for the type of person we need. They will review all the resumes, based on Council criteria, and do the initial screening and interviews and get the candidates down to the number Council will then interview. They will then conduct background checks, call the police department, references and so forth. They will arrange and assist with the interviews that the candidates have with Council. In most cases they will also assist in negotiating contracts. The two firms we are talking about guarantee their work, if the manager leaves, within one year, they will conduct the search over again with no additional professional fees, but they will charge you expenses. Mercer talked about assisting in developing performance criteria, their managers performances appraisal and will check in 3 or 4 months to make sure the manager is working out.

Deputy Mayor O'Connor said of the five proposals provide, Maximus is in California and expensive, Management Search is too expensive and HR did not provide us with enough information. We are really looking between Bennett and Mercer and asked Mr. Pinette, if he had to choose one, who would it be. His response was Bennett. They are a New England based company. He has already heard from Mr. Bennett, offering to come down to speak with Council, he was the only one who was proactive. He liked his approach. The other firms are reputable. Councilor Hemmann stated the Mercer Group, in their cover letter, talks about assisting the Town of Stratford rather than Wethersfield. A minor faux pas but a consultant firm sending in an application for consideration to the Town of Wethersfield should be more careful. It does reference Wethersfield on the top and bottom. Deputy Mayor O'Connor asked if Council was comfortable with that. Councilor Fitzpatrick questioned who the hire was in Rocky Hill, what the issue was there, was it a mismatch because they then gave it to the acting manager. Is Connecticut an attractive place for a Town Manager? Councilor Morin stated he agreed with Councilor Hemmann. He was not sure Wethersfield would want to be compared to some of these towns. Councilor Fitzpatrick would not like to make a decision today and then find out in the reference check that the last five people who have worked with them were unhappy with them. While it would be nice to have it today, but felt the need to sit down and make some phone calls, especially in the Connecticut area. Did they feel they did most of the work and Bennett got the money? They are claiming they have hired a number of people in Connecticut for CCM, why, if they have their own headhunting firm, why would they go to Bennett? Councilor Morin asked for a time line.

Chairperson Czernicki said she would like to see someone in place by the first of the year. It would be a push. The bigger question is, if we are looking for that time frame, do we wait to have the new Town Manager in place before hiring the new Police Chief, because that is the person the new chief will have to work with. It would be twelve weeks to get to the candidates. It takes us through the middle of December. Councilor Flynn said a final offer could be in week eleven, then they have to give notice etc. Deputy Mayor pointed out our Town Manager gave a two week notice. Chairperson Czernicki said it would depend on what the person was doing, what his contract says about the amount of notice he would have to give. It would be fair to say three or four weeks. Deputy Mayor said that if someone really wanted to come to this town to work, they would do it. If they make the extra effort it tells of their commitment to the town, It is a qualification. They really want to come here, they are not going to argue that they cannot come until June. Chairperson Czernicki said as we move forward in the process, as we move forward to check credentials, we will push us back two weeks.

Councilor Flynn said it is probably the single most important decision this town has to make. Deputy Mayor O'Connor asked if we were going to do reference checks on Mercer and Bennett. Chairperson Czernicki said possibly the last week of the month we could sit down with the person and let our desires to be known. Are you comfortable with deciding tonight or do you want to interview the firms, putting us into the second week of October. Interim Town Manager Swetcky said they have been advertising in this area.

Councilor Cascio asked if they wanted to vote on this now or wait until the regular council meeting. Deputy Mayor O'Connor said the only one he would feel comfortable with is Bennett. When he came in tonight, he had no comfort level. Even if Mercer and Bennett is the same, Mercer called us Stratford, I want someone interested in us.

Councilor Sassano, said he would be comfortable hearing more about both of them, checking references, and would like to meet the principals of both firms, in person, because personal style and the way each individual relates to this Council is going to be as important as anything else. There needs to be something besides paper to make our decision.

Chairperson Czernicki said she would like Mr. Pinette to set up a meeting with the principles with both Bennett and Mercer for the 30th of September. Try for 7PM. Is there anything else Council would like Mr. Pinette to do in preparation for that meeting? Deputy mayor only cares about the town managers they have placed in the State of Connecticut. The Chairperson would like to know the success they have had in placing others in Connecticut, Councilor Flynn said, CFO, CEO's Deputy mayor would like it sorted by State because the more they have in Connecticut is indicative of how well they know the state.

Mr. Pinette suggested Council look through the standard contract provided in the packet. It would give some idea as to what is standard in contracts, severance if it does not work out, real estate, etc, these are all things to be considered.

Chairperson Czernicki would like to make a decision after meeting with the two men from the firms. The decision will be made that meeting, after the interviews. She is assuming that the one chosen would like to meet with Council soon. She said this is going to time consuming for us, it is someone who will be here for a long time, it is an important decision and she would like it to be a Council decision and therefore would like everyone to be available as much as possible. She asked Council to inform the Town Clerk, Roy Pinette or Joe Swetcky if anyone is unable to attend these meetings, so they will not delay the start of the meetings. Towards the end of the process, there will be an oral process, and if any Councilors have had personnel experience it will be appreciated.

ADJOURNMENT

At 6:40 p.m., Councilor Morin moved "TO ADJOURN THE SPECIAL MEETING" seconded by Councilor Cascio All Councilors present, including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed 8-0-0.

Dolores G. Sassano
Town Clerk

Approved 10-07-2002