

## **SPECIAL MEETING OCTOBER 7, 2002**

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting in the Council Chambers with Chairperson Kitch Breen Czernicki presiding.

**Present:** Councilors Cascio, Fitzpatrick, Flynn, Gardow, Hemmann, Morin, Deputy Mayor O'Connor (7:50) and Chairperson Czernicki. Absent: Councilor Sassano

**Also present:** Joseph Swetcky, Interim Town Manager, Roy Pinette, Human Resources Director, James Mercer, President of Mercer Group, Richard Bennett, Principal Bennett Group, and Sandra Wieleba, Assistant Town Clerk.

Chairperson Czernicki welcomed all in attendance and said the purpose of the meeting was review the two management search firms and interview them to select one to help in the search for a new Town Manager.

All stood for the pledge of allegiance to the flag which was led by Councilor Morin.

Roy Pinette introduced Mr. Jim Mercer of the Mercer Group. He made the first presentation to Council.

Mr. Mercer said he was prepared to make a presentation and take questions. He would proceed with the proposal Council had already received and touch on a few of the highlights in that proposal before taking questions. He had two handouts showing the placement in the Northeast. They respond to the questions Council had after reviewing the proposal previously sent. He was glad to come to Wethersfield, this time representing his own firm, established in 1981. His prior visit was also for a search for a Town Manager.

The Mercer Group is a corporation based in Atlanta. Staff has been in the business and is well connected in the City Manager profession. The firm specializes in executive recruiting of managers and county administrators, strategic planning, management studies as well as compensation studies. They are currently working for Glastonbury. He outlined the proposal they plan on following. Council will be able to modify some items along the way if they so choose. The initial meeting takes Council through the process to see if there are modifications to it. He would be the person responsible to Council. There might be opportunities to bring citizens in. The Mercer Group is very complete in addressing all seventeen points listed in the proposal. The scope of the work plan is very detailed. He comes to get to know Council and the Town, interviews with each Councilor and sits in on a meeting for an idea of how they interact with each other as well as some of the issues Council is facing. He interviews Department Heads because they deal with issues on a day to day basis and collect s written data such as the budget, charter, business description. They will meet to draft criteria for the search. Then they do a brochure, which needs Council's approval. The recruitment process would start after approval of the document, the ad copy and suggested schedule for the search. Typically they open a search for 45 days. They would post it on the internet as well as advertise in the two major papers for governing bodies. Due to the time of year, with holidays, and conferences, he would be reluctant to cut the time too much. Each community has its own innate characteristics. During the process they will receive resumes, evaluating them against the criteria Council established in the beginning, acknowledging those and trying to decide if they have to do other things, such as to encourage particular people to become part of the process. The initial screening is done against the criteria established and also the understanding and the background of some of the people interested in the position. It is a weeding out process. When they get down to 12 - 15 people Mr. Mercer would like another meeting to discuss the strengths and weaknesses with Council and how they meet your criteria. With Council assessments they will reduce the pool down further to 8 or so to interview them, conduct reference checks, background checks and present Council with about 5 for interviews. They produce a report on the candidates, provide Council an interview guide, evaluation forms, candidate resumes, their evaluations of them and the results of the background checks. They also provide questions, which Councilors should refrain from asking the candidates. He would go over that with Council and assist in the selection process. There are a variety of ways to make an offer. They close the search in a professional manner. Mercer Group does follow-up steps, which include checking in on the new manager as well as with Council, facilitates a meeting between Council and the Manager within the first 30 or 60 days to set some reachable goals criteria for the first year. It can take the form of an incentive arrangement. The schedule takes between 90 and 120 days. He would

commit to doing it personally. Cost proposal is \$12,500 plus a not-to-exceed expense charge of \$7,500.

Councilor Fitzpatrick stated the handouts show most placements are in the South and Mid West with a few in New Hampshire referring to projects rather than managers. Mr. Mercer went through the list for searches for people in Worcester, Glastonbury and Hartford. He explained there is a hands-off policy, he cannot steal the people he has placed, so most of the New England territory is open to Mercer Group without violating ethical procedure.

Councilor Flynn asked in the course of doing searches, if there is a common thread Council should address. Mr. Mercer responded the economy and what they rely on for the revenue flow to maintain the municipal business. They have to be sure they understand how the revenue flows. Where it comes from, taxes, state or local, strong business base. They want a team player, someone to work with them. Good facilitator skills to be able to work out an agreement for a win win rather than an adversarial situation. Now there is a lot of emphasis on economic development, or redevelopment, towns usually want someone with experience in those two areas. As far as citizen involvement Mr. Mercer said Councilors are elected and they have the fiduciary responsibility to make this decision. Council should not let the citizen committee make the choice for them or to allow them to reduce the pool. An advantage to having them involved somewhat is they buy-in if they feel they are involved. Residents accept the new person. Council knows the people here and he suggests Council get their input up front. Reserve the back end for Council's decision making. There are issues of confidentiality, applicants need to know they will not be overly exposed. With 25 citizens involved the chances of them calling the area where they are from goes up dramatically. They have to guard against it. Preplan on how Council involves the community

Councilor Cascio asked about being based in Atlanta and he wanted to know how Mr. Mercer foresaw the travel and its costs. Mr. Mercer said the expenses are in the fee as well as the advertising and the brochures and other services. He asked if the timeline of 45 days is the magic number or would 30 days be adequate and in regards to the candidates, would Mercer Group anticipate a large influx of applications? Mr. Mercer stated for a search, just completed they received 180 applications. However, the weather and taxes here may scare some away. It is possible you could do interviews in mid December. There is a lot of work to do, some of the advertising only comes out once or twice a month. It is possible but they would prefer to have 45 days given the time of year.

Councilor Gardow asked besides posting online what the primary vehicle of advertising would be. Mr. Mercer said he would want to hit the two basic trade papers, as well as all of the Connecticut organizations, city and country management, moderate womens organizations to encourage them to apply. He has a good list but primarily they network. He handles everything, even those received directly at the town hall so he can run them through the same screens. And then he would give his special recommendation of the best twelve. Part of what Council pays for is for Mercer Group to make calls and get down to a small group for them to interview. What are you finding in the pools? There are an increasing number of females in the pools, more minorities, the person you are looking for would have a masters degree. Most of them have continued in professional development in training programs, keeping up with the changes in the business. Probably looking for someone with several years of accepted management experience, account managers, city managers, assistant or deputy, financial background, budgeting, a team player. In years past they were all civil engineers, now they need to know about a broad range of topics and experience from labor relations, public works, administrative, data processing, informational technology, and school systems. The skills needed are good interpersonal relation skills, they have to be fair and honest with leadership skills.

Chairperson Czernicki asked how many cases he serves as the principal contact as any one time. He said three at this time. What is the most you usually carry? He likes to keep it to 6.

Mr. Mercer, thanked them and wished them well in the selection. Mercer Group has experience and contacts in the city manager business across the United States, They have flexibility in each step and it is tailored to the Town of Wethersfield. They make good placements and have a good placement ratio. They work in a professional manner. He is personally committed to this search and has had 30 years as a consultant. He is a certified management consultant and operates in the public sector and he is reviewed by his peers every three years.

The second firm to present was Bennett Associates. Mr. Richard Bennett made the presentation.

Mr. Bennett thanked them for flexibility of their schedule to allow him to attend a conference and spend time with the

resigning president. He was a city and town manager, 30 years ago. In 1981 started his own business as a consultant and remained in the service business working in the civic industry which consists of government and nonprofit associations. Headquartered in Norwell, an area south east of Boston, they have full time offices in Chicago, Rye, New York, and by the end of the year they will have two more full time offices. They are growing nicely and have served their civic clients all across the country, serving a whole range of clients, in 38 states. They are very active in the Northeast and Mid Atlantic area.

There is no great magic in the search business. It entails hard work, networking and building relationships first with the client and then with those people you really get to know quite well and bringing them to the client. The basic elements are the same in a search. The difference is where the individual firm places its emphasis. Getting to know the client, describing the challenge, getting to know the candidates very well, then helping you understand who is best and then closing the deal. He thinks they are particularly good in the first and third step. We spend time with you, and anyone you choose. If Bennett Associates have the privilege of working with you, Council will be working with him and he may have a support person as well. They would be here for a few days to talk to people Council thinks they need to talk with to understand the four things about the community. Its history, where it is right now, as specifically as possible what Council and the community believes has to be accomplished in the next three to five years and lastly, how the individual needs to lead in order for Council to understand that they made the right choice. There are a lot of people in this business, who are good at what they do. Not a question of finding skilled people. The question is finding those relatively few people who know how to use their skills in a particular way that fits this particular Council. The type of people they would be searching for are uniquely qualified for the requirements of Wethersfield. People they searched for in other towns may be good but they are not automatically good. They need to spend a lot of time in the beginning with Council and others to do a profiling and the preparation of the challenge statement. There is a copy in the proposal they previously sent.

This step is the most critical part in the search. If you do not know what you want to accomplish with this hire, then he guarantees the person you hire will change the organization in a way you did not anticipate. It may not be anything wrong with that but hiring a Town Manager, you want to hire somebody who is going to accomplish what you identify as being important. By spending the time in this profiling stage, and then coming back with a draft of the document, it is ultimately your own. This is a statement about what Council wants to accomplish. This document gives us the structure of the type of person you want. It gives them the opportunity to tell perspective candidates not to be interested in Wethersfield unless you know you are expected to accomplish these things and lead in this particular way. It is helpful for Council to have focus on what you want to accomplish and for important candidates to understand what is expected.

Sometimes what has to be said about a position and what is important for the future is not always comfortable. Profiles are not like a Chamber of Commerce statement that says everything is wonderful in Wethersfield. That may not be the case. The intent is to be very truthful about what the circumstances are and what is expected. It is helpful for Council and candidates to go through this process to understand with clarity what really is expected. Reduces the chances of making a mistake is what the process is about.

When they understand what Council is looking for, it becomes easier to identify the right kind of people because Bennett Associates have a pretty precise set of expectations for the position. We identify 8 -10 people that they would bring back to Council who Bennett Associates believe are particularly well qualified for the position. They do all the placing of announcements, all the mechanical things, it is a public job opportunity and there are all kinds of procedures to follow. They also use an extensive data base which they have built up over time. They have a reliable network of friends and colleagues in the industry who speak to them about who is good, what are the best issues are for these individuals. There is a lot that goes into identifying those people. The third stage is helping Council get to know them and they getting to know you. So you can make a good choice around what you are trying to accomplish with the search. This is not a chemical issue, there is always some of that, where the chemistry is right. They are always bad choices if there is too much chemistry involved in the equation. They want to help you understand with each of the candidates strengths and weaknesses lie and helping you understand what they are. They want Council to make an informed choice. They think they are quite good at that referencing and understanding those individuals and getting the information and sharing it with you to help you make good decisions. They stand behind the choice. Bennett Associates give a guarantee, one year from date of hire, short of death or disability. It has only happened in two or

three cases over twenty years where they have had to do that.

Sometimes, you make a wrong choice and sometimes the candidate makes a poor choice. It is very infrequent. When they feel there are issues they follow up after the hire. If appropriate and they are asked, they will do some goal setting and try to solve some of those types of problems for Council. We have a pretty good track record as far as tenure. We have people in place for 15 and 20 years. There have been only a few incidences where they had to do a job over. This is a business now where job security and tenure is much more important. They encourage their clients to think in three and five year time frames because everyone can see that far into the future, five to ten years have too many variables. Identify what you want to accomplish. Add to that list and build relationships. With the profiling challenge Council has the framework to do a review with the candidates, to lay out what you want to accomplish and then come back and use it for measures. Think they have a consistent process, work just with board driven types of organizations, in civic types of settings, all around the country during a whole range of searches. They come with a wide range of experience and a clear track record in this part of the country. They have an understanding of the complexities of the structures and traditions here which are not consistent with Montana, Utah or Georgia.

Councilor Flynn asked what common issues of themes have they seen. What kinds of challenges are there? Mr. Bennett said from the Council perspective, in this part of the country, there is a more active, political types of environment in communities where it is difficult to handle some of the complexities because in some instances the political traditions are so vibrant. It is difficult to keep managers, not because they are not good managers but because the communities have long histories of struggling with one another. It is more prevalent now than five years ago. The money issue is always an issue, there is never enough even when there is a lot of money. Allocation of resources and what the role of administrator should play in the decisions. It has become more complicated to move candidates. If a spouse has a very good career in his own right there is reluctance to pick up and move. He calls the "homework issues" it is quite difficult, most sensitive part of searches right now. No way to predict. Candidates are trying to live and solve their own problems. The length of tenure is going up which translates to candidate pools no longer being huge even for very good jobs. It is not a bad thing. You only need one, but you need six or seven to get to that one. What role do you see for citizen involvement in this process, how would you structure it, how would you manage? Mr. Bennett said in the profiling and preparation of the challenge statement, it is important to invite representatives of the town that represent legitimate constituency that have an interest in the town and its affairs. It says you have a good process and you are asking people to participate, to make contributions. They always do. Right up front it is important for the public to be involved and asked. There always is common ground with Council and the public. They have the same key points, maybe different priorities and ways of accomplishment. Prefer to do it in small groups in private settings. Do not abdicate in any real or perceived way the control or outcome. It is fine to use a screening group but do not abdicate your responsibility for the outcome. No big hearings in public as they feel it is not meaningful in those settings.

Councilor Cascio asked a question concerning a timeframe. Is eleven weeks normal? Mr. Bennett said that is when they are hired. It may take longer for them to wrap up where they are and start here, so he uses 120 days. He asked if the recruitment process was four weeks. Mr. Bennett said the recruitment process and the networking, it starts around the fourth week and ends around the ninth or tenth. They are hamstrung by some dates due to publication dates. Typically would like the application deadline thirty days after the publication of the first time. Increasingly they use the Internet and their own web page. They also use four or five national web pages. The other issue is the holiday season, from Thanksgiving until the end of the year, it is time for people to power down. They tend not to think of job changes at that time, their minds are in other places. They would set a reasonable schedule with Council and do everything they can to stay with that schedule. Knowing that our Town is without a manager, it is not new information, in your travels have you heard that Wethersfield is looking for a Town Manager, is the word out there? Yes, at the conference he just attended they knew he was coming in and wanted to know what was going on. The word is out on the regional street.

Councilor Fitzpatrick what is the down side of your being one of the leading recruiters in the Northeast? Ethically, you cannot go back and recruit somebody you placed or even someone else from the organization for two years after they were placed. It destroys business if you raid organizations. They do a lot of work everywhere, the good pools are not shrinking, the numbers are shrinking. They tend not to recruit the same individuals over and over. Create a new pool every time, placements are unique to the situation. They have a good reputation in this part of the country because they

know the types of government and know typically the way they work. Treat the candidates respectfully. They work hard to develop and protect their reputation and also their turf. The core group changes with every search.

Councilor Gardow is there any other method of advertising? They send out mailers to people they think would be interested in the position and they have identified from other searches and feel would be a good match. They spend a lot of time on the telephone, networking. Conversations and tracking people. If our Human Resources received applications would you look at those? Definitely, they would collect any applications received to this date and anything that comes in later. Any resume from any source is theirs to make a decision. What are the general qualifications for people you have been placing in a position like this? Darien closed ten days ago, the gentleman coming was an assistant village manager from Scarsdale to become Town Manager for Darien. He was there for 15 years. He is 55, heavily experienced and delighted to come to Darien. Another placement, the woman was a Finance Director before becoming a City Manager and is taking over in Spartanburg South Carolina. Weston MA they replaced the Town Manager with 52 years on the job with Town Manager from Needham, has been in the business for 20 years. His experience with these positions and with boards and Councils is that they want experience.

Deputy Mayor O'Connor asked if there is an additional percentage fee? No, it is a fixed fee. In the course of a search, if we do not take someone as our manager but later look to him as a finance manager, you charge for that. Yes we do, that is the way they protect their work. It is a percentage of what the fee was. It protects what we did to get to that particular point. Do you recycle candidates? If I ask them if they applied for Darien would they tell me no? No I will tell you they applied or were a candidate. Will you do cold calling or do you only call in your network? When they know what Council is looking for and when they know they are in the area, they will typically call someone they know and ask them who they know, who is good.

Chairperson Czernicki asked about seeking out candidates who are not typical. If you want certain things, like a bus system, it is important for us to find someone to set up and run a bus system. We do not go to the private sector to find someone. it is quite risky to do that. Some private sector people do come over if they have a civic mission. If they do not have a civic mission or see some good that public entities can do, having a private sector orientation can be devastating in the public sector. They have to believe in public service. It comes back to the profile. How many searches are you the principal in at any one time? We try to handle four or five at any one time, depending on where we are in the process. Why would you choose to be the principal recruiter in this search? Ralph DeSantis. When I was in grad school I did an internship with him in Michigan. When he was a Manager in Scituate, he came to Wethersfield to see our computer system. It is close, two and a half hours away, In summary, he hopes to work with Council, thinks it would be fun and that they could be of service to Wethersfield. Thank you for the opportunity to compete.

Deputy Mayor O'Connor moved "**TO CHOOSE BENNETT ASSOCIATES AS THE SEARCH FIRM FOR THE TOWN MANAGER**" seconded by Councilor Flynn. All Councilors present including the Chairperson voted AYE. The motion passed, 8-0-0.

## **Adjournment**

Councilor Flynn moved to adjourn at 8:53 p.m. seconded by Councilor Cascio.

Dolores G. Sassano  
Town Clerk

*Approved 10-21-2002*