

SELECT BOARD

KATELYN DAMON, BOARD CHAIR

JANUARY BENNETT

INGRID GAITHER

ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

TO THE SELECT BOARD

JAMES FORTUNE

TOWN CLERK / TREASURER

BENJAMIN SUMNER

PUBLIC SAFETY COORDINATOR

SHARON MORRELL

Town Manager Transition Committee Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Attendance:

Joe Connell, Chair

Lauren Noether, Vice Chair

Heather Spurling, Secretary

Garth Hallberg, George Dickson, Committee Members.

Ingrid Gaither, Selectboard (non-voting).

I. Call to Order

A. The meeting was called to order at 4:39pm by Chair Joe Connell.

II. Approval of Minutes

A. Motion to approve minutes was made by Garth and seconded by Joe.
All in favor.

III. Follow up on Action Items

- A. Lauren spoke with MMA on the phone. They were unable to give definitive answers over the phone at the time. However, a call-back from “legal” was received, and they answered that they were unable to advise regarding contracts. Joe proposed that we stop relying on MMA as a reference in this regard. General consensus.
- B. Joe created a “cheat sheet”, intended as a guide for responding to questions regarding the role of a Town Manager.

IV. Next Steps

A. Reviewing Interview Questions and Resources for Interviewers

- a. The Committee discussed whether interviews could begin to be conducted.
- b. The conversation centered around the “cheat sheet” created by Joe that was shared with the Committee. General discussion, including specifics regarding duties of current town employees. Joe agreed to edit some of the language behind “bullet point 4” to state that a Town Manager could make decisions based within the guidelines of the annual town meeting.
- c. Ingrid mentioned that some of the duties outlined in the “cheat sheet” refer to current tasks managed by the Tax Collector (i.e., budget preparation). General discussion, including who signs off on which budget items. Joe and Ingrid helped clarify that Ben Sumner prepares checks as the Tax Collector, but the Selectboard signs them. The Selectboard also signs the warrant. A note was made by Ingrid that sometimes payments are made before the Selectboard sees them.
- d. Joe pointed out that there is a significant difference between elected and appointed town employees. He also emphasized that contracts of town employees dictate many of their duties and limitations. Ingrid added that there is no contract for W-2 employees of the town (that we know of).
- e. Lauren asked whether it would be helpful to look at a copy of Ben Sumner’s contract.
- f. Ultimately, the Committee agreed that it would be best to hold off on interviews until some more details were confirmed and the conversation was revisited. Garth asked whether Committee members could do anything in the meantime to move the process along. Joe suggested that the Committee use the “cheat sheet” as a conversation point between meetings, and that comments could be made. An action item for Committee members was created based on this point.

B. Regarding Contracts

- a. Conversation turned to the subject of contracts regarding the authority level of a Town Manager in relation to the Selectboard.
- b. Ingrid posed a question of whether the Town Manager would have authority to hire personnel without consulting with the Selectboard. An example was given in terms of the current public safety budget. At this time, the town has authorized funds for one full time and one part time public safety employee, though only one person is currently employed in that capacity. Under Ingrid’s understanding, the Town Manager could use budgeted money to hire for the currently unfilled part-time position. Joe confirmed that a Town Manager would be allowed to make decisions (such as hiring) within the budget given, but couldn’t create a new position without authorization. He cited the specificity of line items in budgets as proof that funds couldn’t be appropriated to another area. Garth helped clarify that the Town Manager would need approval for spending over any approved amount, and asked whether that reality might pose an argument for or against having a Town Manager.
- c. Ingrid supposed that one of the biggest changes a town like the Cranberry Isles would experience would be that of authority level, anticipating potential growing pains. Joe mentioned that most decisions would still be subject to the monthly

Selectboard meetings, but that a contract would help define the authority level of a Town Manager. Lauren confirmed from a legal standpoint that the contract written for a Town Manager would determine their authority level.

- d. Joe reminded the Committee that one of the reasons for conducting meetings and interviews with community members will be in order to flesh out questions that may exist. Talking with the community will help narrow down a contract for a potential Town Manager. He brought the conversation back to the key difference between duties of a Town Manager and that of the Selectboard, mentioning that the Town Manager would be authorized to execute duties as a full time person with authority (though that authority may be limited depending on contract). The Committee's work will be to analyze and highlight benefits and possible side effects of employing a new Town Manager, and to help come up with a contractual agreement that will address the needs of our community.
- e. Lauren suggested that adding a Town Manager position would be like adding a new layer on top of the current form of government. The roles of the Selectboard, Tax Collector, and other town officials would still exist, but the Town Manager would do the work of the Selectboard at their bidding, while making things streamlined and more efficient. She also pointed out that many Selectboard members also have other jobs, whereas a Town Manager would be a full time position.
- f. Ingrid asked a clarifying question: Isn't Jim Fortune already filling that role (as Administrative Assistant to the Selectboard) and at a fraction of the cost of a salaried Town Manager? Joe pointed out that Jim F. isn't authorized to make decisions without the Selectboard. Garth had a reaction similar to Ingrid's, and mentioned that there are upsides and downsides to both arrangements (having all authority contained within a Selectboard, or having a Town Manager with executive authority). He also mentioned that it will be important to avoid misleading the public about the role of a Town Manager, and that ultimately the ability to "execute" the will of the people will be a key distinction. This led the conversation back to the fact that ultimately a Town Manager would be bound by a contract.
- g. Lauren offered some legal insight, saying that the Selectboard still possesses power to check the Town Manager's authority. A Town Manager isn't an ultimate executive that no one can touch, but instead is answerable to the Selectboard, and the Selectboard is answerable to the public. She mentioned one "pro" for employing a Town Manager in that they might understand the "business" of running a town. For example, in interviews conducted with other towns, one sentiment was that a lot of power was given to the Town Manager because they were trusted by the community with that level of authority. Lauren pointed out the difference between a Town Manager and an administrator who takes direction and checks in frequently with the Selectboard.

C. Subsequent Agenda Items

- a. Continue discussion around financial research. Specifically, what would be an attractive salary for a potential Town Manager?
- b. Finalize plans for conducting interviews.

III. Action Items for Next Meeting

- a. Garth agreed to research what an attractive salary might be for a town manager (in reference to his work interviewing representatives from Vinalhaven).
- b. Lauren will talk with her own municipality in order to track down a sample contract. She will also follow up on a voicemail she received from MMA.
- c. Ingrid will look into contracts for Ben Sumner and Jim Fortune.
- d. All Committee members will attempt to circle back with the towns they interviewed previously for relevant information.
- e. All Committee members will weigh in regarding the “cheat sheet”, using an email thread rather than the shared spreadsheet.

IV. Subsequent Meeting

Will take place on Tuesday, March 24th 2026 at 4:30pm via Zoom.

V. Adjournment: 5:26pm

George motioned to adjourn, Lauren seconded the motion. All in Favor.