

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, April 21, 2026

Attendance:

Joe Connell, Chair
Lauren Noether, Vice Chair
Heather Spurling, Secretary
Garth Hallberg, George Dickson, Ingrid Gaither, Jim Kehoe Committee Members.

I. Call to Order

A. The meeting was called to order at 4:31 pm by Chair Joe Connell.

II. Approval of Minutes

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

III. Follow up on Action Items

- A. Joe hasn't heard back yet from Avery at Hancock County Planning Commission regarding a meeting in May. Late April meetings with HCPC are scheduled for Comprehensive Plan visioning.
- B. Lauren was able to obtain a sample contract from the Administrative Assistant to the Selectboard. Job description has been the same for awhile (since 2008).
- C. More interviews were held by several Committee Members.
- D. Financial Research was tabled until the next meeting.

IV.

V. Interview Reports

A. Lauren was able to interview two current town employees.

With the first, she discussed HR and reviews. She learned that some reviews were conducted in late February/early March for the Administrative Assistant to the Selectboard and the Safety Coordinator. It was noted that some town personnel positions are more informal than others.

Lauren asked: what are the obstacles to efficiently running the town? This interviewee mentioned that the Selectboard is quasi-volunteer and therefore not necessarily professionally trained in how to run a town. The Admin Assistant at times may have a hard time staying on course/following through. Action items exist, but it's hard to get larger projects done. There was some frustration voiced regarding how things get done, or if they even do get done. The interviewee thought that town government did not feel efficient at this point.

The second person Lauren interviewed added that someone is always up for election in our present system of government. For the most part, they felt that the current system works.

One difficulty mentioned was geography (3 islands with infrastructure, Manset, parking in NEH...). They also mentioned that grants reporting and management is difficult, using the example of a waterfront grant for hundreds of thousands of dollars, which is a lot to expect an Administrative Assistant (AAS) to manage.

The current Selectboard has taken on some grant related roles, which helps.

Hiring a part time grant specialist might also be helpful. The AAS is a self-directed 40hour/week position. Desk work often falls to the AAS, but not the technology aspect. The town uses Downeast IT in Surry for the town website and major printing jobs.

This interviewee felt there were roadblocks to every project or initiative, making it hard to get things off the ground. Examples given were the parking lot on GCI, FEMA project, dock on Sutton (two year back log on dock repairs from the company that gave the bid Permits, etc). They thought that it is sometimes better to have a contractor take charge on projects, as otherwise it can be like "herding cats".

Regarding communication, this interviewee felt things were pretty good within the town. They wondered whether it would be possible for town employees to receive training of some kind.

B. Ingrid interviewed someone who heavily emphasized how relationships carry weight. They mentioned that changes we make are deeper than personnel or employee changes. This interview was viewed through that lens. This person was against having a Town Manager, thinking we are too small of a town to employ one. They have served in town government and are a year round resident. Some comments included: concern that a Town Manager would have too much authority. They feared that a T.M. could override decisions by the Selectboard (they believed this to be true). Ingrid didn't add info, just listened. The interviewee continued, saying the wrong personnel in that role could be detrimental. They used the example of the current GCI snowplow contract, which would make no sense to an outsider/Town Manager. They worried that a Town Manager wouldn't handle small town politics or needs delicately. They felt

strongly that a Selectboard of three can do a lot, and it is best to leave the governing to those within the community rather than outsourcing to a higher paid outsider. They added that a Selectboard is the simplest form of government and the best fit for a small town. Ingrid asked whether there was a downside to current system. This interviewee cited that problems emerge when someone elected to the Selectboard does not taking care of the duties involved.

C. Garth interviewed one of the same people that Jim talked with: a part time resident with generational ties to GCI. This interviewee holds a masters degree in public education. They took the point of view: what problem is having a Town Manager designed to solve? Garth floated the idea of larger projects running into barriers. The interviewee felt that making a change to the current system in such a small community felt out of scale to the size of any current problem. They said that “the Town Manager is a big thing in Maine”. If you pay attention, there is a lot of movement among town managers (staying for a couple years, then moving on). If it’s challenging to get the right person to do a hypothetical job once, what do you do when someone who does a good job decides to move on? How do you replace them? Why not set a timeline (suggested 3-5 years) with the things that should be improved, and if things still aren’t working at that point, move forward with a new system. They recommended a two-tiered step for transition, being skeptical of big changes in a fast timeline for the size of this community.

D. Jim was able to conduct two interviews.

He called a friend who used to sit on town council in Vermont. Though comparing apples and oranges when it comes to size of towns, there was some useful info to be gained. This VT town does have a Town Manager that recently retired. They were over and above, to the point where their successor can’t begin to fill those shoes. The Selectboard meets every two weeks. Jim’s friend likes the delegation of that role and the regular process. Major decisions stay at the Selectboard level, but the Town Manager takes initiative on other matters. Inside their town is a group called “the village” run just by the Selectboard. Based on their experience in Vermont, this interviewee was very much pro-town manager.

Another person Jim interviewed was surprised, asking: why are we having this conversation? Who brought this up? Is something broken? Jim explained the committee's process and upcoming forums. He asked whether they had any frustrations with the way the town operated. They answered that on the whole they had no real frustration, and as a seasonal person they don’t need a whole lot from town government. “I want to be able to pay my taxes and get my boat stickers.” This interviewee didn’t have qualms with much, at least not much that impacted their life specifically. They were not influenced by how quickly things get done. Admittedly, their opinion was “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it”, feeling that in this particular community, it’s important to tread lightly when making changes. Objectively: they thought that (if you could design it) a hybrid system might be good, where we could tweak or amend or empower what we already have slightly more.

VI. General Discussion:

- A. Ingrid asked Lauren a question regarding efficiency in reference to one of her interviews. Was there frustration regarding the system, or the AAS/personnel? Lauren answered that it might be a bit of both.
- B. Regarding the contract for the AAS: Joe asked whether Jim Fortune felt the AAS contract was effective. To Joe it seemed like the job description for the AAS sounded very close to a possible Town Manager's job description, with very sweeping duties. Clarity around the structure is key. Joe wondered whether there is a historical structural problem (the contract may be outdated).
- C. Regarding HR and employee reviews: Joe remarked that it will be important to define the difference between a Town Manager and an AAS (currently noting that the biggest difference is HR). "We don't have to act in a black and white fashion as a committee. We are tasked with examining, exploring, and coming back with recommendations. Let's keep digging in the right directions."
- D. George brought up a possible solution to revolving backlog issues. He wondered if we could have an assistant to the AAS, or split that position into two positions. There is precedent for this in reference to the town budget. What if there were a deputy assistant? Example: deputy assistant to town clerk was recently able to step into that role seamlessly.

VII. Next Steps

- A. Joe proposed that the Committee close the interviewing phase. General agreement.
- B. On deck to pursue: job descriptions and possibility of adding HR.
- C. With comprehensive plan discussion starting: pay attention to how discussion there might dovetail with the Committee's work.

VI. Subsequent Agenda Items

- a. Discussion around financial research will be continued.
- b. The Committee will work on planning upcoming public forums.
- c. Job descriptions and contracts for a Town Manager will be considered.

VII. Action Items for Next Meeting

- a. Committee members will continue preliminary research regarding financial figures.
- b. Committee members will look into job descriptions and other town manager contracts to compare with.
- c. George will share sign-in info or link to some relevant MMA documents regarding a salary table.

VIII. Subsequent Meeting

Will take place on Tuesday May 5th 2026 at 4:30pm via Zoom.

IX. Adjournment: 5:30pm

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