

Susan L. Inman – Candidate for Town Administrator of Boxford

Question #1: A) Although my role as town administrator would be beginning, my tenure in Boxford is now nearing ten years. I have long cultivated my leadership style and management presence. In the first 30 days, I will meet with each department head and encourage communication by reinstating the department head and LEPC meetings monthly so that managers have a forum to share information. I will lead by example by being present both physically in the office and online for the many meetings that a town administrator must attend. I will reinstate training for boards and committees on Open Meeting Law and continue to support Zoom remote participation at meetings. As an internal applicant, my candidacy offers Boxford a clear picture of my style and resulting outcomes.

B) Strong communication skills will allow me to help build trust and confidence amongst the Select Board, department heads, and staff by giving truthful guidance to help others meet expectations. Department heads know me as trustworthy, unafraid to take on challenges, and as someone who will press on until I achieve my goals. I have collaborated with nearly every department head to successful outcomes—project examples include town-wide IT replacement with the finance director, a communication plan for trash contract changes with the health director, and hiring positions within all town departments. In addition to leadership within positive change, I am also called upon in challenging times to support department heads in disciplinary meetings with their staff. I offer help and advice daily on numerous disciplines, particularly technology, procurement, and human resources, to all levels of the organization, including elected boards. As the town administrator, I will continue to offer my support and assistance facilitating concise, effective communication with the Select Board.

C) The Select Board should clarify goals and objectives annually during the evaluation of the town administrator. In the first year, the general expectations of both the Board and the town administrator would be expressed in the interview process so that each would enter into the personal services contract with full knowledge of expectations. After hiring the new town administrator, the chair and the Board would further direct the town administrator toward priorities.

D) The role of a town administrator is to execute the will of the Select Board. While I may observe issues within the organization, it would be more important to me what the Board collectively determined were its three most important issues. Presently, I see several unavoidable challenges for the next town administrator: 1) Succession planning for expected retirement of five key department heads within two to five years, 2) Continued conservative financial leadership while maintaining a commitment to the capital plan and debt management, and lastly, 3) Lack of civic involvement in future generations impacting the town's dependence on volunteers.

Question #2: A) In Boxford, preparing the operating budget is the role of the finance director in collaboration with department heads and the Finance Committee – it is the Finance Committee's budget for presentation at town meeting. However, the town administrator and the Select Board play a role in collectively addressing the town's needs, reviewing options for reductions or increases, and making recommendations to the Finance Committee. Part of developing an accurate, conservative budget depends on effective financial forecasting of revenue and expenses. Each year the process begins with the revenue forecast using last year's budget and current market conditions. The Finance Committee works collaboratively with the finance director to project Boxford's revenues which come primarily from its residential tax base and limited commercial tax base, state revenues – chapter 70, unrestricted state aid, motor vehicle excise tax, a PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) for the state forest, and other local receipts such as trash stickers, investment income, permits, licenses, and fees. The projection of revenues is necessary to determine a target range for the expense budget. Next, the finance director completes an expense forecast by meeting with each department head to review their draft department budget, going through each item to justify any increase/addition that would impact the budget. Significant expenses that will increase the operating budget permanently are considered for an override, thereby forcing the voters to choose to support or deny a substantial increase. A summary of operating budget changes for the fiscal year, broken down between Salaries by Department and Non-Salary Operating Budget, is created, including the Finance Committee guideline. When she identifies required expenses, the finance director works to align them with the Finance Committee

guideline. Upon approval by the Finance Committee, the operating budget is ready for the town meeting. The warrant article lists support from the Select Board.

B) Development of a long-term capital plan begins by meeting with department heads to identify the needs in order of priority. An excel workbook with several sheets separates projects by funding source – debt authorization and pay-as-you-go are the two primary sources of funding. Worksheets identify the capital item by asset type, project title, term, and fiscal year. Boxford's Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) runs over five years with a strategy to maximize the tax impact of capital expenses in FY21 at 4.75% of the total tax levy, with planned increases of .25% each year until reaching 5.75%. The CIP is to pay for capital expenses from free cash at no more than \$1.5 Million. While there were some apparent setbacks in FY21, committing to the plan long-term is paramount to its success. Getting buy-in from voters, building trust in public government, managing successful projects within voted budgets, and continuing to regenerate free cash are essential ways to sustain a CIP.

C) Boxford has not faced a drastic decrease in revenue because it does not have a significant commercial tax base. An increase in building permit fees offset the roughly \$100,000 decrease in motor vehicle excise tax. I would advise elected officials to be aware of how funds available through the American Rescue Plan and ESSER II can support financial planning. In the coming year, the elementary schools may add more sections due to the incoming headcount. Funding can come from these sources and eventually become part of the school's operating budget. While it is not prudent to pay for permanent budget increases with temporary funds, schools expect this type of ebb and flow and commonly adapt to class sizes. Therefore, using these funds is an acceptable way to fund this increase in staff temporarily. It will be a challenge for Boxford to spend the money allotted to the community in the approved ways; the town administrator will have to be creative in finding ways to use this aid. Two opportunities to investigate for the possible use of the aid are a more permanent tent structure for the summer months at the COA to allow seniors to gather and a transfer of some of the town's support funds to assist Boxford schools further.

Question #3: A) My view of the best overall relationship between the town administrator and the Select Board is one with clear, direct communication for the collective benefit of the town. The Board must communicate with clarity to the administrator, review performance regularly, and support the development of the administrator. The relationship would include trust, and the Board should know what motivates its administrator. In response, the administrator must perform to expectations and be accountable for deliverables in harmony with the town's strategic plan. B) Relationships with department heads and staff are also based on trust and respect. The town administrator must support department heads in the face of challenges. Communication and awareness of strengths and weaknesses are a must. C) The administrator does not commonly interface directly with the School Committee; our office would communicate with the superintendent. The best scenario in this relationship is to have strong communication and support between the superintendent and the town administrator, which would transfer to the School Board as determined by the superintendent. D) Respectful engagement and strong communication would build the best overall relationship with residents. Citizens expect the government to listen to their views when making decisions. Everyone must have the opportunity to participate in government and the ability to influence public decisions. The best scenario is when residents' participation enhances the validity of the decision-making.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION: A few years ago, the town adopted the Boxford Park Program as a town program. This decision was based mainly on the financial impact and the overall benefit to the town's residents. Soon after, the volunteer beach director was unhappy that the town did not adopt the beach employees as a town program. He eventually quit his position as beach director. Several board members tried to discuss this with the beach director to no resolution, and he made comments online and in a public meeting that furthered the tension with the Board. I had suspected that the beach director was feeling underappreciated, and there were various personal reasons for which I sensed he harbored some resentment. After one evening meeting, I engaged him in conversation in the hallway to explain the basis of the refusal to adopt the beach employees. I explained that the decision was purely financial and recommended because the program was in the red – meaning it could not become a revolving fund and support itself. I feel that my communication abilities enabled trust and understanding, leading to his return to the position as beach director.