

TOWN OF PEMBROKE  
APPROVED  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE MINUTES  
18 November 2019

Linda Peterson, Chairperson opened the meeting of the Advisory Committee in Pembroke Town Hall at 7:00PM on 18 November 2019. Also present were Stephen Walsh, Sandra Beaton, Matthew Norton and Kelly Seifert

**Absent:** Patrick Chilcott, Tim Landy and Maria Karas

**Guest:** Matthew Rushing

Linda Peterson opened the meeting and welcomed Matthew Rushing, Advisory member candidate.

- Linda asked why he was interested in Advisory. Matthew said his family moved to town one year ago and believes he can provide some lift. He acknowledged that his wife is Jessica Rushing, Board of Selectmen member. Linda expressed concerns about that relationship. Stephen Walsh addressed the “conflict of interest” law which prohibits taking official action on matters affecting an immediate family member. Advisory votes on the budget which includes the Board of Selectmen salary. Sandra Beaton asked if Advisory votes or advises on the budget. Stephen Walsh said Advisory votes on the town budget line by line. Matthew Rushing noted that other members of Advisory are related to town staff. Linda recommended seeking guidance from town council on the conflict of interest law.
- Linda asked Matthew about his employer RiskCanvas. Matthew explained that it’s a software company that tracks transactions by customer which flags fraud and money laundering. He will be traveling three days this week and two next week but works from home. He is able to manage his own travel schedule, most of the time. Sandra Beaton asked one thing he thought Pembroke could do better. Matthew said he grew up in Maryland but also lived in Texas, Virginia and abroad. Most communities were county based with very little interaction with government. He is very interested to see this level of interaction. He has experience in identifying gaps in information; similar to what this board does.
- Linda said Advisory is not sure how it’s role will be affected once the Town Manager is hired. Advisory receives a copy of the budget from the Town Manager around end of January early February. After receiving the budget, the committee normally schedules budget meetings with Police, Fire, DPW and the School. Matthew Rushing asked how Advisory decides on the individual process. Linda explained the “Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund” process which is set aside for emergencies and unforeseen expenses. This fund is \$50,000 per fiscal year. One of the requests received for payment from this fund is “vacation buyback”. Advisory sent a recommendation to the Town Manager suggesting a separate line item be included in department budgets to cover this cost.
- Matthew Rushing asked who decides if we have a fall town meeting. Linda explained that the Snow & Ice deficit is the only item for fall; this year it was paid at the spring town meeting. There was not enough to warrant a fall town meeting; capital requests were once part of the fall town meeting but moved to spring town meeting. Linda explained that the Department of Revenue “DOR” completed a review of Pembroke’s processes about seven years ago and provided recommendations. The town still has issues such as pension liabilities. Also, healthcare costs are decided year to year. Payroll direct deposit was suggested for all town employees; still not implemented.
- Linda said that Advisory tries to go to Town Meeting in sync with the Board of Selectmen on the budget and warrant articles.
- Matthew Rushing mentioned that Pembroke has a lower tax rate versus surrounding towns. Stephen Walsh explained that trash and water are not included in the tax rate. Pembroke only has one tax rate for both residential and commercial business. The town did implement a meal tax about five years ago. The water rates have not been raised in years; infrastructure is currently an issue so an increase in water rates is being considered.

<sup>2</sup> The Chairperson did not vote on this motion

- Stephen Walsh said Pembroke needs economic development. He mentioned how Sysco Foods moved to Plympton from Norton. Sysco wanted to expand; a member of the Plympton Board of Selectmen reached out to Sysco and made that happen. Another example discussed was the Sports Complex in Hanover. Pembroke would benefit from a hotel, i.e. occupancy tax, real estate tax and meal tax. Linda said the town does have property on route 53 that was originally purchased for a new school. The student population has decreased during the past ten years but the school budget still goes up. Matthew Rushing said he has four children, two attend North Elementary and one goes to Middle School. His oldest daughter attends Notre Dame.
- Linda said Advisory doesn't always receive the data they need. The town has moved to a new finance software system that should provide better reporting. Matthew Norton said there was a feasibility study developed for Pembroke recently by UMASS as part of a grant from the state which includes a tool for forecasting. Stephen Walsh mentioned the town has done a good job with the grant process since Brandon Gulnick working in the Board of Selectmen's office has been writing for grants.
- The committee discussed ways to improve communication to residents regarding the budget and warrant articles. Over the past few years, Advisory has hosted a yearly Budget meeting for residents scheduled a few weeks prior to the spring Town Meeting, although attendance at these meetings has been low. Sandra Beaton suggested using social media to get this information to the residents. She said that this is being done by Jessica Rushing, BOS member after each meeting. She posts an unbiased 10 minute message as an overview of the meeting. It was also mentioned that the chairperson of the Planning Board does the same thing. Sandra volunteered to post Advisory information to social media as approved by the committee. Stephen Walsh suggested that no other committee/board meetings be scheduled the night of Town Meeting to avoid conflicts, maybe attendance would improve. He also suggested including a town newsletter to resident via water bills and/or tax bills as a form of communication.
- Advisory agreed to send an email to Ed Thorne, Town Administrator seeking Town Council guidance on the "conflict of interest" law for municipal finance committee members. This may also impact Patrick Chilcott and Tim Landy. Matthew Rushing said he would reach out to the State Ethics Commission as well.

Linda thanked Matthew Rushing

Upon motion moved by Stephen Walsh and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Sandra Beaton the meeting minutes of November 4, 2019 was

**VOTED<sup>1</sup>:** To accept the meeting minutes of November 4, 2019. Stephen Walsh, Sandra Beaton, Kelly Seifert and Linda Peterson supported the motion. Matthew Norton abstained

Upon motion moved by Kelly Seifert and 2<sup>nd</sup> by Matthew Norton to approved the Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund from Michael Buckley, Town Accountant in the amount of \$2,664.68 for vacation buyback for the Assistant to Town Manager.

**VOTED<sup>2</sup>:** To approve the Request for Transfer from the Reserve Fund from Michael Buckley, Town Accountant in the amount of \$2,664.68 for vacation buyback for the Assistant to Town Accountant. Stephen Walsh, Kelly Seifert, Sandra Beaton and Matthew Norton supported the motion.

The next meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 25, 2019 at 7:00pm.

Advisory adjourned at 9:11PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Stephen Walsh, Clerk

<sup>2</sup> The Chairperson did not vote on this motion