

TOWN OF WEBSTER

Personnel Advisory Board

350 Main Street

Webster, MA 01570

Board of Selectmen Appointments

Patricia Nectow

Candace Shivers

Finance Committee Appointments

Sarah Sansom

Joshua Sterczala

Town Moderator Appointments

Elaine Davies, Chair

Steven Raymond

Town Administrator

Doug Willardson

Town of Webster Board of Selectmen

350 Main Street

Webster, Massachusetts 01570

Dear Selectmen:

On behalf of the Town of Webster Personnel Advisory Board (PAB), I am forwarding to you the results of the PAB's recent evaluation of the Town's Personnel Policies and their implementation. We are happy to answer any questions you may have. We look forward to your feedback.

Sincerely,

/S/

Elaine F. Davies,
Chair

Enclosure

TOWN OF WEBSTER

Personnel Advisory Board

350 Main Street

Webster, MA 01570

Board of Selectmen Appointments

Patricia Nectow

Candace Shivers

Finance Committee Appointments

Sarah Sansom

Joshua Sterczala

Town Moderator Appointments

Elaine Davies, Chair

Steven Raymond

Town Administrator

Doug Willardson

REPORT TO THE TOWN OF WEBSTER BOARD OF SELECTMEN

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE TOWN OF WEBSTER PERSONNEL POLICIES

MAY 7, 2021

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide the Board of Selectmen with the findings and recommendations from an evaluation of the Town of Webster Personnel Policies performed by the Personnel Advisory Board. Its intent is to provide constructive, positive feedback and recommendations regarding the Town of Webster workforce and management in order to promote continuous improvement in the services provided to its citizens.

Background and Methodology

On July 9, 2018, the Webster Board of Selectmen approved the Town of Webster Personnel Policies. This document, the first comprehensive set of personnel policies for the town, was developed by a newly reconstituted Personnel Advisory Board (PAB), under the leadership of Chair Kathryn Ward and working closely with newly hired Town Administrator Doug Willardson. The effort began in spring 2017 and took a year of intense effort, research, and writing. The PAB's plan was to allow some time for the document to be distributed, read, understood, and used before evaluating its implementation and determining the need for changes. While it was hoped that the PAB evaluation could start in spring 2020, the COVID19 pandemic interfered and the work was not begun until October 2020.

The evaluation was conducted in two parts. First, using a standard interview guide, the Board interviewed seven town managers about their experience with the guidance and areas that needed attention—whether that be additional or revised policy or guidance, or assistance in implementation. The second part of the exercise was the in-depth review of the Policies document. The following managers were interviewed over five months from October 2020 through February 2021.

Tina Landry, Town Collector
Tim Bell, Town Accountant
Amanda Grenier, Director of Library Services
Chief Michael Shaw, Chief of Police
Kenneth Pizzetti, Highway Superintendent
Theodore Tetreault, Building Commissioner/ADA Coordinator
Jean Travis, Senior Center Director

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

General

o The Personnel Policies document is comprehensive, managers are familiar with it, and it is a good reference document—consulted primarily when issues arise. It is particularly important for new hires to know that the information is easily available and contains useful information to ensure a fair, equitable, and safe workplace. It should continue to be part of the New Hire Welcome Information Packet. The Board suggests that periodically all managers and employees be reminded of the intent, content, location, and usefulness of the document. As a living document, it should be updated at least annually by the Town Administrator. The PAB should review its content and implementation once every three years and report to the Webster Board of Selectmen. The Town Administrator should designate a person to whom employees can go for assistance in interpreting the personnel policies.

Performance Evaluation System

o A performance evaluation system is vital to the continuous improvement of town services. It is important for managers and staff to understand their goals for the year and how they fit with the town's goals, and how they can efficiently and effectively perform the work to accomplish this. Managers stressed that they frequently communicate with employees about their work and specific assignments. However, the formal performance evaluation process outlined in the Policies document—beginning with clear performance standards and annual

goals, mid year conversations, a final evaluation of the year's effort, and a conversation on training and educational needs—has not yet been implemented fully. It should be noted that there is a pilot program currently underway in the Collector/Treasurer offices to do self assessment and performance reviews. This should be quite helpful in not only implementing the performance evaluation system, but also in determining whether the policies need adjustment in the future. The Board recommends that implementation become and remain a priority over the next several years, all managers and relevant employees have formal standards, and the relevant conversations take place and are documented at the mid year and end of year. The Board recognizes that many feel stress associated with performance reviews but there are ways to ensure that a performance discussion is positive and constructive. The Board thus suggests that coaching and interview tools and techniques be provided to managers to enhance positive performance discussions.

Position Descriptions

o Position descriptions are important tools to define the type of work to be done, the skills needed to do them, and interrelationships between departments. While most employees have position descriptions and work is underway where they need attention, it was not clear to the PAB that all of the relevant department manager and employee position descriptions accurately outline the type of work required now or for the future. The Board recommends that this year the effort to update and/or create accurate position descriptions be given priority. In addition, the descriptions should be reviewed annually. To facilitate this, it might be useful to provide guidance on what should be part of a position description, including crossover and cross training needs and opportunities.

Onboarding

o Getting new employees acclimated and functioning effectively in their position as quickly as possible is important to any organization. Thus the way an organization “on-boards” its people is important. The information and training program varies with the department and type of work. However, there are two types of processes used—one for general information that can be standardized, and the second for specific training. The town currently has a good “New Hires” package for general information. Several town departments, such as the Police and Highway departments, have detailed programs and processes to assist new employees in getting onboard and trained. The Board encourages efforts to develop a standardized program for general information for all new employees. It should be available online. A program customized for each department can be developed as needed. In addition, the Board recommends an online password protected “best practices” page for employees.

Emergencies

o Over the last year the town experienced an unanticipated long term emergency caused by the COVID pandemic. The Policies and Guidance document includes a section on personnel issues that arise during emergencies, but one which covers mostly weather events. The pandemic has taught that an emergency is broader than dealing with late arrivals during inclement weather and can be long lasting. Given the experiences from the pandemic, this may be a good time for the town to look broadly at issues of continuity of government and operations. (A standard Continuity of Operations plan includes such things as available legal underpinnings for action, order of succession, alternative sites and plans for their use, designated personnel, contact lists, and communication plans. Personnel issues are part of this.) At a minimum, the Board recommends a revision of the emergency section of the Policies document to deal with longer term disruptions to work in addition to normal weather emergencies. It also supports the development of a Telecommuting policy and suggests inclusion of other issues, such as furloughs, staggering shifts and hybrid work situations, and leave carryover that could be affected by a long term emergency.

Succession Planning

Nothing can be put aside more easily when the priorities of the day surround a town than succession planning—i.e. understanding how retirements and resignations may affect your overall mission, how work may change in the future, and what that means for a hiring plan. While the Town Administrator has begun succession planning efforts, the Board believes that the town should continue to identify key positions as part of a formal succession planning effort. Several areas of need emerged from discussions with the managers, among them human resources (HR) and technology positions. An HR person could play an important role not only in keeping policy and guidance information up to date and answering personnel questions, but also could post best practices and develop guidance. The Board discussed opportunities for sharing an HR person with the School system or regionally and recommends that this be explored. Also, providing and securing information will continue to be important as technology changes and evolves, including such things as personnel and financial data security. It will be important to ensure that the town has the expertise.

Management Team

A strong management team is crucial to enhancing town operations and meeting town goals. This often is difficult to achieve in a flattened organization such as the one under which Webster operates. The town managers are talented and there have been several promising efforts to promote cooperation among managers on issues. Encouraging such cross departmental problem solving and information sharing is important and should continue. In addition, the Board recommends coaching and peer support programs.

CONCLUSION

In Spring 2017, the Personnel Advisory Board found much to do in the realm of personnel policy. Four years later, while work remains to be done, the town has a comprehensive set of policies, classification plan, and many tools. This is due to the leadership of Town Administrator Doug Willardson and his team, and the support of the Board of Selectmen.

The Personnel Advisory Board will continue to offer its support to the town, providing assistance in developing additional guidance as needed. These include: specific personnel policies; performance review techniques; interview techniques for hiring, references, and exit discussions; coaching; position descriptions; and onboarding best practices.

The Board wants to thank the managers who took the time to meet with its members and share their experiences. Special thanks go to those members of the PAB who worked so hard on the original policies and guidance document but no longer serve. Current members pledge to continue efforts to assist the town in moving forward.

Respectfully submitted,

/S/

Elaine F. Davies
Chair