

September 2, 2015

The Stonington Board of Selectmen held a special meeting on this date at the Stonington Police Department at 7:45 p.m. Present were First Selectman George Crouse, Selectman Rob Simmons and Selectman Michael Spellman. Also present were members of the public and press.

(1) Call to Order

Mr. Crouse called the meeting to order at 8:10 p.m.

(2) Comments from the Public

None

(3) Discussion of Ombudsman, Ethics Commission and Independent Ethical Mediation

Mr. Crouse, Mr. Simmons, Mr. Spellman and the town attorney, Tom Londregan spoke with regard to having an Ombudsman and a seated Ethics Commission to handle complaints and resolve disputes. The board agreed that both are needed for the town.

(4) Comments from the Public

Ms. Ashley Gillece stated that after the public hearings of the Charter Revision Commission only one member of the general public ever requested that the Ethics Commission be a seated commission. She stated that as we're pushing it forward now with the Board of Selectmen, it's a little concerning to her because in those public hearings, it was not something that was pushed for by the citizens of the town.

(5) Comments from the Selectmen

Mr. Simmons stated that he has long supported populating an Ethics Commission and pointed out that we have at least one letter on hand from a citizen who is interested in serving (Mr. Henri Gourd). He also stated that just a few weeks before he had a conversation with several citizens who recommended an Ombudsman approach to our town's disputes. Mr. Simmons stated with regard to an Ethics Commission, it could be very useful in educating town employees and elected officials on the proper use of computers, cell phones and other town-owned equipment which should not be for personal use.

(6) Adjourn

There being no further business to come before this Board, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.



George Crouse, Jr.
Recording Secretary

Augmentation of Minutes of 9/2/2015

Mr. Londregan stated that there were three basic ways of dealing with complaints as follows:

1. Ombudsman – Not Just For Ethics:

An ombudsman would be available to discuss and try to mediate or solve disputes of any nature, not just ethical problems.

He is a referee who works to prevent things from getting out of hand by making an effort to resolve them early in the process. Sometimes non-profit organizations sponsor the Ombudsman from outside the organization. He is neutral and tries to be useful in resolving disputes. The New London Bar Association is an example. Also, it is possible that The Day Publishing could sponsor a mediator for a day or so. Because we have had a number of issues that have spiraled up over the past few years it is important that we fashion a remedy.

2. Ethics Commission – On Call To Hear A Particular Complaint: In the past First Selectmen Dibble and Maranelli both recommended having an Ethics Commission with the Town Attorney being the gatekeeper for the system. He would determine whether the allegations amounted to an ethical violation. The Town would not appoint members to the Ethics Commission until the Town Attorney ruled that a complaint was a legitimate ethical violation. Then the Selectmen would pick their own commission for the period of their service for a particular complaint.

The Town has a Code of Ethics involving issues regarding gifts, conflicts of interest, family relationships, etc.

3. Ethics Commission To Be Appointed Now.

The Code of Ethics can be amended to allow the Town to appoint an Ethics Commission now. There are other duties that an Ethics Commission can perform besides hearing complaints filed by someone claiming a violation of the Ethics Code. A standing Ethics Commission could issue advisory opinions. If somebody does not want to file an ethics complaint, but believes there may be something amiss, they can request an advisory opinion from the Ethics Commission. Likewise, if somebody in Town wants to do something that they question themselves might be an issue, they can ask for an advisory opinion to avoid criticism.

A standing Ethics Commission can also perform the job of educating new board members and new commission members in Town about the Ethics ordinance. The Ethics Commission can share the reported cases from other towns so as to avoid similar pitfalls in the Town of Stonington.