

**Joint Washington & Middlefield Select Boards with
Town Administrator Screening Committee**

(The meeting was held via Zoom due to the snow storm impeding travel)

**Minutes
December 16, 2022
4:45-9pm**

Attendees:

Representing the Town of Middlefield:

Select Board: Curt Robie and Ann Marie Visconti

Screening Committee: Joe Kearns

Residents: Adair Laurel-Cafarella (Finance Committee) and Tamarin Laurel-Paine (Assessor)

Representing the Town of Washington:

Select Board: Kent Lew, David Ellis, and John Fish.

Screening Committee: Tricia Drugmand and Meg Megas

Resident: Dick Spencer (Finance Committee)

Representing the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission:

Ken Walto

Two Town Administrator candidates:

Mark Seigers

Bill (William) Sisk

Agenda Items:

1 4:45 pm Organize

The first order of business was the acceptance of the minutes from the Nov. 21, 2022 meeting. Kent Lew shared that Ann Marie had raised the question about whether "AARP" in the minutes (in question 10 being answered by Mark Seigers) should have been "ARPA". After a brief discussion, it was decided that it should have been ARPA. A motion was made by Kent Lew to accept the minutes with the amendment. John Fish seconded that motion. No further discussion ensued. The motion was passed unanimously. Meg Megas, the note taker, will forward the amended minutes to Kent Lew.

Kent Lew went over the agenda for the evening. He explained that at 5pm Mark Seigers would join the Zoom meeting for a one hour second interview. The purpose of the second interview was to ask him follow up questions that arose out of the first interview. The format would be fairly informal, he said. Kent would call on Select Board members one at a time to ask their questions. Turns would be taken, first from a Middlefield Select Board Member, then Washington and so on ending with Kent Lew. Select Board members would have approximately 10 minutes each to ask their questions. It was stated by Kent that additional follow up by other Select Board members should be kept to a minimum and should be directly related to what had just been said. He continued by saying that holding those questions to their turn would be best. If time remained after all Select Board members asked their questions, then the

Screening Committee members would have an opportunity to ask their questions. There would not be any comments allowed from the public. After a brief discussion, it was decided that Curt Robie from Middlefield would start. Ann Marie Visconti asked about whether anything Mark Seigers brought up in the first interview was fair game to ask him about in the second interview. It was agreed that it was. Kent asked Ken Walto if that sounded appropriate and he agreed it was. Ken suggested that referring back to and reminding Mark of what he said in his first interview as a prelude to asking a follow up question would be advisable. Some specific comments regarding comments Mark made in the first interviews were brought up by Select Board members as possible follow ups (raising his voice and his view on who was the boss).

Kent said the interview would end at 6 pm. If there were important elements of the interview to discuss, then it would be done so then. If possible, however, Kent wanted to hold that discussion to after the end of the interview with William Sisk. A 20 minute break would take place, and the group would reconvene 5 to 10 minutes prior to the next interview to prepare for William Sisk. The format of that interview would be the same as that used at the Nov. 21, 2022 interviews. It would consist of the same 16 questions and 2 scenarios asked of the other two candidates for the Town Administrator position during their interviews. The same approach of Select Board members taking turns to ask questions would be used. Follow ups by Select Board members would be saved for the end. The Screening Committee members would be allowed to ask questions following the Select Board members.

Kent continued with describing the format by saying that the Select Boards would deliberate following the conclusion of the interview with Bill Sisk. Ann Marie asked how we would respond if the candidates asked when we would be getting back to them. Curt Robie asked about reference checks on the applicants. They had not been requested during the application process, Ken Walto explained. Tricia Drugmand asked Ken what he had said to Mark Seigers following his first interview; specifically, whether we told him we had selected the other candidate. Ken shared that he did not share that; he merely offered him a second interview. Back to Ann Marie's initial question, Ken said to tell Mark, if he asked, that we are interviewing another candidate and then we will deliberate following the conclusion of that interview. Curt suggested we let the candidates know that we may be asking for references. Ann Marie was in agreement with Curt and followed up with the suggestion to check references before we offered the position to either Mark or Bill. Ken said when we offered the candidate the position, it was stated in the letter that this was conditional upon background check and reference check. David Ellis suggested we get them after we selected the candidate. Ken said that Tom Matuszko favored narrowing the field of candidates to one and doing background checks (including references) at that time. The consensus of the group was to ask the applicants at the conclusion of their interviews to contact Ken and give him 2-3 references.

2. 5:00 pm Interview Candidate 2, Mark Seigers

Mark Seigers joined the Zoom meeting shortly after 5pm. Kent welcomed him back. He explained that the Select Boards had follow-up questions to ask him following reflection on the first interview and also based on his responses to the essay questions. Kent briefly described for Mark's benefit the format of the one hour meeting (these were described earlier in these minutes). Kent then deferred to Curt Robie to begin asking his questions.

Curt Robie first asked about Mark's thoughts on the responsibility of a TA on a day like this (winter storm). Mark answered by asking if the head of DPW phone number would be readily available. If not, he said that he would then be fielding phone calls about plowing and salting. He also said he would be finding out whether people could get into work (assuming it was a work day at the Town offices), and

posting notices about what was going to happen as scheduled and what was not going to take place. His primary concern would be that everyone would be safe and that there would not be any issues with employees whether they were driving trucks or coming into the office.

Curt next asked about Mark's comments in his last interview that he had strong grant writing experience and abilities, namely EOHED grants for the Mall, Sewer, and Water project analysis he worked on and the Berkshire Water Main grant. Curt asked him to explain the steps necessary for advertising and posting a project for public bid in Ch.149 and Ch.30B and State Trades Persons contract. Curt asked if he had any experience with those. Mark replied yes, and went on to describe a project he worked on through the MPO which was a full depth reconstruction of the Berkshire Mall Rd. He worked with the engineer to get the project shovel ready. He went through the permit process in Pittsfield. This project was funded with stimulus money. Grants for the water and sewer were based on proposals solicited before they applied for the grant. Curt followed up by asking Mark what his role was in the project; specifically if he was the lawyer or actually wrote the application. Mark answered that he was paid by Pyramid to work with the engineer of the MPO to get a design finalized through the state. He was paid to be the Clerk of the Works. He was on the job every day meeting with the state to make sure that everything was done according to the plan. He also worked with the on-site engineer regarding problems that arose during construction. The Water project grant was a grant through USDA. The Water District Board hired an engineering firm. They advertised for bids, reviewed them, and then negotiated any change of terms. He inherited the project from the Town, because the then TA of Lanesboro said the town couldn't do the project. Mark maintained this was not true, and that she just didn't understand what the application was asking for. The project was taken over by him, the funding was completed, and Tighe and Bond provided the construction services. He was the Project Manager.

Curt next asked about Mark's working knowledge of Information Technology Systems, hardware and software. He further asked to what degree Mark could help the Town of Middlefield with connectivity, internet, software upgrades, equipment, website, and other needed changes. Mark replied that he built his own website, but has no formal training as a consultant. He said he could fix simple problems but did not know how to fix server problems.

Curt referred to a recent article in the newspaper that Mark had applied for the TA position in Lanesboro, but that they had decided to go with another candidate. Curt said that Mark had expressed concern about the process which was reported by the newspaper. He asked Mark to explain what the issues were and why they were raised. The Selection Committee, Mark explained, was comprised of 5 of the 6 Town employees in Town Hall and one citizen of the town. Four of the employees had worked for the Town less than one year and they did not live in Lanesboro. The TA, who was named the Chairman, was from Pennsylvania and had been in Western Ma less than one year. For the past month and a half, he had not been in the community. Excluded from the Committee were the Chief of Police, the head of DPW, and the head of the EMS services. Mark felt the process to be unfair because the Committee failed to meet their stated objectives which were to look for someone local, someone with experience, and someone who knew the Town of Lanesboro.

John Fish asked about Mark's response to an essay question regarding his philosophy about supervising the Town and its agencies, specifically the comment that "there was a boss and others". As the TA, John asked him who he would perceive to be the boss. Mark replied that it would be the Select Board. In the Town Hall, he stated further, that the TA would have general management of the Town Employees. His role would be to make sure the functions specified in their statutory mandates were being carried out.

John then asked about the fire hydrant situation in Berkshire Village. His understanding was that the money that the Town voted to appropriate for fire hydrants was used, instead, for connecting the water to the homes from the water main. John asked if it was acceptable to mislead taxpayers about what the money would be used for. Mark answered that, no, it was not. He reiterated that he did not and that it was not his idea. He said you should always tell people the truth because doing otherwise destroys trust.

Ann Marie Visconti asked Mark what ARRA stood for because some in the group thought he said AARP in the last meeting we had with him. He responded that it stood for: American Recovery and Reconstruction Act.

Ann Marie added that she was glad he had experience with grants. She shared that the Town of Middlefield has had difficulty getting grants due to such things as the median income being too high or the townspeople living too far from each other. He referenced his experience in Lanesboro as being similar up to a couple of years ago. He mentioned the One-Stop process that has now earmarked funds just for small communities.

In regards to working with staff, Ann Marie brought up what he had said in the last interview; specifically, that he has been known to raise his voice and that others have expressed discomfort with that. She asked him to expound on that. Mark said he expects everyone to have a learning curve. However, if the person is in charge of something but never gets past the middle of that learning curve, he feels frustration because he ends up being asked to do more and more. That would be an instance of when he has raised his voice. Of three different chairmen he reports to, only one has said something to him about his raising his voice (that he shuts down when Mark does so). The other two say he has too much passion. Mark said that passion is misinterpreted as his being negative. He sees it as the consequence of his being very committed to the project at hand. When the person in charge of the project cannot grasp what needs to be done, Mark said he tends to take on the project and complete it himself.

Ann Marie shared a situation in her Town whereby people who work on commissions or committees either volunteer or get very little pay. Some are critical to the Town's operations. She asked him how he would deal with people who don't commit to being available for certain hours or who are not responding to questions from residents or other Town employees. Mark said that he would sit down with the person so as to figure out what it is that was impeding them from meeting their obligations. He emphasized how important it is to really listen to the person. If they are willing to reveal why they have been unable to meet the expectations, then he feels he would be able to coax them into the desired action. Or he would arrange accommodations for them, such as allowing them to work via Zoom for instance.

Dave Ellis passed on asking any questions. He felt the ones he had were already asked.

Kent Lew asked for clarification of the times Mark would be involved with the 2 districts (Water and Road). He asked for the time commitments he had to them and how that would interact with his time in the 2 towns at TA. In addition, Kent asked about Mark's role on the COA and Assessors. Mark shared that both districts have day time meetings. The Road District meets the second Wednesday of every month from noon to 1 pm. Additional time would be necessary if there's an emergency and for the once yearly daytime annual meeting. The Water District meets on the first Friday of the month from 10 am-1pm plus an evening annual meeting once yearly. He stated that he intends to resign from the COA and the Northern Berkshire Cultural Council. There are a couple other projects he has been doing for

the town, but he would not be able to continue doing those and wasn't sure if they still wanted him to continue those projects anyway given the hiring of a TA. He offered that he could ask if the Water and Road District meetings could be moved to evenings, then it wouldn't be an issue. If this was not possible, he would take personal time to attend those meetings. He said he would be committed to working the 40 hours (and more, he said) as TA.

Kent's second question was to clarify Mark's role on the Water and Road Districts. Although he was named on record as legal counsel, following the first interview, Kent walked away with the impression that Mark's role was somewhat more like being that of a TA. Kent asked if he had experience managing employees in the Road and Water Districts or if he felt he had the breadth of knowledge that a TA would have based on his work with them. Mark responded, "Both". There are no Road District employees, he said. However, when Pyramid left, he and the Treasurer of the Board were charged with hiring new Accountants, setting up the books, and making sure processes were followed. In the Water District, Mark said he deals with employees and consultants. He referenced an employee that had to be disciplined then later discharged and that there was not a good employee policy for guidance, so this was charged to him to take action on. Kent commented that the prudential committees appear to keep charging him with tasks and managerial responsibilities similar to that assigned to the role of Executive Director /Manager in an ad hoc sort of way. Mark agreed with that summary description. He shared that he enjoyed that role more than that of being a lawyer.

Kent wanted to know if Mark had municipal experience/familiarity with budgets, cherry sheets, Proposition 2 ½, levy limits, and the tax recap process. On the Board of Assessors and on the Road District, Mark said he had experience with the tax recap. He had budgeting experience to a small extent for the town because the COA has its own budget that has to be voted on in Town Meeting. Also, there are generally questions about the money that the Road District provides to the Town to which he responds to at the Annual Town Meeting. He said he is very familiar with cherry sheets due to his association with the Road District and their giving the Town some funds for projects. He knew that the cherry sheets were based on the miles of road the towns have and the number of people in the town.

Curt had an additional question for Mark about grants. He asked when Mass Works, One Stop or any other grant program is open for proposals, what would Mark do as TA to secure some of the grants available? Mark said he would ask the Selectmen to provide him with a priority of what needs funding. He would put out a preliminary proposal (Expression of Interest) based on that priority to which the state would respond with recommendations of what you might do or not do. For instance, he would shape the town's (assuming they have them) economic plan, plan for recreation or open space, or strategic goals into a compelling proposal and submit an Expression of Interest. The state would respond with the type of grant they recommend the Town pursue. Prior to the state response, he would obtain proposals to determine what the project would cost. BRPC is helpful to communities, he said, in putting together a planning document that would hook most grant sources in the State. Having a written plan is essential, he found from experience. If the Town didn't have a plan, he would work with the Select Board to write one. Curt asked if he has actually filled out state grant applications. He said he had. He wrote and submitted some for Lanesboro when a Select Board member gave him access to the Town's account where he could fill out the application. Once the Select Board member approved the application as written, he submitted it. He also completed the application request for the Water Main project.

Curt asked Mark about his experience in personnel management. Mark had stated on his resume under Other Employment that he had worked for Krofta Waters later known as Krofta Waters International with over 300 employees. He started out as General Counsel. He was hired to re-organize all of their

offices throughout the world. That was just when 9/11 occurred. They ran into financial difficulty. They then named him President to handle their bankruptcy reorganization. He left that company because Pyramid contacted him about helping them with the expansion to the Mall (the addition of Target).

As there was time remaining, Kent offered for Select Board members to ask any follow-up questions, followed by Screening Committee members.

Ann Marie Visconti asked again why he would want this job considering that his legal practice would be more lucrative than the TA position. Mark said he saw this as a perfect project to bring his skills and interest to. He loves public service, he said. He sees this position as a great opportunity to do something that would provide an example to other communities. He feels it is a great idea and feels energized to help accomplish it.

Tricia Drugmand asked Mark whether, since we last met, he had spent any time in the Towns, or looking at our websites and newsletters. He said he spent more time looking at the websites, and he drove through Middlefield on his way to Springfield yesterday. He would spend more time familiarizing himself with our towns if he knew he would be working here, he said. Tricia then described the proposed schedule of twenty hours a week per town, five days a week in addition to evening Select Board meetings plus the commute to and between the towns. She asked Mark if he was ready to commit to that. He said, yes, he could commit to that.

Kent thanked Mark again for attending and for his flexibility in accommodating to the change of venue. Mark expressed that he likes in person meetings better. He then exited the Zoom meeting.

Kent asked for observations before a break was taken. Ann Marie shared that she felt he interviewed better this time around. He didn't seem as anxious and was more laid back. She liked his answers to the questions. David Ellis felt that he seemed more sincere and his answers were better than they were the first time. John Fish acknowledged that interviewing before a room full of people must be intimidating and that this Zoom meeting allowed for Mark to be more relaxed.

At 5:59 pm the meeting was recessed. Kent asked participants to return at 6:20 pm.

The meeting was reconvened at 6:25pm

Kent admitted that he had forgotten to ask Mark for references. He asked Ken Walto to follow up on that.

William Sisk joined the meeting at 7pm. The first thing Kent did was to ask William if he preferred to be called Bill, to which he replied affirmatively. Because of that, he will be referred to as Bill throughout the remainder of the meeting minutes

He introduced to Bill the 5 Select Board members present: Ann Marie Visconti and Curt Robie from Middlefield, then himself (Kent Lew), David Ellis and John Fish from Washington. Kent shared that Tonya Santaniello, the third Select Board member from Middlefield, was not in attendance as she is also a Police Officer and she was out performing her duties in the storm. He also introduced the Screening Sub-Committee members: Tricia Drugmand and Meg Megas from Washington and Joe Kearns from Middlefield. Skip Savery, the third Middlefield member of the Screening Sub-Committee and the Middlefield Highway Superintendent also was absent from the meeting due to the storm, he explained. Members from the general public in attendance were Ken Walto, from the BRPC, who has guided us through recruiting Town Administrator candidates, Dick Spenser (Washington Finance Committee

member), and Adair Laurel-Cafarella and Tamarin Laurel-Paine who are from Middlefield and serve as Finance Committee member and Assessor, respectively.

Kent explained to Bill that there are 16 questions that will be asked of him and 2 scenarios. Kent went on to describe the length and format of the meeting that was reported earlier in the minutes. Kent thanked him for being flexible and joining the meeting via Zoom.

Questions (see the addendum for a list of the questions asked):

1. Asked by Kent Lew. Bill shared that he has studied Public Policy and local government as an academic (he just completed his PhD), and that he is looking to get involved in the local day-to-day of government. He feels he has a good skill set in terms of his analytical abilities and interpersonal skills. He loves the Berkshires. He is familiar with Western Mass and the Albany area. He would be comfortable here and not too far from family. He's looking for some financial stability, as well, he shared.

2. Asked by Ann Marie. His greatest strengths are in analytical, organizational, and interpersonal skills. Where he said he could improve would be in building out a schedule and coming up to speed. He said that he needs to learn the dynamics and interplay of the two towns and how resources are shared between them. He would want to meet everyone, and get acclimated to the Town functions and norms. In terms of his leadership qualities, he feels he needs more experience. He would like to build his skills in professional setting such as in leading larger teams and with HR and interpersonal or conflict management.

3. Asked by David Ellis. He sees the TA position as a very facilitative role. He feels it's important to have an open door policy. He would facilitate communication between the different stake holders. He would make himself available when needed, make sure people know to whom they need to talk, and make sure there is an exchange of information, coordination, and awareness. With residents he feels he needs to be affable and a good listener as well as an advocate on their behalf and a sympathetic ear.

4. Asked by Curt Robie. The place to start, he said, was to get a sense of the greatest challenges in the individual Towns. Generally, most towns are dealing with, post covid, filling in the gap as covid relief funding is drying up. Many have issues with growing local businesses and the economy, and aging. Keeping an eye out for grants and opportunities to bring in more funding would be important. Figuring out ways to get more people into the Berkshires, he cited as an innovative idea. Trying to make housing more available and finding ways to grow the local tax base he said he would be interested in looking into or expanding. It's a matter of coming up to speed and figuring out what the actual needs of the Town are before he comes in with a million ideas.

5. Asked by John Fish. Bill answered that he does this all the time as a teacher. It's the most important thing to him to be aware of. He gave an example of a student he had who had challenges. He was housing insecure and was considering quitting. Bill helped him with a plan to finish the semester and to get the internship he really wanted. Getting somebody back on track was a proud moment for him as a teacher. He acknowledged that different people need a different set of motivators. Some really need empathy; others need an extra nudge or a kick. It's really about getting to know people and what they need to motivate them. In his professional setting, his experience has been working with students who are motivated as it is a setting of higher learning. He has not had much experience with people who foot drag, he said.

6. Asked by Kent Lew. In terms of monitoring part-time employees, Bill said it's all about scheduling and making sure that you get in contact with everyone and have a contingency plan should someone's

schedule shift. The sharing of part-time and full-time work depends on the situation and how essential the services are. He said that it's hard for him to do this in the abstract.

7. Asked by Ann Marie. Change can be difficult. It depends on the nature of the change. The first thing, he said, was to make sure the change is essential. Is it something the Town really needs, is it unavoidable due to a budget restriction, or is it a change in a process that will make things more efficient. Part of the evaluative process is both budgeting and looking at outcomes. Are we meeting the goal and if not, are we communicating the need for that change? It's important to follow through on it. Sometimes you have change in name but not in actuality.

8. Asked by David Ellis. He recently had an idea to change the way that he was running his course at Fitchburg. Lecturing was not working as he'd hoped, so he ran some ideas by his students. He asked what was working and what wasn't. The group agreed that they wanted something different. So he built in some simulation games of different scenarios. An example was: What would you do if you had a major snow event? He found that this worked very well. It turned out to be a better way to get his students engaged and build in the theories that he really wanted them to talk about. Once they experienced these situations directly, it sensitized them to the concepts he wanted to cover.

9. Asked by Curt Robie. Bill said he is a fast learner and that he had to be as he finished his PhD. He's had a wide number of experiences in different policy areas and problems and referenced work on education policy and charter policy. He also worked on law enforcement and tax policy. He has a wide range of information on different areas. The areas in which he felt he could be criticized were that he could be more organized and sometimes he talks too much.

10. Asked by John Fish. Bill said that he's experienced going for academic grants. As far as the grant process, most of his experience has been through the state through contracting and purchasing. When he worked for Ma DOT, there was a bidding process; there was a bid opening, the contract was put out to bid, and the legal criteria were met. The latter was his area; specifically making sure that minority and disadvantaged businesses were represented. He wasn't in purchasing but he worked directly with purchasing. Finding the right sized contract was the challenge as most state contracts are large. So he would search out smaller grants more suitable to the Towns. That, he said, is the ongoing and big challenge. He hasn't put in for grants for a state or town but he understands the process. He knows where he would start to look as far as getting that process going. He has some contacts at BRPC, and he said he would be proactive in seeking out help.

11. Asked by Kent Lew. He said there were many pressure situations in finishing his PhD. One thing he has learned is "Don't let perfect be the enemy of the good", he said, in regards to working toward perfectionism. "A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow". The most important thing, he said in hindsight is to trust his gut, make a decision, move it forward, and live with the consequences.

12. Asked by Ann Marie. Ethics, he said, is very important to him. His role would be to serve the Town and the Select Board the best way he could. But, if the Board suggested something that was unethical and illegal, he would try to dissuade them from taking that action, first in-house. But if they decided to move on with that action, he'd do his due diligence and go through the necessary reporting steps to prevent that illegal or unethical action. He said it is important to first give people a chance. They may not understand the implications of what they're doing or realize that what they're doing is not above board.

13. Asked by David Ellis. His biggest challenge will be making the transition from academics to now being in a direct, practical environment. In terms of balancing the needs of two towns, he'd have to find out the differences between the two Towns. That resource sharing process will take some time.

14. Asked by Curt Robie. It always starts with a goal, he said. He told a story about wanting to play baseball, but he was deathly afraid of being hit by the ball. He described the steps he took to get over that fear. It took a lot of work, some discipline, and there were some humbling moments, he admitted.

15. Asked by John Fish. Bill said it is really important to him that he have a network of support or trust in his carrying things forward. If he took this position it would be collaborative, not so much confrontational. Between the two towns it would help him to know that there's a good relationship there. He also wants to know that there is desire and/or a shared vision to move the Towns forward and that everyone's on the same page. He's motivated to help. He is interested in learning about people and places and real commitment to helping people. What can I do for you based on my skill set? He goes above and beyond (long hours and extra work). He puts others ahead of himself sometimes to his own detriment.

16. Asked by Kent Lew. Bill asked three questions. In the first he was curious as to the split of time he would spend between the two towns. Would there be two office settings, and how often would he be in those settings, he asked. Kent responded that the conception was of two part time jobs merged together into one. He would be in each town 20 hours per week barring emergencies. The proposed schedule would be that he would spend time in each town each day. Kent described the frequency and days the two Select Boards meet, and that Bill would be expected to attend each, so that hours spent in the two towns those days would be adjusted accordingly. Ann Marie added that any Special Town Meetings or the Annual Town Meeting would take place on a weekend in Middlefield.

Next, Bill stated his plans to move from Fitchburg close to the Towns of Washington and Middlefield. He wondered what the time table was for relocating. He shared that the commute for him would be two hours, so he is cognizant of the need to acquire housing quickly. Kent responded that there is no specific requirement that he live in either town but the expectation is that Bill would reside in the area. It would not be tenable to sustain a permanent two hour commute, Kent said. Once terms were agreed upon, there would be a process started to figure that out. The transition shouldn't take three to four months. That would be too long. As soon as possible would be the bottom line realizing there are exigencies that may affect the transition. When asked by Kent, Ann Marie agreed with all that he had said in regards to Bill's relocation should he be offered the job.

Last, Bill asked the top 3 goals to be completed within the first year for each Town. Kent said that the Select Board has not gotten to that point yet, but from his experience being very hands-on with the day-to-day management of the town he sees three practical projects that need to be addressed in the next year. The first is the need to transition the Assessor's office as the Town recently lost its head assessor. Second, there needs to be an overhaul regarding the building inspector and other inspectors. Third, the Town has an untenable financial situation regarding vocational education. The Town is required to provide transportation. Kent briefly explained the present situation (4 student transported to three different schools). Conversations, Kent said, need to be had regarding the regionalization of transportation.

Ann Marie said that there may need to be some updating of department personnel as some may be retiring or thinking of retiring in the near future. Middlefield's two buildings are in poor shape. The roofs of DPW and the Fire Dept. have been repaired, but there is asbestos in the Town Hall floors and

the Senior Center is waterlogged underneath. An architect gave the Town some quotes. Grants for their Town are a huge thing, Ann Marie said. It's hard to get grant funding. The median income of the townspeople is too high to qualify for some grants, she shared. Bill said that the state has announced some redevelopment funding, and he thought abatements may be available. He would be interested to see if the Town qualifies for these.

Scenario 1 – Bill felt that the highway crew should finish their immediate job before they moved on. He would encourage them to try to move along quicker. He would also feel things out with the Selectman. He would approach it diplomatically and recognize that the Selectman sees a need for them to move to the next location. It may be better to let them carry forward the present task then move on, he would tell the Selectman.

Scenario 2 – He'd be polite, but would tell the staff member that they have to meet a deadline. He would say that everyone is working long hours as a team and that the employee will have to sacrifice their weekend away.

Kent Lew then asked the Select Board Members for their follow-up questions.

John Fish asked about Bill's answer to question 15, specifically when he referred to a network he draws on. He asked him to explain. Bill said having worked in a Public Administration Dept. he has colleagues who work in local government in Albany and others that have expertise in public finance and emergency preparedness. He could consult with them as needed. There are also student interns who could come from the Fitchburg and Albany area whom, he felt, would love to work for local government.

John also wondered about Bill's understanding of the schedule. He wanted to make sure that Bill understood that he would be expected to drive back and forth between the two towns nearly every day. Bill said, yes, he did, and followed with a question about how long it takes to get between towns. It was determined to be 15 -25 minutes depending on whether the dirt road or paved road was taken. A brief discussion on the best type of vehicle to have to traverse the dirt roads ensued.

Kent reminded Curt that he had earlier wanted to ask a follow up question on question 14. He wanted a real world example of how Bill would approach a project to get it completed. Bill gave an example of a policy paper he wrote on one homeless ordinance in Springfield, Missouri. He approached the project by starting with a theory and building out from there. It involved setting a goal and planning phase, breaking it down into tasks, creating a time line, and then sticking with it.

Curt referred to some projects Bill had listed in his resume. He wanted to know Bill's role in these projects regarding direct input. In the gun research project Bill said he worked directly with a team of first responders. Some training information was shared, questions answered, and help provided as to different ways to triage in certain circumstances. In the fracking project, his role was one of research, primarily.

Ann Marie shared that she liked the idea of interns as having them makes you keep up to date with the latest information. She asked Bill if he was familiar with Ma State regulations for municipalities and for bidding on contracts. Curt added that Ch 149 and Ch30b deal with municipal procurement related to capital projects. On the Mass DOT project there were multiple parts, Bill said. There was purchasing, then a good faith effort to have a fair bidding project by considering diminished and minority businesses. He has some familiarity with the bidding process for things like road improvements. He said he would have to brush up on other regulations related to capital planning and building inspections.

Ann Marie referred to his work on Climate Change Policy. Middlefield is working on Municipal Vulnerability and Hazard Mitigation plans. She asked him what he did while working on this project. He worked on that project with Dr. Sadler at Northeastern University. They looked at the contributors to climate change, ways to estimate various emissions, and ways to mitigate their (carbon) foot print. Towns with old buildings should be eligible to receive grant funding for better insulation, new windows, and new roofing, he said. Ann Marie mentioned that it is important to include the terminology "underrepresented communities" in the wording of the applications for this type of grant.

Davis Ellis asked Bill a further question about grants; specifically whether he had experience with implementing, tracking and completing them. He wanted to know if Bill has gone through the whole process. Bill said he's carried out the steps in the grant. Once the grant is approved there are fewer parties involved. He also said that built into the grant application itself is a time table, a suggested budget, and who's responsible for carrying out X, Y, and Z. There are people available at the state and federal agencies to assist with the application process, Bill added.

Kent Lew asked what his current course obligations are and if he were offered the position how he sees the transition process playing out. Bill said his present course obligations end in a couple of days. He said he is looking at some other positions; most don't start until next fall so there is a gap right now. If he were offered the position, he would see himself transitioning during January and February.

Kent also asked and alluded to work with BRPC, preliminary capital budget planning strategy. He attended a function in SUNY Albany. He spoke with Paul Sieloff, a former TA in Lanesboro, about how he designed his budget for Lanesboro. They discussed the kinds of things to think about in the present and long term when forming a budget. It was determined that the event was sponsored by BRPC and that he did not work directly with BRPC.

Kent asked him what prior experience or any familiarity he might have with overall municipal finance; specifically, the cycle of budgeting, the Annual Town Meeting, the Prop 2 ½ levy limits, and the tax recap process. Bill was aware Ma has a cap on how much you can collect and anything over that cap has to be refunded back. He thought that the first budget is due in Nov/Dec and that another one kicks off in June. He acknowledged that he doesn't have a ton of experience going through that process. He repeated that he learns pretty quickly. He said he has some experience with research on state budgets and state budget planning, but has less experience on a local and municipal level.

John Fish asked why Bill was leaving Fitchburg. Bill responded that he is in talks for a 1-year appointment that could possibly turn into a tenured position. However, school budgets are tight, and many may not be filling their tenured positions. There are no guarantees, so he's looking for more financial security, despite loving teaching.

Meg Megas observed that he has worked in several large cities. She asked what experience he had with very small communities such as our town and what he knows about our two towns and what they are like. He said he comes from a small town of 5,000 people. He said he was very impressed with our websites. His experience in the Berkshires is that it has a lot to offer and is, he felt, underrated. He gave examples such as the opportunities for hiking, being outdoors, and attending venues such as Tanglewood. Meg commented that young people are leaving the area as is not suited to young people for several reasons. He said he would not write off the opportunities to make the area more accommodating, affordable, and attractive to young people.

Tricia Drugmand followed up with another question regarding our communities. She shared with Bill that we have a lot of older residents. We also get resident complaints, she added. She wondered how

he would respond to complaints and daily interactions with residents. Bill said is quite used to interactions that can be contentious and is good at de-escalating them. He is affable, patient (he's learned that as a teacher), and tries to find common ground. Also, he said he is professional and sympathetic without being confrontational. He comes from a town that is similar to our two towns, particularly when it comes to the aging population. He is aware of the need for a network of care available to them and accessibility to the care they need.

Tricia went on to talk about our Highway Depts. and how important they are to our communities. She referred to the Highway Dept.'s budget as a large piece of the Town's overall budget. She said it's critical for the TA to, not only become familiar with the Highway crew and their equipment, but also to form a connection with the crew. She wondered how accessible he would be. He replied that it is his biggest strength. He's committed to outreach and the value of local knowledge. It is critical to have knowledge of equipment and vehicles, he said. He also knows the importance of having a Plan B in regards to such things as a truck breaking down. He recognized that he won't have critical information unless he talks to people.

Kent said there were 15 minutes of allotted time remaining and asked for additional follow-up.

Ann Marie Visconti talked about her experience with 12 years of academia after high school and likened it to Bill's history. "It's a totally different animal" running a small town, she said. She asked him what his understanding of this job might be. He said that it would be very different than the day to day in academia. He would miss academia, but he would be able to put some of his skills to work in a way he hasn't been able to. He would be able to talk as part of his job and he wouldn't have to feel bad about that. He found himself in the past gravitating to projects that included talking with others. Writing all day is very isolating, he found. Having persons he was accountable to would be helpful for him. He likes thinking on his feet. That is when he's at his best. He realized there will be a learning curve. He thinks he has the skills and patience to learn the job quickly. He will humble himself and know when to ask for help. Teaching for him is rewarding but the opportunities there are somewhat limited.

Curt Robie asked what Bill would do in each of the towns in the first 100 days. First, Bill said he would make an appointment to meet with everybody, have then bring him up to speed by finding out what they do, and asking what he can help them with. He would make a point off immediately sensitizing himself to the budget and budget line items; where the most essential spending is apart from the highway and education. He would work on reconfiguring departments (he mentioned Assessor's Dept). Other top priorities and target goals going forward would be making sure to fix the major problem items: the school transport issues and funding some redevelopment issues. He would introducing himself, learn the towns, and get a feel for the ebb and flow of town operations.

Bill had a question. He asked what the favorite part of living out here was. Each of the Select Board members shared. Comments included: having the woods nearby, knowing everyone in town, being close enough to others to care and pitch in without being in everybody's business, wanting a small town that would be safe and rural for children to grow up in, getting pulled out of the mud by the highway boss, diverse professional backgrounds represented among the residents, townspeople wanting to work together, neighbors blowing out snowed in driveways with their tractors, cookie swaps where no one gets mad at each other, land (hard to find land that is not really expensive), hiking and the outdoors, the community coming together, long time residents as well as those new to the town doing well together, and the ability to call DPW to sand your road because you have to go to work.

Bill said his hometown was like that. Cities, he found, were very different.

That concluded the interview. Bill was thanked and he exited the Zoom session.

A recess for 5 minutes was taken with reconvening at 8:06pm

An hour remained on the schedule for deliberation, Kent observed. He asked for comments regarding Bill.

Ann Marie had the same concern with Bill as she had with George. She didn't know whether Bill knows that this is a one-year granted position. Kent said that he had asked Ken that question off line. Ken said that, in writing, he told him it was a one-year grant-funded position with continuation having to be approved by the Towns. Curt shared that teaching positions at universities were much the same in regards to uncertainty. Kent pointed out that basically all Town jobs are one-year positions and are dependent on funding by the townspeople at the ATM.

Next comments on Mark Seigers were asked for from Kent Lew.

David Ellis felt Mark interviewed much better this time. He worried after the first interview whether Mark would be able to get along with everyone. He brought up the latest conflict over the TA selection process that Mark objected to (as reported in the Berkshire Eagle). Kent felt his clarification of why he objected was helpful. David felt he could do the job and that his grant experience was very positive. He still has a slight reservation about his personality, however.

In contrast, Kent asked for overall impressions of Bill.

John Fish said he interviewed better than he thought he would. His resume was unimpressive for the position, John felt. Bill definitely wouldn't hit the ground running, John said. John found him to be a nice person and he liked several of his comments. He thought his responses to the scenarios were the best of all three applicants. John felt that Bill understood the chain of command, which he liked. In contrast, John said that Mark would hit the ground running and he thought we could work with his personality.

Curt Robie was concerned that only one candidate was asked to come back for a second interview. He felt that what the candidate learned and processed in the first interview would help them in the second. He felt that put Bill at a disadvantage. He prefaced his second concern by acknowledging that Mark interviewed better. He didn't feel won over, however, because he said that Mark had "acted up" in Lanesboro shortly after our interview with him. This was in reference to the complaint Mark voiced about the appointment process of a new TA in Lanesboro. He didn't feel Mark learned anything from our questioning in the first interview regarding Pyramid and the Mall Road. He also questioned whether Mark's grant work was as extensive as he implied. He didn't always feel that Mark answered the questions. A case in point was that he wasn't explicit on what his role as Clerk of the Works was. Curt felt he didn't answer whether he followed a grant from start to finish, and that his answer wasn't strong. He liked that Bill was honest about his not having much experience. Curt liked Bill's recall of the first 100 days; especially that he remembered the three priorities that had earlier been communicated by the two town Select Board Chairs. Curt felt that because he was able to articulate these issues, he was the stronger candidate. Curt expressed that he still has reservations about Mark.

Kent brought up the second interview process, and suggested we level the field and have a second interview with Bill. We could defer the selection of a candidate until after that second interview, he said.

John Fish brought up the fire hydrant installation in Lanesboro and said that he felt that it was illegal to use appropriated money for one purpose for another. He felt Bill was more ethical than Mark. Kent expressed that he had more concerns about that situation (fire hydrant installation) after hearing what Mark had to say in the second interview.

Kent Lew, after hearing Mark's responses to our questions, felt that he had more direct familiarity with the areas of top priority for the two towns than did Bill. Mark understands the One-Step grant process and had experience participating in a project from start to finish. Mark is passionate about seeing things through, Kent said, but he expressed lingering reservations on how Mark's "passion" can manifest, especially in regards to how he would interact with other town employees. On a practical level, he felt that Mark has a familiarity with the fiscal process through such activities as participation in Town Meetings and participation in the tax recap process in his role as an assessor in Lanesboro. He also did some budgeting for one of the commissions on which he served. He didn't feel Mark would add to the cohesion of staff, however, and that he tended to work as a "lone-wolf". Bill, on the other hand, Kent felt, was very collaborative, empathetic, and responsive. His approach was one of consensus seeking which Kent felt would be well received in our Town. Kent acknowledged that Bill lacks practical experience so that there would be a lot of getting him up to speed.

John Fish asked, in reference to Bill, if we have to take the funding of the TA to the ATM in May, would we run into trouble if we didn't have any results to show to justify the expense.

Ann Marie Visconti mentioned that she had brought up that point after the last pair of interviews. She wished we had a candidate that was a combination of both Bill and Mark. She had a variety of other thoughts that she expressed. One was that Mark has a huge personality that will conflict with others. Yet, she did think he would get things done. But she wasn't sure if it would always be ethically done. She felt Bill would fit in better with our towns. She thinks we need some new blood in town. She didn't think we should base our decision on which candidate would be more negatively impacted if funding for the position wasn't approved. She wondered if Bill would get bored after a time once he had acclimated to and assimilated to the job. She liked that he could call on interns. She supported a second interview with Bill, although she said she would like the position to be filled as soon as possible. If she were to vote today, she would pick Bill.

David Ellis revisited the conversation about having any visible results in May. He didn't feel there would be anything by way of results (for either candidate, it was implied) as most of that time would be a transition period. He felt it would be easier to get the position funded if the Townspeople liked the candidate vs. someone who has already "stirred the pot". It would just take Mark alienating one or two staff members for "word to get around"; David said. Kent agreed with that sentiment.

Kent Lew said despite Mark wanting to get out of the spotlight and expressing a desire to be appreciated, it seems that the spotlight follows him. And, he observed, that despite each member of the Select Board admitting that they all think Mark has a lot to offer, there continues to be some reservation on everyone's part. Kent summarized a conversation he had with a colleague he has in DLS who was working on a project in Lanesboro. Without referring to Mark by name, she knew the exact situation in Lanesboro. As she was interviewing various people related to her project, Mark's name always seemed to come up with strong feelings one way or another. That tracked with Kent's experience with Mark. To some he may present as an energetic, interesting, relatable guy, but he could see others feeling that "I don't get who this guy is" in regards to his energy. He said this could complicate the conversation about, after a short period of time (from Jan-May), coming up with funding may be a harder ask.

Ann Marie Visconti agreed with Kent. She referenced the recent article in the Berkshire Eagle. One Lanesboro Select Board member refused to vote because he felt there was a qualified person in town (in reference to Mark) who wasn't considered for their TA position.

Meg Megas was more impressed with Mark just because, in contrast, Bill was "incredibly green." She was concerned that Bill would see everything as a research project. He's very data-gathering oriented and she worried that he wouldn't look at things with the perspective he ought to. Also she was concerned he wouldn't stay at the job for very long. She referenced his comments about having some possibilities in the wings (for employment). Her impression was that the TA position was just one of many he was considering. She was not even sure if he would accept the position. She didn't feel he knew what he was getting into. Our small town is not like a small town of 5,000 people. She felt he was naïve to what the job would be like and for that reason he would not be happy. Mark would hit the ground running, not without concerns, she said. She felt it might take up to a year to get Bill up to speed. She expressed surprise at her impressions as she had not been in favor of Mark as the candidate selected after the first set of interviews.

Tricia Drugmand said she was thinking similarly to Meg. She felt the best way to go forward was to ask Bill back for a second interview. She felt we could use that opportunity to drill into some of those questions we had about him. She liked Bill and felt he could be formidable in time. But she was concerned he wouldn't stay at the job very long, and being "boots on the ground". Others qualities she commented on were that he was "super smart" and that he has the right personality to make the fit. In terms of Mark, she had all of the concerns expressed by the Select Board members. Despite all the skills he would bring to the job, "there is too much drama".

David Ellis stated that you never know how long someone is going to stay at their job. Mark could decide to retire for that matter and Bill could get a teaching job, he said.

Kent Lew commented that a second interview may allow us to probe that. And to Meg's point, he said, would Bill be able to let his research orientation go. There would be times those skills would be valuable to get the large picture, where gathering more data is necessary. But many decisions that are made in town are done so by getting information then acting on it. Bill recognized that for change to happen, you've got to follow through, Kent pointed out. He felt that was a valuable response on Bill's part.

Ann Marie Visconti said being a professional student is not the real world. Bill is saying that he wants to put what he has learned in school into action. Basically, she said, he wants to grow up and enter the real world. Her concern was, when he gets into the real world does it "blow his bubble".

Kent Lew said he understood Bill to be saying that he wants to put all the theory he's learned into practice, and "test his mettle" in that way. In much the same way that he introduced his students to simulations to make their experience more real, his wanting to work as a TA with real world problems would do the same for him. His work experience has been more on the assisting side and not to the degree of responsibility that this job would require. Kent suggested the Boards probe further into his declaration of being a fast learner and what that means. That could mean he could absorb concepts quickly but make the same mistakes over and over again which would not demonstrate truly being a fast learner.

Ann Marie Visconti said that if Bill comes back for another interview and has researched our towns that would impress the Boards.

Kent thought that Bill "whiffed it" with more than one or two questions. Kent didn't know if Bill didn't seem to get the point of the question or if it was due to how it was presented. Or another explanation would be that his perspective was one of not really understanding how small our small towns are and also not having that municipal background. An example was with grants. Bill described his involvement as being on the procurement side. Kent maintained that Bill would have to get people to do the job and monitor it as project manager. He would have to do the reporting, and keep track of the budget and timelines. Bill seemed to think that there were people on the state level who would do that which Kent maintained was not true.

Tricia voiced concern about whether Bill will have done his homework by the next interview. She asked, "Will he have looked into our towns, our backgrounds, our grants, and state regulations?" If he comes back more informed, that would be a big plus for her, Tricia said.

Kent Lew wondered whether as Mark had demonstrated, would Bill absorb what we said in the first interview and come back with stronger responses.

Ann Marie Visconti wanted the second interview to be in person. Kent replied that would be the goal.

David Ellis suggested that an in person interview would allow him to see the towns.

Kent Lew summarized where the group was at this point. He believed he heard that in fairness a second interview would be set for Bill. Then the two candidates would be on equal footing when the Boards evaluate them.

John Fish wanted to talk, again, about the fire hydrants and whether the way they were funded was illegal. Ken and Kent weighed in that it seemed highly suspicious although they didn't feel it was done nefariously. It would depend on how the appropriation was written.

David Ellis asked about training to help Bill with grant writing. He recalled the Boards discussing this in regards to the first candidate interviewed, George.

Kent Lew responded that for all the areas Bill needs help, there are resources. And Kent pointed out that Bill already shared he has several resources he could reach out to. BRPC would assist with the grant writing training. DLS was mentioned as a resource for municipal finance training materials.

Kent Lew asked Ken Walto if Mark were to ask, what Ken will tell him. Ken said that in this instance, he should tell Mark that there are two candidates and that the Boards want to interview the second candidate a second time.

Kent had the Board members look at their schedules to plan a second interview date/time. Curt pointed out that Mark was given two weeks between interviews, so he proposed Wed., Jan. 4 as the second interview date for Bill to be fair in that regard. It would take place at 6:30 pm in Middlefield. Alternate dates decided upon were Fri., Jan. 6th at 7 pm in Washington or Sat., Jan 7th at 1:30 pm in either Washington or Middlefield. Zoom or cell phone access to the meeting remotely was discussed as Tricia is out of town. As an in-person meeting is desired, Ken was asked to offer some dates to Bill as snow dates. One hour of open-ended questions would be the format. It was suggested that Ken might mention to Bill that he drive through the towns before the meeting. The preferred date was determined to be Wed., Jan 4th. Ken asked if he should get references. The Boards indicated that he should. He said he will ask the two candidates for 3 to 5 references.

Kent motioned that the meeting be adjourned. David Ellis seconded the motion. All voted "aye". The meeting adjourned a little after 9 pm.

Kent
David Ellis
[Signature]

Anthony Visconti
Secy. - [Signature]