

Town of Guilford, Connecticut

31 Park Street, Guilford, CT 06437

01-19-10

**TOWN OF GUILFORD
EFFICIENCY TASK FORCE
MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2010
7:30 P.M. – GUILFORD TOWN HALL**

Present: Task Force Members: Marti Carlson, Michael Dowley, James Galvin,
Gary Gilbert

Department Heads: Mitchell Goldblatt, Human Resources Director;
Pamela Millman, Purchasing Agent; Jacklyn
Simonetti, EDC Specialist; Sheila Villano, Finance
Director

First Selectman Joseph Mazza,
Selectwoman Veronica Wallace, Karen Quercia, Clerk

1. Call to Order

Chairman Gilbert called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

- **Approval of minutes of the January 6, 2010 meeting.**

Motion: Upon a motion by Ms Carlson, and seconded by Mr. Dowley, the Task Force voted to approve the minutes of the January 6, 2010 Efficiency Task Force.

Vote: In Favor: Carlson, Dowley, Galvin, Gilbert
Opposed: None
Abstain: None

- **Introduction of Town Department Heads**

Mr. Gilbert explained that in order to accommodate the Department Heads that need to attend the Board of Finance meeting, the order of the meeting would be changed slightly. He explained that is not a formal hearing, but an opportunity for the Department Heads to share their ideas and thoughts as to where they may see overlaps and redundancies. The Department Heads in attendance are Finance Director Sheila Villano, Economic Development Specialist Jacklyn Simonetti, Purchasing Agent Pamela Millman, and Human Resources Director Mitch Goldblatt

Ms. Carlson stated that she felt the use of the term "formal hearing" set a tone of interrogation; she preferred to use the term discussion or conversation. The Task Force agreed that these were conversations and informal discussions with town employees to explore cost savings and efficiencies.

- **Discussion of town operations with representatives from the following**

departments;

- **Finance Director Sheila Villano**

Mr. Gilbert introduced Sheila Villano, Finance Director for the Town. Mr. Dowley asked for an overview of Ms Villano's responsibilities. Ms Villano explained that she has been Finance Director for the Town for nine years, and this is her ninth budget season. Much of the work of the Finance Department is very cyclical; they do certain tasks at the same time every year, which has allowed them to become very proficient at what they do. At budget season they work closely with the departments to find savings, in the spring they focus on open encumbrances, June 30th is the end of the fiscal year, in the fall they work with the auditors, and then prepare for budget season again.

The Finance Department prepares all the financial statements for the auditors, no adjusting entries are made by the auditors. In addition, the Finance Department issues bonds and notes for the Town, recently they have refunded some issues to reduce the debt service. All payroll is done in house. The department has recently been able to make some changes to streamline the payroll process. In response to a question from Mr. Galvin, Ms Villano explained that towns rarely use a payroll service to prepare their payrolls. All departments submit time sheets to the payroll clerk, with the exception of the Police Department which enters their hours directly into the MUNIS system. This insures that the end process is done right. Ms Villano would like to see more of the larger departments getting involved with MUNIS, but that requires training which costs money.

In response to a question from Mr. Dowley, Ms Villano explained that the Public Works department uses a time clock, and their department clerk manually calculates the hours. She would like to see the system updated, and they have investigated the use of a KRONOS system which would integrate with MUNIS. This system would also be a benefit to the Parks and Recreation department, especially for all their seasonal employees. Again, this would require an initial investment of funds for the purchase of the system as well as software and training.

The Finance Department also pays all the bills for the Town, and takes in all the revenue. They also reconcile all bank accounts and manage the budget and audit processes. The Town splits the cost of the annual audit with the Board of Education for a total expense of approximately \$45,000.

Information Technology also falls under Ms Villano's purview. She understands the needs of the Town in terms of technology, but the IT Specialist is the person involved with the technical aspects of the job. Ms Carlson asked Ms Villano if there were areas where she saw any redundancies. Would there be opportunities to move the town into a technology system that would be more effective down the road? Ms Villano responded that there is a lot she would like to do, but it would take an investment of time, money and desire. Hands on training would be needed, especially for those individuals who have a fear of technology and change.

First and foremost she is working with the Purchasing Agent to streamline the purchasing process. In the spring they plan to start having the Police, Fire, Public Works and Park and Recreation Departments enter their requisitions directly into the MUNIS system, as opposed to handwriting each one as is currently done. The Finance Department is also working towards utilizing e-mail to send copies of purchase orders, as well as direct deposit advices.

Mr. Gilbert asked if Ms Villano thought it might be feasible to create a "smartform" that could be utilized by various departments and could be accessed and submitted online by the public. For example, forms for the building department or fuel assistance could all utilize the same process and be captured into a database. Ms Villano stated that it could be looked at by the IT Department. Mr. Dowley noted a recent article in the Hartford Courant regarding four towns that shared forms such as their building permits online.

Mr. Dowley asked Ms Villano what changes she would make if she could. Ms Villano stated that one of the biggest obstacles is being bound by labor contracts. The Task Force discussed performance evaluations and compliance and the need for tools to start a discipline and review process. Another point of discussion was area towns which have a Chief Administrative Officer who oversees the major departments such as Fire, Police, Park & Rec and Public Works.

The Task Force asked how billing is done. Currently the Ambulance Department does its own billing as does Youth and Family Services. Both are specialized types of medical billing. They discussed the possibility of consolidating the billing functions. Ms Villano stated that HIPPA regulations would have to be considered, and both department heads would have to be involved in this discussion.

Ms Carlson asked about healthcare insurance. Ms Villano stated that this is a difficult number to budget. It is a moving target and a big number for the town. She explained that the town is self insured and the stop loss is \$175,000. Labor contracts limit benefit cost sharing.

The Task Force thanked Ms Villano for her contributions. They asked her to continue to think about areas which could be made more efficient. Ms Carlson commented that Ms Villano is doing a great job and provided a really good look at what people are doing.

4.3 Human Resources Director Mitchell Goldblatt

Mr. Goldblatt introduced himself and provided the ETF with the job descriptions for all town employees. He gave an overview of his responsibilities, including all hiring and benefits administration, personnel issues, and union negotiations which are done with the town's labor attorney. He interacts with the actuary to calculate pension benefits. Ms Carlson suggested that an online benefits calculator for town employees might be helpful to Mr. Goldblatt. She suggested he take a look at the benefits calculator that is on the State website.

Mr. Goldblatt concurred with Ms Villano that contractual obligations also make it difficult to impart changes that might improve efficiencies. Those types of changes are being made slowly and in small increments.

The ETF discussed the town's workers compensation rating and would like more information regarding this issue. Mr. Goldblatt explained that he chairs the Town's Safety Committee which meets regularly and reviews various employee safety issues including a review of Worker's Compensation claims. A loss control representative from the Town's insurance provider attends the meetings. The Town was recently audited by CONNOSHA and passed the audit.

Mr. Dowley asked Mr. Goldblatt what he would change if he could. Mr. Goldblatt stated that he would consolidate all the various departments into one building. Right now there are too many different cost centers (i.e. Town Hall, Town Hall South, Youth and Family Services, and Social Services are all in different buildings.) He noted that this is the biggest impediment to efficiencies. Having so many different physical plants makes it impossible to share resources or personnel.

He also stated that in his experience, which includes serving as a Selectman in another area town, municipal government is sometimes afraid to make the leap of an initial investment which can provide subsequent cost savings. He stated that the cost to run a municipal government is never equal to what the grand list brings in.

Ms Carlson asked if the town had an intranet website. Mr. Goldblatt stated that it does not, and there are two department heads that do not have computers. The ETF discussed how job descriptions need to reflect proficiencies with technology.

The ETF also discussed the issue of training. A supervisor needs training to know how to effectively supervise otherwise they become a liability. Mr. Goldblatt explained that the town tries to take advantage of free training on compliance issues such as safety and sexual harassment.

The ETF asked if there was any interface between the Town and the Board of Education (BOE). Mr. Goldblatt responded that there is, but the BOE is completely separate in areas such as insurances and pension.

Mr. Gilbert asked about the organizational charts which were distributed to the ETF. Mr. Goldblatt explained that none existed prior to the ETF request. Neither he nor Mr. Mazza had reviewed them.

The ETF discussed retirement health benefits and early retirement incentives. Again, this is an area dictated by contracts. The ETF discussed whether offering an early retirement package really provided any cost savings. It is an area Ms Carlson would like to look at more closely in the future.

4.4 Purchasing Agent Pamela Millman

Ms. Millman is the Purchasing Agent for the Town and is an attorney and has just been named In House Counsel. She has been the Purchasing Agent for a little over one year, and since that time has tried to create more purchasing power by getting the individual departments to consolidate their purchasing requests. This has been accomplished in areas such as electrical service, maintenance and cleaning services, and HVAC maintenance.

She has been working with consortiums and networking with other municipal purchasing agents to realize cost savings, and is encouraging departments to work together. In addition, the town, in conjunction with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, recently held a reverse auction which worked very well. Guilford was the first town in the state to do this.

Ms Millman informed the Task Force that the Town of Madison has one person that is responsible for the town wide IT budget, including Police, Fire and BOE. She suggested that the ETF contact Madison to learn more about how this works. Ms Carlson

stated that she has had conversations with Guilford's BOE Chair and he is very interested in having conversations with the ETF regarding IT.

Mr. Gilbert suggested interfacing with the BOE to explore master contracts that the Town and BOE can negotiate together (i.e. carpeting for schools and town buildings). He asked if the Town and BOE work together to share resources and information.

The task force stressed the importance of using best practices and procedures so that all staff and department heads are familiar with the proper purchasing procedures. Ms Millman stated that the purchasing manual was last updated in 2003 and she is working to rewrite and update it so that it provides more guidance for the departments.

Ms Millman reviewed the basic purchasing procedures currently in place. For purchases over \$1500 three written estimates are required, and purchases over \$7500 must go out to bid. She has received good cooperation from all departments.

4.2 Economic Development Specialist Jacklyn Simonetti

Ms Simonetti explained that her position was restructured to a permanent part time position approximately 18 months ago. Until this time there was no vehicle to promote the Town. One of her primary functions is to maintain existing businesses as well as attract new ones. The EDC Specialist is in some ways a salesman for prospective businesses, as well as a tourism representative.

Her job interfaces with many different departments, especially those at Town Hall South such as Planning and Zoning. She provides an EDC perspective for the P&Z Commission. She looks for revenue sources and ways to increase the tax base of the Town.

In her position, Ms Simonetti is the first contact most business owners, prospective businesses, and realtors may have with the Town. She acts as a resource to businesses and property owners, and facilitates workshops with business owners. She would like to see Guilford become more proactive about marketing itself. She keeps a matrix of available commercial properties, and facilitates smart, appropriate business development

It is important to have an Economic Development perspective on prospective projects to match a project with available space and to make sure the project is on line with the goals of the town. She would like to see the building permit process streamlined and would like to create a checklist for potential businesses on the town's website and in booklet form.

Another goal is to get the various land use boards and commissions to work together and understand each other's functions. It would help if each group could see the big picture and work together to mutually resolve conflicts or issues. It is important to support development and open space, but finding the balance is difficult.

While the EDC Specialist position works closely with the Economic Development Commission, their relationship is evolving and there is no set protocol on working together. Her position reports to the First Selectman. Ms Wallace stated that EDC works only in an advisory capacity.

Ms Carlson asked Ms Simonetti if she thought Guilford was business friendly or unfriendly. Ms Simonetti stated that there is always room for improvement. It is not easy for a business to get through the approval process. She would like to see improvements made to streamline the approval process, and would also like to insure that business owners are given consistent information.

Ms Carlson stated that she would like to devote one two hour meeting to Economic Development. She would like to spend one hour focusing on legislative issues and one hour on functional issues. In response to a question from Mr. Dowley, Ms Simonetti stated that economic development was a regional issue. What happens in one town effects what happens in surrounding towns. Ms Carlson stated that for a part time position, a lot was expected.

- **Review progress on organizational charts and evaluation forms.**

The ETF discussed the benefits of having received the organizational charts directly from the department heads. Some members felt that the unedited charts could provide useful insight into whether there were any disconnects between the raw data and what the Human Resource Director sees. Other members felt the charts would not be of any help without having been reviewed by the Human Resources Director.

- **Discuss and take possible action on methodology, priorities, timeline and action plan.**

The Task Force discussed the methodology they would use to gather information. It was agreed that all members of the ETF need to be on the same page in order to get the cooperation of the town employees. If they do not get the cooperation of the town employees and boards and commissions the Task Force will not accomplish their goals. The ETF needs to be consistent in their questions. They need to be mindful of the elements of the final report in order to stay on task. Mr. Dowley asked that a time line be included on future agendas.

Due to the late hour, The ETF asked Mr. Dowley to submit his suggested methodology via e-mail to all members for their review prior to the next meeting.

- **Discuss Meeting Schedule.**

The next meeting will be held at 7:00 p.m. on January 27, 2010. The location will be determined based on meeting room availability.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Quercia