

**TOWN OF GUILFORD
EFFICIENCY TASK FORCE
DRAFT MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JULY 20, 2010
7:00 P.M. – GUILFORD TOWN HALL**

Present:

Task Force Members: Marti Carlson, Michael Dowley, Chairman Gary Gilbert, Jim Galvin, Mark Matlosz

Town Staff: Tammy DeFrancesco, Social Services Director; Barbara Hammarlund, Assessor's Aide; Dennis Johnson, Health Director; Danielle Scheltens, Social Services; Elisa Young, Assistant Town Clerk

Town Officials: Selectman Charles Havrda

Clerk Karen Quercia

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

1. Approval of minutes of the July 6, 2010 meeting.

Mr. Dowley asked that the minutes be reviewed for typographical errors.

Motion: Upon a motion by Mr. Dowley, and seconded by Mr. Galvin, the Efficiency Task Force voted to table the approval of the minutes of the July 6, 2010 meeting.

Approve: Carlson, Dowley, Galvin, Gilbert, Matlosz

Oppose: None

Abstain: None

2. 7:01 p.m – 7:30 p.m. Discussion with Town Staff

Mr. Gilbert summarized the objectives of the Task Force and explained the work they have done so far. He explained that staff members were invited to come and meet with the ETF to discuss any ideas they might have that could assist the ETF in compiling a list of action items that could improve efficiencies and provide cost savings to the Town. He explained that the ETF cannot take any action, but will provide a list of action items to the BOS when they have completed their assignment in September.

2.1 Barbara Hammarlund Assessor's Aide

Ms Hammarlund gave an overview of her duties as Assessor's Aide:

- Transfers deeds
- Records map changes for subdivisions, lot splits, etc.
- Works with elderly tax relief applicants
- Works with State and Veteran's programs
- Handles personal property declarations
- Deals with heavy phone and public contact
- Has been clerk for the Bd of Assessment Appeals for nine years.

When a particularly challenging resident comes into the Assessor's office, Ms Hammarlund is most often called upon to work with them.

Ms Hammarlund took it upon herself to attend a CCMA 1B Assessor's class, but has not been able to attend any further classes due to scheduling conflicts within the department, as well as financial constraints. Currently the only place to take classes is UCONN, but she is working with the clerk's association to try to make classes more accessible by holding them in different parts of the state.

Ms Hammarlund stated that the biggest priority for the Assessor's office is the lack of a fireproof safe for the department's records which must be retained in accordance with State regulations. Currently they have files in numerous places. Town Clerk land records are stored in the vault in the basement of Town Hall, but no other department may store their records there. State statute requires that Town Clerk indexes and land records be kept forever. This is a major situation for the Assessor's Office; they need a vault for their records.

Ms Carlson and Mr. Gilbert asked about off site storage and optical storage. Neither option is being used currently. They also asked about the size of the documents and maps which require storage. Mr. Galvin asked if there was a disaster recovery program in place. There is not.

Mr. Dowley asked whether files are purged on a regular basis. Ms Hammarlund explained that there is a retention program for all town documents which is mandated by the State. Before any town records can be destroyed, a form must be submitted to the State Librarian requesting permission to destroy the records. The request must be signed by the Department Head and First Selectman. Once permission is granted by the State Librarian in the form of a signed consent, the files can be purged.

The second suggestion Ms Hammarlund made would be to have all town computers (including BOE) have the same up to date software. Often times a taxpayer may send a file which a staff member cannot open because the town does not keep current with software programs. Within one office, each computer may have different versions of a report writing program, and there may be four people trying to print to one shared printer at the same time, causing a backlog of work.

Mr. Dowley asked why the Assessor's Department needed to have both hard copies of documents as well as computer files. Ms Hammarlund explained that not everyone that comes into the office is comfortable with and/or familiar with the use of computers. Also, if there are several people who come into the office that need to access records, more people can be accommodated at one time. Frequently people come in from out of town and even out of state and cannot wait to return when there is a free computer terminal.

Mr. Gilbert asked if the department had any forms which could be populated online. He also asked about a data base with names and addresses of all taxpayers. The Assessor's office handles several different bulk mailings including personal property declarations and elderly tax relief. They run labels and stick them on the forms. It would be helpful to be able to populate the names and addresses right on the forms. The personal property declaration is a booklet, so that may be more difficult to do.

Ms Hammarlund also suggested that there should be interdepartmental access to databases, such as the building permits which are filed with the Building Department. Right now a staff member from the Assessor's office physically goes to the Building Department on a regular basis to get the information from the building permits. Other departments should have access to the field card program as well.

Right now a resident looking for information has to go back and forth between the Assessor's and Town Clerk's and back to the Assessor's office to obtain information regarding map numbers and deeds, etc.

The final suggestion from Ms Hammarlund was to have in house training for programs such as Excel and Power Point. Mr. Galvin asked if the training could be provided by the library staff, but that training is very basic. The Assessor's office budget does not include any funds for staff training.

The ETF thanked Ms Hammarlund for taking the time to share her ideas.

2.2 Elisa Young Assistant Town Clerk

Ms Young became a State certified Town Clerk in 1991. She worked for the Town of Essex for 13 years and has worked in Guilford for 12 years. She described the Town Clerk's office as the gateway to the use of all Town offices.

The Town Clerk's office is in need of technology updates, both of the Assistant Town Clerks would welcome the ability to better utilize technology. Their office still uses typewriters to fill out forms, i.e. marriage licenses, rather than use the computer. This is very burdensome and time consuming. There are 2 PC's in the office, and 3 typewriters. The computers were mandated in 2006 by the State of Connecticut to make the Town Clerk's records more accessible to the public. Typed documents are indexed and bound in books which are kept in the vault. The Town Clerk's office must adhere to State recordkeeping regulations.

Some members of the department utilize e-mail and the in-house instant messaging system (Pink Notes), but the use of technology is not encouraged.

The Town Clerk's office uses the COTT system (which is a public records management company) to index every document.

Ms Young stated that she felt it would be helpful to be able to attend professional development conferences to keep current in her field. No members of the department have attended a Town Clerk's conference.

The Town Clerk's phone system is also in need of improvement. Approximately 85-89% of the calls they receive are for other departments. Because the last four digits of their phone number are 8001, many people dial their number. 411 Information also gives out that number as the main number for Town Hall. It would be helpful to have an automated system directing callers to the appropriate extension, as well as to have the ability to transfer calls. This would free up the staff to better serve the people who come into the office. If she had to prioritize, she would say that a new phone system should be the first

item to be addressed, followed by technology upgrades. Grant funds may be available for technology upgrades.

Ms Young stated that she thought it would be helpful for elected officials to spend a day in the Town Clerk's office to gain a better understanding of the type and volume of work that they do. They are always busy. In 2003 their office handled 60-80 documents per day. They currently handle approximately 20-30 per day.

The ETF asked who the Town Clerk's position reports to, whether it is the First Selectman or the OPM at the State. Ms. Young stated that the position reports to the First Selectman.

The ETF thanked Ms Young for her time and input.

2.3 7:50 – 7:55 p.m. Tammy DeFrancesco and Danielle Scheltens – Social Services Department

Ms DeFrancesco and Ms Scheltens would like to come to a future meeting of the ETF with some of their volunteer staff to present their thoughts and ideas on efficiencies. Mr. Gilbert stated that the ETF would welcome any suggestions which could have an impact on the budget and or improve the delivery of services.

2.4 7:55 – 8: Dennis Johnson – Health Director

Mr. Johnson introduced himself and explained that he has been the Health Director for Guilford for the past ten years. Other members of the Health Department include a full time Sanitarian and a full time secretary. One of the reasons it is necessary to have a full time Health Director is that the State only awards grant money to towns that have a full time director.

The responsibilities of the Health Director include:

- Inspection of licensed food establishments including restaurants, groceries, deli's, and food vendors at temporary events.
- Inspection and licensing of day cares
- Inspection of public pools
- Inspection of salons, motels, etc
- Investigate complaints
- Investigate sewage problems and complaints
- Review septic system designs
- Investigate blight ordinance violations and enforcement
- Get water samples for Shellfish Commission
- Mosquito control
- Liaison to WPCA (Water Pollution Control Authority)
- Supervise WPCA budget of approximately \$30,000
- Enforce sewer avoidance ordinance
- Inspect sewage systems for condominium complexes, Big Y and Walmart.

There are approximately 6400 households in Guilford with septic systems. The Health Department is a very busy department and works closely with the Building, Engineering and Planning and Zoning departments.

The Health department investigates construction proposals by conducting soil and flow testing and makes recommendations about a project to Planning and Zoning based on those test results. They also handle any communicable disease issues including TB, salmonella, food poisoning, and polio. They work closely with the VNA nurses to provide therapy for TB patients.

Mr. Johnson's department oversees state grants such as smoking cessation, injury prevention in senior citizens, and public health preparedness. They also receive grant funding for programs and clinics for diseases such as swine flu, small pox, and anthrax. The Health Department has been the recipient of a \$40,000 bioterrorism grant each year since September 11, 2001. This grant money has been used to strengthen the communications systems between the police, fire and health departments and any departments that would need to be involved in emergency management.

The Health Department recently received a \$100,000 STEAP grant for a water main feasibility study, and they have received grant funds to clean out ditches to reduce the mosquito problem.

Mr. Johnson explained that he determines what programs to pursue, and manages and decides what to purchase with grant funds. The manner in which grant funds are spent is determined by the scope of services of the grant, only certain costs are grant eligible, and are also determined by the agency awarding the grant. Audits are done regularly.

The Town's Reverse 911 system, which was requested by the Fire and Police Departments, was purchased with bioterrorism grant money. This system saved a man's life. This is a good example of how funds can be shared among departments where appropriate. If an expense improves the overall communication within the town, it may be eligible for grant funds.

Mr. Johnson stated that he would check with the Communications Department to see if the need for an updated phone system which was expressed by the Town Clerk's department might be funded with grant money.

Mr. Gilbert commented that for a small department, the Health Department covers a lot of ground and must be operating efficiently. Mr. Johnson commented that they are spread quite thin and that a staff member will be retiring soon and will not be replaced. Despite the economy, they are busy inspecting additions, pools and decks, etc.

Procedurally, Mr. Johnson noted that Town Hall South has lots of departments that weigh in on things such as building applications, including Inland Wetlands, Building, Engineering, and Planning and Zoning. Efficiencies could be realized by giving field staff more authority to make administrative decisions. If officials and inspectors could make decisions in the field it could eliminate time and expenses associated with processing minor applications, as well as time consuming hearings and meetings.

Mr. Gilbert asked if there were any positions that could be shared among the departments at Town Hall South. Mr. Johnson stated that the administrative assistants are the staff members who deal directly with the citizens when they come in. A permit application must be approved by five different departments: Engineering, Building, Fire, Health and

Planning & Zoning. Any one department can stop a permit. There is no one person that walks a permit through the entire process. Town Hall South staff pride themselves on their efficiency. Frequently contractors come in and complain about the approval process in other towns compared to Guilford.

As for sharing secretarial services, there were three secretaries, but they are now down to two and the vacant position will not be filled. Inspectors are certified in their specific field, so their services cannot be shared.

There was a discussion regarding the microfiche cards and digitalizing the permits and field cards. Digitalizing would be very expensive. The Assessor's office physically checks the building permits on a routine basis in order to update their records. The Assessor's card and Building permits contain some of the same information but not all. For example, the Assessor's card does not have set back information, and the building permit has survey and lot information on it.

The ETF thanked Mr. Johnson and all the staff members for their time and willingness to participate.

The Efficiency Task Force meeting was adjourned at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Karen Quercia
Clerk

