

TOWN OF WESTMINSTER
PLANNING COMMISSION [SPECIAL] MEETING (PC) VIA ZOOM
April 18, 2022

Members Present: Bari Shamas (Chair), Seroya Crouch, Richard Crocker, Kathy Kingston
Katrina Hamilton

Others Present: Sarah Buckingham (Recording Secretary)

1. **CALL TO ORDER:** Bari Shamas (Chair) called the meeting to order at 6:32.
2. **COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLIC COMMENT:** None.
3. **ADJUSTMENTS TO AGENDA:** None.
4. **ACCEPTANCE OF MINUTES:** Tabled.
5. **UNFINISHED BUSINESS (Discussion / Action):** None.
6. **NEW BUSINESS (Discussion / Action):**

A. Nomination of Allison Bigwood for interim Zoning Administrator (ZA).

Crouch inquired why we would want an interim ZA, why not just advertise for a permanent person. Hamilton said we are doing that, but aren't gonna have a permanent person in a timely manner. Crouch wondered if the interim person needs time to get trained, how helpful is it to have an interim person? Is that faster than getting someone who knows what they're doing? Hamilton said there are people to help the Interim ZA and that the nominee is willing to become the new permanent ZA if the new Town Manager keeps her on. So, it's not wasted training. Hamilton said no qualified people have come forward and said they want the position. Crouch wondered why Bigwood doesn't just apply for the permanent position.

Kingston asked if the position is being advertised currently. Hamilton said yes. It was sent to VLCT and they're supposed to be posting it, and Town Hall created a job listing last week but Hamilton doesn't know how they've spread it around. Kingston said ideally we should have someone who has experience as a ZA or in a related capacity. She send a letter to Selectboard (SB) members Kevin Hughs and Katrina Hamilton about this. Kingston said in her ideal world whoever it is would have a lot of experience as ZA. She said Hodgkins was new at it and I think that we ran into difficulties. She acknowledged it might not be possible to find someone experienced.

Hamilton said she reached out to neighboring towns and the Regional Commission and asked for help part-time. The answer was no. But, they would be willing to mentor and help someone like Bigwood.

Shamas asked the commission what qualities specifically, or what background, should the ZA have?

Kingston said that's the problem, I don't have enough training to know what the ZA does. I'm working from the planning perspective. What Russ Hodgkins and Bill Jewel did was explaining Act 250 permits, permit requests, how we would word a letter to the Public Service Board to make it strong, help with the language in the Town Plan, understand the relationship between our planning board and Windham Regional and the state, understand the different Acts from the state, and so forth. That's what I would hope for. I have some understanding of these Acts, but if I were to leave the board, there would not be that knowledge at work on the board. Crouch agreed.

Kingston recalled people leaving the Planning Commission in the past, saying it was difficult to get new members on the board. In order for the commission to stay strong, it's helpful to have a solid person at the helm as the ZA, it can also be the Town Manager, but someone who can support the Planning Commission in their work. Crouch said the ZA would also have to administer permits and deal with the public. She asked how many hours a week is this job? Hamilton was not sure, since Hodgkins combined ZA with his Town Manager role. She said she gathered it's only part-time; 15-20 hours/wk, maybe even less. It requires flexible hours so you can meet people after hours if you need to, and attendance at certain things is legally required.

Shamas asked if anyone had other things they want to see in a ZA resume. Crouch said some demonstration of being effective. She said there are people who let things sit on their desks and people who get things done, and it is important to have someone who is an effective administrator. Kingston said that Bigwood seems like that kind of person. Crouch said she was puzzled why we don't have a resume and we're not meeting her. She's just a name, I don't know anything about her. I don't see how we can make a decision. Crocker agreed.

Shamas said we were advised that we could act on her nomination by having her submit a letter, and that's what was asked for, so that's what she gave us. I did ask her to come to the meeting, she said she couldn't. Kingston said she had been the one who said, in an email chain, that Bigwood could write a letter. Kingston said she didn't think the board had ever agreed that a letter was enough. She said there's a lot of confusion and uncertainty about how this process is supposed to proceed. Kingston said she agrees with Crouch, in an ideal world we would have a resume. But, we're being helpful to the SB and the town to just get someone in there for the interim. What I want to know is are we going to have a role in selecting the ZA or just the Interim ZA?

Crocker said that's exactly it, we might not be able to undo it. Hamilton said if things aren't going well, please tell the SB. Crocker said he wanted to know the limits of what we're dealing with here. Hamilton said she's under the impression from a lawyer that the Planning Commission would have to nominate someone in order for the SB to take action to appoint them to a position. Crouch asked whether this commission would be screening and interviewing the candidates. Hamilton said she believed so, but she will clarify. Hamilton said the Town Manager can appoint a ZA but since we don't have a Town Manager at the moment, it would have to go through the SB. Hamilton wasn't sure whether an Interim Town Manager could appoint a ZA.

Shamas pointed out that the commission had not yet discussed Bigwood or her nomination. She said she appreciated the conversation, and it did raise questions about whether

we have the opportunity to weigh in on the permanent ZA - and do we want that? She reminded the commission, the task this evening is to decide on the nomination of Allison Bigwood to Interim ZA.

Kingston said she wanted to know if Bigwood agreed that climate change is a factor in decision making moving forward and that she had emailed Bigwood to ask her. She said she was willing to vote on the nomination with the acknowledgement that it is only for the interim and she hopes the Planning Commission will have input into the permanent ZA. She wants to see applicant resumes for the permanent position.

Crocker said he cannot vote because he doesn't have information. He said he would need to meet her. Crouch said it's weird we don't know how many hours a week it is, it is so nebulous. Crocker said he needs answers to all the questions that have been raised. He needs to know how the permanent selection happens, know more about Bigwood. He said he doesn't have the information to say for sure that that would be a good choice.

Hamilton noted the SB meeting tomorrow at 6:30 and said that Bigwood would be in the office part of the day tomorrow, suggesting commission members stop by and chat with her. Shamas said we can't vote on the nomination tomorrow because it hasn't been warned.

Crouch said most of this discussion should be in Executive Session and not in public minutes. We're talking about a specific candidate and it might be illegal to publish that in public minutes. There was discussion about whether Hamilton should stay in Executive Session and whether or not the Recording Secretary stays. Crocker invited Hamilton to stay and suggested the Recording Secretary stay, but not take notes. Shamas moved into Executive Session at 7:02.

The commission returned to Open Session at 7:14. Crouch moved to defer voting on this topic, pending receipt of a resume and being able to meet with Allison Bigwood via Zoom sometime in the next week or so. Kingston seconded the motion. The committee agreed to leave it to the chair to schedule this. The chair called the vote and the motion passed 4-0.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Monday, May 9 2022 @ 6:30 via Zoom

8. ADJOURNMENT:

Crocker moved to adjourn. Kingston want to clarify next steps. Shamas will contact Bigwood as to her next available meeting time. There was discussion as to whether this meeting would need to be warned. Crouch said it will be totally in Executive Session as a job interview. Shamas will talk to Larry Slason about this. Crocker repeated his motion to adjourn. Crouch seconded. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:20 PM.

Signature of Clerk

Date

Prepared by: Sarah Buckingham, Recording Secretary