

MAYOR
THOMAS F. SLATER

VICE MAYOR
ROBERT F. AUWAERTER

COUNCIL:
JESSE L. "SAM" CARROLL, JR.
BRIAN T. FOLEY
DEBORAH H. PENISTON



TOWN MANAGER
ROBERT H. STABE, JR.

TOWN CLERK
LAURA ALDRICH

TOWN ATTORNEY
CHESTER CLEM

**MINUTES
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
TOWN MANAGER CANDIDATES REVIEW**

**Tuesday, December 18, 2018
5:00 p.m.**

6001 N. State Road A1A, Indian River Shores, FL 32963

1. **Call to Order**

- a. Invocation
- b. Pledge of Allegiance
- c. Roll Call

The meeting was called to order by Mayor Slater at 5:00 p.m. The Invocation was given and the Pledge of Allegiance recited before the Town Clerk called the roll as follows: **PRESENT:** Mayor **Slater**, Vice Mayor **Auwaerter**, Councilman **Foley**, Councilman **Carroll**, Councilmember **Peniston**, Town Manager **Stabe**, Town Clerk **Aldrich**, Executive Assistant Michelle **Fentress**, Captain Mark **Shaw**; **RESIDENTS:** Nancy **Auwaerter** (Ocean Colony), Mike **Ochsner** (The Estuary), Patty **Gundy** (Pebble Bay); **GUESTS:** W.D. **Higginbotham, Jr.**, Dona **Hunt**, Mike **Korpar** (John's Island), Janet **Begley** (Press Journal)

2. **Council Candidate Discussion**

Mayor Slater opened by stating that he had spoken with WD Higginbotham, and he suggested that we ask the Council to rank them in order.

Vice Mayor Auwaerter addressed his conversation in June with the Town Manager, who had been experiencing much stress. Since some of the causes have since passed, he distributed a memo reopening his suggestion made in June that the Treasurer, Heather Christmas, be considered as the Assistant Town Manager. This would allow Robbie to stay here several more years. Mrs. Christmas is not currently interested in a full Town Manager role at this moment, but could possibly consider it in the future. While the three candidates were decent, Vice Mayor Auwaerter said he knows the job that Robbie has done. As WD pointed out, it is very different running a small town than a big town. The Vice Mayor had discussed this with Heather and Robbie. He reiterated that **keeping the current Town Manager and adding responsibilities to the Treasurer**, who has proven to be invaluable, **is his recommendation**.

Councilman Foley said he could not in good conscience move forward with the three candidates that have been presented. His **recommendation is to continue the process**, and was **open to the Vice Mayor's suggestion** to remove the pressure.

Councilmember Peniston said she was not particularly enthusiastic with the Vice Mayor's suggestion, but was encouraged with Mike McNees, who is very experienced with union negotiations. She is not comfortable with the current management. She cited issues with the sale of the property, Old Winter Beach Road, Union negotiations and the first town manager search that could have been handled a lot better. Heather is terrific, and while Councilmember Peniston would be supportive with her being the Assistant Town Manager if she so chooses, she **recommended consideration be given to Mike McNees**.

The Town of Indian River Shores does not transcribe verbatim minutes. Should any interested party seek to appeal any decision made by the Council with respect to any matter considered at such meeting or hearing, he will need a record of the proceedings, and that, for such purpose he or she may need to ensure that a record of the proceedings is made, which record includes the testimony and evidence upon which the appeal is to be based.

The Vice Mayor's proposal was not of interest to Councilman Carroll for reasons mentioned by Councilmember Peniston and others. He said each candidate has the requisite background in education, employment, job knowledge, personal and communication skills, and could work effectively with staff and council. He rated all as capable of doing the job. Brian Wilson has salary and location motivation. Mike McNees is on the rebound, and has a severance package that will cover 2.5 years. David Strahl resigned from Fallon for what he called admirable reasons, for Council violating sunshine laws. Each candidate wants to spend the balance of his career here. Brian Wilson, he thought, would be taking on more responsibility. Mike McNees would find this to be easy street here, redundant and not challenging, which is a negative. David Strahl would also find this not to be challenging. So, he rated them Brian Wilson, David Strahl and Mike McNees in that order for "would they do the job?" He found each candidate to be likeable and could fit in here. He thought Brian's response to labor negotiations to be creative and interesting compared to the other two, attaching quantifiable measurement to job performance. He rated them for best fit as Brian Wilson, David Strahl and Mike McNees. Overall, he favored Brian Wilson for this position, as he thought it would mean more to him than to the other two candidates. He suggested that the Council **consider the candidates in this order: Brian Wilson, David Strahl and Mike McNees.**

Mayor Slater discussed Old Winter Beach Road and the issues with The Shores. Two days after being elected to Council, Robbie gave his resignation letter. Hiring the new Town Manager this summer did not turn out as they anticipated. The suggestion offered this summer for promoting Heather to Assistant Town Manager, he said is problematic because of her availability, although he views her as a gem and a fabulous employee. Mayor Slater said he is still very concerned about Robbie's health, even though the stress is lower at the moment. He thought it would be a better idea **to continue to look at other candidates** and let Robbie take time off. Mayor Slater continued that of the three candidates, only one had the leadership skills he thought were necessary, **only candidate he would recommend is Mike McNees.** This is so much smaller, he was concerned if he would give the effort. Mike was an All-American athlete who wants to win and be a very good manager. He is not looking to use this Town to further his career, but if he is not working out, he could be removed by the Council. Mayor Slater had discussed the salary with Mike, and received assurance that he would be very comfortable with the range we offered. He also spoke with the Mayor of Melbourne, and the 4-3 vote to dismiss Mike was contentious, with many residents speaking in his favor.

Mr. Foley's **concern is not to rush** for a variety of reasons. Mr. Wilson and Mr. Strahl are very qualified, but they struggled with a vision of what they would do here. Recasting and redefining the role structurally for the future is important to him. He liked Mr. McNees, who was very successful in labor negotiations. He had some concerns such as the pay cut, history of looking for another job, and running a huge organization, wondering if it made sense long term. At a minimum, he wanted to see someone with a better fit.

Mayor Slater said we have a **strong suggestion for Assistant Town Manager, one for Mr. Wilson, and two for Mr. McNees.** Councilman Carroll said there were 37 applicants initially, and then narrowed it down to six. They asked about the female candidate, who three days after the selection as a finalist, was not interested in the position any longer. Mr. Higginbotham said she was not one who he would recommend after he further researched her background. He was prepared to offer Council ballots for 1-3, or none of the above and the process can be reopened.

Mayor said **there is not a majority in favor of any one candidate, and thought that they should reopen the search.** They spoke about Susan Parker as one who had a very good background. Mr. Carroll had called her and the reporter, and Vice Mayor Auwaerter also had spoken with her.

Councilman Foley agreed with the Mayor, the search should be reopened. Councilman Carroll agreed that they should reach out to Susan Parker and take a few more weeks to see if there are other candidates. He still **stands pat with his decision for Brian Wilson, but wouldn't mind extending the search until a more definitive consensus was reached.**

Councilman Foley said he agreed that Susan Parker also be reconsidered, if the lawsuit was the only reason she was removed from the list. Mr. Higginbotham said he had asked the Council to review

the 37 resumes. He has reasons for not recommending a candidate, and will do whatever the Council directs.

Mr. Higginbotham recommended **waiting until mid-January to reopen this search.**

Councilmember Peniston asked that the **female candidate from the first group (Libbey Tucker)** be considered once again. **A key part of the decision, she added, is the staff, department heads and their opinion,** which should be done in private by Council with those staff members and could be helpful to the Council.

Mr. Higginbotham said he spent anywhere from 35 minutes to close to 2 hours in discussion with each of the 37 candidates who met the minimum qualifications. The Town Clerk has the jump drive, can make copies. It was suggested that the Town Clerk provide Mr. Higginbotham the initial 25 resumes the Town received.

Mayor Slater and the Vice Mayor agreed with the suggestion to reopen the search again January 10th.

The Council was reminded that two of the five previous candidates took another job, one was not a good fit and one did not respond.

There was more discussion about potential changes the Council could consider for future stability, such as having an assistant manager to promote the continuity.

3. **Council Recommendation**

The Council unanimously agreed to have Mr. Higginbotham research the four additional candidates that were not given as part of his search, and reopen the search to include Susan Parker and Libbey Tucker.

4. **Audience Questions**

Patty Gundy, Pebble Bay, expressed that revisiting the Assistant Town Manager position is a really good idea for continuity, and it is being very sensible. Heather is brilliant, she added, and often wows the audience.

5. **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 6:20 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

/s _____
Laura Aldrich, Town Clerk

Approved by Town Council at the January 4, 2019
 Regular Special Called meeting.