

DATE: November 30, 2020
TIME: 2:53 PM

**Town of Belmont
Fire Chief Screening Committee
Thursday, October 1, 2020
Remote Meeting
7:00PM**

Call to Order

The first meeting of the Fire Chief Screening Committee was called to order at 7:04PM on Thursday, October 1, 2020 by HR Director, Jessica Porter. Committee Members Patrice Garvin, Dan Halston, Chao Lai, Ralph Jones, John Sullivan, Kathy Keohane and Stacey Zawel were present.

Also present: Brian Duggan, MRI Consultant, Bob Loomer, MRI Consultant, Shawna Healey Assistant HR Director

Mr. Duggan notified the committee the meeting was being recorded with Zoom technology.

Introductions

The members of the committee and the consultants introduced themselves.

Chair Election

Ms. Porter discussed the role of Chair and the commitment the Chair needs to the committee.

Mr. Jones nominated Dan Halston. 2nd by Mr. Sullivan. Vote 6-0-1. Mr. Halston abstained.

Review of Committee Charge

Ms. Porter brought to the group's attention a letter that the Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts circulated to union members across the state. She wanted to make the committee aware of the letter and reiterated that the Select Board intends to fill the vacancy with the best candidate, and internal or external candidates will be considered.

Mr. Duggan noted this is normal for unions, he enforced that it is MRI's and the committee's job to identify the best candidate, with the best qualifications regardless if the candidate is internal or external.

Mr. Duggan stated to direct any questions from the public about the letter to the Human Resources office and if MRI receives a question from an applicant they will answer the question to the best of their ability.

Discussion continued about consideration towards internal and external candidates.

Mr. Duggan stated there are three former Chiefs in the meeting and they all were Chief in other communities. Mr. Duggan estimated that about 55% of the candidates are internal and 45% are external in the 160 searches their organization has done.

Mr. Loomer informed the committee that 2/3rd of the finalists are internal candidates based on the searches he has been involved in. There are number of factors in a community that a Town should

look at when determining whether an external candidate would be a good fit and sometimes the external candidate prevails. It is important to consider all candidates in a fair and impartial way and ultimately the Board will make the choice on who is the next Fire Chief.

Chief Sullivan described the process he went through a few years ago. The process is dictated on the needs of the community and the quality of the internal candidates. If there is a qualified, internal candidate this robust process will prove that the candidate is the best for the job.

Ms. Porter reiterated the charge for the committee is to identify the best candidates; internal or external and to recommend the best candidates to the Select Board. The committee will vet the applicants, determine the interviews and identify candidates to bring to the Select Board.

Mr. Duggan noted it is a normal process as long as people are qualified and do well in the assessment center to bring more than one candidate to the Board so they have an ability to make a choice. The goal would probably be three but it will depend on how candidates do because they need to pass the assessment center.

Review of Feedback

Mr. Loomer stated MRI had individual interviews with each Select Board member and the current Police Chief. The interviews were about 45 minutes each. Mr. Loomer reviewed the process that after candidates are reviewed and identified, some candidates will be asked to respond in writing to a number of essay questions relevant to the administration and leadership of the Fire Department. These questions will be based off the feedback MRI obtained from the Select Board and the current Police Chief.

Mr. Duggan noted the Board believes the candidate needs to be able to work with a tight budget and potentially make cuts. The Board wants the Chief to bring a culture of being a team player with the Town, the department and the community. Community presence will be important for the next Chief. The Board wants the next Chief to have an interest in looking at the organization and being open to change in professional development, how can the organization be optimized to meet the needs of the citizens of Belmont. The importance of leveraging some of the things that already exist in Metro Fire and how to support regional resources.

Mr. Loomer noted there was a strong sense to have a good spokesperson to the community and someone who is engaged in the community. The discussion of the override and the importance of having someone with creative budgeting skills was of top concern. The interviews will help us discuss the essay questions and identify the questions to ask the candidates.

Mr. Duggan also noted the recognition of diversity and generational differences in the department. The Fire Chief will need to grapple with these issues. The candidate needs to have strategies to engage all members of the department.

Review Potential Essay Question

Mr. Duggan stated that the committee will vet candidates and then candidates will be given 5 essay questions to respond to in writing. The questions will be developed based on the committee feedback and the information received from the interviews with the Select Board and the Chief of Police.

Mr. Jones stated the Town is entering into a difficult fiscal situation. One needs to think about how we can make professional fires less costly. Do we have too much equipment or too few people, is there a way to share apparatus with other communities.

Mr. Halston noted there has been a fair amount of discussion about regionalization and how to share resources across municipalities.

Mr. Duggan noted from MRI's perspective we would look at the concept and what is truly doable in the environment.

Ms. Keohane noted the need to have someone to come in and do a critical assessment of the department, determine where it is today and where it needs to go: from a people, skill, culture, and equipment standpoint. In her opinion critical thinking, vision, planning and execution across the board are the important characteristics for the next Chief.

Ms. Garvin noted communication is key for her in the next Fire Chief when looking ahead in regards to budget, and Civil Service.

Mr. Lai noted there is a population of 12% elderly in Belmont. Mr. Lai discussed the importance that the Chief of the Fire Department knows how to communicate with the elderly and how to help and prevent things from happening in their neighborhood.

Ms. Zawel stated having a good strategic mind is critical as well as someone that is out of the box thinker and creative to be able guide the discussion to get people to find the best resources. The Fire Chief needs to be politically savvy.

Ms. Keohane believes that staff development is very important we are asking town employees to do a lot with a small budget but coaching a diverse staff is important. The Chief will have to deal with the McLean development and 40B developments, the Chief needs to be able to evaluate developments from a fire safety standpoint.

Ms. Garvin noted COVID and the issues with Belmont Manor, the prior Chief handled the issues very well and was on top of the issue. He was able to understand what was happening and knew how to proactively respond to the issue and that it would be an area of focus throughout the pandemic.

Review of Job Description, Job Posting, and Ideal Candidate Profile

Ms. Porter noted the job description includes the requirements in regard to education and background stated the Fire Chief is a "Strong Chief".

Discussion continued on the Fire Prevention Bureau, noting it is code enforcement, inspection and responding to complaints from the citizens. It is one of the most important pieces of the Fire Department, the more a department can prevent a fire from happening the less danger there is to the public

Mr. Jones believes it is will be important to have this be a priority because there were issues in the department with prevention.

Ms. Garvin noted Chief Frizzell had a great relationship with the code enforcement side and it is important to flush out how the candidates will continue the relationship with the code enforcement throughout this process

Discussion on compensation noting the Town did look at compensation with MRI, the salary advertised is the base pay and there will be consideration made for education level and experience when determining the final salary.

Review of Steps Involved in the Recruitment Process/ Preliminary Overview of an Assessment Center

Mr. Duggan noted the first thing MRI does is ask the Town to review and update their job description. The advertisement was on 7 or 8 venues locally and nationally. MRI works with the community to create the challenge statement. Current interests include 3 to 4 applications processed and others coming in. With the COVID environment it is important to note that quality is more important than speed, if it is necessary to repost communities have and we can do so.

MRI has a 17 step process. MRI will review and score the resumes and bring those back to the committee based on qualifications. At that point those candidates will receive essay questions to respond to. They will be scored by MRI and shared with the committee. Mr. Duggan noted they will do phone interviews with candidates then work with the committee to identify candidates to do the assessment center of normally 6 exercises. Each candidate is scored 1 to 10 on each exercise, and a tactical exercise will be required. Tactical and presentation are always 2 of the exercises. There are 14 other exercises that the committee will review and pick the ones to use. Matrix on assessment center, essay scoring and resume scoring will be provided to the committee to identify the best candidates to recommend to the Board.

Mr. Loomer reviewed the timeline, and noted the Board hoped to have the next Chief appointed by mid-November. Late October MRI will receive the response from the essay questions and then needs 7 to 10 days to review the essays. The committee will meet then and review the candidates to be set up for an assessment center. Given the process and the timeline the best estimate for the assessment center is early December with hopeful appointment at the beginning of 2021.

Mr. Loomer confirmed the contract with the Town allows for 5 candidates in the assessment center and if the committee finds more than 5 should move forward a 2nd day would be needed and the contract would need to be adjusted. He stated after the holidays the committee will likely have a meeting to identify the candidates to move forward.

The committee should not rank candidates provided to the Select Board. The committee should provide the Board with candidates they believe are fully committed to do the job and it is the Board's responsibility to find the best fit from the group.

Mr. Duggan noted in a COVID environment the committee does not watch the assessment center to limit exposure. The committee meeting the candidates can be discussed but in the COVID environment committees have not been meeting with candidates.

The committee will only receive resumes of candidates that are vetted and qualified in addition to the essays of the candidates.

Mr. Keohane asked if MRI spoke with Chief Frizzell to see what challenges he sees.

Mr. Duggan noted they spoke on relative terms, and the general issues coming down the road. Professional Development for 1st line supervisors and up was of key importance.

Mr. Halston asked if all meetings are open session?

Mr. Garvin confirmed yes until we meet with candidates they are open.

Mr. Halston asked about public records law, what emails are public?

Mr. Garvin confirmed all e-mails would be public records.

Mr. Duggan stated the next step would be to meet as a committee the last week of October after applications are received.

The Impact of COVID-19

Mr. Duggan noted primarily our meetings could be in person closer to the end and the briefing meetings would be via zoom. We will need to see where we are with the pandemic but have to be mindful of it knowing it will impact the process.

Next meeting date Thursday October 29th at 7pm.

Adjourn

Mr. Duggan confirmed for the record the waiting room was constantly checked throughout the meeting.

Ms. Keohane made the motion to adjourn at 8:20pm 2nd by Mr. Halston. Vote 6-0-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Shawna Healey
Assistant HR Director

Voted and Approved 10-29-2020