

April 22, 2018 – 8am @ Legion Hall

Select Board Mediation Workshop – No public comment is anticipated.

Members Present: Jack Petropolous, Alison Manugian, Josh Degen, Barry Pease, Becky Pine

Additional Attendees: John Giger, Patrick Parker-Roach

Chair Degen called the meeting to order at 8:05am. Barry Pease arrived at 8:10

Intent of the meeting is to discuss recent board interactions and behaviors that have become problematic for the public and the board.

Brief discussion of having John Giger participate as the only member of the public and a future member. Consensus that this will be discussed on Monday and his participation may be included in future session(s). Further discussion reached consensus that his role will be observation and learning.

Members were given index cards in red and yellow; and asked to note items for further discussion on each. Red being items we disagree with and yellow being all other comments. These will be used in the second meeting.

Presentation of the topic of Ladder of Inference and the pitfalls it brings. The idea of this is that by making assumptions (on the part of all participants) that we jump to conclusions and begin to attribute explanations to things based on our own perceptions. These are often in error.

Overview of notes from interviews:

Members like -

- helping town and influencing direction, making a difference in our community,
- Interaction and working with staff
- Hard decisions, first defenders of the public
- See ideas sprout and come to fruition

Recent board successes:

- Workings with Jack as chair and Fran Dillon on board
- pull together and handling of homicide situation last fall
- New Fire Station – did work, overcame bumps and had strong result
- Shared values about Groton, brainstorming and collaboration

Necessary ideas

- Respect & Trust - respectful disagreement
- Listening – with open, willing to change, mind
- Move on after decisions are made
- More time for back and forth as we seek consensus – OML complicates this
- Foundation principals that we are willing to fight for
- Recognize own biases and be reflective
- Shades of grey in discussion and result – acceptance of undecided status
- Team actively picked for diversity of talents
- Identify norms and behaviors – preparation, how to call out members (public v private)
- Process for analytical thinking

Comments made about fellow board members:

- Fully explains issues and laws and their understanding
- Prepared rational approach
- Knowledge of Groton history and therapist background
- Background working with youth
- Small business owner
- Quick thinking, analytical, future oriented and able to plan path
- Contract negotiation experience
- Thought discipline – rational pragmatics
- Good listener
- Good at budgeting

Changes desired if a magic wand were available:

- Change member traits – eliminate defensiveness and don't attribute motivations to others
- Eliminate Biases and negative body language
- More narrow focus on tasks
- Remove preconceived notions
- OML reductions
- Increased trust and ability to discuss nuts and bolts

What other things should the mediator know in advance?

- This isn't fun anymore
- Five very logical capable folks
- Manipulation of OML for political benefit
- With me or against me attitude on the board
- Town Manager is open to change, doesn't have finger on pulse of community, quick to overreact
- Petty disagreements need to change

Select Board and Mediator divided into pairs and participated in some active listening exercises.

Returning to the large group – discussion ensued around the take-aways of the exercises.

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 am

Approved: 5/15/18