

FINAL

PRESENT: M. J. Farinola, Chairman; Maryann Kasprzak, R. P. McDermott, Selectmen; E. N. Small, Town Administrator; L. A. Ruest, Administrative Assistant; H. E. Knowles, Town Clerk; M. S. Hill, Tax Collector; J. Fournier, Assistant Town Clerk; K. Sabatini, Deputy Town Clerk

COMBINING TOWN CLERK AND TAX COLLECTOR OFFICES: This meeting was requested by the Board of Selectmen to discuss the possibility of voluntarily combining these two offices or putting the question to the voters on the 2011 ballot. M. J. Farinola stated that he is interested in this idea more than other Board members and outlined his discussions with other Towns in this regard. He stated that he felt combining the two would accomplish more regular hours and would better assist with meeting the staffing needs of both offices.

Discussion was opened to employees at this time. H. Knowles stated she has given this matter significant thought and provided Board members with a listing of items to consider as well as a listing of courtesy duties performed by her office that are outside the scope of Town Clerk. She reviewed the listing with the Board indicating concerns with construction and furniture moving costs, software purchase/data conversion/support fees, increased salaries, increased hours for part-time employees, required training and certifications, and other matters.

H. Knowles explained that she plans to run for re-election and then retire at the end of that term. She expressed concern with training officials who may be retiring and then paying to train new personnel shortly after. M. J. Farinola suggested that combining the offices be done without a ballot question, voluntarily. He added that he felt the two officials could appoint each other as deputies. H. Knowles and M. Hill disagreed referring to rules they are familiar with.

Discussion took place with regard to staffing and activity at present to include busy times of the day, month or year. M. Farinola suggested that all could be achieved with the staffing the Town has now and added that training could be worked in and gradually increase each other aptitudes.

Questions that were raised included who would take over the other responsibilities, how salaries and number of hours would be affected, and the possibility of longer lines. H. Knowles noted that in checking with the Town Clerk's Association, she learned that some other towns similar in population to Hampton Falls have combined the offices and have full-time employees with benefits that do not perform duties outside that of Town Clerk and Tax Collector.

M. Kasprzak noted her appreciation for the explanation of the duties of these two offices. She stated that M. J. Farinola's suggestion of combining the offices voluntarily over time makes sense as long as the Board provides budget monies to accomplish the goal. She asked H. Knowles if other Towns found the combination of offices to be a positive. H. Knowles stated she did not ask this question, however, found that the other Towns started with full-time officials with benefits; Hampton Falls is not full-time. M. Hill added that her review found that some officials resigned due to town meeting decision to combine.

E. N. Small stated that it is his understanding that both the Town Clerk and Tax Collector are each to appoint a Deputy. He suggested that the Board check to see if the law allows for M. J. Farinola's suggestion and also suggested that a cost comparison be done.

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M. Kasprzak questioned if this suggestion benefits Hampton Falls and its budget and further questioned if it is found that there is no less or more benefit why the staff would go through the change. R. P. McDermott concurred with M. Kasprzak indicating that he would like to know the costs for the worst case scenario. He also concurred with M. J. Farinola's suggestion of trying to voluntarily combine the offices.

M. J. Farinola stated he is anticipating no more than 32 hours a week with increased deputy hours. He added that his experience in the military showed that with one person in charge and support personnel to assist, that the offices will be more efficient than the current set-up. He indicated that he is not in favor of a cost comparison. K. Sabatini asked why the offices could not cross-train employees and maintain the current hours of operation.

M. Hill expressed concern with the indication of inefficiency; both officials know their jobs well and all works well. H. Knowles added that her review of the results of the recent survey found that people don't want to pay more taxes given the poor economy. R. P. McDermott stated that no one has stated that employees are inefficient and that he is looking to combine the offices in order to have a cohesive team. H. Knowles questioned who is to take over the non-official duties of the offices and whether another person would be hired. M. J. Farinola stated that by combining the employees of the two offices that work would be assigned to others within the combined office. M. Kasprzak acknowledged that because each can do their own job efficiently that the other assigned tasks can be included, however, as each takes time to learn the other's job, there won't be an opportunity to do the other duties as assigned.

H. Knowles explained the amount of training required as well as the length of time to learn the job. She stated that she feels all employees of the Town work well together and do things in order to not require a receptionist or assessing clerk. M. Hill stated she is acceptable of change and learning new things, however, indicated she is not sure of what the Board is trying to accomplish compared to what will result. She added that she feels the Board is not hearing the fact that employees will be unable to continue certain duties which will result in the hiring of a new employee; the survey results indicated approval of existing hours with no more costs. M. Hill reviewed the results of her review of various towns which resulted in full-time employees with benefits at 40-45 hours per week for the prime person and various hours for Deputies. Some had part-time assistants in addition to the Deputies and all have separate assessing assistance. She also noted that change from individual office to a combined office was made at the time of retirement or other employee separation. M. Hill provided a copy of her findings to Board members and referred the Board to a listing of duties she completes that are outside the scope of Tax Collector.

L. Ruest explained that should a decision be made which results in change to software that the change would affect the municipal accounting software used by the Bookkeeper/Town. She also inquired as to why certain Board members suggest that teamwork is a concern when employees at the Town Hall work well together and have for many years. R. P. McDermott stated that maybe "cross training" would be a better term over "teamwork."

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M. J. Farinola stated the Board would review the information provided this meeting and discuss the matter again at its next Selectmen's meeting of January 5. The Board requested that E. N. Small check with Local Government Center counsel to research the indication that state statutes do not allow the Town Clerk and Tax Collector to deputize each other and report at the January 5 meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS:

E. N. Small informed the Board that an invoice has been received for repair to the portico at the front of the Town Hall. The Board approved payment from the Government Buildings budget line.

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting at 2:55 p.m.

MOTION: M. J. FARINOLA
SECOND: R. P. MCDERMOTT
UNANIMOUS