



Schoharie County Administrator

Office of Agricultural Development Services

276 Main Street – Suite 2, P.O. Box 396

Schoharie, New York 12157

Steven R Wilson, Administrator

Vacant, Senior Planner

Schoharie County

Operations Review Committee Minutes

April 19, 2021

Present: Alicia Terry, Harold Vroman, Dan Crandell, John Riedl, Alan Tavenner (in person), Eric Stein, and Bonnie Post (by phone)

Also Present: Steve Wilson, Kayla Redmond, Nancy Dingee, Maryann Wollaber-Bryan, Donna Becker, Suzanne Hayner-Graulich

The meeting was called to order by Alicia Terry at 8:48 a.m. on April 19, 2021.

Dan Crandell made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from April 5, 2021. Alan Tavenner provided a second. The motion was carried 7-0.

Alicia Terry discussed the establishment of the subcommittees. Bonnie Post and John Riedl were assigned to the Human Services Centralization Subcommittee. Dan Crandell and Alan Tavenner were assigned to the Improvement of Tax Collection Rates and Strengthening the Tax Levy System Subcommittee. Harold Vroman and Eric Stein were assigned to Centralization of Financial Functions Subcommittee.

Alicia Terry introduced the next topic on the agenda, to identify informational resources for the Committee. Alicia Terry mentioned that people are interested in what types of departments other counties have and how they are structured. They are looking to see if they have a county manager, administrator, executive or perhaps none of these positions. Alicia Terry stated that people are interested in who other counties choose for their budget officer and how the budget process is handled. Alicia Terry expressed that after communicating with members on the committee that their most important informational resource will be the department heads within Schoharie County Government. She expressed her thoughts that the initial step should not be to reach out to other counties, but to develop an understanding of what is happening here first.

Eric Stein stated that it would be important to reach out to other counties. He mentioned that literary sources may be helpful, but he would not recommend spending too much time reading from these sources. Eric Stein noted the need to speak with the County's employees and expressed the importance of making sure these conversations are structured in a way to keep the conversations positive and constructive.

Bonnie Post agreed that it is important to talk with the Schoharie County department heads and staff, as they are a wealth of information. Her understanding was that the County Administrator's office had previously investigated how the other counties utilize their form of government. Bonnie Post expressed the need for this information to be provided to the Committee as she believed these potential demonstration projects were thought up using this information as a basis.

Dan Crandell stated that the starting point is to go over the reasoning for these projects. In order to know what to improve, the Committee needs to know if the issues are strictly financial or if there are other functional kinks that need to be addressed. Dan stated that with that information the Committee can better structure the discussion with the county employees. The employees may have ideas on how their departments can run better. He mentioned that the Committee should look at other counties but be mindful that their functions and processes may not work for our county government.

Alan Tavenner agreed that it is important to look at other counties as he feels there will be many differences to be found. He believes that by looking into how other counties operate, the Committee will identify ways to budget better.

Harold Vroman stated that it is important to listen to everyone's input and hear what the department heads have to say. He mentioned that looking to outside sources may help to identify solutions to some of the issues that arise.

Eric Stein left the meeting at 9:00 a.m.

John Riedl explained that in his experience working in the Margaretville Central School he has found that every school district has their differences and functions differently. He connected this thought with the Schoharie County Government. He stated that the functions and expectations in our county will be different than those in other counties. John Riedl mentioned that the work that this Committee does will also serve as a learning process for him as well as others.

Alicia Terry stated that she would like to keep the pool of informational resources open. She asked for the committee members to be open to introducing other resources that may be helpful to their mission in identifying improvements going forward.

Alan Tavenner asked how the committee members should begin to obtain input from the department heads. He asked if the department heads should attend the regular meeting or if it will be the subcommittee's job to reach out to them.

Alicia Terry answered Alan Tavenner and stated that she believes that the department heads may attend some of the meetings, while other times the subcommittees may be reaching out to them. Alicia Terry thinks that a key role of the subcommittees will be to communicate and gather information from the employees. She also mentioned the subcommittees will need to look at literary material and perform investigations for obtain data. Alicia Terry then began to discuss the process for gathering information from other small upstate counties by using a questionnaire.

Alicia Terry stated that a questionnaire will need to be created. She explained that other counties have similar departments that can be found in our county government, but that they may be structured differently. Some of the surrounding counties offer the same programs that Schoharie

County does. Alicia Terry said some questions will need to be developed according to specific data that is obtained by the Committee and subcommittees.

Steve Wilson expressed the importance of understanding what our government is doing first before reaching out to other counties to compare and ask questions.

Alicia Terry mentioned the need to be efficient in asking the other counties for information as to avoid reiterating the same questions. She offers that the State Comptroller website may have data with budget information on multiple counties. Alicia Terry acknowledged that there may certainly be differences.

John Riedl suggested sending one questionnaire to each of the other counties that covers all the areas that the Committee wants to gather more information on. He asked about the timeline to gather and review the questionnaire.

Steve Wilson discussed his thoughts on meeting with Human Services. He stated that he made a series of proposals to the Board of Supervisors and this Committee. He noted that the department heads were not involved in the creation of these. Steve Wilson hopes to meet with the department heads to answer any questions they have now that they are aware of the proposals that were made and get their input. He would like to have an additional conversation with all the other employees that are not department heads to keep them informed. Steve Wilson feels that it is his responsibility to prepare the department heads and give them an understanding of what to expect so they can more effectively engage with this group. He discussed the appropriateness of who attends these conversations. He expressed to the Committee that the conversations he hopes to have with the employees stays candid and avoid a large group meeting. Ultimately, the decision on these proposals Steve Wilson feels should come from this Committee and the Board of Supervisors.

Bonnie Post wished that she could be in on these meetings that Steve Wilson hopes to achieve.

Steve Wilson ensures cooperation with Bonnie Post to allow her to be a part of the communication he hopes to have and maintain among the employees. Steve Wilson hopes to move to discuss these proposals as soon as possible as there is an urgency to provide that understanding to the departments. He explained that he does not want to create a parallel process to this group. He assures that his office will report back to the Committee to facilitate communication.

Alicia Terry moved to discuss the reorganization of the office of the County Administrator and the creation of the office of the Human Resources and Budget. She asked for Steven Wilson and Harold Vroman to provide their thoughts on this topic and identify what the next step is for this.

Steve Wilson explained that this was an opportunity to combine some department heads. Steve Wilson believes that the personnel and financial functions need to be combined. He saw this proposal as the first step to accomplish that. Steve Wilson stated that originally the thought was for Fonda to do this. He stated that the personnel committee should think that each of these hires could be a part of this consolidation. He suggested that the new hires are both interviewed by this Committee. Steve Wilson noted that the job specifics have not yet been developed but that both Barb and Fonda need to be replaced. Therefore, two positions need to be filled for the time being.

Alan Tavenner stated that it does not seem practical for one person to do both personnel and finance.

Harold Vroman offered that he feels they need to take it slow and interview all parties involved before finalizing any decision.

Steve Wilson explained that the Committee needs to investigate what will work best for our government. He suggested that they need to make sure that there are efficiencies by combining these two functions. Steve Wilson noted the savings that will happen with starting the new hires at a lower grade. The Committee discussed how to attract new people to hire for the position and the issues that the Committee and Personnel Committee might run into.

Steve Wilson mentioned that implementation and reorganization will take time. He discussed how it will take time before we see changes in efficiency and savings. He also touched on areas that need to be developed for long term savings. He stated the significance of setting accountability measures for some departments as this is extremely important. Steve Wilson expresses the importance of evaluating the functions rather than the department heads to determine where to improve.

Alan Tavenner defined what Steve Wilson meant by accountability. He stated that it is not used to give a bad performance rate to the departments, but instead it will be used to determine what needs to be fixed to improve performance moving forward.

Steve Wilson emphasized that they do not feel people are doing a bad job. However, he stated that the Schoharie County Government is trapped in a system that makes it difficult to achieve programmatic gains and financial gains. The goal is to track performance. He feels that most organizations are either over or under managed. Steve Wilson also feels that there are many duplicate functions that can be resolved and consolidated.

Alicia Terry stated that she hopes to ensure taxpayers are getting a good investment. She stated that many employees are stakeholders in this process as many employees are customers and taxpayers.

John Riedl asked about the expectations in moving forward.

Alicia Terry proposes to meet on May 10, 2021 at 8:30 a.m. and expressed her wishes on inviting Fonda Chronis and Barb Schaffer to participate for additional thoughts on the proposals discussed in today's meeting. She mentioned that she does not expect work from the subcommittees but does hope to have a report from Steve Wilson on the conversations he has with the department heads.

John Riedl provided a motion to adjourn. Alan Tavenner and Harold Vroman provided a second. Motion is carried 6-0 and the meeting was adjourned at 9:54 a.m.

Recorded by:

Kayla Redmond