



SELECT BOARD  
Fire Chief Interviews  
Meeting Minutes  
June 5, 2023

APPROVED: June 12, 2023

**PRESENT:** Kristin Hilberg, Chair; Wesley Fowlks, Member; Priya Sundaram, Member; David McKiernan, Member

**ALSO PRESENT:** Town Administrator Mike Johns; Rajon Hudson, Assistant Town Administrator; Kelley Price, Administrative Assistant; and Kirby Dolak, BXBTV

*The documents discussed herein have been included with the file copy of the agenda packet for the above referenced date and are hereby incorporated by reference.*

**CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER**

At 6:00 PM, Chair Hilberg called Select Board meeting to order at the Boxborough Town Hall Grange Room.

**GENERAL DISCUSSION ON PROCESS**

Chair Hilberg explained that Town Administrator Johns would be asking the interview questions. The Select Board will likely chime in with additional follow-up questions. She would like for this to be a conversational interview process.

**FIRE CHIEF SELECTION**

**CANDIDATE A - KEVIN GREBINAR**

The Board interviewed Kevin Grebinar.

In response to a question from Member Sundaram, Mr. Grebinar stated that he has been a shift commander for approximately 10 years. He has previously applied to be a Fire Chief. He was the number two candidate recently for a couple of towns but lost out to internal candidates.

In response to a question from Member Fowlks, Mr. Grebinar stated that his current team is staffed by 70 people, with 12 people on a shift. Mr. Grebinar stated that he is currently employed in a per diem capacity by the Town of Sterling. He would like to have a larger impact on the overall Department for a town.

In response to a question from Member McKiernan, Mr. Grebinar stated that he tends to take on additional work in the Fire Service. He takes on additional positions to see if they are of interest.

In response to a question from Member Sundaram, Mr. Grebinar stated that he would foster a good working relationship between team members by leading by example and being transparent. He stated that everyone on the team is important, and he will formulate plans to work with everyone.

In response to a question from Member McKiernan, Mr. Grebinar stated that his lieutenants and captains will be his first line supervisors. If there are issues with this first line, he will communicate effectively with the team leadership.

In response to a question from Member Sundaram, Mr. Grebinar stated that he encourages bringing diversity into the Fire Department. He would never shun anyone from joining the Department for any reason.

The Board thanked Mr. Grebinar for his time.

**CANDIDATE B – LYLE MCKAY**

The Board interviewed Lyle McKay.

In response to a question from Member McKiernan, Mr. McKay stated that, in the past, he has performed fall/risk assessments as part of his job.

In response to a question from Member McKiernan, Mr. McKay explained that he has a call member in Dudley since 2005 but wanted to go to the city of Biddeford for the experience. During his divorce, he chose to be closer to his child and moved back to work in Dudley again.

In response to a question from Member Sundaram, Mr. McKay stated that one of his challenges in Marion is staffing. He has started using a cross training method in the department.

In response to a question from Member McKiernan, Mr. McKay stated that he has some experience in grant writing.

In response to a question from Member Sundaram, Mr. McKay stated that conflict should always be solved at the lowest level possible. There is a chain of command to be followed. He would like to be able to find the root of the issue. Decisions need to be owned and considered in moving forward.

In response to a question from Chair Hilberg, Mr. McKay stated that he handles difficulties between departments through ethics and sticking up for what he believes is right.

In response to a question from Member McKiernan, Mr. McKay stated that Marion has local dispatch. This is not as efficient as he would like for it to be. There has been discussion with moving toward regionalization, but this has not yet happened.

In response to a question from Member Fowlks regarding how to boost morale, Mr. McKay stated that nonpaid benefits, such as training opportunities, professional development, or specialty speakers can be used to accomplish this.

In response to a question from Member Fowlks regarding an example of how to deal with people of different skill levels while encouraging cohesion, Mr. McKay explained that empowerment is important. Skills can be made from weaknesses while working together cohesively as a group.

The Board thanked Mr. McKay for his time.

#### **BOARD DISCUSSION AND VOTE**

Member Fowlks stated that these are two very different candidates, one with more primary fire experience and one with more primary EMT experience. He would like to review the Town's call numbers in terms of this difference. The Town has an aging population but there are also families moving in. The Fire Station is one of the largest upcoming projects from the Department.

Chair Hilberg stated that she is trying to consider what each candidate could bring to the table. One candidate has more management experience and spoke of working through problems as a group conversationally. The other candidate appears to be more analytical and military in this process. She would like to consider what the Town needs regarding this process. Both are qualified for this position.

Member McKiernan stated that he previously lived in Marion and there are some similarities with Boxborough. He is leaning toward the fire experience over the EMT experience. That management expertise will be important to the Town with some of the development occurring. He is also considering who will be an effective presenter during Town Meeting.

Member Sundaram agreed that one candidate is more analytical and structured, versus more of a conversationalist.

Chair Hilberg stated that she liked that both candidates mentioned working with Department Heads. She is leaning toward a more back and whiter thinker and conversationalists can move into a gray area.

Town Administrator Johns stated that he is convinced that each of these candidates is Chief material. He could work easily with either candidate. One was specific in his visions for Boxborough and the other was interested in taking that as it comes.

*The Board agreed to recess until 8:30pm.*

Chair Hilberg noted that the Board can either choose one of these candidates or start the process over again.

Member McKiernan stated that Mr. McKay seems to be an analytical person with a great educational background. He believes Mr. McKay is a driven person. In terms of someone to speak at Town Meeting and manage the Fire Department, he believe Mr. Grebinar would better fill that role through his style.

Town Administrator Johns explained that this process began with a paper analysis of five applicants. He and Assistant Town Administrator Hudson found all five to be highly qualified and brought them all in for interviews. The Chair of the Personnel Board, John Fallon and the Police Chief all sat in on those interviews. Input from the two Fire Captains, including desires from the Department, were included in the process. Following that, background checks and references were considered. Three candidates were then brought to the Assessment Center. This evening is the final step in this process. A more extensive background check will be run by the Police Department once a decision is made by the Board.

Member Fowlks stated that a more analytical person is able to be given a team of people to drive forward. The technical aspect could be helpful in creating a presentation for Town Meeting.

Member McKiernan stated that he is considering this more from a conversationalist standpoint, as to who would best be able to convince people at Town Meeting. He is more comfortable with a single management style to help mesh with the entire Department. He noted that he believes Mr. Grebinar may have more experience writing grants.

Member Fowlks stated that many grants are not written by the Chief, but by Department staff.

Member Sundaram stated that she is leaning toward the communicative, collaborative candidate.

Chair Hilberg stated that one candidate spoke more to how to motivate staff and clear direction. She was a bit concerned regarding the 180-day plan suggested by that candidate, as she would like to see this undertaken more quickly. She preferred that Mr. McKay had experience with both regional and local dispatch, along with city and small-town experience. He has an EMS background which could be helpful to the Town. Her one concern with Mr. McKay was lack of management experience. She is leaning toward Mr. McKay, as strong leadership is needed in the Department at this time. She is concerned that there were only five candidates for the position. She would like to seek other candidates who could bridge the gap between these two candidates. She believes if the compensation had been part of the interview process, these may have been additional candidates.

Member Fowlks noted that Mr. McKay is an Eagle Scout which shows determination, and he has respect for. He stated that there were less than 12 candidates the last time the Town sought to fill this position.

Town Administrator Johns stated that the Town budget is public and salary for this position is as well.

Member Sundaram noted that she has a concern with the experience of one candidate versus the other. One candidate's experience looks very similar to some of the existing Department staff. Chair Hilberg agreed that she is concerned with this as well.

Town Administrator Johns noted that he was surprised there were no internal candidates for this position. He would like for the new Chief to create successional development within the Department.

Member McKiernan stated that he is leaning toward Mr. Grebinar as someone who can make connections with people in the Town. This requires someone who is outgoing and will work to bring people together.

Member McKiernan moved to appoint Kevin Grebinar as the next Boxborough Fire Chief, subject to successful contract negotiations and any final background and reference checks. Seconded by Member Sundaram.

**Failed: 2-2-0** by Roll Call Hilberg, "nay," Sundaram "aye," McKiernan "aye," Fowlks "nay."

Member McKiernan noted that the scores from the Assessment Center also speak to the value of the differential between the candidates.

Member Sundaram stated that she voted for Mr. Grebinar due to his ability to listen, ability to collaborate, ability to create an expectation for staff, his transparency, and the connections he will make in Town. The Town Administrator could be used to set goals and be more analytical in his role.

Member Fowlks stated that Mr. McKay's age is not a detriment in his mind. He believes that Mr. McKay has owned up to any mistakes he has made and has prioritized his family throughout his career. The scores from the Assessment Center missed some of the intangible component. Mr. McKay actually scored higher in the collaboration and teamwork piece.

Chair Hilberg stated that she believes Mr. McKay would be more tactical and Mr. Grebinar would be more political. She does not believe the Town needs more politics at this point in time. She stated that Mr. McKay does not necessarily have as much traditional management leadership but has a better overall skillset.

Member McKiernan stated that Mr. Grebinar's management style spoke to him. It was one of openness and transparency. People need to be able to connect and work closely together, and he felt more of a team aspect from Mr. Grebinar.

Chair Hilberg stated that Mr. Grebinar was excited only by the Town's problems and challenges but not its strengths. She is concerned that he may be walked all over. He did not well flesh out how he will encourage firefighters to move up in the Department. She would prefer seeking other candidates.

Member Fowlks explained that being outward facing is only a small amount of what the Fire Chief does in a day. The Chief needs to set out a plan and work toward it in a methodical way. He believes this is one of Mr. McKay's strengths.

Chair Hilberg stated that Mr. McKay did his homework and Mr. Grebinar depended on his past experience. She would like to see a mesh between the two.

Town Administrator Johns stated that all references for both candidates came back good. He stated that he believes the Department has structure and needs to see that continued.

Member Sundaram stated that she could switch her vote to Mr. McKay upon hearing this, as he may be more strategic and structured for the Department.

Member Fowlks noted that there are very few local towns currently searching for a Fire Chief. It is unclear if restarting this search will find additional candidates at this time. Chair Hilberg stated that she believes this may lead to more candidates.

Member Fowlks moved to appoint Lyle McKay as the next Boxborough Fire Chief, subject to successful contract negotiations and any final background and reference checks. Seconded by Chair Hilberg.

**Approved: 3-1-0** by Roll Call Hilberg, "aye," Sundaram "aye," McKiernan "nay," Fowlks "aye."

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

- a. to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel; per MGL Ch. 30A §21 (a) (2) (Fire Chief)

Member Fowlks moved to enter into Executive Session at 9:40pm to conduct strategy sessions in preparation for negotiations with nonunion personnel; per MGL Ch. 30A §21 (a) (2) (Fire Chief), and to note that any discussions in public session would be detrimental to the Town's negotiating position, and not to adjourn in open session. Seconded by Member Sundaram.

**Approved: 4-0-0** by Roll Call Hilberg, "aye," Sundaram "aye," McKiernan "aye," Fowlks "aye."