

**TOWN OF LA POINTE
SPECIAL TOWN BOARD MEETING
THURSDAY, JULY 12, 2012
AT 4:30 AT TOWN HALL**

Called to order at 4:35 PM

Present: Nick Nelson, Jim Patterson, Greg Nelson, Ham Ross, Larry Whalen

Public Present: Kate Bortell, Dave Thomas

The purpose of this meeting is to interview Alan Eckstein, a candidate for the Town Administrator position. His answers to the following questions appear in bold type.

Why us? Where did you hear about this position? **Eckstein replies that he heard about the job from his boss as well as his friend Alyssa Core from the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.** What have you done since to learn more about the challenges you will face if you get this job? **Eckstein replies that he has visited with department heads & staff, visited the Island with his family, read the website, the Town budget, the Comprehensive Plan. He has tried to get the “flow” of the Island, and feels that the job will require someone who is “low-key & consistent.”**

What are some things your current (or previous) employer could do differently to be more successful? **Eckstein responds that he feels listening is a lost art, and that losing sight of customer service is nearsightedness. He also feels that focusing on “free money” should be a focal point for the Town.**

Ham Ross asks if Eckstein is aware of all the unfunded mandates that the Town faces.

Eckstein replies that he is, as well as having contacts developed from his current position. He is also familiar with the grant-writing process. Nick Nelson asks about Eckstein’s key grant-writing experiences. Eckstein responds that he has successfully written grants for fire protection service as well as long-term planning for Ashland’s infrastructure. He feels it is important to have monthly communication with the people who regulate the Town.

Why have you decided to leave your current job? **Eckstein states that he has been drawn to the “unique character of the region.” The Island fits his life style and that of his family; he also feels that this is a logical next step in his career.**

If not your current job, what job in your past do you think most resembles the requirements of this position? **Eckstein feels that his current job has taught him the importance of working as a team while still being a self-starter. He**

feels that following the Comprehensive Plan is important. He has also gained experience working with regulations and with unions.

Larry Whalen asks Eckstein if he would consider himself a content or a process person.

Eckstein responds that it would depend on the situation. Sometimes people don't have all the information that they need, so it is necessary to "start at the beginning." Eckstein feels that he can both summarize or be detailed.

What adjectives would your current (previous) employer use to describe you? **Eckstein responds: "ethical, hard-working, dedicated, community-service oriented, and a committed person.**

Ham Ross asks if Eckstein considers this job a "stepping stone." Eckstein replies that as long as his employment is "mutually beneficial" then he would remain in the position for a minimum of six years.

Think of someone you have had problems with in your career, as we all do, who you would NEVER use a reference. What adjectives might they use to describe you? **Eckstein responds: "headstrong & abrasive."**

Describe a time when you hired (or fired) the wrong person. **Eckstein replies that this has not happened. He adds that he has hired people who didn't work out; however at the time they were hired he felt they were the best person for the job. He adds that he has never fired anyone: "People fire themselves."**

How do you alleviate stress? **Eckstein responds that he has a "boating addiction." He also watches TV and reads a lot of history. He says that he functions well under stress and is willing to be a "dumping ground." In the interest of looking out for the staff, he is willing to be stressed. Are you more likely to cause stress in others v. them causing you stress? Eckstein has been asked if he would rather be feared or liked. His answer is neither: he would rather be respected.**

What tools or habits do you use to keep organized? **Eckstein responds: pencils, tablets, a voice recorder, charts, a calendar on his computer and "his wife."**

What are the first 5 things you would do if you got this position? **Eckstein responds that he has jotted down some things: a.) a central information server for the staff; b.) a meeting with every department head to form a plan, particularly regarding inter-departmental equipment sharing; c.) a study of the Comprehensive Plan for benchmarks with a view to revision of it; d.) a meeting with the Town Board regarding a list of proposed projects.**

Greg Nelson reminds Eckstein that the new Town Administrator would be starting the job just in time for the budget cycle and asks him to elaborate on his budget experience.

Eckstein responds that he built his budget in Ashland with no previously existing budget. His goal would be to spend the least to get the most.

What are the things you do NOT like to do, and not want to work on? **Eckstein responds: “Someone else’s job.” [if that person is not working] He doesn’t feel that he is “too good” for any job; he may not be trained, but he can figure it out.**

How you would go about revising our (personnel policy handbook, comprehensive plan, zoning ordinances). **Starting with the personnel policy book, Eckstein would go to each job class and ask them to keep a log of activities. He also feels that it would be valuable to get staff opinions. Greg Nelson points out that the Zoning Ordinance was just revised and that the figures used for projections in the Comprehensive Plan are wrong. Eckstein replies: “I hope you don’t think it’ll ever be done.” He adds that these documents are always morphing, and that from his reading, he thinks that Conditional Use Permits might be the first focus. He also adds that the Town Board would be his “guiding entity.” Eckstein would refer to the Comprehensive Plan for every agenda; a Comprehensive Plan is very helpful if it’s kept up.**

Greg Nelson points out that the Island has a very “diverse citizenry,” and many of the non-resident taxpayers do not understand how much of their tax dollars leave the Island.

Eckstein replies that this may be handled through a “public outreach” and education.

Ham Ross adds that the Town wants an administrator who will get the funds that the Town feels it is owed.

Eckstein responds that he can “play hardball” and that he looks for a challenge. He suggests more representation on the County Board.

Ham Ross replies that the Town is seeking an administrator that would deal with the County Board.

Eckstein replies that he has many contacts and that he would invite them here to get a taste of the Town.

Ham Ross leaves at 5:35 PM

Are you more of a hands-on manager or a delegator? **Eckstein replies that he does not care for people who delegathe their work; however, there may be a time for delegation based on priorities. He adds that he likes to fill every day with work and that he would lead by example.**

This position has been vacant for more than ten years, and we seem to have survived without it. Why do you think we should fill this position now? **Eckstein**

feels that the Town “started down the right path;” he doesn’t know what happened—perhaps it was the poor economy. However, the Town needs someone to facilitate its goals.

Greg Nelson asks Eckstein if it would be his intent to attend meetings. Eckstein responds that attending meetings is part of the job.

How will you decide what matters need review by the Town Board, versus those matters you can resolve on your own? **Eckstein replies: in the beginning most things should come before the Town Board. Beyond that he would rely on the Comprehensive Plan and would come to the Town Board if guidance is needed.**

Assume you are a member of the Town Board, what question would you ask that we haven’t? What questions do you have for us? **Eckstein states that he feels there is value in “outreach;” that he would like to “engage the community.”**

Nick Nelson asks how Eckstein would disseminate information. Eckstein replies that he has used Survey Monkey successfully in the past, and that he would have a newsletter and a link to the website.

Greg Nelson adds that many summer residents feel deprived because some of the most important meetings & public hearings have been held in the winter because it is so busy here in the summer. Eckstein replies that he “can use technology” to advantage.

Jim Patterson adds that Madeline Island is “not just one community” and that there is a bit of a disconnect. He asks Eckstein if he would be comfortable being the “face of the Town.” Eckstein gave an example of people coming to his house [in Ashland] for information. He added that the “war against public officials has trickled down to the good people.” He understands the public nature of the job and is able to relate to many kinds of people.

Eckstein added that he wants to give thought to what the Island will look like, not just five or ten or twenty years from now, but 120 years from now. He would seek the happy medium: enough growth to keep a thriving community.

1. What is your comfort level of daily operation – dress for success, casual attire, informal, casual Fridays, etc.
2. How do you operate your daily work – support staff needed, independent, resourceful, get things myself or “I’ll have my coffee now”?
3. What kind of work atmosphere are you used to? Quiet, private space, right in the thick of things, etc.?

4. Can you handle an “open door” type of atmosphere?
5. What type of tasks are “beneath” you to perform? Cleaning up, snow shoveling, making coffee, helping the public, etc.
6. What type of office or space do you work best in?
7. What frustrates you the most in the work place?

What do you see happening with the Town of LaPointe and an administrator position five years down the road? **Eckstein replies that he doesn't see the position “going away.” He feels that regulations are going to continue to be a problem as well as an aging infrastructure and decreased funding. A huge expansion of the infrastructure is not viable right now. The Town should work to attract small businesses: diversification is key. He is pro farmers' market and pro arts. He would like to see more festivals held on the Island.**

Jim Patterson asks Eckstein to give an example of a successful conflict resolution in which he has participated.

Eckstein responds that he is frequently called upon to resolved conflicts. He feels it is his job to support the boss; he will usually try to resolve the situation by providing more information.

Nick Nelson asks Eckstein's view on renewable/alternative energy.

Eckstein responds that he has brought along a set of plans in that regard. He has made changes [in Ashland] that saved the city \$65,000.

Eckstein asks if the Board has a clear understanding of what the Administrator's priorities should be.

Greg Nelson responds that they do not want the Administrator to feel overwhelmed; that the person will need to do an assessment of what is needed and help set the priorities.

Eckstein asks if the Board is currently getting the reports/information that it needs from all the departments.

Greg Nelson says no, that there are a few “real problem areas,” but certainly not in every department.

Eckstein returns to an earlier question about what an employer could do a better job at: he feels that valuing people is the most important thing anyone can do.

Motion to adjourn: Nick Nelson. 5A's Motion Carries

Adjourned at 6:47 PM

Submitted by Patty Hobin, Town Clerk

Approved as submitted on July 31, 2012

Patty Hobin, Town Clerk