



**Selectmen's Retreat at Toah Nipi
05-25-2012**

Present: Jed Brummer, Select Chair; Roberta Oeser, Selectman; Sam Seppala, Selectman; Carlotta Pini, Town Administrator; and Linda Stonehill, Assistant

When the Selectmen and Town Administrator asked Toah Nipi Director Greg Hodgson what his vision was for the Town of Rindge, he said he thought that Rindge could use more restaurants and things to do so that Franklin Pierce University can draw more students here.

Sam: New England Studios (a recording studio) about 40 minutes from Rindge submitted a Letter of Intent regarding a joint venture with Hutter. The first phase will cost \$30M and they have an interest in Rindge. Roberta: Rindge has been trying to get one of the restaurant chains onto Fogg's corner--they say the traffic count isn't there but businesses do well at that location. People come from north of Fitchburg to shop in Rindge. Sam: Tractor Supply has done very well here; growth is going to happen. Carlotta: The new Tractor Supply/AutoZone has been assessed at \$2.6M and generates around \$11,200 in tax revenue for the Town (the Town's portion is just 17% of their \$65,832 tax--\$54,632 goes to the Schools and the County). Sam: We have major roads and there's more demand for police and fire services.

Carlotta: Today, we can focus on goals the board might have for the coming year in terms of our services, financial operations, personnel, and other important areas. Please jot down between three and five important items to work on this year and then we'll see if there are common threads.

Roberta:

- Restore voter confidence
- Plan for public safety facilities
- Recruit more diverse community involvement – personal invitation is important

Jed:

- Address police/fire facilities (public safety building) – possibly a donor match?
- Economic development
- What can we do to strengthen Rindge's image?
- Plan for a change in the fiscal year
- Create a road plan
- As Rindge grows, what level of services does it need to support and be attractive to newcomers, whether commercial or residential? Homes should be more in demand because people like Rindge. But if we have rough roads, that will be a turnoff. The Town must be managed fiscally responsibly and have proper levels of staffing as it grows.

Sometimes we're stretched just to get things done and can't get at the bigger picture; staff are just trying to keep up with the daily stuff with no way to get beyond it.

Sam:

- Change the fiscal year so that the Town's budget is in sync with the State/School's.
- Help FPU's viability and do whatever we can do to help them attract more students.
- Capitalize on the retail growth that's going to happen; we need to make Rindge more attractive as a college town—perhaps provide a bookstore, entertainment, and places for the students to eat.
- Promote harmony among the townspeople, town government, and its departments.
- Have cost-efficient public safety and town facilities.
- Promote good roads (a top priority).

Jed: Sam, do you think there's a possibility of opening up views to some of our lakes and Mt. Monadnock by cutting some trees along the major roads? There's a waterway by the rail trail and if the view were opened up, people might say, "Oh, look at that!" Sam: That's an excellent idea – and you could have views of the mountain as you're coming home. Roberta: Jaffrey says it's the home of Mt. Monadnock and Rindge is the gateway to the Monadnock Region.

Carlotta: It seems like you three are on board with common issues, and a lot of what you've talked about is consistent with what the department heads said their goals are for the coming year. The Police and Fire Departments are very interested in improving their facilities and have taken interim steps to upgrade the wiring, etc.

Jed: Whoever's the new Chief has the chance to restore faith in our Police Department. Roberta: And we have to address staffing.

Restore voter confidence and improve the image of the Town: What are some concrete steps that can be taken to accomplish this goal?

- A professional hiring process for the new Police Chief. Roberta: Having a hiring committee is not a great idea and there's a company that can handle this. Carlotta: A citizen committee hired our Chief, so maybe bring citizens on early in the process and get people's vision for what they're looking for in a Police Chief. Then use that to create a profile for the ideal candidate. Once we have the top two or three candidates, we could bring them in for the citizens to meet and review. Because you can't terminate a Police Chief without cause, it's important to screen candidates and do a background check. Jed: Yes, I think that's really important. Roberta then read a letter and said it would make sense to have an outside firm manage the hiring process for the Chief. The NH Police Chief's Association does the same thing for free.

Carlotta: We also need to take a proactive stance in our media relations. Right now, we're a victim of the *Ledger-Transcript* that prints what it wants about Rindge. We need to think about what we want covered. Linda has the ability to write press releases and she can photograph events like today, posting them or keeping them for the annual Town Report, so we create our own image and keep from being a victim to the press. Jed: And maybe we can hold a contest for the Town Report cover or pictures. Carlotta: *The Rindge Connection* was aimed at this but fell by the wayside. The Chamber's trying to do something now. Let's see where that goes and if that doesn't go anywhere, then maybe we can try to reconvene with FPU. The Town of Rindge is a member of the Chamber and Rick Donovan is a member on the Board. Selectman involvement in

the community is critical. Jed serves on the Rotary and is going to the Eagle Scout Court tonight at the Meeting House. There are lots of opportunities for the Selectmen to go to events: Roberta will be at the Memorial Day event all day, Carlotta went to the Farmer's Market, and Jed visited the Jaffrey Civic Center.

Jed: It would also help if we could develop the Rindge brand. Carlotta: That probably should be brought up with the Planning Board because I think they brought in Roger Hawk to do some branding work. Roberta: It was part of the REDI report.

Carlotta: Regarding the budget process, do you think there's something we could do to bring folks into the process and help restore people's confidence in it? Roberta: I think the budget reports need to be simplified. I went through Jaffrey's whole report and we have line items in more places. Carlotta: I've tried to compare our budgets with other towns, and how towns account for things varies. Roberta: Jaffrey's tech budget and other things are all under Administrative. So, their number is huge compared to ours because parts of our budget are outside Administrative. Carlotta: Ellen has talked about possibly using a different accounting software and, if we change it, that might be a good time to revise our chart of accounts. We have transaction history in this chart of accounts back to 2001 and, once we change it, we'll lose the ability to go back and compare. Roberta: Our numbers are the same as Jaffrey's but it's where we put them on the chart. It was easier to find things in the Jaffrey report because it was all in the same place, not in separate departments.

- Simplification of Budget: Roberta: We tried to get people to come to the budget meetings. Carlotta: I can't help but wonder if having the Budget Advisory Committee, who are elected, advise the Selectmen, who are also elected, is a set-up for failure. Roberta: You have nine elected people, so you could get a diverse community, but the BAC seems to be made up of one segment of the population. This Board, however, seems to be diverse. It's trying to get people to run – nobody ran last year.
- Extend the Voting Poll Hours: Jed: I think one thing we can do is to keep the voting polls open longer to accommodate commuters. There are people living in Rindge who work in Massachusetts – they leave early and come home late, they don't vote, and are not involved. It might help to keep the polls open later.
- Town Facilities: Roberta: What would it cost to move the Town Office to the Police Department – maybe it would be cheaper to have new town offices rather than a new public facilities building. Carlotta: At the Deliberative Session, there was talk of a new committee to look into a public facilities building – do you see value in forming that committee? Roberta: I think if we could get outside the box with new thoughts – I think everyone I talked to in Town agrees we need one but they've been voting with their pocketbooks. We need to keep it cost-effective. Office space is cheaper to build than a Police Station or Fire Station. Jed: Studies have been made at Famsteel, etc. and there's the possibility of the Rice building. Sam: You think about putting everything in one building on Route 202, but that would kill the old town center. I think the town government should stay in the old town center. Roberta: Putting the Fire Dept. on Route 202 would locate it too far out west. The center of Rindge is less than a mile from Route 119.

- Public Safety Facilities: Concrete actions we could take this year – police, fire, highway:
Jed: As far as police services, we’ve looked into regionalizing them. Jaffrey needs additional town office space and their Chief will retire in a year or two. The Jaffrey Administration could relocate to its Police Station and the police could do something with Rindge right on Rte 202. Mike Pardue said that would probably happen down the line. But typically you don’t save money for three years. You could reduce to having one Chief position and that’s a \$70,000-\$80,000 savings. Sam: But did you mention the possibility of a donor towards a fire and public safety building? Jed: If that person comes forward, we could take a strong look at it, but if that person doesn’t come forward... Sam: Then I don’t think we can do anything this year. I don’t think addressing public safety would go under the “restore voter confidence” category this year.
- Evaluate the Highway Department’s exhaust system options and develop a proposal.
Sam: Diesel fumes are not good. Carlotta: I think the DOL has an administrative rule on that. Jed: The whole area of the Transfer Station is not the most attractive place. Roberta: It might not take a lot of work to move the Transfer Station back and there’s plenty of room there; the Public Safety building could be there. Jed: There are some wetlands on-site. Roberta: There’s still a lot of usable property there. Jed: I think we have to look at single-stream recycling which would get us out of the trucking business and make it easier for people to dump their trash.
- Establish a committee to explore the Town’s needs and develop list of options, maintaining services in the center of Town (present town offices, highway dept., existing police and fire stations). Sam: I like the idea of keeping things in the center of town. Roberta: We could bring forth a possible referendum for the 2013 annual Town Meeting to ask how people feel about the plan.
- Change the fiscal year
- Revise the road plan so we have good roads. Carlotta: I asked Mike if he thought the current Board of Selectmen was familiar with the existing five-year road plan. He thought you might be but it could be time to update it. Sam: That five-year plan breaks the town into quadrants. This year, Route 202 is being repaved from Fogg’s to the border.
 - Pursue Cathedral Road paving.
 - Consider a warrant article to pave additional miles of road. Update/publicize plan.
- Recruit more people to get involved.
- Staffing levels/services:
 - Hiring a Deputy Town Clerk is a priority.
 - For the last five years, Carlotta has had a lot of paper on her desk because her assistants have been over busy with their workloads plus the sale of dump stickers and punch cards. Linda has also been clerk for the Zoning Board of Adjustment.
 - Going forward, the new part-time Planning Secretary will serve as the clerk for the Zoning Board.

- Review of dump sticker/punch card sales procedure. Roberta: If you increased the dump sticker to \$40, you could give people a \$15 punch card. Carlotta: Fitzwilliam actually doesn't charge anything for dump stickers. Right now, Linda's work is frequently interrupted for face-to-face transactions with everyone who needs dump stickers and punch cards. Because we no longer sell multi-year stickers, all who use the transfer station must come to the Selectmen's office to renew annually, so in two months she has processed well over a thousand transactions and that has impacted her regular work. Maybe stickers and punch cards could be sold at the transfer station – the way things are now, people have to make a special trip to the Town Office to buy dump passes and they don't like that. This system's not working well for either residents or staff so we'll review this process and develop a recommendation.
- Craig Fraley had brought up some concerns about the Recreation Dept. They used to have two full-time employees but now there's just one. Plus, they've increased their programming, so Recreation needs a liaison.
- Review accounting function and consider reorganization: Julie was a one-man show in the accounting department. When she left that position and came across the hall, the idea of splitting it up was for efficiency. Pat is inputting payroll and bills and running checks. It's not terribly complex work and doesn't require a CPA. Ellen, who's been doing the accounting, puts in about 25 hours/week. That may decrease once things are settled, but she's doing more specialized work – she's streamlining accounts and straightening out the funds. Why pay accountant wages to pay the bills? But I think there's potential for doing things better in the future, so maybe that's something we want to look at. Ellen thought the Town could use the full-time finance director, and that was actually recommended to us six or seven years ago. There's some work we need to do for our financial operations and we need to implement new policies regarding how to use the fund balance for the town – should we use it to lower the tax rate or build up an emergency fund? That's something a finance director could and should work on. Ellen's interested in transitioning from Vadar to better accounting software. And there's the possibility of moving payroll in-house. It costs about \$9,000 a year to process it outside. Jed: Maybe the action step is to review the accounting function and consider reorganization. Roberta: How many part-time staff hours per week does the Town Office average? Assessing/Code Enforcement averages 20 hours per week. Roberta: In Hinsdale, the Town Administrator does the assessing. Jed: But the files and updating take quite a bit of time. The bookkeeper works 26.5 hours a week. Accounting is hard to gauge; Ellen's averaging 25 hours a week and Helene is putting in six hours. Bob Cleland works three hours a week, and Amy fills in when Linda's out.
- The Zoning Board's new Clerk / Planning Secretary: Sam: Could the new Planning Secretary fill in for part-timers in the office? Carlotta: The new person will be working 25 hours a week for Planning and another three to four hours for ZBA duties. Our threshold for part-timers is 32 hours a week. The ZBA had been paying for a Clerk the last few years but stopped last year when they tried rolling the Clerk's duties into those of the new Administrative Assistant. Jed: If we can get someone to sell dump stickers for \$7/hour and Linda can write press releases and help with the Town's image, it's a better use of our resources.

- Roberta: Here's a thought – if there were fewer physical interruptions, it would help to get the work done, so should the Town Office have part-time hours? If there were three to four uninterrupted hours a day, we might be a lot more efficient. Carlotta: The office used to be closed on Friday, but residents demanded we be open. Roberta: Maybe you could stay open until 6:00 or 7:00pm and one Saturday a month for a few hours. I would propose that the office be open two mornings, two afternoons and one evening late enough so that people working can get here, and one Saturday a month so they can get their dump stickers. Carlotta: We also used to close from 1:00-2:00 like the Town Clerk and Tax Collector's offices do. But, what the people want most is access to the Town Clerk. The Planning Board is open until 1:00pm and after that it's by appointment. Roberta: The primary service the Selectmen's office makes available to people is the dump stickers. So consider a reduction in office hours for the Selectmen's office but also make it more accessible by staying open until 6:00pm in the evening and deciding whether it should be open once a month on Saturday. And if it ends up that we do something else with the dump stickers, that could change. The dump is tax-supported. User fees only cover a fraction of that operation. People who pay for a private dumpster are also paying for the transfer station through their taxes. We could get a better handle on what other towns are charging. Carlotta: New Ipswich's transfer station is only open one day a week and requires residents to buy the trash bags from them. Ashby's is open only by appointment.
- Look at the impact of senior housing / consider tax options: Roberta: How much of a burden can be imposed on the taxpayers for the care of a few? Payson Village has impacted our rescue operation considerably. Carlotta: According to our alarm ordinance, the Fire Dept. can bill for nuisance alarms and negligence. We could have this discussion about the senior housing facilities with Southwest Community Services: for instance, could Payson Village provide payment in lieu of taxes? Roberta: Because we have both fire and rescue departments, we have liability issues. If we had fire and not rescue, maybe other calls could go to the ambulance service. Right now, 90% of our calls are rescue and emergency. Couldn't the Jaffrey/Rindge ambulance service handle those? Carlotta: There's a protocol for response. Roberta: If I called the ambulance for transport, Rindge rescue would show up because of liability. Our EMTs have to show up, too, so we're paying for it twice. Jed: The actual cost is \$20,000 which is fairly low. But this is something that needs to be looked into. The EMTs respond to 911 calls and call the ambulance for transport, but there are EMTs on the ambulance, too. Often the ambulance is called and then there's no transport. Roberta: We couldn't do anything for over a year because the Fire Department grant for the exercise equipment prohibits any changes to the Fire Dept. for three years.

The meeting adjourned at 12:10pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Linda Stonehill, Administrative Assistant.