

January 12, 2024

An emergency meeting of the Town Board of Vernon was held at 5:00 p.m. on the above date at the Town Office Building. Council members present: Gene Bennati, Deputy Supervisor; Steve Adamkowski, John Peters, and Myron Thurston. Supervisor Watson was absent. The meeting was called to order by Deputy Supervisor Bennati at 5:00 p.m.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, there was a moment of silence.

BUSINESS:

Board members took some time to meet Judge Bellinger who is currently the sitting judge in the Village of Vernon and a perspective interim Judge for the Town of Vernon. Thurston asked what the reason was for the Village closing their court down after March 31st. Bellinger believes it is not cost effective for them. Tickets within the Village will be issued to appear at the Town of Vernon Court. The next court day in the Town of Vernon is scheduled for January 17th. Judge Bellinger comes into her office ahead of time to study the cases on the doc and make her case notes ahead of time. Thurston asked what the plans were for a court clerk. Bennati has a perspective applicant he has had discussions with for the position. When Bellinger took her position in the Village of Vernon her court clerk was Sandy Schell who she explained was a wonderful clerk. After Schell left the position Bellinger explained that she went through two other clerks. One of them hated the job and the next seemed promising as she was a retired engineer for NYS. She only lasted a week and a half. After that Bellinger took on the position as court clerk. Thurston explained as Town Justice it is the judge's decision of who to hire as a Court Clerk. Bennati spoke highly of the perspective applicant as he stated she has proven to him to be extremely efficient and highly educated. Bellinger asked if the interim position would go to more of a permanent position after February 16, 2024? Adamkowski explained that with little time to make an educated decision on who to appoint he wanted to be respectful to the constituents in the Town of Vernon before making a decision. Bellinger is not interested in coming in for a couple months. She would rather take over for the remainder of the year and possibly running in the election to fulfill the remainder of the term for Town Justice. Bellinger asked who would be the clerk for court on Wednesday, January 17, 2024. District 5 Justice, Judge Gideon is looking to find someone to fill in for the day. Bellinger said that it is possible to have a Court Clerk come from the Town of Verona for the day. Bellinger mentioned that she attends the Oneida County Association of Justices meetings every month. Bellinger wanted to clarify that if she starts this undertaking that she will be here the whole year. Adamkowski said that was the boards intentions. Bellinger explained that she was a write-in for her current position in the Village. Peters suggested that the Board members attend court to observe proceedings.

A motion to approve NYS Unified Court administrative appointment of Judge Bellinger for term until February 16, 2024, and agree to pay Judge Bellinger during the term of appointment was made by Peters, seconded by Thurston. 4 Ayes. 0 Nays. No discussion. Motion carried.

Peters asked that they not make a decision on the next item. There was a meeting between three board members and the town bookkeeper that could be considered a quorum. Adamkowski stated that he had talked to the Town Attorney. Bennati, Adamkowski and Thurston were inquiring on information. This was not a private nor a business meeting and was not scheduled. They had called Judge Gideon and closed the door during that phone conversation while on the speaker phone. Peters challenged the motion to change the previous motion from the January 8, 2024 meeting when it was approved to increase the court clerk wage based on decisions that were made during the meeting between the three board members. He was asking to wait until Supervisor Watson came back from vacation before moving forward. Adamkowski stated that they violated the procedure when they voted to increase the salary without amending the budget first. They were told that the budget needs to be amended before they can vote on the raise. It is not about the money. Once they amend the budget, they can put the money in for the new clerk. Adamkowski feels as rash decision was made before they had all of the information. It was the wrong decision based off information from the bookkeeper. Peters stated that that was decided during the meeting between Adamkowski, Thurston, Bennati and Bookkeeper Coston when he was not there. Bennati informed Peters that they all just happened to be there at the same time and a discussion was started. Thurston had stated during the January 8th meeting that he believed they could amend the budget based on the motion to increase the court clerk salary that night. He stated that he was mistaken. They need to go by the state of NY rules to amend the budget. Adamkowski was here the morning of

January 9th as he had received a phone call from bookkeeper Coston stating that an Emergency Meeting had been scheduled for Friday, January 12th to appoint Judge Bellinger according to Judge Gideon. He was upset that someone outside of the Town of Vernon jurisdiction was telling him how to vote and when to do it. Judge Gideon informed them during their conversation that they could vote for Judge Bellinger as an interim Judge until February 16th, so they have time to meet her and vote while all Board members were in attendance. Adamkowski mentioned that the Board members never wanted Peters off the Town Board but they supported his decision to be the Town Judge. He would support him again later but is glad Peters is still on the Town Board as he enjoys working with him.

A motion to rescind the motion from January 8, 2024 increasing the court clerk wage to \$21.85 as it was out of order for amending the budget was made by Thurston, seconded by Adamkowski. Ayes 4. Nays 0. No discussion. Motion carried.

GOOD OF THE ORDER:

None

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

None

There being no further business, a motion to adjourn at 5:43 p.m. was made by Thurston, seconded by Peters. No discussion. Ayes 4. Nays 0. Motion carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Additions to minutes on file
in Town Clerk's Office.

Jennifer Champney
Town Clerk

This meeting was digitally recorded and is on file in the Town Clerk's office.

COMMUNICATIONS:

None