

TONOPAHA TOWN BOARD

WORKSHOP MINUTES

FEBRUARY 9, 2011

Horace Carlyle and Glenn Hatch were present. Jon Zane, Duane Downing, and Javier Gonzalez were absent. Lack of quorum.

1. Positive Governance Workshop to provide board members an understanding of public board governing roles and responsibilities.

Wayne Carlson and Shani Dues from Pool/Pact conducted the workshop which commenced at 4:36 pm.

Wayne Carlson explained the origins, locations, and scope of Pool/Pact. In 1996, the Pool//Pact Human Resources Support was created. Human Resources issues are huge for everyone and personnel costs are some of the highest costs encountered by institutions.

Shani Dues from Pool/Pact HR briefly explained the different member services for Pool/Pact HR. These include consultation with members, instructor-led training classes, on-line training, and development of sample personnel policies. She noted the addition of on-site assessment. This is a new program that is a self-audit check looking at policies and practices in an attempt to reduce liability and make sure that all policies are in compliance.

Wayne Carlson presented the workshop on Positive Governance. He bypassed the workshop on the Open Meeting Law since the Attorney General already presented a workshop several weeks before.

Which way to go is the problem once you get elected to a board. You now have to cope with the results of that election. It is important to set boundaries. You have other responsibilities besides the board. Now that you are on the board, everyone thinks you are an expert on everything dealing with the town. There are more nuances you did not see before. The three most important things you need to get right are the people (HR), the potholes (the day to day items which are the most visible), and the poop (the Public Safety/Health concerns).

Before you are on the board, you get comfortable doing tasks. Once you are on the board, your thought process has to shift. You now deal with policy and others are doing tasks. You have to think about the consequences of those tasks. The only power you have is as a collective board. You do not have individual power. The town manager is the only employee the board has. The town manager is responsible for making sure all the other operations are taken care of within the framework of the policies created by the board. The board is responsible for making the policies and the town manager is responsible for making sure the policies are implemented.

One of the key things in board work is to learn the facts. Individuals give input and it is the board's responsibility to look into that input. You need to find out if it is an operational or board issue. If an issue reaches the board, you need to make sure you have information on both sides of an issue. After that, the board must decide what is best for the people. The board has one voice

Even if the vote is 3-2, the majority constitutes "our" decision. You must support the majority vote regardless of whether you agree or not.

A board needs to be bold. It must take steps to lead the community and it must make decisions even when they are tough. It is active. It is discovering opportunities. It is open to suggestions and the people. It is responsive to other ideas and issues, even when they come from left field. It is decisive.

Board members became leaders in different ways. Some found a crowd to lead. Some were pushed to the front of a crowd because a few thought they would be a good leader. Some were found by followers.

The board is not down there in the field but is above it. It clarifies the role of the town, what its function and role is. They monitor what is going on and make sure that it is consistent with the mission. You must make sure the staff is leaning towards and following that mission.

The most important role the board has is decision making. The board member's job is to adopt policies and the staff's job is to administer that policy. The board does have the opportunity to delegate some tasks. It can collaborate on policies but it has to make the final policy decision.

Oversight is central. The board has to monitor decisions and actions to make sure they conform to policy and create the desired results. It must reexamine policies to make sure they are not the problem when the desired results are not being produced.

When the board becomes dysfunctional is when problems arise. If you shift to a positive approach within the board and between the board and the citizens, a different, more positive result occurs. You need to learn how to communicate with each other and the staff. There are three different communication styles you must learn and understand: visual: communicate better with visual aids such as handouts and power point presentation; auditory: communicate better with auditory aids or descriptions; kinetic: communicate better through actually being on a site or touching. The goal is to discover each other.

Dysfunctional boards result from power struggles, lack of civility, a fear of letting their point of view known or fear other board members will hold it against them. Being preoccupied with procedure can slow down the flow of the meeting. Procedure needs to be followed but do not get bogged down in following the rule. Micromanaging staff can slow down the process and make it more difficult to accomplish tasks. Boards who are paranoid (fear or panic, fear of failure or success, distrust of others), schizophrenic (misperception of reality, delusional, strongly held false beliefs), depressed (discouraged, irritable, lack of interest in organization), hypochondriacs (preoccupied with problems, constant self-examination, switch from program to program), manic-depressive (inflated self-esteem, excessively discouraged) or psychotic (extreme loss of contact with reality, disorganized, unrealistic thoughts and feelings) are all dysfunctional boards.

You should recognize when you may need to step aside and let someone else work. At the same time recognize when you need to step up and lead. You need to find that balance between power and trust. Your job is to first understand the needs of the people before you begin making policies. You need to make sure you have enough information on an issue so you can make the best decision. If you do not have enough information, put off the decision until more information can be gathered.

The board has the responsibility of adopting a vision and mission. It needs to act as a trustee. It has been entrusted with the money and it needs to spend it wisely. It has to be aware of the budget so it knows if it is spending money wisely. It needs to develop a strategic plan to accomplish or meet the mission.

Interact with and learn from other boards when you visit them. Be loyal to the town. Put the interests of the town before your own interests. You need to evaluate issues and proposals wisely. If they put the organization at risk, reject them.

The Business Judgment Rule protects the board's decisions. There is a presumption that the board is acting in good faith and not doing anything which could put the town at risk. The decisions the board makes need to be reasonably informed plausibly rational, not completely rational.

In order to survive, the board needs money. If there is no margin or bottom line in that budget, the board cannot complete its mission. It needs to do a self-assessment and development. Add an agenda item to complete a board assessment. Discuss how you interact with each other. Be open to each other and engaged with the citizens. Toward the end of your term, start thinking of a good replacement.

There are certain board skills it is good to have. You need the ability to think deeply and broadly about the mission. You need the ability to imagine both the intended and unintended consequences of decisions you make. You need to be willing to make tough decisions. You need to be active but not intrude on the operations of those around town. You need to establish clear expectations and monitor the performance of the town manager and staff without micromanaging. You need to be able to delegate directions and operations to the staff and hold them accountable for carrying out those operations and directions.

Board members need to govern each other. They need to hold each other responsible. If you are in a position of power or responsibility, you have an obligation to stop harassment or other forms of unacceptable behavior. The chair needs to balance control on the board by bringing those board members into the discussion who have spoken very little and tempering those who tend to dominate the conversation. Use time productively so meetings do not run longer than necessary.

Recognize the value of input from others. Though the tone of voice information is being delivered in may be angry, there may still be bits of truth in everything. Review policies every one to three years. Choose the top five to ten policies and make sure one of them is on the agenda once a month to be reviewed. The less important policies should be reviewed every three years unless legislation or laws change require update. The policy as practiced is the official policy regardless of what is written. If the policy being practiced is different from what is being practiced, you can either fix the written policy or trade policies so the practiced policy becomes the written policy.

Remain professional under pressure. Leave your ego out. This is about the people not about you. Positive governance is personal, positive, professional, productive, performance, and patience. Redefine culture and civility. Power is granted by the consent of the governed. They gave you the power. Positive governance graciously guides the people willing to lead.

2. Public Comment

3. Adjourn

The Workshop concluded at 6:43 p.m.