

Stevensville Special Town Council Meeting Minutes

for WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2023, 6:00 PM 206 Buck Street, Town Hall

CONDENSED MINUTES

1. Call to Order and Roll Call

Mayor Gibson called the meeting to order. Councilmembers Barker, Brown, Lowell and Michalson were all present.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

Mayor Gibson: before we begin, I ask that everyone, please turn off cellphones and other devices.

3. Public Comments (Public comment from citizens on items that are not on the agenda)

NONE

Mayor Gibson: with the council's permission I would like to do a brief introduction of a guest, it is not on there. It is the first time she had been here since I was sworn in my son and his family, and my two granddaughters are at Disneyland and my daughter, and my grandson went back to Helena after Thanksgiving. So, the person that is here is my wife Debbie of 49 years. 54 years my best friend. (applause).

4. New Business

a. Discussion: Interview of Mayor Applicants, Mr. Howard S. "Scott" Butler and Mr. Bob J. Michalson

Mayor Gibson: introduced the process, that was sent to you some time ago, Bob we will take candidates alphabetically if you could just go in the other room. Jenelle, we have a set number of questions that were reviewed by the attorney, and you will be able to ask questions but remember by protocol you will have to ask both candidates the same questions. We will go in alphabetical order after that, after both interviews, I will ask for a motion and keep in mind that just because you seconded it doesn't mean that you have made a decision. it would be good and then we could go to public comment. Hand out the questions. We will start with Mr. Buttler.

Councilmember Brown: before we get started, I would like to advise the council and the mayor that I was contacted by one of the candidates for mayor on Monday afternoon. The candidate called my home and left a message that he wanted to talk about my view of the town of Stevensville. I returned the phone call as he is a citizen of the town and he does deserve a return call as I would do for any citizen, brief discussion and I informed him that the town of Stevensville was a weak mayor form of government that is the council that has the power in the town. I refrained from any significant discussion pertaining to the interview process. I disclosed

this to the council that this was a causal conversation, and I did send an email to the mayor and Jenelle and council president with the content.

Mayor Gibson: that is fine, I think that anyone can ask questions, I am sure that Mr. Michalson has asked questions. Mr. Butler would you please come up and state your full name.

Howard Scott Butler

Mayor Gibson: Jenelle, if you want to, we have 5 questions and the council you can ask questions as well. With that Jenelle would you ask the first question.

Jenelle Berthoud, Town Clerk: read question number one. "What do you see as your role being as the mayor?"

Howard Butler: answered question number one. "My role as the mayor is the presiding officer over the council. Along with departments within. I also view the mayor position as a weak position weak mayor system. It is also the public face of the community. Representing it as a fine place to live and a good community."

Jenelle Berthoud: read question number two. "You will be responsible for the supervision of 5 people directly and approximately 10 others, how would describe your management style?"

Howard Butler: answered question number two. "it is easy to quote management style, and that is to hire good people and step back and let them do their job. And that is true, you hire good people and sit back and watch what they can do. The difficulty arises when people have egos that come into play. I can assure you that I know very little about the public works department or the chief of police and would not attempt to assume that I knew more about those positions than the people that do the job. Recognize your limitations and acknowledge that the people overseeing those departments know more about them than you do. Listen to the people that you are managing."

Jenelle Berthoud: read question number three. "Who do you see as your employer?"

Howard Butler: answered question number three. "my employer is the town of Stevensville, the citizens of this town. Our responsibility is for the citizens of the town of Stevensville. We need to be responsible and accountable to those people."

Jenelle Berthoud: read question number four. "please elaborate on your educational experience and how that experience will support you as the mayor."

Howard Butler: answered question number four. "I have a bachelor from Pittsburg University and some years ago have taken a number of hours of accounting. My background educationally wise was diverse and allowed me to read up on a lot of areas that I had an interest in. My business career was in sales and required hours and hours of contact, in a lot of ways we are salespeople for the town, we need to be persuasive we need to listen to people. If I am chosen as mayor my door is always open to listen to ideas and listen to that person."

Jenelle Berthoud: asked question number five. " what experience do you have with creating and maintaining a budget?"

Howard Butler: answered question number five. "I have done a lot of accounting and in the service, I was involved in accounting. As a businessman I had to work within my own budget. An issue that is going to come up a lot with this town and what is possible within the budget restraints that we have. A lot of things that we would like to see but may not be able to due to financial restraints.

Councilmember Barker: asked her first question "some people in our community say that we have a traffic problem, what do you think and how would you mitigate those concerns and change the situation."

Howard Butler: answered question number one from Councilmember Barker. "I would agree with you we do have a traffic problem. mitigating that is not easy, I don't have a quick ready answer for you. It is going to be an issue as the town grows and developed."

Councilmember Barker: asked her second question "if someone came to you with a proposal to build a new piece of public infrastructure in our town how would evaluate whether or not the project was worthy of implementing."

Howard Butler: answered question number two from Councilmember Barker. "I think we have to look at the pros and cons, what would be the benefit of that infrastructure, can it pay for itself, is there alternative funding, long term costs. Do we have the money to keep that going."

Councilmember Brown: asked her first question "if appointed as Mayor what would be the first thing that you would do after being sworn in."

Howard Butler: answered question number one from Councilmember Brown. "I think one of the first things as mayor is to introduce myself to the public. Our business community is necessary for a successful town, the business community has the know-how of what is going on in this town. With that development brings development for the town."

Councilmember Brown: asked her second question "are you familiar with the Montana Municipal Officials Handbook and what if not are you willing to attend training seminars and what are your thoughts about the council and employees attending training seminars."

Howard Butler: answered question number two from Councilmember Brown. "I would certainly be in favor of attending training. I believe the more educated a person is the better. We need new ideas, and close ourselves off, we will continue to come with old ideas. I am 100% in favor of that."

Councilmember Brown: asked her third question "tell me one word that sums up who you are professionally and or personally and what do you stand for."

Howard Butler: answered question number three from Councilmember Brown. "I spent four years in the coast guard and the moto is that you have to go out and you don't have to come back, that means do a good job regardless of personal risk. Be accountable, and if I am chosen as mayor, I will be accountable and responsible."

Councilmember Brown: asked her fourth question “tell me one professional or personal accomplishment that you are proud of what steps did you take to make this happen and what did you learn.”

Howard Butler: answered question number four from Councilmember Brown. “after I left AT&T an opportunity arose that an individual could start their own business and I did that. Selling and installing phone systems, I acquired partners, I learned a lot and there are people out there that have knowledge and if you are open then people are willing to share their knowledge. We want people to feel welcome. I want people to say this is my town.

Councilmember Lowell: asked question. “how do you see your daily routine if appointed mayor?”

Howard Butler: answered Councilmember Lowell’s question. “I see my routine in the office is probably not a full-time position but the need to go out and introduce ourselves to the public, I will spend a lot of time in public relations, we need to build community participation in the town. Need to find ways to get citizens involved in our town.

Jenelle Berthoud: read question number one. “What do you see as your role being as the mayor?”

Robert Michalson: answered question number one. “my role as mayor would be as lined out in our town ordinance. Which is basically run the staff, manage the budget, run the meetings for the council, make recommendations to the council, bring anybody in front of the council for review. Other than that, everything would come in front of the council. We work under a weak mayoral system.

Jenelle Berthoud: read question number two. “You will be responsible for the supervision of 5 people directly and approximately 10 others, how would describe your management style?”

Bob Michalson: answered question number two. “I think that my management style would be pretty good, I haven’t done it in a few years. When I was a welder on the railroad, I managed 27 workers at a time. I did have that administration, did the books, did the time and did the payroll.”

Jenelle Berthoud: read question number three. “Who do you see as your employer?”

Bob Michalson: answered question number three. “the Town of Stevensville the taxpayers, they are the ones that hold all the cards them and the council.”

Jenelle Berthoud: read question number four. “please elaborate on your educational experience and how that experience will support you as the mayor.”

Bob Michalson: answered question number four. “I started on the council in 2016 at the time the mayor was Paul Ludington and then Jim Crews and then Brandon Dewey and now Steve. I have worked with four different mayors in my years of service on the council and I think will be good as mayor, I have worked with council, and I would work with staff.”

Jenelle Berthoud: read question number five. “ what experience do you have with creating and maintaining a budget?”

Bob Michalson: answered question number five. "eight years' experience, the first two years was a learning experience. And this year I think that I did pretty well."

Councilmember Barker: asked her first question "some people in our community say that we have a traffic problem, what do you think and how would you mitigate those concerns and change the situation."

Bob Michalson: answered question number one from Councilmember Barker. "traffic issues are not going to get any better, as our county grows, and people come here. There is a clog on 2nd, and we have sent letters to the state. Out by Logan and the pharmacy need to be looked at."

Councilmember Barker: asked her second question "if someone came to you with a proposal to build a new piece of public infrastructure in our town how would you evaluate whether or not the project was worthy of implementing?"

Bob Michalson: answered question number two from Councilmember Barker. "my first thing would be to bring it to the council, I would talk to them, but it would need to be brought to the council."

Councilmember Brown: asked her first question "if appointed as Mayor what would be the first thing that you would do after being sworn in."

Bob Michalson: answered question number one from Councilmember Brown. "I would sit back and observe for a while, this staff here they all know what they are doing they know their jobs and I would sit back and observe for a while I would not make any changes; I would like to continue what Steve and all of us have worked on. Fix leaks and streets, it has been put on the back burner and it has to be a priority moving forward."

Councilmember Brown: asked her second question "are you familiar with the Montana Municipal Officials Handbook and what if not are you willing to attend training seminars and what are your thoughts about the council and employees attending training seminars."

Bob Michalson: answered question number two from Councilmember Brown. "I am familiar with the handbook, I have attended most of the trainings, I would recommend councilmembers and staff to attend. Online is okay, but in person is when ideas are shared."

Councilmember Brown: asked her third question "tell me one word that sums up who you are professionally and or personally and what do you stand for?"

Bob Michalson: answered question number three from Councilmember Brown. "I stand for the truth, I try to. I can be joking but at the end of the day it is the truth."

Councilmember Brown: asked her fourth question "tell me one professional or personal accomplishment that you are proud of what steps did you take to make this happen and what did you learn?"

Bob Michalson: answered question number four from Councilmember Brown. "I am a recovering alcoholic and I have 37 years sobriety. I am very proud of that every day."

Councilmember Lowell: asked question. "how do you see your daily routine if appointed mayor?"

Bob Michalson: answered Councilmember Lowell's question. "my life would definitely change; I will spend as much time as I need to do to keep the town running.

b. Discussion/Decision: Appointment of Mayor by the Town Council

Mayor Gibson: as I mentioned before, if we could get a motion with a recommendation and hopefully a second, as you know many times just making a motion and a 2nd does not make a decision, but it will allow us to involve the public with public comment on either candidate.

Councilmember Brown: I move that we appoint Bob Michalson as mayor.

Councilmember Barker: 2nd.

Mayor Gibson: with that we will go to public comment. Either candidate. Is there anyone that would like to give public comment?

PUBLIC COMMENT

William Rowe: I actually reside in Hamilton; but I have two businesses in Stevensville. I am the airport manager, but I am here tonight as a business owner. I started the process to get the first business going a year and four months ago. I have religiously come to council meeting and airport board meetings and in turn became a second business. Years ago, I lived in Stevensville years ago, I have moved but I have chose to have my businesses here. Throughout that year and four months of coming to council meetings you experience a lot, but there really is not an easy way to put this, I have concerns with Bob Michalson taking the mayors position because of his demonstrative past. I am involved with the town and the employees with this town, he has demonstrated that he has a history were a lawsuit was settled over harassment. What is the town financially going to do if we go through that again, we can go through the numbers. \$85,000 settlement and cost the town \$93,000 in legal fees. The insurance went from \$23,000 fiscally to \$73,000 because of this. The town can't afford to go through another instance like that. We know councilmember Michalson because he is on the council and there is comfort there. As a business owner working with a person that you know versus a person that you don't know. But sometimes you have better progress with that breath of fresh air that you don't know. I have had conversations with Mr. Butler, I think that is the best candidate for that position, I am really concerned about having businesses here in this town and what would happen if there is another instance of harassment what is that going to create for this office. I am not here to play favorites; it is just what I see from the outside. The past needs to be taken into consideration when taking over Mayor Gibson's seat.

Mark Adams: 610 E 2nd Street. I can understand the former participants concerns about Bob, but I think I have known Bob before he was on the council, and I know Mr. Butler, I used to live right next door to him. I would not recommend Mr. Butler for this position because of the personal problems that he seems to have, I will not present his personal problems in public. But Mr. Michalson has told the public that he is a recovering alcoholic for 30 plus years and that to me means something, I do understand the other persons concerns, but there is more to that sortie. I think that the council would be wise to consider Mr. Michalson and not Mr. Butler.

Mayor Gibson: any further public comment? Seeing none, further discussion by the council. We have a motion and a 2nd to appoint Bob Michalson.

Councilmember Barker: I do not know much about Mr. Butler; I have sat on council with Mr. Michalson for some time it is a hard decision to make everybody grows from their mistakes, I was on the council when the lawsuit happened, I was part of that lawsuit and I seen connections change, I wish that I knew Mr. Butler more and I wish everyone knew what happened. People can change we always look in the past and w need to look in the future.

Councilmember Brown: thank you to both of you for putting your names in the hat. I do not know much about Mr. Butler, not to say he is not qualified, because he is qualified. Right now, it is to me the difference is that we have one candidate that is versed in Montana code, the budget procedure and we have one person that would bring in new ideas.

Mayor Gibson: Jenelle, please take the vote.

Councilmember Barker: aye.

Councilmember Brown: aye.

Councilmember Lowell: abstain because I am not going to be here.

Mayor Gibson: we have two ayes and an abstain, Bob Michalson has been appointed Mayor. With that Mr. Michalson you can come back up. You will need to submit a letter of resignation by 5:00 pm tomorrow so that you can be sworn in. the judge with swear you in on December 1st at 9:00 am.

5. Mayor Update

Mayor Gibson: as you know I usually don't read anything and or say a lot but tonight I am going to read so I don't forget anything. It has been an honor and a privilege to work for the people of Stevensville the last two years, the first day that I started here there was no finance officer, no human resource officer, no utility billing clerk, no park supervisor and audits were three years behind and we were being fined. Information was missing and a budget that blotted and underfunded. We have done pretty well with the budget despite inflation we did not raise water and sewer fees, business permit fees or building permit fees, as many others has done. We actually reduced taxes in lighting districts. Today the budget is in pretty good shape, through cost savings that have been put into place the last two years. Contracts that totaled over \$147,000.00. next year you should be able to look at larger raises especially for the police and I would ask that you look at a 20-year retirement for the police. I have been told that it was really expensive, it is not, I would ask you to consider that. There needs to be more money for equipment upgrades, especially for the fire department. Bids have gone out to fix leaks and street repairs. We are closer than ever to get our water rights. Bob, one of the first things that we need to talk about is water rights. Working with DNRC, Mr. Overstreet was in that meeting. This was neglected for years. The previous administrations were close, but they dropped the ball. Talked about traffic safety, continue to follow through MDOT. Updated personnel policy and subdivision regulations. I would like to thank the staff for their dedication and hard work, the police and the volunteer firefighters and EMT's. I would also like to thank Pam and Mac Sosa who are no longer there. Thank town attorney Greg Overstreet. Thank you, airport manager, Will who has done more in the last three months then what was done in the past three years. I would like to thank the majority of the community who supported me from day one. I

especially want to thank Jenelle. Without her in the beginning I don't think I would have survived, and the town would have been in dire straights. More needs to be done, growth policy, water and sewer projects. For the new mayor I think you need to remember who your employer is, the citizens of the Town of Stevensville. To the new mayor, if you wish feel free to contact me at any time, something that I did not experience.

Councilmember Michalson: I would like to personally thank the outgoing mayor. Steve got on the council, but it took a lot to get him to run for mayor and he stepped up and did the job. I did not want to take this job because I wanted him to stay another two years. I will be contacting you all the time for guidance and support.

Councilmember Lowell: I just think that you have done a wonderful job brining the town together. I have enjoyed being on the council with you.

Councilmember Brown: I would like to say also I do believe that you were the right person at the time, and I appreciate what you did.

Councilmember Barker: I know that I am tough cookie to work with sometimes and I can be pretty harsh. You came in and you proved to the people that you would do the job that you said you would.

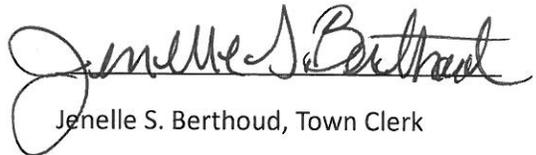
6. Adjournment

APPROVE:



Steve Gibson, Mayor

ATTEST:



Jenelle S. Berthoud, Town Clerk