

July 13, 2009

To the Citizens of Hinesburg:

RE: Timeline and Status of the Selectboard's Action Regarding Chris Morrell

There has been enough publicity about the Selectboard's action against Chief of Police, Chris Morrell that it is appropriate to share a summary of events and an update of where we are in the process.

On April 16th Selectboard members Jon Trefry and Randy Volk, acting on behalf of the entire Board, met with Chief Morrell to inform him of the Board's distress over continued leadership and personnel management problems in the police department, and of a breakdown of morale in the department. The Board requested that the Chief consider resigning and informed him that if he chose not to resign the Board would begin a process that could lead to his termination. The Chief chose not to resign and on April 21st the Selectboard placed Chief Morrell on paid administrative leave to conduct a further investigation into his management of police department personnel.

Between April 22nd and May 7th the Board conducted interviews with department employees, past employees, volunteers, associates, and with Chief Morrell. Based on information gathered in the interviews, and in light of documented personnel management issues that have been discussed for several years without resolution or change, on May 14th the Board initiated an action to dismiss Chief Morrell.

Prior to dismissing the Chief and setting a date for a hearing, the Board again chose to offer the Chief an opportunity to resign. An eight-page letter was delivered to Chris on May 19th, providing him with information regarding the management problems in the department and requesting his resignation. The Chief chose not to resign. The Selectboard did not formally learn of the Chief's decision until May 27th.

At the June 1st Selectboard meeting the Board was presented with a petition supporting the Chief signed by approximately 900 individuals.

The same meeting was attended by approximately 50 individuals many of whom attended to voice support for the Chief.

On June 8th the Selectboard met to discuss how to proceed with an action against Chief Morrell. State statute permits the Board to act as prosecutor, investigator, and judge in personnel matters regarding police chiefs. There was reason to believe that if the Board followed that process it would be vulnerable to a challenge claiming that the Chief was denied due process. On June 10th, 2009 the Board decided it would be best to hand decision making authority over to an independent arbitrator. It is clear to the Board that if both parties present their arguments to an independent arbitrator, there will be no doubt that the process was fair. It is important to the members of the Selectboard that the process not only be fair, but that it is perceived to be fair by the community.

Since June 10th the parties have been negotiating the agreement to arbitrate. On Monday July 13th the Board voted to sign the agreement and to deliver a letter to the Chief with formal charges. The two parties will present their cases to the arbitrator on September 2nd and 3rd.

The Board thanks you for your patience while we work through what is a difficult process for all parties.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Brown

Andrea Morgante

Howard E. Russell

Jonathan S. Trefry

Randall C. Volk

THE HINESBURG SELECTBOARD