



## MEMORANDUM

TO: CHILMARK SELECT BOARD  
FROM: DON LEOPOLD  
DATE: 10/18/22  
RE: ORGANIZATION REVIEW INITIAL FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

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Gentlemen,

Based on your request to conduct an Organization Review of the Town of Chilmark, I have conducted 18 individual, confidential interviews with town employees based both within and outside of Town Hall.

This note is to share my initial findings and observations. I look forward to discussing them with you, and thinking through appropriate next steps, at your earliest convenience.

### Initial Findings

- Chilmark is very fortunate to have extraordinarily qualified and committed staff providing high levels of service both inside and outside of Town Hall
- They do so in a setting that provides important elements of support
  - Staff express genuine respect and regard for their colleagues and the character of the town they serve
  - Those outside of Town Hall consistently praise the people with whom they interact inside the building
- They also do so in an environment that presents many challenges
  - The town's **structure** of select board, town administrator, elected committees, and appointed committees, with roles that are often not clear or consistent, can create a difficult operating environment
    - Reinforcing the lack of role clarity among these multiple bodies, some find it challenging to answer the fundamental question, *"Who is your boss?"*
    - Having staff members report to different entities without a clear, shared set of norms and expectations (work hours, work locations, what needs to be delivered to whom by when, etc.) makes it such that, as one long-term staff member said, *"we do not work as one team"*. The lack of being one team also makes it very difficult to understand each other's roles, needs and timetables, which inevitably creates unneeded and often difficult strains and frictions between staff members
    - Committee chairs are inconsistent in how they define their roles; staff reports they range from being *"hands-off, being helpful sounding-boards"* to *"very hands-on, almost to the point of micro-managing"*

- The role of **Town Administrator** is reported to have such a broad set of tasks and responsibilities that many staff inside and outside of Town Hall wonder if the job as currently structured is “do-able”
  - *“He has so much going on that it is often frustratingly hard to get a response when I need one, or to feel that he has had the time to give me a useful answer.”*
  - Staff cite multiple examples of “*firefighting*” versus planning, missing deadlines that critical to people’s jobs, and varying between being absent and micro-managing
- The lack of fundamental planning, management, communication, conflict resolution and even budgeting and reporting **processes** creates “*dropped balls*”, costly re-work, inefficiencies, poor communication, and high staff frustration
  - *“We always seem to do things by the seat of our pants”*
  - *“We are always re-inventing the wheel”*
  - The lack of process and documentation makes bringing new staff on board particularly difficult and frustrating
  - Those outside Town Hall particularly express frustration with insufficient communication and inconsistent levels of responsiveness
    - It is not always clear from whom information is supposed to flow, and whom to call for what
      - *“We are always the last to know information that may be important for us to know.”*
    - While all express high levels of satisfaction with day-to-day Town Hall operations, many report inconsistent, and often slow and unhelpful, responsiveness to their needs and questions
      - *“Not responsive”*
      - *“When I do get answers they often don’t help”*
      - *“I wonder if the job as defined is do-able”*
      - *“It seems that there are too many roles to do them well”*

## Observations

- We as citizens of Chilmark are extraordinarily fortunate in the quality and dedication of Town staff
- Staff frustration, inefficiencies and higher-than-needed costs will continue to rise until such basic processes as planning, reporting, budgeting, communications, and decision-making are put in place and documented
- The town would benefit greatly by taking three steps
  1. Assess the current role, and then determining the best-and-highest use, of the Town Administrator role.
  2. Prioritizing processes to develop and document, and then doing 2-3/year
  3. Develop clearer definitions of all roles, individual and collective, with regards to:
    - Scope of responsibility
    - Reporting relationships
    - Expectations
    - Authority
      - Advisory versus decision making

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