

June 1, 2009

To the citizens of Hinesburg:

A recent editorial in the Burlington Free Press took the members of the Hinesburg Select Board to task for the manner in which it is handling a personnel matter involving its police chief, Chris Morrell. The Free Press wrote:

*What can't be justified is that Morrell appears to have no idea what the Selectboard is investigating about his department or why. ... The situation compromises the chief's public standing. He, at the very least, has the right to know what they suspect is wrong with his department.*

The starting point for the Free Press editorial is its assumption that the Select Board has either failed or refused to inform Chief Morrell of the reasons for its investigation, or its results. The Free Press has failed to reveal the source it relies on in reaching its conclusion, but nothing could be further from the truth.

Since April 16<sup>th</sup> the Board has met with Chief Morrell four times to review the issues. The Board has shared its concerns with Chief Morrell and his counsel in the course of its investigation and has provided Chief Morrell with the opportunity to respond to those concerns. On May 19, 2009 the Board provided Chief Morrell with an eight-page letter which specifically detailed the issues of concern to the Board. The statement by the Free Press, i.e., "...Morrell appears to have no idea what the Selectboard is investigating about his department or why..." is simply untrue.

Chief Morrell has a right to confidentiality in personnel matters, a right which the Board respects and which it has honored. However, the statement quoted above from the Free Press editorial, to the effect that Chief Morrell is unaware of the Board's concerns - is not factually correct.

We agree that the public has a right to know as much as possible about this matter within the legal constraints of a personnel action. We want to be very clear: the Board is not investigating criminal matters or allegations of statutory violations. The issue under consideration is personnel management and leadership within the police department. It is

an issue that has been before the Board in the past and one that the Board has previously discussed with Chief Morrell on numerous occasions. The Board has concerns with the management of the Police Department, and it is doing its best to resolve the issues in a manner which will best serve the people of Hinesburg. False charges by the Free Press are not helpful to anyone.

There is much to appreciate about the work that Chief Morrell has done for the community of Hinesburg. We all respect him for that. But the Hinesburg Selectboard must act in what it considers to be the best interests for the future of the Hinesburg Community Police department and the Town.

Recently a petition supporting the Chief has been circulating around Town. The petition attests to the Chief's popularity and service to the community. The petition also suggests that the Chief is being treated unfairly and unethically. The Selectboard is aware of the Chief's popularity within the community. The issue at hand is not about popularity. Many public officials including chiefs of police are protected by State and Federal laws dictating the process to follow for any disciplinary actions. The Town's personnel policy also has a process that must be followed. The Selectboard is behaving ethically and adhering to these processes to the best of our ability.

It should also be made clear that the Selectboard is forming its own opinions and making its own decisions and is not acting at the direction of the Town Administrator. The Town Administrator never made a recommendation that Chief Morrell be terminated as was falsely stated in the Burlington Free Press,

The voters of the Town of Hinesburg elect the members of the Selectboard. They are our friends, neighbors and colleagues, and we are theirs. The Board is struggling to find the appropriate solution to issues of concern. The Selectboard is committed to conducting its business in public whenever possible, but will also respect the confidentiality of its employees.

Sincerely,

Kenneth Brown

Andrea Morgante

Howard E. Russell

Jonathan S. Trefry

Randall C. Volk

THE HINESBURG SELECTBOARD