

PERSONNEL/ADMINISTRATIVE AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

MARCH 19, 2003

A meeting of the Personnel/Administrative Affairs Committee was held on Wednesday, March 19, 2003 at 6:25 p.m. in the Aldermanic Chamber.

Vice Chair, Stephen C. Liamos presided

Members of the Committee present: Alderman James R. Tollner, Chair (arriving at 6:40 p.m.)
 Alderman-at-Large Paula I. Johnson
 Alderman Timothy B. Nickerson

Members Not in Attendance: Alderman Robert A. Dion

Also in Attendance: Alderman-at-Large Frederick Britton
 Alderman-at-Large David W. Deane

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INTERVIEWS

Health & Community Services Division Director

- Stefan Russakow (New Appointment) Term to Expire: Indefinite

Chair Liamos

- Tonight's special meeting is called for the purpose of interviewing the Health & Community Services Division Director.

- Mr. Stefan Russakow would you please step forward sir? Welcome. We look forward to speaking with you tonight. You are here as the Mayor's appointment to the Division of Health & Community Services. We would like to hear a little bit about your background and your interest in the position, and if you have any questions of us. You can open up with a statement and any of the Aldermen present may ask questions following your statement.

Stefan Russakow

I have a 30-year history in public health between the military and the civilian. Within the military I operated doing field public health in Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Medical action programs. I was a Chief of Environmental Health at the Uniform Services University of the Health Sciences, which is tri-service medical school in Bethesda, Maryland. I received a direct commission as an army medical

service corp. officer. From that point I then spent some time in Korea working up near the DMZ as a Division Preventative Medicine Officer, time in Japan as the Chief of Environmental Health & Preventative Medicine, finished up my military career at Fort Devens as the Chief of Environmental Health & Preventative Medicine and also the hospital safety officer, radiation protection officer, and other associated duties as assigned. At 20 years I felt that it was time to move on so I wanted to get into civilian public health. I then took a position as an Environmental Health Specialist with the Town of Wellesley and Weston in Massachusetts, looked for a bigger challenge, spent almost 5 years there, moved to a position in Connecticut as a Chief of Environmental Health for a 12 town health district similar to a county health department if you will with a population of almost 100,000 folks basically from the Massachusetts border to the North almost down to the casino area in the South, Rhode Island border on the East and almost a third of the way of the way to the West. It was a very good challenge. For someone in my field the normal progression is to move either to the state or the federal level. I chose to move to the state level and managed a single program – the Connecticut Lead Program, Director for Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program. Other duties as assigned due to the military background were emergency response, emergency planning, desk officer at the command center during certain natural disasters – for example Y2K, nursing home strikes, things along like that – nuclear drills, decontamination drills, jack of all trade, master of none.

I am here tonight because I am looking for a challenge. It is an opportunity to go back to multi-program public health. Nashua has been my adopted home if you will. I live in Pepperell and I spend my time in Nashua. I think it is a way to give something back to the area that I spend a lot of time in. I am interested in multi-program public health. There are a lot of opportunities I see between the pure public health community, health disease, and disease prevention – certainly the bio-terrorism, and then the environmental health. From what I understand from my interview process they are some challenges in the welfare department and some other new issues as well. That is why I am here.

Chair Liamos

We are glad to have you aboard, and we certainly appreciate you going through the interview process and being recommended here by the Mayor. I will open up the floor for questions from any members of the committee present.

Alderman Britton

Could you please talk a little but about your preparing a budget experience Mr. Russakow please?

Stefan Russakow

Currently I manage a budget of about \$2.2 million. It is divided into areas that I control on a day by day basis, which is about \$1.3 million and that is broken up into a large CDC grant that manages personnel, contracts to local health departments, two regional treatment centers for lead treatment – the New Haven Hospital and Hartford Hospital in St. Francis. We also manage another \$1.4 million in aide to local health departments – separate pots of money – state block grant money. I administer that, but not in as great a detail. I don't monitor the day-to-day expenses, I monitor that on a

quarterly basis. We set priorities, we set goals, we monitor proper expenditures, do monthly audits, site audits as well to see how they are doing the utilization of funds.

Alderman Britton

You mentioned emergency operation center in your resume. Can you talk a little more about that experience and how it may relate to what we may encounter here in Nashua in the bio-terrorism effort?

Stefan Russakow

As I mentioned earlier, one of my responsibilities, depending on the type of a condition, would either to be the desk officer at the state command center or also to either be the assistant or the director of the department of public health emergency operations center depending – if it was a nuclear drill or a simulated nuclear event I would usually be at the department of public health command center. I am also a member of the emergency education and response committee. We provide the training, we work with the Office of Emergency Management and Planning on conducting drills – decontamination drills. I am trained in decontamination procedures also radiation monitoring, general sanitation as part of the environmental health perspective. Again, an environmental generalist. I am used to fill in wherever needed. Also under the incident command system, I am part of a logistics team. I am the environmental health representative for the Connecticut Disaster Medical Assistance Team as well that was formed after 911.

Alderman Britton

Can you talk a little more about your supervision experience as a director/as a direct supervisor and perhaps you can go to your philosophy in that area please?

Stefan Russakow

Philosophy first – team all the way and power team members to participate in change. I think it is important that everybody has an equal buy-in in wanting to be a part of the process. I supervise and have direct reports to 7 people with 5 other folks that are in different units and then direct oversight to contractors. There are also environmental sanitarians as well. We operate in a team environment. I have a respond to the Director of Office of Childhood Lead and Asthma who responds to a Bureau Chief. I am also the Deputy Office Director if you will when she is not there.

Alderman Britton

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Thank you.

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Alderman Deane

Welcome to our interview process. I have a number of questions. My first question is how did you hear of this job opening?

Stefan Russakow

I saw it on an Internet search. I think it was in the Emery Public Health Connection I believe.

Alderman Deane

Have you spent any time over there at all prior to coming here? Have you reviewed the way that department operates and the different ...

Stefan Russakow

I am familiar with the organization of the department. I have met some of the staff members today. I have looked at the budget very, very peripherally and I have had a chance to talk to Mary Nelson as well as Jane Joyce.

Alderman Deane

You really haven't spent much time reviewing any of the day-to-day operations? I know you probably have another job and ... One of my questions is what you thought of the way the department was set up and how it operates and if you had any changes, which you might have, but I was just wondering looking basically for your opinion of the way that division runs now, but you haven't spent much time over there so you are not really familiar with how it operates?

Stefan Russakow

- To be fair I think it would be better to assess it once I came on board, assess the staff, assess the programs, see the interactions, see - I know we have for example a very, very good emergency preparedness plan and a good relationship with fire and safety, and I know we are on board with small pox and some of the bio-terrorism areas. There is always room to look for other challenges and opportunities. I just quite frankly have not been given that opportunity yet to spend much time there.

Alderman Deane

Has the salary associated with this position been discussed with you?

Stefan Russakow

- Yes it has.

Alderman Deane

It has. This is a question that I am going to ask because this has been happening - it seems that lately what occurred was - not in your case because I haven't asked you the question yet, but it seems to me that some of the new hires lately are told when they are hired that they will be moved up a couple of grades and a few steps after a year or so. I don't think that is right for people to be

told that. If you come in knowing what the salary associated with the position is and then there are step increase, but it seems more often than not what they are doing is changing the PDFs on the job so people come into these positions and are told we will start at this and another year your PDF will be addressed and we will move you up two steps or two grades and three steps, and we are seeing that now in our budget process with a few positions that are fairly new, but I think people should be paid what they are worth. If you go in and you do your job and you help Mike out and the rest of the folks over there because I know they are in dire need of some help over there, but I just take issue with the fact that – I don't want you to feel disappointed or remiss when they come forward with a new budget that shows a \$10,000 or \$12,000 increase in salary after years on the job and that is starting to happen in a few other departments and I just want to make you aware of the fact that I don't support that type of activity going on prior to somebody being hired and it has gone on. They should hire you with what your net worth is with your experience, and your resume was quite lengthy. I just wanted to reiterate that point, and wish you luck. Thank you.

Alderman Johnson

Rest assure Alderman Deane I have already squished one of those issues. Thank you for coming tonight. I appreciate you being here. Where you are now do you have a specific person who just does grant writing?

Stefan Russakow

That would be me.

Alderman Johnson

So you know where to find grants for the department?

Stefan Russakow

Ours are fairly well limited for the most part the Center for Disease Control, EPA and HUD. As we expand our health education and intervention efforts we are looking further and further up field because some of the federal money is not quite as liberally dispensed as it was before. We do have connections with the primary care folks at St. Francis and Yale. We collaborate with them also on seeking grants. We are involved in several health and home incentives. We are expanding our reach if you will.

Alderman Johnson

You have a very impressive resume. It seems like you have been able to do quite a bit in your field in the military and in the private sector. If you had to look at your life what would you say is one of the most impressive areas that you have liked the most out of everything that you have done between the military and now? What would you give yourself the most accomplishments?

Stefan Russakow

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Being in front of this committee.

Alderman Johnson

Thank you. Is there anything else?

Stefan Russakow

I am serious about that. If you look at the resume you will see a progression of smaller assignments to large assignments, smaller health departments to larger health departments, moving from a single jurisdiction to multi jurisdictions with a state wide program and looking at Nashua while it is a city it is a large program, it is a big, important program, and I can't relate it akin to something as any other large city. This is a pretty big accomplishment.

Alderman Johnson

Given the fact that you have seen the operation over there slightly right?

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Stefan Russakow

Very slightly.

Alderman Johnson

Very slightly – I have asked this of Mr. Mack too when he interviewed before us – I am sure you are not going to be able to answer it, but it might give you some food for thought – where would you like to see that agency in 5 years? Like I said you probably won't be able to answer this, but it is food for thought.

Stefan Russakow

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What I would like to see is an agency that is operating totally in the black number one, and there may be things beyond my control and my ability to change, but certainly I am going to strive for that. I would also like to see an agency that is moved out of the traditional public health, which is reactive to an agency that is proactive and looking towards not only handing out the brochures at the health fair, and I am not saying that is what is going on now, but true community health education intervention, being culturally sensitive – Nashua is a city with changing populations. We need to make sure we take care of all of those folks. Also moving up and modernizing where it is appropriate with environmental health. The traditional environmental health of our fathers so to speak is we inspect restaurants, we do the swimming pools, we do some housing sanitation. We are finding our now in the public health field that there is more to it than restaurants. There is more to it than community health. There is emerging infections, there is certainly the bio-terrorism issues, there are certainly other issues when we are talking about indoor air quality, we are talking about issues in schools, people with multi chemical sensitivities, there is a lot more to it and I think from what I have seen at the department and after talking to Mike for a while there is the opportunity to

expand in a lot of those areas.

Alderman Johnson

Thank you. I am glad you were able to come up with an answer and it was an appropriate answer. I just want to wish you good luck.

Stefan Russakow

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Thank you.

Alderman Nickerson

You may have already somewhat answered this with the answer that you gave Alderman Johnson. I was curious why is it that you have decided to leave your current position to search for a different one at this point?

Stefan Russakow

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Several reasons – First one is quality of life. I love my job in Connecticut. I have chosen not to move to Connecticut and I still live in Pepperell right across the border. I would enjoy a shorter commute and spending more time with my family.

Alderman Nickerson

I understand that. I work in Portsmouth and live here.

Stefan Russakow

Second is a challenge. I have been at the State Department of Public Health for almost 5 years. I have made my mark. I have been successful in my job. I have gotten more federal money every year. I have developed a program as far as I think it needs to go under my direction. There are other opportunities at the State Department of Public Health that have been offered to me, but this is an opportunity that I can't not consider. It has got the ability to be challenged, the ability to be close to home, and the ability to make a difference.

Alderman Nickerson

Thank you. Also you mentioned working with some of the other departments as far as in the future. What do you see as a possibility? Obviously this would take cooperation from the other department, but where would you see the Community Health Department and the School Department say working in the future?

Stefan Russakow

Health education and intervention typically. I understand that there are health educators within the

school department. I am sure it is a requirement. We also have that at the Health Department within the Community Health section within the Environmental Health section. When we talk about public health, public health is preventive medicine. We really want to minimize cost, avoid duplication of services. We want to prevent that teenage girl for example from being a pregnant teenage mom and having more medical care than is probably necessary. We don't want that person not to be employed. We don't want that person to be on the welfare roles for example. If we do some good health education ahead of time – we could do an anti-smoking program if there is not one – I am sure there are. That also works well as far as preventive medicine. Things along that line.

Alderman Nickerson

Even though there is a anti-smoking, it is always helpful to expand that and make it more successful than it already is. Thank you.

Alderman Tollner

First I want to apologize to the committee members – I knew when I scheduled this at the time I did I was taking a risk given where I come from, and I want to apologize to Stefan for being late. The reason for scheduling it was we wanted to get you in, interview you, move you to the full Board as quickly as possible, and having a conversation with the Mayor that was the reason for us having the meeting tonight before this other committee meeting. I do apologize to my colleagues for having the meeting started before I got here.

I just have a couple of questions. Can you just comment on your communication skills as far as you will be taking over a department that hasn't had a permanent leader for quite some time. There have been people in there overseeing it and have done a very good job temporarily overseeing it, but it has been a position that has been vacant for quite some time and it is an area where they need attention. The Welfare Department is an area that is struggling right now to keep their head above water despite all the hard work and effort that they have put forward, but just take a second and provide me with some comments on your communication skills and how you are going to deal with all of that.

Stefan Russakow

I am going to be an agent of change number one. I need to know certainly the other folks within the City Hall infrastructure also make the connections up at the State level, up in Concord, and then also out in the community. We also need to partner with the Southern New Hampshire Medical Center and St. Joseph as far as resource sharing within the medical community if that is appropriate manage care plans. We need to be a social marketer in a way to the external customers. Internally I have got to assess staff, assess programs, work with the new deputy director and the new epidemiologist when that person is hired and we will work as a management team and come to the Mayor for guidance and advice where that is appropriate also with some of the other organizations within the city as far as planning and community development and things like that. I think right now sir it would be assessment first and not to jump into it feet first until I had the information that I need and work with the staff to get that information.

Alderman Tollner

You have worked within budget restrictions/budget guidelines in the past. Given the state of the economy I don't think there will be a department in the city this year that will get everything that they want whether it be programs or money. How have you dealt with that in the past?

Stefan Russakow

Setting priorities for essential services and making cuts where you need to to carry out the services that you have to do also looking for alternative source of funds and partnering with other agencies that may be able to help you whether they are within the city government or not. If it means for example partnering with a commercial firm to do some P.R., to provide some office supplies or health education materials, if that saves a couple thousand dollars that could be used somewhere else I would do things like that.

Alderman Tollner

Could you provide me with what you think are your strengths and I will ask you at the same time also provide me with some areas that if you had an opportunity to concentrate on you could strengthen.

Stefan Russakow

I am assertive, I am aggressive, I am confident, professionally competent at my job, I am a fairly good communicator, I think I communicate well both orally and in writing. If I had something I would rather not do it would not be in front of large audiences 7 hours a day. I think I don't procrastinate too badly with things. I am very good at setting priorities and goals and using resources.

Alderman Tollner

If we were to speak with a colleague down in Connecticut in the Department of Public Health where you work what would be 2 or 3 things that they would say about you if they had to describe you?

Stefan Russakow

Dedicated, loyal, and always there.

Alderman Tollner

Thank you very much.

Chair Liamos

My colleagues have already asked you a number of questions, and I just have one. What do you expect from us?

Stefan Russakow

Support and guidance.

Chair Liamos

Well you will get that and much more I am sure.

Alderman Tollner

You may get too much guidance.

Chair Liamos

We very much appreciate you coming up tonight and we certainly look forward ...

Alderman Britton

Thank you. I just wanted to make the committee aware I was part of the interview process, and we interviewed 4 candidates for this position and Mr. Russakow was the number one choice of the entire committee – a unanimous choice to be recommended for the divisional director.

Chair Liamos

I appreciate that Alderman Britton your sharing that with us. Again, we very much appreciate your willingness to come up here. What will happen is in about 30 seconds someone will make a motion to approve you at the committee level and we will vote on that and then your nomination will go forward to the full Board of Aldermen at which time you will be voted on there, and you will be – I will make assumptions that with a favorable recommendation you will be there, and we look forward to working with you in the very near future.

Stefan Russakow

I look forward to being here.

Alderman Tollner

While Mike is here I also want to thank him for overseeing that department over the last few months. I appreciate his support as well.

APPOINTMENTS BY THE MAYOR

Health & Community Services Division Director

Stefan Russakow (New Appointment)
19 Bemis Road
Pepperell, MA 01463

Term to Expire: Indefinite

MOTION BY ALDERMAN NICKERSON TO APPROVE THE APPOINTMENT OF STEFAN RUSSAKOW TO THE DIVISION DIRECTOR OF HEALTH & COMMUNITY SERVICES DIVISION FOR AN INDEFINITE TERM

MOTION CARRIED

DISCUSSION

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY ALDERMAN NICKERSON TO ADJOURN
MOTION CARRIED

The meeting was declared closed at 6:49 p.m.

Alderman Timothy B. Nickerson
Committee Clerk