

VILLAGE VIEW

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It's been with considerable curiosity I've noted the request by the Affirmative Action Compliance Officer of the Town of Barnstable for an increase in salary and, later, the request by the Chairman of the Selectmen that Mrs. Dietz tender her resignation.

The situation is of particular interest to me because I was one of those who applied for the job she eventually got. There were many of us, of course, who applied. Of all of us, I want to confirm, Mrs. Dietz was best-qualified, as far as I know. At least I believe, from what I read in the papers, that she was better-qualified than I. The qualifications of the other applicants are unknown to me.

Another point I'd like to make clear is that I'm just as glad I didn't get that job. Although the pay was pretty good, some jobs that pay well are still lousy jobs; sometimes that's one reason they do pay well. The salary wasn't a big issue one way or another.

Working for the Town of Barnstable can mean a very pleasant situation. There are a lot of jobs with the town, I'm sure, that are satisfying and rewarding. And yet, I'm still glad I didn't get that job.

If you've been following the history of the position of Affirmative Action Compliance Officer, you'll recall the unfortunate incident in which a candidate was hired-and-fired, practically overnight, based on the qualifications question. That was a sorry mess.

More recently there've been complaints about the performance of the program. Very recently there's been the publicity about Mrs. Dietz now being on "probation for sixty days" during which time she's supposed to "prove herself". I'm awfully glad, now, I didn't get that job.

Let me tell you more. When I was interviewed for the job, I met with then-Chairman of Selectmen Brown, Mr. Taylor and Mrs. Montagna. Each of them had a copy of my employment application and of my letter outlining my background and experience. There were only two questions asked me during the interview. First, I was asked whether I objected to the press being informed of my interest in the job.

There were some questions I asked the Selectmen about the position. I asked if any affirmative action program had been considered, if any plans had yet been drafted. On, no, none whatsoever, I was told.

I wanted to know if there was any group in Barnstable with whom I might work on such a program. Oh, no. They didn't envision the compliance officer would need any outside help from any citizens of the town.

I wondered if there was any clerical staff to assist in work I might generate, in case I were to get a program rolling. No. There was no clerical help available to the compliance officer. In fact, Mr. Brown stated (and neither of the other Selectmen disagreed) that what was most needed was an up-date of the personnel by-laws and a re-write of the job-descriptions of every position in the town.

Would I, he asked, be willing to work on that? That was the second question. I said I'd be glad to help with the re-writing job but felt there was a good deal more to the job of

Affirmative Action Compliance Officer than re-writing job descriptions and up-dating the personnel by-laws. I inquired if it wouldn't be appropriate to attempt to encourage members of minority groups to apply for vacancies, as they occurred, on the town payroll.

Mr. Brown was vehement (and neither of the other Selectmen contradicted him) in stating there would be no program involving "out reach" to minority groups. Vacancies, he said, would be advertised in the newspaper, and everyone would have the same opportunity to apply, but should I be hired, he said, I was not to contemplate developing a program that would involve meeting the public, or speaking with women's groups, or actively soliciting participation of citizenry, minorities or otherwise.

What I was hearing the chairman say was: "This job is being filled strictly to satisfy the letter of the law." He was telling me that if I got the job it was to be a non-program, without goals, without functions. It was to be a job anyone reasonably well-versed in the English language could do. All that was required was re-writing and updating personnel by-laws and job descriptions.

"Don't think for a minute," he was saying, "that the job of Affirmative Action Compliance Officer will give you any scope or any contact with or chance to help those people the program is designed to serve. All you'll be, if you're chosen for this job, is a glorified typist."

I didn't get the job. I wasn't surprised I didn't get the job. Nor was I disappointed I didn't get the job. I can't imagine anything more frustrating than trying to be an Affirmative Action Compliance Officer under the guidelines laid out during my interview with the Selectmen.

Now we hear, approximately a year later, that the present Chairman of the Selectmen is criticizing the performance or lack of it, of the lady who did get the job. She's accused of doing nothing and accomplishing nothing. That lady has my sympathy. She's in a difficult spot.

She came to the Cape from out-of-state to fill this position. She had moving expenses. She took a cut in pay when she left federal government service to work for the Town of Barnstable. Living costs are, if anything, higher on Cape Cod than in the part of the country she moved from. She came here, unfamiliar with the machinations of Town Hall.

Mrs. Dietz came, a stranger. When she arrived, as far as I know, she had no friends or relatives in this town. She had no influence, no clout, no constituency of her own. I don't know how she stands today (I've never met Mrs. Dietz) but I suspect she is still quite alone.

If she received the same message about what was expected of her that the Selectmen gave me, she must have been fighting an up-hill battle ever since she first sat down at her desk. Somewhere along the line she was able to procure an assistant (since resigned) to help get the program off the ground. That must have taken some doing, given the attitudes in Town Hall.

Now, however, she's under attack because her "accomplishments" are insignificant. I wonder she's been able to accomplish anything at all, under the circumstances. Perhaps we should give the lady an opportunity to tell us what she hoped to do, how she tried to implement a program, and what sort of cooperation she received from the Selectmen.

The Town of Barnstable is administered by a three person board; all of those persons are relatively inexperienced at the job; none of them, apparently, put affirmative action ahead of personal feelings; and all of them, it seems, failed to give Mrs. Dietz the support and assistance she needed and deserved to do the job for which she was hired.

And now, since she hasn't much to show for her year in the town's employ, she's "on probation". She's also on the defensive and looking for scapegoats. I don't blame her for that, either.

Perhaps Victor Adams, George Cross and Tom Murphy would have managed to maneuver a similar situation to a like conclusion, I'm rooting for Mrs. Dietz. And I hope she blows the whistle. Not by attacking the police department, but by putting the blame exactly where it belongs.