

DARIEN

Interviews

- Jon Zagrodsky, First Selectman – February 18, 2025

1. When was this form of government adopted?

Historically, Darien was Town Meeting form of government. In the 1950's, it became an RTM. The RTM has 100 members drawn from 6 districts, with approximately 16 people per district. Darien has a 5 person Board of Selectmen. The First Selectman is the Chief Executive Officer of the Town. In 1998, the town created the Town Administrator position. It is a charter position. The Town Administrator reports to the Board of Selectmen, but works day to day with the First Selectman.

2. Why was it adopted?

The Town concluded it was very important to have a professional who could deal with intricate municipal issues such as building issues, for example. In addition, at the time the Town Administrator was created, the First Selectman was a part time position and less a day to day manager. Now the First Selectman is a full time position (Jon works 50-60 hours per week), but the Town Administrator position is still viewed as critical.

The First Selectman role is to oversee all management of the town, to be the public voice, to interview candidates for department head roles, and to referee disagreements among department heads.

3. What works well?

Jon believes the Town Administrator works well and is an important position. The Town Administrator provides advice and support to the First Selectman.

4. What could work better?

Jon has had some concerns about the functioning of the RTM, and would reduce the number to 50.

Jon intends to take a fresh look at the structure and role of all town committees in order to energize the community and give a clearer mission to committees.

5. What additional costs are incurred with this form of government?

The Town Administrator salary is \$204,000. The First Selectman salary is \$150,000.

6. What savings or efficiencies are realized with this form of government?

No savings were specifically identified.

7. Are you considering changes to your form of government?

No, other than reducing the size of the RTM.

8. What advice would you give to towns considering the adoption of this form of government?

Jon suggested that if Ridgefield is going to hire a Town Administrator, it should move forward sooner rather than later, in order to ensure some overlap with the current First Selectman. The current First Selectman should participate in candidate selection. He suggested that the Town Administrator position should first be a non-Charter position in order to expedite hiring.

He also said it was important for the First Selectman to work collaboratively with the Town Administrator, including consulting with the Town Administrator on important decisions before presenting them to the Board of Selectmen or the public.

10. Who do the Town Clerk, Tax Collector, and Treasurer report to?

All are elected officials in Darien.

11. What have you done to increase participation or improve the effectiveness of Town Meetings?

Not applicable because they have a representative town meeting. And even so, the participation in RTM is relatively low.