

Bryant sizes up town manager

By GEORGE D. BRYANT
Provincetown selectman

I take strong exception to the gist of your editorial entitled: Killoran still endangered. I have wondered over the past few months if there might be something missing in your understanding of our local government and in the qualifications and capabilities of Mr. Robert Killoran, our town manager. So I am writing.

Private and public business has taken me in the past to municipal functions all over New England, and particularly the Cape. I have yet to find two governments alike. Many are very different.

A selectman here has no office, no desk, no chair, no conference room, nothing except a folder in a steel filing cabinet. We have regular meetings scheduled twice each month but in fact meet more frequently — on the average of more than once a week — and nine-tenths of that time in the evening. Most of the public contact that selectmen have for receiving suggestions and complaints is done on an individual basis over the phone, at home or at work. Meetings are held in the former district court room with a capacity of 79 people. We make field trips to gather facts.

It is at meetings, with the citizens present, that ALL of our business takes place. It has never been done differently while I've been selectman. Our charter and the Open Meeting Law dictate the format.

I am aware of and have observed other selectmen's meetings up the Cape in rooms that were barely large enough to contain ten standing people, that were held at odd times during the day, that were hardly public, where there was little give and take and where the whole proceeding seemed to be more akin to a private gentlemen's club than a governmental process. I'll take our system any day in preference and praise the men who devised it.

Through the years our meetings have been regarded as the "livliest show in town", and be that as it may, it is more because of the structure of the government than of the doings of the personalities present. The Athenian ideal of democracy is more perfectly practiced here than in any other place I know — rough and lumpy at times, but ultimately to nobody's disadvantage.

Within our system Mr. Killoran and his predecessors have had a great deal of latitude. The manager is at his desk five days a week. He sees and can screen many communications before they reach our board. In this position he can if he chooses exert considerable influence over the selectmen's decisions in the initial approach that he takes to solving any given problem.

He is responsible for the administration of the town departments and their employees, of roads and of properties. His position is somewhat analogous to that of the first mate in old-time sailing vessels: It is not a job for an indecisive or passive soul. The manager is

responsible for the internal functioning of his "ship".

The manager makes his report of activities to the selectmen and the public in the forum of the regular meetings. We as selectmen see his report for the first time no more than a half hour before the meeting.

In fact, Mr. Killoran is more likely to have discussed important decision with the press than with the selectmen prior to the meeting. He has resisted any suggestions to change this method. It is in this part of the meeting that any conscientious must ask many tough questions of the manager, as he is often calling for approval.

It is not pleasant to be so limited, but the charter picks the place, Mr. Killoran picks the time and the Open Meeting Law dictates the contents. These sessions aren't press conferences they are primary acts, and the unexpected can and often does happen.

Mr. Killoran has chosen to work under several handicaps. His family residence is in Brockton. He is in Provincetown only to work and as a result has learned very little about the town and its people. Yet he is responsible by the charter for appointing many board and commission members. He claims not to read local newspapers. He is not overly communicative. While I was chairman of the board he called me a grand total of 10 times in 10 weeks — twice to inform me that Advocate reporters were "snooping around." More power to them.

To the repeated distress of most of the selectmen it has been found that Mr. Killoran's innate sense of what is important and essential often varies considerably from what you expect of a man who terms himself a "management engineer." He waited nearly two months last fall before giving the selectmen copies of a crucial letter from a Boston bank after one of the deadlines in it had already passed.

He remains opaque to criticism of an inspector directly under him who last summer used his official position to settle a well documented personal grudge. This is a situation serious enough not only to remove the inspector but Mr. Killoran himself.

While the results of our municipal audit are shocking enough the real scandal is that it took so many months to complete it, and for this he must shoulder the responsibility. He certainly knew weekly where a majority of the board of selectmen stood on this issue.

As with the ship's mate a large part of his responsibility is the organization of the personnel. Keeping a vessel afloat is one thing and preparing it to sail through choppy seas is quite another. Mr. Killoran is quite simply not capable of handling this job even under calm conditions.

Incidentally your article of February 10, 1977 entitled: Wellfleet selectmen asking for raise, says that Provincetown selectmen get \$500 per year. This is an error. We receive nothing.