

**Government Study Committee
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 8, 2010**

In attendance: Betsy Gordon, Donald E. Shute,
Daniel Collins, Eric Russo, Paula White

1. Approval of minutes of September 1, 2010 meeting

The committee reviewed and voted unanimously to accept the minutes as prepared from the September 1, 2010 meeting.

2. Steve Rollins

The committee interviewed Steve Rollins, Hanover Town Manager and former Town Administrator. Hanover recently approved by a town meeting vote to move to a form of government with 5 selectmen and a town manager from a 3 selectmen and town administrator model. The committee wanted to hear Mr. Rollins' opinion of how the new structure was working.

Mr. Rollins spoke about the 8 page act that changed the form of government in Hanover. In his opinion the act that was used in Hanover was one of the best he had read after much research into the subject. Mr. Rollins highlighted some of the acts strong points.

- The act leaves all elected officials of the town as elected not appointed positions. Thus leaving the decision of leadership to the town residents.
- The model lends to consistent employment practices across all departments of town government
- All staff report directly or indirectly to the town manager.
- Committees deal with issues surrounding their committee's task while the town manager deals with employee and staff issues, billing, and other administrative tasks.
- The Selectman and the committees are freed from the burden of dealing with personnel issues, but still collaborate with the Town Manager on job descriptions, direction of the department, and interview process for all hired positions.
- Certain committees can choose to have the town manager handle certain administrative issues and can pull back those responsibilities at any time.
- The town manager has the freedom to use resources across departments within the town, thus eliminating duplication in positions and responsibilities.
- The town manager has the ability to consolidate the town budget across departments to share resources and utilities.
- The town manager has the ability to set up cross department programs - for example an Emergency response system in case of natural disaster, accident, or weather which will require the coordination of several departments.

Eric Russo posed the question to Mr. Rollins "Why didn't the change in Government model pass the first time it was tried in 1980?"

In Mr. Rollins opinion, the act did not pass in 1980 because the town did not have the support of the staff. They were not consulted in the process and were concerned with effects the change would have on them directly. Mr. Rollins also believes that the language of the act this time around was very supportive of leaving the power of election in the hands of the residents and policy making in the hands of the selectmen and appointed committees.

Besty Gordon asked Mr. Rollins where the checks and balances lie in the Hanover model.

- In Hanover all town manager expenditures area signed off by the selectmen.
- Town Counsel is appointed by the selectmen.
- Hiring and firing of the town manager is handled by the selectmen.
- The town manager hires and fires the 5 major department heads; Municipal Finance, Public Works, Community Services, Police, Fire (and he wants to add Library) while the selectmen have veto power over these decisions.
- The selectmen approve the appointment of the Auditor, hire the town manager, and hire the legal counsel.
- The elected officials and appointed committees set procedure and policy like DPW setting garbage rates, tax rates, water rates, etc. while the manager oversees how that income is spent.

Paula White asked, what is the biggest advantage during the budget process of this new model?

Mr. Rollins explained that the old model allowed the selectmen to negotiate new contracts with union and town officials but were not responsible for the budget for those departments and therefore had no power to negotiate moving resources from different areas of the department. In the new model, the town manager had the ability to negotiate contracts and control over those departmental budgets.

Dan Collins asked Mr. Rollins to explain the advantages or disadvantages of a 5 selectmen board vs. a 3 selectmen board.

- Mr. Rollins feels that 5 selectmen created a board that was more representative of their town. With more people there was additional input that was valuable.
- The transition can be challenging for the town manager as most likely 2 to 3 people will be new to the board and have no experience with the current staff.
- However Mr. Rollins does feel that new selectmen add another level of check and balances within the system because more people in the process the greater the oversight.
- It also makes it easier to meet with a few selectmen to prepare agenda items, budgets, planning etc. without breaking open meeting law.

Don Shute posed the question, what do you see are some of the gained efficiencies in a Town Manager vs. a Town Administrator? Mr. Rollins cited the following areas:

- Centralization of budgets.
- Consolidation of staff and resources.
- Equal treatment and professional procedures for all employees.
- Long range planning for the whole town by prioritizing town needs against current resources.
- Regionalization of utilities and services are an option.
- Sharing of staff for administrative, custodial, overtimes, and special programs.

Paula White asked how long-range planning works in the new model.

Mr. Rollins explained that the selectmen create the plan and set priorities for the town and the town manger will have input on how those goals can be executed and with what resources.

The committee thanked Mr. Rollins for his time. He handed the committee several reference items including an organizational chart of the town of Hanover for the 5 major departments, an organizational chart for the appointed boards, a chronology of the Hanover town government, and copies of the warrant article for the new town structure. All these items are attached.

3. **William Buckley- Town of Pembroke Government Study Committee**

The town of Pembroke last year appointed a Government Study Committee look at the efficiencies of the town government. The committee presented their findings and suggestion at town meeting and the article was not passed.

The committee asked Mr. Buckley why he believed the article failed.

- In the government study committee in Pembroke, the committee was not unbiased. A selectman was the chair, the fire chief, a teacher, a developer and Mr. Buckley sat on the committee.
- In Mr. Buckley's opinion the article did not pass because people were uncomfortable transitioning too much authority to one person.
- The residents did not like the idea that their right to vote for elected town positions was being removed under the suggested model. The article proposed disposed of all elected positions except those mandated by the state.
- The Model had no backing from any of the individual departments or boards.
- Many of the departments liked their autonomy and did not want to answer to a centralized manager.
- The position became personalized - residents assumed the current town administrator would become the town manager. The argument become about his specific qualifications and not on the merit of the model.
- The article came at the very end of town meeting, most residents had left and only the town employees remained.
- Very few people attended the public hearings held by the government study committee.
- There was a lack of interest in change.

The committee asked Mr. Buckley what was the impetus for the Government Study Committee.

Mr. Buckley told the committee that a small group of citizens were concerned with the inefficiencies town government. The mission of their committee was to find a form of government that would be more effective. With technology changes, state and federal mandates, union contracts, complicated budgets, government grants, etc. volunteers who were running the town simply didn't have the background or expertise to handle all the issue. The idea was to hire a professional to deal with the administrative details leaving the boards to legislate.

Town Manager Salary

Mr. Buckley suggested that we take a poll of surrounding towns to understand a typical town manager salary in the current market. Mr. Buckley informed the committee that Middleboro's Manager's pay is \$130,000 while Stoughton's Manager makes \$158,000 per year.

Danvers

Mr. Buckley discussed with the committee the attributes of the town of Danvers and its form of town government. During his committee's research they found Danvers' government an interesting model.

Danvers has a Town Manager and a 5 selectmen board. The Selectmen appoint and remove all department heads. The town manager executes a bond in favor of the town if he fails in his job. Mr. Buckley presented the committee the Town Manager Act of Danvers (attached) to research different options while building a government model.

Mr. Buckley also suggested that the committee research the towns of Marshfield and Abington.

4) Next Actions

It was suggested that the committee meet with other seasoned town managers to have perspective from individuals who has been in the position long-term and can assess the pros and cons of different models.

Betsy Gordon will ask Jim Boudreau to approach the following town managers to schedule interviews with the committee:

Rocco Longo – was Duxbury town manager for a long time now is in Marshfield.
Billy Griffith – Cohasset Town Manager
Rich MacDonald – Current Duxbury Town Manager.

Betsy Gordon will try to schedule meetings with the MMA representative and Jim Boudreau, Norwell Town Administrator.

Betsy Gordon will draft a letter to all town committees with an invitation to meet with the committee.

Donald Shute agreed to research Scituate as they decided not to have a town manager but rather a strong town administrator. Don will try to find out the reasoning behind that decision and the results.

Dan Collins reminded all committee members to keep an open mind about all forms of town government. We should look at all forms of government from an academic standpoint to come to a conclusion about which model, including the current one, will be best for the Town of Norwell for the next 30 years.

5) Pubic Comment

Betsy Gordon recognized Marie Molla, a Norwell resident. Ms. Molla reminded the committee that she was the person who submitted the citizen's petition to form the Government Study committee. She believes the petition was well received, and passed unanimously as well as being supported by the Advisory Board. Her reason for bring forth the suggestion was because the town hasn't looked at this for over 20 years. It was about time to take a look again.

Ms. Molla suggested that some of the selectmen will not be in support of government change because they like the way things are working now. Ms. Molla believes that forming an unattached, unbiased, group was the right move.

Ms. Molla also told the committee that she believes moving to a town manager model will make the town budget process easier by giving that person the power to consolidate all the department budgets into one working system.

6) Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Government Study Committee will take place on Wednesday, September 15, 2010. There will be no meeting on September 22, 2010.