

**Government Study Committee
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 15, 2010**

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

1. Approval of minutes of September 8, 2010 meeting

The committee reviewed and voted unanimously to accept the minutes as prepared from the September 8, 2010 meeting.

2. Rocco Longo

The Committee interviewed Rocco Longo, the Town Administrator of Marshfield, MA. He brought a number of documents for use to review:

- a) Forms of Local Government in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
- b) ICMA Code of Ethics – He mentioned this was the most important document.
- c) Strong Charters for Town Manager Form of Government; Hanover, Reading, North Reading, Longmeadow, Concord, Ashland & Bourne,
- d) Weak Charters for Town Manager Form of Government; Marshfield, Littleton, Hanson & Holliston.

Rocco kicked off the meeting by giving us a little background on his experience.

- He started working in local government back in the mid-70's. He has a master's from West Virginia University. When he was studying at WVU, city management was a new profession. He started his career as a city manager in Wellsburg, VA in 1981; he worked there for 3 years.
- The town had a mayor form of government; he termed it a weak mayor system with a city council. The town is 1 mile wide and has a population of roughly 4,000 people. They had a \$1 million budget and a \$250,000 deficit.
- An ordinance was made to recruit him but the risk was that the city could have created an ordinance to get rid of him as well. The town had no long range goals and 1 councilman was quoted as saying "why do we pay for a city manager. We should fix the streets instead".
- His next role was as a Town Manager in Northborough, MA; he worked there from 1984-1991/1992. He was the town's 3rd city manager and they had a strong charter for Town Manager. The town eventually changed the title to Chief Administrative Officer; they thought the title for Town Manager sounded too strong.
- After leaving Northborough, Rocco spent 3 years at a private non-profit.

- He then was hired as the Town Manager for the Town of Duxbury in 1994; he served there until 2005. The town had 3 Board of Selectman and they worked together well. Their charter was approved by a state act; they have a strong manager form of government. The town lost a lawsuit between 1983-1985, which triggered them moving from a Town Administrator form of government that took effect in 1987.
- In 2005, Rocco became the Town Manager of Billerica; he worked there for 3 years. The town had a strong charter but the 5 Board of Selectman which had trouble coming to agreement on many issues. When he started there, they didn't have a Finance Director, Labor Attorney or a Personnel Director; these roles now exist in town.
- The committee asked Rocco how long a Town Manager typically stays in their role.

He commented that a tenure for a Town Manager is now 7 years; the average used to be 2-3 years. Applicants like Rocco are highly sought after, so they typically have multiple offers from multiple towns when they're looking for work. They have to be careful not to give a commitment to a town/city until they are 100% sure of their decision. It is considered unethical to go back on your word to a potential town/city, once you've accepted the position, even if you've only done it verbally.

- The Committee asked Rocco whether he preferred 3 or 5 Board of Selectman.

He said that he doesn't have a preference for 3 or 5 Board of Selectman. In Northborough, they had 5 Board of Selectman and they had a team approach, which allowed them to have 2 sides on every issue.

- The committee asked Rocco why he decided to take the position in Marshfield.

He said that although he has held positions in local government that allowed him more power, that is not the reason he took the position; he wanted to help grow the community. The 3 Board of Selectmen are dependent on him; they go to him for help frequently. This new role for him is a challenge but he thinks that the people are great.

- Rocco said that times are changing in local government and that it's hard to get volunteers, which means it's even harder to find a diverse group for committees or boards in town. Marshfield changed their elected boards to appointments. The town is now better represented by the community as there is a more diverse group of individuals involved today.

- The Committee asked Rocco for any last advice for the group.

Rocco commented that a strong charter will allow you to find better candidates and there will be more competition among the applicants. He said it's important to have an open door policy. It's also important to not make appointments without elected official's approval, given that they have ultimate veto power. He ended the

discussion with a fact that roughly 80% of all litigation in our Towns and Cities is Personnel related.

Next we interviewed Jim Boudreau, current Town Administrator for Norwell.

- Jim said the town has a decentralized government and that he is currently working on an organization chart.
- The School Committee's authority was created by a state statute. They're in charge of their own budget but the town gets the final say on their bottom line. Teacher's salary comes out of the school's budget and their health benefits and pension are included in the health care line item in the town budget.
- He said his responsibilities are nebulous, based on the language in the bylaws and charter.
- The Committee asked Jim whether he wanted to add or get rid of any of his responsibilities.

He said his responsibilities are ok. However, the HR component of his job takes up a lot of his time

- The Committee asked him about his relationship with the Board.

He said he has a good relationship with the board.

- The Committee asked if any changes should be made to the elected board process.

Jim didn't have a direct response on this but he said that no matter what you do, the Assessor's office should remain an elected board because you don't want a discrepancy amongst the community on taxation.

- Since Jim has arrived, they have hired 2 Fire Chiefs, 1 Police Chief & 1 Accountant
- The Committee asked Jim whether he preferred 3 or 5 Board of Selectman.

His preference was for 3. He has had experience working for both size boards and feels it is easier with only 3.

- The Committee asked that given the vague responsibilities in the Town by-laws and charter, do residents know what you do on a daily basis?

He felt that they do have a good understanding of what he does. His largest responsibility is putting together the town's \$40 million budget.

Administrative Matters:

Dan emphasized the importance of the Open Town Meeting Law information that he sent to us. We will likely discuss these laws in greater detail at a future meeting.

Eric Russo

Recording Secretary