

**Government Study Committee
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 29, 2010**

In attendance: Betsy Gordon, Daniel Collins, Eric Russo, Paula White

1. Approval of minutes of September 22, 2010 meeting

The committee reviewed and voted unanimously to accept the minutes as prepared from the September 22, 2010 meeting.

2. Charles Costello

The committee interviewed Charles Costello, former Hingham Town Administrator, Middleborough Town Manager, and former town manager in Watertown. Mr. Costello is also a representative for the MMA (Massachusetts Municipal Association) Form of Government Committee.

The committee asked Mr. Costello if he had any advice for the committee before we asked specific questions. Mr. Costello suggested that many town administrators have been granted certain powers and administrative tasks, but it is not outlined clearly where the separation of power lies. Whatever final structure Norwell finally adopts, it was recommended that it be put writing in the by-laws or a charter. As the personnel in a town government changes you need the charter or by-laws clear so that the structure of government won't change.

The committee asked Mr. Costello his opinion of the benefits and liabilities of a Town Manager vs. Town Administrator. These were his points:

- With a town manager you have more of a clear central authority on all administrative decisions leaving the selectmen to be the central authority on all policy and planning.
- There is a clearer organizational structure with a town manager model with a hierarchy of responsibility.
- The Hanover model is the best he has seen in years.
- TM creates stability in personnel issues, assessments, and budgeting processes.
- He believes we need to leave elected officials alone.
- Good charters are failing at town meetings because town departments have opposition to too much power being invested in one person.
- Mr. Costello did not see a downside to going from a town administrator structure to a town manager structure. It is his opinion that the system can work if the board all maintain the ability to hire their own department head and the town manager would do staff hiring with the selectmen maintaining veto power over those hires.

The committee asked Mr. Costello to comment on towns that have changed from 3 to 5 selectmen.

Mr. Costello told us that the trend for most towns is to look at increasing to 5 selectmen from 3. In his opinion boards with 5 members tend to be more of a policy making and planning board because they have the ability to meet in small groups and work on specific projects outside of the board meeting. Many boards have a lot of change when this happens because on any given year one person will be up for election then adding two new seats will result in at least two or three new members of the board.

The committee asked Mr. Costello if there is any other advice he would like to give the committee.

This was his advice:

- Mr. Costello suggested that the screening process be outlined in the town charter.
- Make sure there are checks and balances in whatever structure is recommended.
- If the collective bargaining responsibility lies with the TM then it needs to be signed off by the selectmen.
- If the TM hires staff – the selectmen should have a majority veto power
- If the selectmen set policy then the TM should have the power to ensure those policies are followed.
- If the checks and balances are in place the government structure will have lasting value.

3. **Citizens Opinion**

The committee discussed the best way to invite town residents to a committee meeting so that we can gather citizen opinion. This committee will investigate using WATD radio, spreading the word through town committees, through the schools, during the selectmen meeting, on the public television station, and through the Mariner newspaper.

4. **Town of Cohasset**

Eric Russo researched the town of Cohasset in it's attempt to change forms of town government. Please see attached summary by committee member Eric Russo.

5. **Public Comment**

Marie Molla suggested that the committee consider posting all committee minutes on the town web site. Committee members agreed to review the minutes and consider the suggestion.

6. **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote

7. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Government Study Committee will take place on Monday, October 4, 2010