

**Government Study Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 4, 2010**

In attendance

Committee members: Betsy Gordon, Daniel Collins, Don Shute, Paula White

Selectmen: Richard Merritt, Gregory Mc Bride

1. Approval of minutes of September 29, 2010 meeting

The minutes from the September 29th committee meeting were not ready for approval.

2. Hanover

Betsy Gordon presented her research on the town of Hanover and it's recent change in town government. Please see the attached summary prepared by Betsy Gordon.

3. Review of the committee plan

From the beginning the government study committee agreed on several points:

- We have no preconceived notions. We will go where the data takes us.
- We are looking at the structure of town government. This is not about the people working for the town as a volunteer or employee.
- State regulations, budgetary needs, personnel laws have all changed since the town charter was written. What has worked for Norwell in the past may, or may not, be the most effective form of government for the future.
- We are not responding to a crisis. We have the luxury of looking at all options
- We are going to be as transparent and inclusive so to hear all points of view prior to deciding on our recommendations to Town Meeting.

In September we looked at other towns demographically similar to Norwell to study the pros and cons of various forms of town government.

Now we are meeting with as many Norwell boards, volunteers and citizens as possible to determine what makes sense for Norwell.

The kind of questions we are examining include but are not limited to:

- Might a different government structure increase efficiency? Long term planning?
- Is accountability presently clear? If not, why not?
- Are checks and balances sufficient? Burdensome?
- Does the existing structure help or hinder your ability to work effectively?

4. The committee invited Mr. Merritt and Mr. McBride to provide comment on Norwell's current form of government, their opinion on what currently works, what parts of government could work better, and any concerns they have regarding the charge given this committee.

Mr. Merritt asked the committee if it was considering a Mayoral form of government. The committee responded that at this time its focus was researching the change to a Town Manager and the change to a 5 person board of selectmen although the charter for this committee allows it to consider all forms and all sections of town government.

The committee asked the two selectmen what they thought of moving to a 5 person board?

Mr. Merritt commented that he does not have any experience as a selectman other than on a three person board so he felt unqualified to discuss the successes of a 5 person board. He pointed out that the majority of towns in Massachusetts with triple bond ratings also have 3 person boards. Mrs. Gordon pointed out that the majority of all towns in Massachusetts have 3 person boards. Mr. Merritt also believes that a 5 member board will lead to more off-line discussion and members creating alliances.

Mr. McBride commented that most of his experience is sitting on a 7 person committee. He likes to work on a board where a subset of members can discuss, debate, research and prepare specific issues. He feels this form lends to more long term planning and more effective pro-active policy rather and reactive policy.

The committee asked the selectman “Without the ability to meet outside of the selectmen board meeting, how does long-term planning for the town happen?”.

Mr. Merritt answered that at this point long term planning is centered around the town budget, planning for taxes, and financial issues.

Mr. McBride believes that currently the board deals only with short term issues. He feels we need to do more long term planning from the town’s master plan. He was surprised at how little the board does outside of the budget and administrative issues. He feels that Jim Boudreau needs to be making the administrative decisions so that the board can focus on active policy rather than reactive policy.

The committee asked the selectmen if they are concerned with the transfer of some authority to a town manager.

Mr. Merritt is concerned about changing elected officials to appointed officials. He would not change the way any Norwell boards are currently created. He believes that the right of the citizens to elect committees leaders should be preserved. He believes that more elected officials the better. We should not do a nation-wide search but the person must live in Norwell. He also commented that when administrative changes happen at the selectmen meeting, town residents have the ability to hear the changes and voice their public opinion. If those decisions are made by a town manager the residents lose the ability to actively take part in town decisions. He also commented “We cannot efficiency ourselves out of our problems.

Mr. McBride commented that he is also concerned with the change from elected to appointed positions. However he feels that administrative tasks are more efficiently handled by an administrator, the board would actually gain power because they gain the ability to affect policy and planning because they have time to focus on long-term and would be relieved of administrative duties.

5. **Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote

6. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Government Study Committee will take place on Wednesday, October 6, 2010 where they will hear comment from Norwell’s Advisory Board.