

**Government Study Committee  
Meeting Minutes  
Wednesday, October 13, 2010  
7:50 p.m.  
Lower Level, Norwell Town Hall**

In attendance: Betsy Gordon; Don Shute; Daniel Collins

**1. Patricia Anderson, Town Clerk**

The Committee heard from Patricia Anderson, Town Clerk of Norwell. Ms. Anderson has served as Town Clerk since her election in 2008. Her term expires in 2011. Prior to that, Ms. Anderson had been Norwell's Assistant Town Clerk starting in 1999. She has been a resident of Norwell for most of her life.

The Committee asked Ms. Anderson her opinion on changing Town Clerk from an elected to an appointed position. Ms. Anderson said she favored electing the Town Clerk because she feels it is a matter of serving the voters. She would also prefer to "partner" with government as an elected official. Ms. Anderson noted that 85% of the Commonwealth's 351 cities and towns have an elected Town Clerk. She said her appointed counterparts only benefit from an employment contract and a higher salary. She felt that elected Town Clerks that live in the town have a unique perspective on town matters and can be available at any time.

The Committee asked Ms. Anderson about the potential for electing an incompetent Town Clerk. Ms. Anderson conceded that electing unqualified persons is always a risk but she would rather be elected by hundreds or thousands of citizens than be appointed by 3.

The Committee asked Ms. Anderson about the roles and responsibilities of the Town Clerk. Ms. Anderson said she manages 3 budgets for 3 departments/areas: Town Clerk, Board of Registrars, and Town Meeting and Elections. Aside from numerous duties as Town Clerk, Ms. Anderson is Norwell's Election Administrator with significant responsibility for the conduct of all regular and special elections in Norwell. The Town Clerk reports to the Town and to the Secretary of State.

The Committee asked Ms. Anderson for her opinion on other positions that should be elected or appointed. Ms. Anderson liked the appointment of the Treasurer/Collector and Town Accountant departments because it created a "financial team."

The Committee asked Ms. Anderson what difference it would make to the Town Clerk if Norwell changed from a Town Administrator to a Town Manager form of government. Ms. Anderson said it would make no difference as long as the Town Clerk remained an elected position. However, such a change could affect the Assistant Town Clerk and other staff who are appointed.

The Committee asked Ms. Anderson if there were any other changes she would like to see in Norwell's governmental structure. Ms. Anderson recommended changing the Town Moderator's term from the present 1-year term to a 3-year term. She said having to run for reelection every year seemed burdensome.

## **2. Paul Foulsham, Highway Surveyor, Tree Warden**

The Committee also heard from Paul Foulsham, Norwell's elected Highway Surveyor/Tree Warden. Mr. Foulsham has been the Highway Surveyor since 1988.

The Committee asked Mr. Foulsham for his opinion on making the Highway Surveyor/Tree Warden (Surveyor) an appointed position. Mr. Foulsham expressed concern that he would lose autonomy and that the Board of Selectmen (BOS) could interfere with his job. Mr. Foulsham felt that a strong Town Manager could direct Highway Department for political purposes. He cited the BOS' objection to offering him a contract the last time someone proposed making the Surveyor an appointed position. Mr. Foulsham liked that the Surveyor is an elected position but believes people are the key factor.

The Committee asked Mr. Foulsham to talk about snow and ice removal and how the Surveyor is affected. Mr. Foulsham felt strongly that snow and ice removal are a public safety matter and that the Town should value it like other public safety departments. Norwell pays roughly \$4,000 per hour for snow removal activities; it does not budget using road miles or similar data used by other towns. Inevitably, the Department appears to go over budget because Norwell did not set a reasonable budget before the season.

The Committee asked Mr. Foulsham to describe the Department's other duties. Mr. Foulsham described a busy department with less staff for a wide variety of responsibilities.

The Committee asked about budget and long-range planning. Mr. Foulsham criticized "special interests" reflected in the Town Warrant but did not know whether it could be changed. He felt that his department does not get the "backing" of Warrant articles that would address his department's needs. Mr. Foulsham said a strong Town Manager could coordinate the budget and hoped that the Town will conduct long-range planning.

The Committee asked Mr. Foulsham for his opinion on moving from a 3-member BOS to a 5-member BOS. Mr. Foulsham expressed no opinion on the subject.

The Committee asked Mr. Foulsham about Highway Department contract negotiations, hiring and firing, and budget. Mr. Foulsham said that only Town Administrator Jim Boudreau negotiates his department's labor contracts. BOS comments and approves the final agreements. Mr. Foulsham solely hires and fires personnel under his supervision.

The Committee asked Mr. Foulsham about inter-departmental relations. Mr. Foulsham credited town departments and personnel with working "extremely well" compared with other towns. Again, he noted that it often comes down to individuals.

The Committee asked Mr. Foulsham whether “off-loading” some of the Surveyor’s responsibilities would help. Mr. Foulsham answered that he would prefer to do his own budgeting. He felt it was not efficient to cut funding for seasonal help since he could hire a significant number of “kids” who could perform the work relatively cheaply.

The Committee asked Mr. Foulsham for any other advice on possible changes to town governance and structure. Mr. Foulsham would like to see a BOS with long term vision. The BOS acts only at weekly meetings or when they field a citizen complaint.

### **3. Public Comment**

Norwell resident Marie Molla recommended that the Town Clerk be appointed because it is “limiting” to fill that position through town election. Ms. Molla suggested that all elected officials be residents of Norwell. Ms. Molla also recommended that the Committee consider a 5-member “Select Board,” because the term “Selectmen” does not recognize female members. The Committee said it would review both proposals.

### **4. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote.

### **5. Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Government Study Committee will take place on Monday, October 18, 2010.