

**Government Study Committee
Meeting Minutes
Monday, October 18, 2010
Norwell Town Hall**

In attendance: Betsy Gordon; Don Shute; Daniel Collins, Paula White

1. **Minutes** – The committee unanimously voted to accept the minutes from the meetings on 9/29 and 10/04.
2. **Over view of Government Study Committee**
Betsy Gordon reviewed this committee’s activities this far in the process and the plans going forward.
3. **Board of Assessors**
Charles Markham, Barbara Gingress, Leo Reed and Peter Etzel attended.
The Board of Assessors gave the committee an overview of what the board’s duties, responsibilities and scope of their work. No long range planning is necessary in their department.

What would make your jobs easier?

The assessors would like the ability to use an attorney with expertise in the area of property litigation. Now, the selectmen insist that the assessors use Town Counsel who does not specializes in this area of law.

Doing business in Norwell proves difficult as well. Articles for approval, and questions that need to be answered seem to get bottled-necked at the Town Administrators desk. The town needs a more efficient process.

The current structure now has no accountability and no coordination between departments. If the assessors need something from another part of government there is no one to ensure the request is fulfilled. Each department functions as its own entity with little coordination between them.

What do you think about moving to a 5-member board of selectmen?

Peter Etzel has had some experience working with a town manager and a three member board of selectmen and feels that this model does not work. If you have a TM you need to move to a 5-member board otherwise the 3 members try to control many of the operational issues that arise. The concensus of the board of Assessors is that a 3-member BOS does not represent the town properly and does not invite diversity of ideals.

Appointed vs. Elected

All boards should not be appointed by the BOS. They feel that Advisory Board in particular should be separate from the BOS otherwise the AB feels that should do what the selectmen want or they will not be reappointed. There is no separation of powers in the current model.

The Assessors Board would not want to have a TA or a TM that would have the hire and fire authority in their department. They feel that this would take power away from the board to have the Office of Assessors report to anyone but them. Elected boards should be able to

hire their own department heads. There are certain positions that require a specific skill set and knowledge base and those are better filled by people on the coordinating boards.

Right now there are several seats open on town committees and the selectmen never appoint people to those spots. The appointment process needs to be addressed.

4. Library Directors

Henry Goldman, Kathryn Mudget, Jeanne Ivas, Becky Freer

How the board functions

The Library Board gave this committee a summary of how their board functions. The Library Trustees function is mandated by the State of Massachusetts. The State mandates that library board be elected boards, that the director deals with the day to day issues concerning the library and that the board of trustees shall manage and operate the library.

The library trustees hires and fires the library director and the BOS only plays a part in appointing the library trustees if and only if a member leaves mid-term.

The board of trustees operates as a 6-member policy and planning board while the library director is responsible for the day to day operations and decisions. The Library board is happy with the way they operate.

Doing business in town Government

The Library trustees believe that all departments should be able to see other department budgets for building of the town budget as a whole. There needs to be a more centralized budget process. Information within town government needs to be much more accessible. The trustees want to be assured that they will maintain control of the Library and its budget.

3 vs. 5

The Library Trustees all agree that 5-member boards in general work better, there is more brainpower, more diversity, more opinion and more deliberation therefore the decisions are more thought out.

Term limits

All the Trustees in attendance believe that term limits are a good idea. They suggested three consecutive years of three year terms.

5. Water Commission and Board of Health

Term Limits

The water department representatives do not believe that term limits would work for technical boards like theirs but support term limits for policy boards.

Board structure

The water commission works as a 3 member policy making board with the department head who handles the day to day operation and administrative issues. The master plan is managed by the board while the department head is responsible for executing the plan. All department

employees are in the union. The Water department as of now, sets its own rates, handles its own revenue and expenses. They report their yearly financials to the Advisory Board and feel that this is a good system. They also meet with the Town Administrator regarding personnel issues. The Water commission representatives do not think there is a need to change the structure of their department because it works very well now. However, they did agree that there is no coordination between the town boards.

3 vs. 5

Some of the representatives in attendance feel three member board of selectmen works poorly. There is no diversity of opinion because the votes tend to become 2 vs. 1.

Other members feel that smaller board work better because larger boards tend to have more factions and argument. However, agrees that there are strengths and weaknesses to both models.

6. Board of Health

The Board of health works as a reactive board. Board of Health laws are set by a state agent, policy is make at the state level and the local board makes sure that Norwell meets the state standards. They simply review issues and either reject or approve based on whether the state requirements are met. They meet every 2 months for about an hour and receive a stipend.

7. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote.

8. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Government Study Committee will take place on Wednesday, October 20, 2010.