

**DRAFT**  
**Government Study Committee**  
**Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, October 28, 2010**  
**8:00 AM**  
**Sparrell School**

In attendance

Committee Members: Betsy Gordon (Chair), Eric Russo, Donald Shute  
School Committee: Kiersten Warendorf (Chair), Amy Koch, Mary Lou O'Leary, Brian Noble  
Others: Superintendent of Schools Donald Beaudette

**Betsy Gordon** called the meeting to order at 8:10 AM as an official meeting of the Government Study Committee, a quorum being present. As Chairperson of the Government Study Committee and former member of the School Committee, Betsy was able to introduce everybody to each other (with their correct first name)! She then explained to the School Committee the purposes and mandate of the Government Study Committee as outlined in the Town Meeting Article which created the Committee. Although the Article specifically charges the Committee to investigate the merits of changing from a Town Administrator to a Town Manager form of government, the Committee has the authority and responsibility to look at the functions and structure of all Boards as they relate to town government. Betsy's experience on the School Committee was valuable to her to realize one of the key differences between the School Committee and town government....the School Committee has long-range planning with goals and objectives, the town government does not. She mentioned that we are looking at, in addition to the Town Manager/Town Administrator question, Board of Selectmen size (3 vs. 5), term limits, stipends, appointing vs. electing, sharing costs between departments, sharing a Human Resources employee, etc. ....in short, anything to help improve government. With that introduction, Betsy opened the discussion up to the School Committee members.

**Kiersten Warendorf** asked if we could explain the differences between a Town Manager and Town Administrator. Betsy gave a lengthy explanation of the differences, in general, and specifically how it pertains to Norwell. Currently, the Board of Selectmen delegate responsibility and authority to act in their stead to the Town Administrator. But they may withdraw it at any time for any reason. The current Town Administrator's job description is very vague, and, as such, he derives his power from whatever the current Board of Selectmen choose to delegate to him.

**Brian Noble** expressed his opinion very strongly against a Town Manager and a 5-person Board of Selectmen. He cited Cohasset's woes as a good example why we should not have a Town Manager government or a 5-person Board. The Cohasset selectmen split 2-2-1 on whether the Town Manager should be kept despite allegations of sexual harassment. Cohasset Town Manager had too much power and inept Board wouldn't get rid of him. Brian felt that getting 5 qualified people to run for the Board of Selectman would be very difficult and that, if we had a 5-member board, we might end up having some very unqualified people making decisions that we have to live with.

**Mary Lou O'Leary**, who works as a Town Employee at the Cushing Center, suggested the Norwell have a Town Forum, much like Hingham does, whereby townspeople can visit different committees, and perhaps volunteer for ones that they are interested in. This would encourage committee participation and communication. She is generally in favor of term limits.

**Brian Noble** wondered why the Government Study Committee wouldn't just give instructions to the Board of Selectmen instead of suggesting a bylaw change. Betsy explained that the Committee has been specifically charged by Town Meeting to explore that option.

**Amy Koch** asked the Committee about who currently sets the agenda for town boards. The consensus answer is that each board sets their own agenda with little or no coordination with other boards. Amy noted that, from her perception, there doesn't seem to be much accountability in the present system.

**Eric Russo** asked for a poll on increasing the number of Selectmen from 3 to 5.

**Don Beaudette** weighed in. Having served under 3, 5 and 7 member boards in his career, he thought seven was too many, three too few. A five-member board encourages stability while a three-member board concentrates too much power. As to accountability, he noted that the Water Commission seems to spend whatever it wants, whenever it wants but other boards are forced to live within a budget. An HR person would be very helpful, but, if shared, whose budget is responsible? And if an HR person is hired, does he lose his hiring ability. Don has only a handful of employees left in the school system that he has not personally hired. This helps greatly in setting goals. He noted that it would be very tough to do any kind of planning, and be responsible for your department, if you can't hire your own employees.

**Kiersten Warendorf** commented on the town's apparent lack of long-range planning. She perceived that other town boards were jealous of the long-range planning that the school committee is able to do. She believes the role of financial planning for the town should be the responsibility of the Advisory Board.

**Amy Koch** expressed her opinion that, if you are a School Committee Member, it is your job to advocate for the schools. There is an inherent conflict between this advocacy for the schools and budgetary limits. Her inclination was to stay with the 3-member board but saw the merits of five. She asked how a five-member board helps with any of the issues like efficiency and accountability and a general discussion followed. She asked if the Town Manager had different qualifications and pay scale than a Town Administrator and Betsy responded.

**Brian Noble** once again spoke out strongly against the 5-person Board of Selectmen. He would remove term limits on the Advisory Board. He noted total lack of communication between some town departments and gave several examples of wasteful inefficiency at town hall because of lack of cooperation between departments and a refusal to share employees and/or resources.

The meeting was adjourned by a unanimous vote at 9:00AM.