

**Government Study Committee
Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, November 10, 2010
Norwell Town Hall**

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

1. Administrative issues

There was some confusion about past meeting minutes so Paula White will resend the minutes for the October 18th, October 27th, and November 1st meetings.

Eric Russo has been researching the process of putting meeting minutes on line. At this point no other committee posts it minutes on the town website however, the clerk's office thought this was a great idea. Eric will research the process further.

2. Review of Government Study Committee

Betsy Gordon gave a quick summary of this committees progress and activity to date.

3. Public Comments

Those in attendance were:

Bob Borderwick

Rebecca Freed

David Turner

Lois Barbour

Skip Joseph

Marie Molla

John Penney at WATD 95.9FM

Town Manager vs. Town Administrator

David Turner does not believe it is necessary to have a Town Manager. However, the roles of the Town Administrator and the Board of Selectmen need to be clearly defined. He believes the Board of Selectmen need to focus on creating long-range plans and maintenance plans and then overseeing the execution of those plans.

Marie Molla supports the change to a Town Manager with a high level of operational authority.

3 member BOS vs. 5 member BOS

Bob Borderwick believes that a 5-member board would bring in new ideas and perspectives.

Rebecca Freed said that she doesn't see the purpose of moving to a 5-member board of selectmen because with the right people in office, a 3-member board can work very well.

David Turner had worked on boards with both 3 and 5 members. He believes that a 3-member board holds the members more accountable for their actions and decisions.

Lois Barbour shared her opinion that it is more difficult to work with a 5-member board. She favors a 3-member board.

Marie Molla supports a 5-member board of selectmen because of the open meeting law restrictions which does not allow a 3-member board to work together on subcommittees or projects.

Term Limits

David Turner believes there should be term limits for all town positions. If an elected official sits in an office too long they overstep their boundaries and become autocrats. David is in favor of 6 or 9 consecutive year term limits. He believes that term limits helps to create a check system and “cleanses” government.

Lois Barbour would support terms limits but not necessarily with highly technical boards. Skip Joseph supports terms limits on all committees and boards.

Stipends

David Turner believes that the town of Norwell should eliminate all stipends. Skip Joseph believes we should eliminate all stipends.

Structure of Committees

Bob Borderwick believes that the town needs to change the way boards are appointed in Norwell because too many positions stand vacant for too long.

Rebecca Freed feels that there are too many committees in town. Getting rid of defunct committees and consolidating others will be a more efficient way to run the town.

Lois Barbour would like the town to review the number and purpose of all the committees in order to eliminate those that are no longer necessary.

Lois Barbour is concerned with the accountability of the BOS toward other boards and committees in town government.

Skip Joseph believes that Norwell could consolidate or eliminate many of the towns boards and committees.

Communication

Lois Barbour believes that Norwell needs to use technology to better serve its residents and customers.

Coordination of resources

Bob Borderwick would like the committee to consider combining the fire and police departments into a department of public safety that would handle all emergency response situations as well as DPW that would comprise of Tree and Grounds, Highway and Parks. It would be a more efficient, it would coordinate resources and could be housed in one headquarters with a consolidation of management.

David Turner believes that Norwell’s town management is “top heavy”. Consolidation of departments and resources are required in order to run a more efficient government.

Efficiencies

Rebecca Freed believes that Norwell needs to focus on the services of the town. Customers who come to town hall to do business are not treated efficiently.

4. Interview with John Mariano, Norwell Selectmen

T.A. vs. T.M.

Mr. Mariano shared his opinion that Norwell's move from an Executive Secretary to a Town Administrator was a good move. He believes the current system works well with the selectmen granting authority where they see fit and keeping the ability to remove authority from that position at any time. He believes that a Town Manager can get "in-trouble" if the Board of Selectmen loses the power to correct a bad situation. He believes that the job description is vague on purpose so that the T.A.'s power is at the discretion of the selectmen. Mr. Mariano also shared his opinion that the town's employees don't need to report to a T.M. because they are good people and don't need direction.

Elected vs. Appointed

Mr. Mariano feels that Norwell should have fewer elected and more appointed positions. He looks at the town as a business and should be run that way. Elected boards don't report to anyone centrally and that can be tough to manage.

Town clerk should be appointed as they are in charge of elections, otherwise it is a conflict of interest.

Mr. Mariano believes that all appointments need to go through the selectmen because the Selectmen are elected therefore it is a direct line of authority back to the voter.

Stipends

Mr. Mariano believes that the selectmen should receive stipends because it costs a lot of money to run for the office of selectmen. When asked if he thinks all elected officials should receive stipends to run for office, Mr. Mariano pointed out that it costs more money to run for selectman than it does to run for any other position.

Term Limits

Mr. Mariano does not believe in term limits. Re-election every three years is a form of term-limit. When asked about whether terms limits should be removed from the Advisory Board, Mr. Mariano agreed that they should be removed from Advisory Board as well because the A.B. is appointed by the Selectmen and can be removed by them at any time.

Capital Budget

When asked to comment on the idea of combining the Advisory Board and the Capital Budget committee, Mr. Mariano shared his belief that the two committees should be kept separate.

3-member BOS vs. 5-Member BOS

Mr. Mariano believes the current structure works well, it has always worked with 3-members and if the system is working then there is no need for change. When asked about the restrictions with the open meeting law, Mr. Mariano explained that they all speak to the T.A. who relays information between them.