

Town of Sturbridge

Charter Review Committee

Meeting Minutes, October 7, 2015

Meeting convened in the Center Office Building at 6:34 pm by Chairperson William Haggerty. Present: Bruce Boyson (BB), William Haggerty (WH), Sandra Gibson-Quigley (SG-Q), Laurance Morrison (LM) and Paul Zapun (PZ).

SG-Q moved, BB seconded approval of minutes of September 29, 2015, as submitted. Passed 5-0.

WH recounted his conversation with Town Administrator Leon Gaumond, who offered to serve as a conduit in scheduling meetings with the Town bodies. The TA will attend this Committee's meeting on October 21, 2015, when the Committee will continue its line-by-line review of the Charter, and confirm its meetings schedule. The TA will be asked for factual guidance on the Town's options in its form of government, if and when the documented population reaches 10,000; as of April 2015 the official population is 9,653.

Discussion centered, without immediate conclusion, on whether the present reference to male pronouns as covering all persons should undergo the recommendation to either "s/he," or to strive to recast all of the language to use titles instead of gender-specific pronouns; a test of a few randomly-selected sentences showed the built-in awkwardness of the latter option.

Wordsmithing, it was agreed, should be done deliberately, not ad hoc, at a later date.

The Committee decided to: set a date to receive public comment (in addition to public attendance at any and all Committee meetings); invite from both the public and Town staff written statements, which can be submitted as identifiable by name of the writer or as anonymous with the explicit understanding that anonymous submissions will be read into the Committee's meeting minutes; coordinate in those invitations via the TA's blog, this Committee's Town Hall mailbox and the media. All statements will be studied for relevance to the Committee's assignment; some submissions may make their way into a supplemental or collateral report that the Committee will furnish to the TA and the Board of Selectmen.

WH furnished a master list of every Town body and the title of each office holder for review for completeness, looking toward the Committee's extending invitations for discussion with each of them.

LM suggested that there are two fundamental approaches to examining the Charter: As a document subject to revision, or as a documented to be created as if from scratch. He stated that the latter approach is sounder, because it avoids inadvertently carrying forward a defect, flaw, gap, redundancy or contradiction while bringing a fresh-eyes notion to the composition of the Charter.

It was agreed that the Charter should not delve into operational matters. It was noted that the Charter is incomplete in setting forth the scope or charge for each body. It was observed that Section 4-1 (B)

seems to allow an otherwise qualified Town Librarian to hold that position fulltime while serving as a Selectman, in apparent contradiction to the expressed intent of that provision. A question arose whether the Board of Selectmen, in addition to serving as Sewer & Water Commissioners, as the Charter now states in 4-2 (C), also serve as Police Commissioners and Fire Commissioners, neither of which capacities the Charter now mentions. Discussion focused on why only the Planning Board members hold 5-year terms of appointment, which are the longest of all appointments, and discussion indicated that the Planning Board's work inherently covers lengthy projects where an institutional memory and participation in public hearings is essential.

SG-Q moved, BB seconded adjournment. Passed 5-0 at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurance S. Morrison