

Town of Sturbridge

Charter Review Committee

Meeting Minutes August 30, 2016

Meeting convened at 6:34 pm in Town Hall Conference Room #2 by Chairperson William Haggerty. Present: Sandra Gibson-Quigley (SG-Q), William Haggerty (WH), Bruce Boyson (BB), Paul Zapun (PZ), and Larry Morrison (LM), and a member of the public, Lorraine Murawski (LMu), who is the immediate past Town Clerk.

PZ moved, BB seconded a motion to approve the minutes of August 22, 2016, as submitted. Passed, 5-0.

WH invited LMu to speak. LMu, voicing her views on the matter of an elected vs. an appointed Town Clerk, made the following points, which, she said, were drawn from a statewide survey conducted at the end of 2014 by the Massachusetts Town Clerks Association:

From the Colonial era to 1915, all Town Clerks were elected and thus in Sturbridge since 1738; of the state's 351 cities and towns there are 312 towns and 39 cities (whose Clerks hold somewhat different responsibilities from those of Town Clerks, such as having no role in elections, there being, instead, in cities, a separate Elections Commission); an elected Town Clerk is answerable to the Secretary of State and the people and is subject to removal from office by recall; of the 312 towns, 233 elected their respective Town Clerks at the end of 2014; election avoids cronyism and a sense of being beholden to the appointing authority, which can develop in an appointed Town Clerk with a compliant personality; election provides a check and balance in the certification and recording of election results; an appointee, unlike an elected Town Clerk, may live outside the given town and lack a desirable depth of local knowledge; a town-wide survey in Sturbridge showed highest resident satisfaction with the Town Clerk, among all municipal offices; LMu herself holds the highest and internationally recognized professional credential; it is unreasonable to expect a Town Administrator and Selectmen to oversee the work of an appointee whose responsibilities they don't know; in towns of all sizes and types, in the last 20 years, 34 towns sought to change from elected to appointed and of the nine towns in which that change was made, two reinstated the election method (one within a year, the other within five years) and a third is currently in an effort to reinstate the election method.

The Committee acknowledged with thanks LMu's presentation.

WH read a draft letter of transmittal for posting on the Town website, which was agreed to, and stated that he will prepare phrasing for an announcement on the community access cable channel and for a press release with respect to a public hearing on the draft Charter, which hearing to be conducted at Town Hall at 7 pm October 4, 2016.

LM moved, SG-Q seconded a motion to define the draft Charter completed at the Committee's meeting on August 22, 2016, as the working document suitable for presentation at the public hearing. Passed 5-0.

It was agreed that the Committee remains deadlocked with respect to a recommendation to the Selectmen on the election or appointment of the Town Clerk, there being the likelihood that one Committee member favors election, one favors appointment, and three do not see compelling reason for either method. It was further agreed that the issue, which was made known to the Committee as it gathered information from Department Heads and Boards, merits scrutiny.

The Committee reviewed and made changes to LM's draft Recommendations and List of Findings that will accompany the draft Charter in delivery to the Selectmen. The content covers matters that came to light in the drafting process but that fall outside the scope of the Committee's mandate, yet nevertheless deserve the Selectmen's attention.

It was agreed that the Committee will meet with the Selectmen, at the Selectmen's request, after the public hearing, when, perhaps, the Committee will find cause to adjust the draft Charter and Recommendations and List of Findings.

PZ moved, BB seconded a motion to adjourn at 8:15 pm. Passed 5-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Larry Morrison, Clerk