

**Ad Hoc Government Study Committee (Westborough, MA)**  
**Minutes of April 18, 2007**

Present: John E. Arnold, Thomas Shea, Brigitte Casemyr, Manohar Vichare, Kristina Allen, Sue Abladian

Absent: Christopher Senie,

Chairman Shea called the meeting to order @ 7:05 pm and welcomed representatives from the Council on Aging, Barbara Christie, Chairman, and Ann Johnson, Vice-Chairman. A. Johnson provided an overview of the organization and mission of the Council, composed of 11 board members.

A packet of information was provided to the committee, and is attached in hard copy only to these minutes. The packet included the following:

- Responsibilities of the Westborough Council on Aging
- By-Laws of the Council on Aging
- Guidelines for Participation in Programs and Activities at the Senior Center
- Emergency Safety Policy

The committee inquired about the process to be followed to hire a director, and no current board member has been involved in the hiring process of any staff at the Council. Noting that the Council on Aging's By-Laws were singularly unclear about this topic, A. Johnson and B. Christie shared what they believed would be the correct approach. The Council on Aging would form a sub-committee charged with the screening and evaluation of candidates and make a recommendation to the board. The Council on Aging would then interview a number of candidates and present their recommendation to the Board of Selectmen.

T. Shea commented that the Council on Aging's By-Laws do not specifically spell out that the Board of Selectmen has appointing authority for the Director's position.

When it comes to the senior center's staff, it is the director, Alma Demanche, who conducts all screenings and interviews, and then presents her recommendation to the Council on Aging. A. Johnson noted that this is the process that was just used for the very recent hiring of a new bus driver.

Generally, the Council on Aging gets its directions from H. Danis, Town Coordinator, noted A. Johnson, and B. Christie added that since she is fairly new in her position, she turns to H. Danis for guidance.

S. Abladian noted that the Town Coordinator is responsible for the maintenance of the building, and asked if and how this was being coordinated with the members. B. Christie stated that because her vision is to get all members involved in various aspects of the management of senior center, the council has established a maintenance committee to which such coordination is delegated.

J. Arnold inquired then about the impact of town budget on the senior citizen, how the board deals with the Town Coordinator's directives, when these conflict with the board's vision, and whether the board feels that it can advocate for the budget it needs, as a policy-making board. B.

Casemyr asked as well how a different reporting structure, such as the Executive Director reporting directly into the Town Coordinator, might affect the board. The board members responded that they would support the Executive Director, and continue to advocate for their vision, even if the reporting structure was changed.

T. Shea asked if the board felt there was a need for any change, to which A. Johnson responded that it was generally a good idea that board members did not stay too long in their position. S. Abladian asked about board orientation programs. B. Christie confirmed that there is such a program, and that further, as new members join the board, they receive a complete packet of information, and are getting appointed to a sub-committee to get them quickly involved in the business of the senior center. When asked specifically by T. Shea if the board members had any recommendations for improvements, for the center and in general, B. Christie responded that it was very beneficial to have a direct line into the Town Coordinator. Both board members support keeping an Open Town Meeting structure, with A. Johnson further commenting that, from her experience having lived in Marlboro, she felt that a Representative Town Meeting structure was very political and impersonal. T. Shea then thanked the board members for their input to this committee's work.

J. Arnold suggested that the committee should seek to clarify the process of hiring for the Council on Aging, as the current documentation was lacking in that respect. S. Abladian made a further clarification to the responsibilities of the council, in that it represents the seniors in the community and as such, directs the work of the Executive Director, i.e. it is not only an advisory board.

The committee members then reviewed the input received from Town Clerk at the previous meeting and concluded that the responsibilities of that office need to be better defined, as it pertains to the interests of the voters and the legislature, an area of great importance. S. Abladian wondered should the town adopt a town manager structure, if then the town clerk should be hired by the Town Manager. J. Arnold commented that city clerks are hired by city managers, as a result of the way cities are established, but that towns are entirely different. The committee's deliberation on that topic ended as the next guest arrived.

Beth Travis, Recreation Commission board member was welcome by Chairman Shea, who solicited her input regarding the needs for improvements in all aspects of the appointed board, as well as town government in general.

B. Travis started with the process of hiring the recreation director, a process in which she has not participated. Her understanding is that the Board of Selectmen receive letters of interests from candidates, these letters are then forwarded to the Recreation Commission Board, who proceed with its evaluation and conducts interviews culminating in its recommendation to the Board of Selectmen. B. Travis added that the commission's staff is hired through the same process, drawing a comment from B. Casemyr that Frank Desiata, Recreation Commission Director, does not then hire his own staff. B. Travis expanded further on this situation. Members of the board are starting to turn over, but the current board has a very good sense of its mission, and has a strong conviction as to what recreation is and should do in town, this has developed over a long time, with Frank setting the bar very high in town. To hire a new director when that time will come, B. Travis believes that that it would be important for the board to have a representative on the search committee. She also stated that the previous chairperson of the board took care of F. Desiata's review, and that F. Desiata reports to the board. T. Shea asked a hypothetical question,

in case a person needs to be removed from its position, what would the process be? B. Travis believes that the Board of Selectmen should act according to protocol.

J. Arnold continued with a question regarding the board's role, as viewed by the Recreation Commission Director. B. Travis responded that F. Desiata requests input from his board, but she is unclear about an absolute reporting line. She also noted that the long-time chair of the commission had recently resigned.

B. Travis mentioned that there were five members on the commission, and she would not mind to grow that number to seven, not because of workload, but to increase the generation of new ideas, and also to encourage members with very young kids to join.

M. Vichare asked whether the board has put in place a succession plan, to which B. Travis responded in the negative, and that this had not come up during commission discussions. She added that the commission has a 5-year plan, and that should F. Desiata become unavailable, the assistant could step and continue to run the programs.

T. Shea asked specifically about any areas that do not work well, and B. Travis commented that there are some issues with Community Ed. The Recreation Department has always run programs at a reasonable cost, but the lines are becoming blurred, and there should be a greater difference between the two programs, they are too similar. Community Ed could be doing so much for education, and leave sports alone. The board has suggested enrichment programs, and that a division is needed.

K. Allen wondered if the board goes directly to the Town Coordinator to discuss policy, with B. Travis responding in the negative, and that the Recreation Director goes to all the budget meetings.

Speaking of town meeting, T. Shea inquired about our current structure. B. Travis loves Open Town Meeting, she comes from Shrewsbury and does not want anyone speaking for her. T. Shea thanked B. Travis for attending the committee's tonight this evening, and for her comments.

Next, the Government Study Committee thanked members of the Youth Commission for attending the meeting. Representing the Youth Commission are Katie Welch (Chair), Brigitte Casemyr (who, for this part of the meeting, participated as a member of the Youth Commission. Therefore, the minutes for this part of the meeting were taken by Government Study Committee member John Arnold), Andy Rosenshine and Michelle Grasso.

Chairman Shea explained to the Youth Commission members that the Government Study Committee is trying to get a better understanding of how various town Boards and Commissions work. The Government Study Committee understands that the Youth Commission members are appointed by the Board of Selectmen and, tonight, is interested in learning how the Director of Youth and Family Services is appointed and other aspects of the structure and process of the Youth Commission.

Ms. Welch began by saying that John Badenhause (Director of Youth and Family Services) has been serving in his position longer than any of the people currently on the Youth Commission have served. Therefore, no one currently on the Youth Commission was involved directly with his hiring process.

Mr. Shea asked what process the Commission would expect to be taken for the hiring of a Director.

Ms. Welch said that her understanding of the process is that the Youth Commission would be in charge of hiring a Director. Then, stepping back to explain how the Youth Commission works from a more general perspective, she explained that the Youth Commission functioned as a typical small town department that strived to have a well-run office. The members of the Commission are involved with policy discussions, review all issues that are brought to the Commission, and perform the performance review of the Director. In recent years, the Commission has worked to explain its purpose to the Town and has received the Town's support. The Commission has not asked for a large budget and has worked to explain the role and purpose of the Commission and to explain their budget.

Following up on the hiring process, Mr. Shea asked what process the Commission had followed in the more recent hiring of part-time staff. Ms. Welch explained that the Commission worked with the Personnel Board (following the usual process of having the Personnel Board determining the pay grade, etc.) on the financial aspects. Once approved, the hiring of the part-time staff was actually done by the Director. Ms. Casemyr mentioned that the part-time staff (primarily of counselors) requires some specialized knowledge that is needed in order to properly perform the work.

Mr. Shea asked if the Commission could elaborate on their expectations of the process that would be followed when the day comes to hire a new Director. Ms. Welch indicated that the goal would be a process that would include people with the necessary knowledge of the Commissions needs and purpose so the Commission would seem to be involved to – at least – interview and make a recommendation if not do the actual hiring directly. Andy agreed that this approach made sense.

Mr. Shea commented that the uncertainty due to the current Director having served longer than any of the Commission members seems to show that the specific process is a bit of a gray area. Further discussion indicated that the general consensus is that a definite answer to the question is not well understood and that the current Charter and By-Laws do not specifically indicate which Board/Commission is responsible for the hiring of the Director of Youth and Family Services. Following a discussion about the appropriateness of having the people that do the Director's performance review also be responsible for any hiring/firing decisions, Ms. Welch returned to the topic of the Commission's performance review of the Director. She indicated that the Commission does the evaluation of the Director. The Chair of the Youth Commission drafts the performance evaluation and writes the final review with feedback from all members of the Youth Commission. Once completed, the evaluation is sent to the Personnel Board where it is placed in the Director's Personnel file.

Mr. Shea asked – theoretically – who would act if there was determined to be a performance problem and/or some discipline was deemed necessary for the Director. Ms. Welch indicated that the Commission has never had to deal specifically with this so there is no answer based on recent experience. However, the Commissioners each expressed the view that the Director reports to the Commission and that the Commission would be responsible for taking the appropriate action.

Mr. Shea asked the Commission members to explain the day-to-day interactions that occur in the Commission, the Director, the staff, and other Town departments. Ms. Welch explained that the Director works with the Town Coordinator and others in Town Hall as necessary with regard to the Commission's finances, etc. However, in terms of the Commission's primary responsibilities with regard to providing counseling, etc, there is no interaction with Town Hall. Ms. Casemyr indicated that, with regard to the counseling services, the Commission staff interacts with the School Department and other Town departments from which counseling referrals might originate.

In terms of overseeing the Director from a clinical perspective, Michelle indicated that the Director gets clinical supervision from someone outside the Commission and the staff. Ms. Welch elaborated that this is to help the Director's professional skill and that getting this kind of clinical supervision from an outside entity is a requirement since the Director does direct counseling.

Mr. Shea asked if there were any areas regarding the structure and process of the Youth Commission that the members of the Commission thought needed improvement. Ms. Welch said, 'no'.

Ms. Allen noted that the background for many of the questions and discussions tonight are related to the Government Study Committee's desire to investigate the differences between a model where the Town's employees 'work for' a Town Coordinator/Town Manager as opposed to a model where the Town employees 'work for' a volunteer, policy-making Board such as the Youth Commission.

Mr. Shea asked if this explanation inspired any thoughts or comments from the Commission members. Ms. Welch said that, like other business reporting structures, in the case where the person is strong enough to not need day-to-day supervision, the actual reporting structure may not matter. If good people are hired and hired correctly, then the specifics of the reporting structure may not make a significant difference. In a case where it is subsequently decided that the person hired isn't working out, then the Commission members would probably seek assistance from a Town Manager/Town Coordinator, Personnel Board, etc. to make sure that the appropriate action was taken.

Ms. Casemyr and Andy Rosenshine commented that something that may be specific to the Youth Commission is the need for the employees and the Commission members (as policy setters) to have quite a deep knowledge of the primary subject matter. The clinical aspects of the work and understanding it is critical for the staff and very important for the Commission members. In other comments, Michelle Grasso indicated that she liked the process that is used to appoint members to the Youth Commission. This is a process where the current members of the Commission interview the prospective members and make recommendations to the Selectmen (who actually make the appointments). Ms. Casemyr mentioned that the Commission understands the limitations of the Town's finances, etc. and balances the service and the cost. Therefore, it may be that some of the viewpoint that it is believed that a Town Manager would bring with regard to finances is already being taken on by the Commission members.

Mr. Shea summarized his understanding of the opinion of the Commission members present as "when the day comes to hire a Director of Youth and Family Services, the Commission would – at least – want to interview prospective candidates and make a recommendation to the Selectmen

(if it was determined that the Selectmen were the ‘hiring authority’)” and asked for comment. The Commission members agreed with this summary and emphasized that having a search committee with others involved who did not have the background that being a member of the Youth Commission gives would not be helpful to the process.

Mr. Shea thanked the members of the Youth Commission for speaking with the Government Study Committee this evening.

T. Shea confirmed that next meetings are May 2 and May 16.

M. Vichare made a motion to adjourn. K. Allen seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 9.42 pm.

Submitted,  
Brigitte Casemyr, Secretary