

**Ad Hoc Government Study Committee (Westborough, MA)**  
**Minutes of June 6, 2007**

Present: John E. Arnold, Thomas Shea, Brigitte Casemyr, Kristina Allen, Manohar Vichare, Sue Abladian, Christopher Senie @7:35pm

Chairman Shea called the meeting to order @ 7:06 pm and opened the meeting with a review of minutes.

- M. Vichare made a motion to approve the minutes of February 21<sup>st</sup>, Sue Abladian seconded the motion, all in favor except for K. Allen, Chris Senie and J. Arnold who were not present at the February 21<sup>st</sup> meeting.
- The minutes from the March 21<sup>st</sup> meeting were reviewed as well, and the committee decided to ask town counsel Greg Franks to clarify a couple of points pertaining to charter change. Approval of these minutes was thus deferred until a subsequent meeting.
- The minutes from the April 4 meeting will be reviewed at a subsequent meeting. The minutes of April 18 are outstanding. The minutes of 5/2 and 5/23 were completed and sent out for review to ensure accuracy of recording, and will be reviewed and approved at a subsequent meeting.

T. Shea confirmed that the government study committee would meet in Room 23 of the Forbes Building for the next 5 meetings.

Pursuing to the action item of the last meeting, to draft a few paragraphs about the themes that had been developed during the May 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting, four committee members submitted notes to that effect. The committee proceeded with a thorough review of these comments in order to identify similarities, differences, overlaps, to help guide the discussion during this meeting, and to set the direction for future meetings. The committee members also debated the priority of topics to be further analyzed.

The committee then discussed the need for and timing of public hearings, considering that substantial community outreach had already been performed [see details in the Interim Report dated February 7, 2007]. K. Allen and B. Casemyr advocated for public hearings, even during the summer. J. Arnold suggested that the committee must reach the point for our final report where we can state that we are done with our review, and he did not believe we had reached that point yet. He clarified that we had not yet discussed improvements and long-term recommendations, or triggers for a change, and all of these points were important for the committee to discuss openly. S. Abladian commented that even if we believe that the system works today, the fact that 160 voters conduct town business at town meetings might not be the right process. She added a side comment that she had received input from voters who were in favor of a 9 am start of town meeting on the first day (Saturday).

J. Arnold countered that it is the right of the voters to come out and vote, and that there does not seem to be any more than a few voices speaking against Open Town Meeting. Bringing back the topic of holding public hearings, J. Arnold put forth the question: do we have enough input to make a recommendation regarding Open Town Meeting or Representative Town Meeting or any

other form of government? And a follow-up question: have we had adequate discussions as to how to improve our current Open Town Meeting process, such as attracting more people etc.

M. Vichare shared his thoughts regarding OTM/RTM, that despite the fact that the town has grown [population-wise, and budget-wise], the current open town meeting structure works very effectively, which does not preclude suggesting improvements to the process itself. In favor of OTM is the fact that the residents who attend are deeply interested in their local government, and moving to an RTM structure will not change that. An RTM structure will in fact restrict interested residents' opportunities to fully participate and contribute to the process.

K. Allen advocated for public hearing, to give the town and its residents an opportunity to voice their opinion and share ideas for improvements. She also stated that it was important for the committee to document that we have thoroughly research the issue, and how we came to our conclusion to not recommend a change. T. Shea wondered if it was possibly too soon to hold public hearings. J. Arnold added that the Board of Selectmen will probably want to hold public hearings. C. Senie added that a lot of people do not like the commitment of time that it takes, and that other cities pass laws with their town council. Further, C. Senie said that he has heard residents complain about it, but that they trust that the people that are engaged in town meeting will do the right thing. T. Shea suggested that the committee go over the various suggestions received and conceived to improve the Open Town Meeting process. J. Arnold summarized these deliberations with the comment that the committee believes OTP, with improvements, is the best course of action for the town.

T. Shea then addressed elected positions in town, and specifically the Town Clerk position. C. Senie observed that it is overwhelmingly a practice through out the Commonwealth to have the Town Clerk being an elected position, and that the committee had received very good arguments in favor of keeping it an independent and impartial position.

J. Arnold, K. Allen and C. Senie walked through their notes on the discussion topics to advance the deliberations, and to further identify future action items for the committee. As a result of these deliberations, the committee culled the list of topics down to seven at present, with the possibility to add new topics down the road. The committee then deliberated on an effective process to capture the collective knowledge of its members, and analyze, summarize and document their proposed recommendations. J. Arnold took the action item to incorporate the ideas discussed at today's meeting into his own notes and to bring at the next meeting, in essence providing a comprehensive framework for all relevant pros and cons of any recommendation.

Chairman Shea confirmed the meeting schedule for the next couple of months, as follows:

- June 20
- July 11
- August 1
- August 15
- September 5

B. Casemyr remarked that with five meetings on the schedule, the committee might be getting into a time crunch to submit its final report to the Board of Selectmen during November. The committee is currently targeting either November 13 or November 28 as the date to submit this report.

The committee tentatively discussed holding open forums end of September/beginning of October.

C. Senie made a motion to adjourn. K. Allen seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 9.05 pm.

Submitted,  
Brigitte Casemyr, Secretary