

Ad Hoc Government Study Committee (Westborough, MA)
Minutes of November 8, 2006

Present: John E. Arnold, Christopher Senie, Thomas Shea, Brigitte Casemyr, Kristina Allen

Absent: Manohar Vichare, George Barrette

Chairman Shea called the meeting to order @ 7:10 pm.

Mr. Shea informed the committee that Mr. Dexter Blois was not able to attend as scheduled due to a last minute conflict with another town committee.

The committee proceeded with the review of the organization chart prepared by J. Arnold. During the course of that review, a number of questions arose that will need to be explored further. These questions are captured below.

- When an official is not re-elected, should that official lose his/her appointments to other town committees?
- Do site plan reviews belong with the Planning Board or should it remain with the Board of Selectmen? Ms. Allen commented that the Board of Selectmen cannot reject a plan that the Planning Board has approved, and moving the site plan reviews into the Planning Board's purview would go a long way to streamline the permitting process, one of the master plans major objectives.
- Which entity should have authority over signage? It is currently with the historical commission, but it would be more logical to restructure it under the design review board. The committee noted that at the time this responsibility was given to the historical commission, there was no design review board in town.
- Why does the Library Director not hire his/her own staff? Other department heads do.
- Do we need 9 library trustees?
- Noted that the Assistant Town Coordinator/HR Director is missing from the chart.
- Evaluate reasons to keep The Fair Housing Committee, which is not currently active. The Housing Authority & Housing Partnership is performing those functions. Does the Housing Authority appoint its director?
- Is the Industrial Development Financing Authority needed, there are currently no members?

The committee decided to issue letters to boards, commissions and councils to request their input specifically on the issue of which positions they hire/appoint, and whether this process is working efficiently. It was not determined who will take care of this item.

The committee next revisited the input provided by Town Moderator Joe Harrington. By-Laws 2-19 was reported having a typo, however, the committee will need to determine if this was a error introduced during the production of the booklet, in which case it can be corrected, or if it was truly a record of the town meeting discussion, which would necessitate an amendment warrant.

By-Laws 13 re the Personnel Board: the committee will specifically ask this board if they would support J. Harrington recommendation to move the classification plan and the salary structure out of the By-Laws and to create a separate volume. There is a parallel with the Planning Board, which produces and maintains their sub-division planning as a separate document and not as part of the By-Laws.

The committee decided to take no action on J. Harrington recommendation for By-Laws 36 – Residency Requirement for Appointment, to add a registered voter requirement.

The next set of recommendations provided by J. Harrington pertains to timing of hearings and final action by the Planning Board. The committee will review this general recommendation when it meets with the Planning Board in December.

Ms. Casemyr then reported on a separate interview she had scheduled with Mr. John Rainey, ZBA Board Member, long-time town resident and a management consultant in the Small Business Development Center at Clark University. Below is a summary of that meeting:

- Stacked town meetings are an issue, and a possible solution might be to a) delay the broadcast of the proceedings to prevent the timing of a vote by residents who are only being made aware of a very narrow slice of town business, and b) prohibit bringing cell phones into the high school during town meetings.
- The selection process on some committees need to be improved, such as requiring candidates for reappointment to send in a formal letter expressing their continued interest; also, board members should be asked about the candidate's performance.
- Job descriptions are needed for all positions, appointed and elected.
- The town would benefit from better procedures and better alignment under one town manager, who would have the authority to devise and implement.
- Since the town does not have enough volunteers, there should be a process to conduct sessions to inform and recruit.
- The Personnel Board could be carrying out these informational sessions, and also be screening for candidates, volunteer recruiting sessions, facilitate performance reviews, etc.
- Planning board – separation of power is very important, and the town should not put all the reviews under one single umbrella.
- Do research on best practices on running a town, nationwide, not just New England.

The committee next reviewed the first letters and email communications received from town residents and employees. Some input unfortunately deals with issues entirely outside of the charter of the committee (taxes and traffic to name a few). These communications are attached in hard copy to minutes. Ms. Casemyr suggested that the committee responds with a thank you email to all persons who took the time to share their insights.

Mr. Blois joined the meeting at 9:05 pm, and the committee thanked him for his consideration.

Mr. Shea started off the discussion by asking Mr. Blois for his input regarding RTM and OTM. Mr. Blois answered that there are pros and cons with both, and that you have factions in either. Towns such as Agawam, Methuen and Franklin have instituted town councils, but Mr. Blois was not sure that a resident would get fair representation through such a small number of representatives, and he felt that his interests as a citizen would not be represented quite as well. Asked if he saw any reasons for change in Westborough, Mr. Blois felt that the OTM worked well.

The question of town organization and structure brought a strong recommendation for change from Mr. Blois. The town is a business with a \$70 million budget, with no straight-line reporting structure. This is simply not good management practice. With the exception of the Moderator and the Board of Selectmen who should remain elected, all other positions should be appointed, so no other elected boards. The Town Manager should have all department heads reporting directly to him, and the department heads should be hiring all their own staff. The Personnel Director should report to the Town Manager and the Personnel Board should be eliminated. The finance teams – assessor, treasurer/collector, accounting and town clerk need to report to the Town Manager. The Town Clerk position needs to be appointed, a position that should require a candidate who held the denomination of CMC, Certified Municipal Clerk.

Asked about combining the Police and Fire department into a Public Safety Department, Mr. Blois did not think this form of public safety would work here, too many issues with training, cross-training and culture.

Mr. Blois was asked about the composition of the Capital Expenditure Planning Committee. Mr. Blois stated that the Planning Board does not need a seat at the committee, but that certainly, the school committee should, either through a member of the school committee or a designated representative from within the school administration.

Mr. Senie summarized some of the input the committee had received from multiple sources. In our current structure, the Board of Selectmen functions as CEO, and the Town Coordinator as COO. A next level of structure would be a City Council, as the legislative body, and a Town Manager as the CEO. The committee had not heard any input in favor of this particular structure. An intermediary step would be to give the Town Coordinator more appointing authority and more responsibilities, to make this office even more effective. Our Board of Selectmen would remain CEO, giving directions and providing vision to the management of the town. Mr. Senie then asked Mr. Blois what would be gained through such a change, to which Mr. Blois responded that there would be better coordination between departments. With department heads reporting to the Town Coordinator, the town will need to see to it that commissions still have some authority, so maybe they would appoint department heads in consensus with the Town Coordinator,

and act in an advisory role. The Library Director and other department heads would thus report to the Town Coordinator, and hire their own staff. The library trustees would be responsible for the Library Director's performance review, but if there were issues with performance, these issues would be reviewed with the Town Coordinator.

Mr. Blois recommended that the committee obtain a copy of the Ashland town charter. He stressed that the title of the town's top administrator – Town Coordinator, Town Administrator, Town Manager – is unimportant. More important is the accurate description of the job at hand, and to see that it gets done right. If there are concerns about consolidating much power into one person, or if the job is not done right, then the Board of Selectmen will fire that person. If the Board of Selectmen takes no action, then recall the Board.

Ms. Casemyr inquired about good hiring procedures under such a structure. Mr. Blois responded that the hiring of for instance a police chief or a fire chief by a Town Manager is not a public process, and is not subject to open meeting laws. There needs to be checks and balances, so the Board of Selectmen would have a number of days to veto or approve the candidate. If no objections, they'll ratify. As a courtesy to the Board of Selectmen, and to inform the public and the press, the candidate(s) could be brought in to meet with the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Blois also recommended that the committee reviewed the Shrewsbury charter. Its good features work in either OTM or RTM structure, as are the Ashland and Grafton charters. Mr. Blois further suggested that the committee inquire about the process of changing the charter, as there are a couple of different processes that could be adopted.

Mr. Arnold made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Senie seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote and the meeting was adjourned at 10:05 pm.

Submitted,
Brigitte Casemyr, Secretary