

Ad Hoc Government Study Committee (Westborough, MA)
Minutes of October 18, 2006

Present: Kristina Allen, John E. Arnold, George Barrette, Thomas Shea, Manohar Vichare, Brigitte Casemyr
Absent: Christopher Senie

Chairman Shea called the meeting to order @ 7:06 pm.

Mr. Shea noted that Mr. Mogado, Town Manager of Shrewsbury, might be accompanied on 11/14 by Mr. John Lebeaux, chairman of Shrewsbury's Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Barrette announced that he had received two sets of comments following the committee's broad outreach to the community and town employees. Unfortunately, one suggested decreasing town spending and implementing a different tax classification system, neither topics being in the purview of this committee.

The committee's agenda for the day included review and discussions on Mr. Harrington's comments, future speakers and how to best structure the input we are receiving in order to facilitate analysis and reporting.

Mr. Shea opened the discussion by referring to Mr. Harrington's comments regarding RTM vs. OTM, and stated that Westborough's current form of government seems to align well with similar-sized towns' government structure. The source for this comparison was the document submitted earlier by Mr. Joe Harrington, which Mr. Senie compiled in a spreadsheet for easy manipulation. Mr. Shea zeroed in on a comment by Mr. Harrington, that the people who today attend the OTM are the de facto town representatives, but that our OTM structure does not restrict anyone who wishes to attend, to be heard and vote. Ms. Allen noted that we are still in the evaluation stage of this important topic, and it would be premature to form an opinion for or against OTM at this point. Ms. Casemyr suggested that we identify and invite a qualified speaker who would be in a position to speak in favor of RTM. Mr. Barrette pointed to Mr. Mogado's and Mr. Lebeaux's interview on November 14, and noted that these two gentlemen probably will be in a position to present the pros and cons of such structure. Mr. Vichare summarized the town meeting issues raised by Mr. Harrington: pros and cons of OTM and RTM, accommodations, quorum, timing of the number of committee meetings preceding town meeting. Mr. Vichare suggests that if OTM is to remain, we need to address these organizational and structural issues. If we're looking at RTM, the committee needs to find out how these issues will be affected. Ms. Allen pointed out that the future town structure may very well be in the form of yet a third option, Town Council and Mayor and that the committee had not yet compiled enough research on this topic. Ms. Allen also commented that town population is not the sole factor to be considered, there are complex issues to be taken into account. Mr. Barrette added that if the town were to go from OTM to RTM, that would mean drastic changes and many procedural changes.

Mr. Shea brought up the subject of the quorum, set at 100 voters. He would love to see town meeting attended by a thousand voters, but understands that it would be impractical to raise the quorum. Mr. Vichare inquired about the timing and schedule of town meeting, which Ms. Allen explained. (Saturday start, continuation on following week's evening until all articles are voted upon.)

Mr. Shea then addressed Mr. Harrington's suggestion to delete the Permanent School Sites and Facilities Committee. Mr. Barrette confirmed that this committee is redundant, as Town Meeting appointed a separate School Building Committee, which is furthermore separate from the Municipal Building Committee appointed by the town coordinator. Massachusetts General Laws requires a town to have a separate School Building Committee, when such is needed.

The committee next reviewed Mr. Harrington's input regarding the Personnel Board, which is responsible for 39 non-union employees. Mr. Vichare pointed out that the committee needs to have a discussion whether the town needs both a Personnel Board and an HR manager. This topic will be held back until the committee has had a chance to meet with representatives from the Personnel Board. Ms. Bilodeau, Assistant Town Coordinator and HR Director will also be asked to provide input to the committee.

The Planning Board was discussed next. The committee wants to understand the rationale behind the current 5-year term requirement vs. a potential 3-year term. Mr. Barrette suggests that this board together with our Town Planner could shed light on this topic, as well as provide input on their needs. For instance, the Planning Board is currently elected, should there be any appointed members as well? Further, the role of the Design Review Board should also be evaluated, as some elements of its work in the recent past nearly caused the town serious legal problems. The committee needs input as to whether the Design Review Board should be appointed by the Planning Board or the Board of Selectmen. In a similar vein, Mr. Barrette discussed the Site Plan Review Committee, which by charter reports to the Board of Selectmen, and will be looking for input from the Planning Board on this topic. Ms. Allen commented that one of the town strategic initiatives, to streamline permitting, would be greatly facilitated if the Site Plan Review Committee was to report into the Planning Board. Mr. Arnold proposed that the committee meet very soon with the Planning Board to understand how such changes would affect their work, and obtain pros and cons of such changes. Mr. Barrette will reach out to the Planning Board and Town Planner to request their input.

Moving further along in the input provided by Mr. Harrington, the committee discussed the Capital Expenditures Planning Committee. Mr. Harrington currently uses one of his three permitted appointees to provide a seat to a representative from the School Committee/Administration, as this body is far more likely to have capital projects than for instance the Planning Board. The committee will inquire with the Planning Board regarding their need for a seat on the Capital Expenditures Planning Committee.

Mr. Arnold commented that the committee needed to start building a list of questions and topics to be specifically addressed by each town committee we'll be speaking with.

The next set of comments from Mr. Harrington pertained to the town by-laws. The first comment deals with newly elected officials' start of terms for. Mr. Shea commented that if departing elected officials were allowed to finish their terms during that year's town meeting, they would de facto be lame ducks – which happens all the time elsewhere.

In the same vein, Mr. Barrette questioned whether the committee should research moving the town meeting from May. Town meetings are now held in May, a change orchestrated a couple of years ago by a need to await state financial aid information. This change has however caused other issues such as conflicts with other springtime activities, which prevents many voters to attend on the first Saturday. Mr. Arnold suggests that the committee finds out what the Massachusetts General Laws stated about this topic, and also what other towns' schedule is, and the impact of their timing on town business. Mr. Barrette noted that an option available to the town is to move back town meeting to March or April, and institute a mandatory fall town meeting. The committee has already heard from a number of people regarding these topics, and needs to continue exploring the options.

Mr. Arnold then commented on Mr. Harrington's suggestion to find a large facility outside of Westborough to hold large town meeting if required. Mr. Arnold suggests that this could be contentious, if for instance the facility's owner were to be the topic of an article on the warrant that year. Mr. Barrette made the motion to not bring forward this suggested change, Ms. Allen seconded, 4 in favor (Mr. Barrette, Ms. Allen, Mr. Shea and Ms. Casemyr) and 2 abstained (Mr. Arnold and Mr. Vichare).

The committee next reviewed the wording in By-Laws article 2-7, per Mr. Harrington's input. Mr. Arnold offered that the town might need a succession plan, should the Moderator become incapacitated prior to TM, and thus unable to appoint a Deputy Moderator. The committee will seek clarification from the Moderator on this topic.

The committee reviewed Mr. Harrington's suggestion to amend By-Laws article 2-8, Order of Propounding Questions, and agreed to bring those comments forward in their report. Likewise for By-Laws article 2-9 pertaining to the Table of Motions, but also adding the need to reword 6. Call for the Previous Questions, and possibly remove 10. Pass over. These additional questions will be put to the moderator.

At this time in the meeting, the committee stopped reviewing Mr. Harrington's comments, to be continued at a subsequent meeting. The committee members then moved into a discussion on how to best organize all the input.

It was decided that a central repository of all input will be created, i.e. a binder, organized according to charter and by-laws articles and sections, and annotated by the author of said input. The committee thus expects to be able to quickly analyze its research upon the completion of the research phase, prioritize the most important items that will warrant further discussions, and possibly eliminate comments that would have minimal impact on the town's structure and organization. Mr. Arnold then suggested that we may want to

continue our information gathering efforts rather than trying to analyze the input as we go, which may result in the committee reviewing the same topics several times. The committee concurred with this suggestion.

Mr. Shea reviewed the schedule of future speakers:

Nov. 1 st :	Mr. Tashjian, former Town Moderator
Nov 8 th :	Mr Blois, Town Manager, Ashland (and former Town Coordinator, W.)
Nov. 14 th :	Mr. Mogado, Shrewsbury Town Manager
	Mr. Lebeaux, Chair, Shrewsbury Board of Selectmen (Tentative)
Nov. 29 th :	Either the Planning Board/Town Planner or Personnel Board
Dec. 6 th :	Either the Planning Board/Town Planner or Personnel Board

Ms. Allen announced that Fire Chief Peron had informed her that he wished to provide input as well.

The committee collectively identified key individuals that it wished to invite to future meetings: Town Clerk Nancy Yendriga, but hold off until after the November elections; Police Chief Gordon; Assistant Town Coordinator/HR Director Maryanne Bilodeau; DPW manager John Walden; School Superintendent Dr. Anne Towle; as well as other department heads.

Mr. Arnold then made the motion to cancel the October 18th meeting in order to enable committee members to reach out to speakers, organize their own reviews and research. Ms. Casemyr seconded the motion, unanimous vote in favor.

Mr. Arnold committed to continue working on an updated organizational chart for the town, where we can see the effects of suggestions as we discuss them.. This will allow the committee to prioritize and evaluate the impact of the recommendations and give us a framework to discuss with future speakers, without taking incumbents into consideration.

Ms. Allen reported that letters to residents, asking for their views on town government structure, went out in the water bill.

[G. Barrette left the meeting at 9:00 pm]

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 pm. (Motion: J. Arnold, 2nd: M. Vichare. Unanimous vote.)

Submitted,
Brigitte Casemyr, Secretary