

Ad Hoc Government Study Committee (Westborough, MA)
Minutes of September 27, 2006

Present: Kristina Allen , John E. Arnold, George Barrette (arrived at 7:17pm; left @ 8:03pm), Thomas Shea, Manohar Vichare

Absent: Brigitte Casemyr, Christopher Senie

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

The first item of business was review and approval of the minutes of the Sept. 20, 2006 meeting of the Committee. Mr. Shea noticed a need for a correction to the motion to adjourn which was actually made by Mr. Senie and seconded by Mr. Barrette. Ms. Allen noted that 'Industrial Development Commission' should be added at the bottom of the first page just after the mention of the Airport Commission. Mr. Shea noted that the minutes would better reflect the discussion if the section about the timing of the end of elected terms of office in town was re-worded to say that 'it was discussed that it may be better to have terms of elected officers end after the Annual Town Meeting rather than just before the Annual Town Meeting.'

Ms. Allen made a motion to accept the minutes as amended in the preceding discussion. Mr. Arnold seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous vote of members present. (5-0)

Ms. Allen presented a revised draft of a letter requesting ideas and opinions of town employees and town residents. A letter such as this can be included in the town employee paychecks as long as it is received by Monday of the week in which it will be included. Ms. Allen also reported that a similar letter (of kept to 1/2 to 2/3 of a page) could be inserted in the water/sewer bills that will be mailed in mid-October if we can get the letter to the bill processor on Oct. 2.

The committee members discussed the draft and reached a consensus on wording for 2 versions of the letter: one for town employees and one for town residents that will be inserted into the town's paychecks and water/sewer bills, respectively.

At this point, the committee reviewed its work and plans discussed in the meetings to date with respect to the charge to the committee. This was done as a checkpoint to make sure that the committee was working toward the proper goals and expected outcomes as stated in the charge. The committee walked through the charge section-by-section. Special note was made of the statement in the charge that the focus of the committee is to be on the **structure** and **process** of town, not **policy**. It was also highlighted that the committee is a recommending body with the expectation that a first report be made to the Selectmen around Feb. 1 with a final report due on Sept. 6, 2007. These reports will be shared with Town boards, committees, and officers as well as the public. The purpose of these reports is to "stimulate an informed discussion" of the wisdom of implementing the committee's recommendations.

During the discussion of the charge, the following observations came to the forefront:

- The 'first report' in February would be a natural mechanism for any recommendations that warrant action at the May 2007 Annual Town Meeting. However, there is no requirement that the first report include any recommendations.
- The 'bigger' questions that require more thought, more investigation, and more deliberation are probably better left for the final report. Examples of possible 'bigger' questions that the Committee may want to consider include the following: (a) Open Town Meeting vs. Representative Town Meeting; (b) study of various forms of chief executive (Town Manager vs. Town Coordinator, etc.). Longer study of these kinds of questions would allow the final report to recommend specific actions or recommend the creation of a Charter Commission.

Mr. Vichare suggested that, in terms of the delineation of structure vs. process vs. policy, this is something we can watch for during our meetings and discussions. For each 'type' (structure, process, policy), we can ask ourselves probing questions about what it is and what it is not. Mr. Vichare also commented that one way project/program managers approach problems such as those posed to the committee is to review what is working and what is not working in the current situation. Then, study why a specific thing is or is not working. After taking these steps, recommendations of specific actions can be made.

At the conclusion of the discussion about the committee's charge and how the committee can stay on track, the discussion turned to an idea that each of our meetings could be broken up into distinct parts. One part of the meeting would be devoted to information gathering and information organizing. Another part would be devoted to reviewing, thinking, discussing, and suggesting action based on the information that has been gathered.

In terms of organizing the ideas, opinions, or suggestions we create ourselves or we receive from our interviews or request for comments, it was considered that we could establish a loose-leaf notebook with section dividers for each section in the Charter and each section in the Bylaws. Then, when we note a comment about a particular section, we could put a copy of that in the related section in the notebook. This would reduce the amount of time we spent trying to find all of the comments related to a specific aspect of the Charter or Bylaws.

Next, the committee reviewed the upcoming speaker schedule. Henry Danis (Town Coordinator) is scheduled to appear at our meeting on Oct. 4. Dennis O'Neill (former Town Treasurer) is scheduled to appear at the Oct. 11 committee meeting.

Other people who we will try to schedule soon include Jim Robbins (Town Planner) and Jim Tashjian (former Town Moderator). We will try to schedule Dan Morgado (Town Manager of Shrewsbury) in November. Other people to invite to committee meetings include the Police Chief and Fire Chief. Letters should be sent to each elected or appointed Town Board or Committee asking if that group would like to meet with the committee or a subset of the Committee or welcoming any written comment.

For next week's meeting (Oct. 3), the Committee will review Joe Harrington's comments (from the 9/20/06) meeting as part of the 'reviewing/thinking/discussing' part of the meeting. Each committee member should also prepare 1 or 2 questions for Henry Danis.

Ms. Allen made a motion to adjourn. The motion was seconded by Mr. Vichare. The motion passed with a unanimous vote. (4-0).

The meeting was adjourned at 8:43pm.

Submitted,
John E. Arnold, Acting Secretary