

MINUTES – CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE
Thursday, September 22, 2016
Seth Ventress Hall

Present: Robert Marzelli, Barbara Farnsworth, Alyssa McNamara Reed, Bruce Spitler, William Bowers, Daniel Burke, Jonathan Grabowski

Excused: Don Gibson, Scott Borstel, Town Counsel Robert Galvin, and Board of Selectmen Liaison Steve Robbins.

Mr. Bowers opened the meeting at 6:35 p.m. and announced that the meeting is being recorded by MCTV. Mr. Bowers gave a quick overview of the agenda for tonight's meeting.

Interviews with Town Union Officials:

Chris Woods appeared before the committee to represent the library union. Ms. Woods stated that she polled her union members and they did not feel qualified to contribute and/or did not have anything to contribute so she is here tonight to give her own opinions. Ms. Woods told the Board that she has the results of the survey bound and available for residents in the research room at the library.

Ms. Woods shared her thoughts on the questions that were provided to her in advance of this meeting, including the following:

- A 5 member or even a 7 member Board of Selectmen would be good (with representatives from each "village").
- Her dealings with the Town Administrator have been positive and he has been responsive to the needs of the library, she would support a strengthened Town Manager.
- She has friends on elected Library Boards in other towns and she feels this might be a better option than an appointed board.
- She is aware that there is a trend to go to a Finance Director; she thinks this is a good idea, could help in preparing the budgets for individual departments.
- She feels that the town is too large for Town Meeting in its current form; it is an inefficient form of government. The same people get up repeatedly to speak and people get frustrated.

The committee members asked Ms. Woods for clarification on some of her thoughts and thanked her for coming to the meeting and giving her input.

Steve Barber appeared before the committee to represent the DPW union. Mr. Barber said that he is speaking for the union and shared the following thoughts:

- Boards should be more autonomous
- The Advisory Board should be elected
- The Town should support the departments rather than micro-managing. DPW equipment is outdated and needs to be replaced but the budget keeps getting cut.
- All Boards and Committees should be elected not appointed.
- They should hire a Finance Director and they need to stop hiring "incompetents" in the finance office.

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- Town Meeting should be kept the way it is. If the warrants were available in advance and contained accurate numbers the town meeting could be completed in one night.
- Marshfield is very lucky that the DPW, Police Department and Town Hall staff work together so well. The problems are with the incompetent non-union employees at Town Hall.

The committee members asked Mr. Barber for clarification on some of his thoughts and thanked him for coming to the meeting and giving his input.

Sally Marples appeared before the committee to represent the teachers union. Ms. Marples stated that she is a past president and current member of the MEA and was asked by the current president to attend this meeting in his place, but that the union was not polled and these are her personal observations. Ms. Marples shared her thoughts on the questions that were provided to her in advance of this meeting, including the following:

- The biggest concern is growing discontent with Town Meeting, but switching to representative Town Meeting will not necessarily improve that. She feels that Town Meeting is a good form of government and the purest form of democracy; she would not like to see it change.
- Suggested that the Town find some way to make the web page more responsive, it is very difficult to find information there.
- Because of the restrictive relationship the school has with the Town, most of her interaction is with the School Committee, not the Board of Selectmen.
- Do not need more members on the Board of Selectmen, need more people and resources on the ground doing the work.
- Facilities Manager seems to have created a good process for looking at Town buildings and prioritizing work that needs to be done.
- There appears to be an issue in the process for hiring a competent Treasurer/ Collector. The wrong person was hired and left in the job for far too long, there should be a performance evaluation process.
- On the whole people work very hard to make sure the Town is a place that people want to live and work.

The committee members asked Ms. Marples for clarification on some of her thoughts and thanked her for coming to the meeting and giving her input.

Dan Burke noted that he reached out to the leaders of 11 employee unions, and received the following responses:

Rob Reidy, Police – was unable to attend tonight's meeting

Matt Cohen, Fire – did not feel that the union had anything they wanted to offer

Matt Tanis, Supervisory – had already given input with Board of Health

Brenda Eckstrom, Clerical – was not comfortable giving input on the charter

The remaining four union reps did not reply to his email.

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Future Meetings:

After a brief discussion, the committee decided on the following dates for future meetings, all meetings to begin at 7:00 p.m.:

Wednesday, October 5 (Town Administrator, Town Moderator, and Facilities Manager)

Thursday, October 20

Thursday, November 3

Thursday, November 17

Thursday, December 1

Thursday, December 15

Interviews with Former Elected Officials:

Former Selectmen John Hall and Patricia Reilly appeared before the committee to give their input on the questions provided to them in advance. Bill Bowers gave an overview of the work that has been done to date, and the process going forward.

Patricia Reilly said that she would have liked more time to prepare and research her answers, but shared the following thoughts:

- She loves Town Meeting but it is not a practical form of government at this point, it is difficult for people who work and have families to attend. There is too much discussion on the articles which drags the meeting out over several evenings.
- There needs to be something in the charter to ensure that the DPW and Board of Selectmen will be able to work together in the event of an emergency such as a seawall breach. The current DPW is not accountable to the BOS and this could pose a problem.

John Hall shared the following thoughts:

- The biggest issue is the lack of accountability and expectations in Town Hall.
- Need to move to a more efficient form of government with a strong Town Manager and a representative Town Meeting. People are discouraged from attending Town Meeting because the same people get up and speak repeatedly and drag out the meeting.
- The Board of Public Works should be eliminated; public works should be overseen by a strong department head who reports to the Board of Selectmen.
- He would not have a problem with a 5 member Board of Selectmen with a Town Manager.

Patricia Reilly said it doesn't matter how many people are on the Board of Selectmen, it is the quality of the people who are on the Board. She doesn't think that expanding to five members would necessarily help.

Bruce Spitler asked if they ever felt constrained in that they couldn't speak to another member of the Board, and asked if it would be better to have five members so that two members could deliberate without violating open meeting laws. Ms. Reilly and Mr. Hall both agreed that even with a five member Board it would not be a good idea to have conversations outside of the posted meetings.

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Dan Burke asked if a five member Board would make it easier to have sub-committees that could participate on another Board or Committee. Ms. Reilly said that the BOS currently has a liaison to all Boards and Committees; she doesn't see the benefit to having two members of the BOS participate on any Board or Committee.

Patricia Reilly said that a five member board would complicate matters, it is a busy job but extra members would not make it any less so.

John Hall said that he would be concerned about who would run and people who are running for the wrong reasons may have a better chance of being elected to a five member Board.

Dan Burke asked if the possibility of eliminating the Board of Public Works and/or other elected Boards would change their feelings about a larger Board of Selectmen.

Patricia Reilly said that maybe if other elected boards were eliminated a five member Board of Selectmen might be a good idea.

John Hall said that fewer elected boards would be a good thing and would increase accountability and professionalism in Town Hall.

Bill Bowers said that the committee has received some feedback suggesting that the town should function more like the schools, with one Board overseeing all departments.

John Hall said that this would be an improvement, and said that the current system where Boards are working against each other is very dysfunctional. Mr. Hall said that the Town Manager should function more like the School Superintendent where Department Heads would report to him and he would report to the Board of Selectmen.

Patricia Reilly said that she would need to do more research before she could answer this question. She knows that the roles of Town Administrators and Town Managers vary greatly from town to town. Ms. Reilly added that there would need to be a system of checks and balances to ensure that the Town Manager does not have too much power.

Bob Marzelli asked what they thought about having something in the charter that would specify that two members of a five member Board of Selectmen are responsible for overseeing the operations of the DPW.

Patricia Reilly said that the Board of Selectmen could have liaisons to different departments the way they currently have liaisons to Boards and Committees, but she feels that it should be more of a practice than a requirement in the charter.

The committee thanked Ms. Reilly and Mr. Hall for their time and input.

Ms. Reilly said that she will submit some more comments to the committee after she has time to do some research.

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Discussion regarding Public Forums:

Bill Bowers asked what the committee thought about the public forum held last week. Barbara Farnsworth said the format worked well with specific topics to discuss. Alyssa McNamara Reed suggested bringing copies of the charter to the next public forum. Bill Bowers noted that Don Gibson will moderate the next forum, but otherwise it will be the same format.

At 8:15 p.m. Bob Marzelli moved, seconded by Bruce Spitler, to adjourn the meeting. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Burke