

MINUTES – CHARTER REVIEW COMMITTEE

Thursday, September 15, 2016

Martinson Elementary School Auditorium

Present: Robert Marzelli, Barbara Farnsworth, Alyssa McNamara Reed, Donald Gibson, William Bowers, Daniel Burke, Jonathan Grabowski, Scott Borstel

Also in attendance were: Town Counsel Robert Galvin and Board of Selectmen liaison Steve Robbins.

Excused: Bruce Spitler

Mr. Bowers opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m. and announced that the meeting is being recorded by MCTV. Mr. Bowers noted that there was an error on the agenda, and said that next Thursday's meeting is a regular meeting, there will be another public forum on Wednesday, September 28, 2016 at the Governor Winslow School.

Mr. Bowers thanked the residents for coming to this public forum to give their input on the charter. Mr. Bowers introduced the members of the Charter Review Committee and gave a PowerPoint presentation with an overview of the work the committee has done to date, and the format and topics for this evening's meeting.

Mr. Burke reviewed the ground rules for this forum and reminded people to limit their comments and questions to the scope of the Charter Review Committee.

Question #1 – Do you think that there are any significant problems in the way Town government is currently controlled and managed? If so, do you have any suggestions as to how those problems might be corrected?

Kathleen Mulvey, Pilgrim Terrace, asked what feedback the committee has received so far.

Dan Burke said that the committee has received a variety of opinions on things including increasing the number of Selectmen and moving to a more centralized form of government, but have not begun to consolidate these opinions into any sort of finding at this point. Don Gibson said that they received over 300 responses to their survey and felt that it would be beneficial to hear from residents to get their observations on what is working and what is not.

Kay Ramsey, Ocean Street, said that there are no significant problems with the current charter, if leadership is good the employees will do their best for the Town. Ms. Ramsey also said that elected boards are better than appointed boards.

Jean McDonald, Main Street, said that the Zoning Board of Appeals should be an elected board. Ms. McDonald added that some of the language in the charter needs to be strengthened or made more specific and gave some examples including that the appointing authority of the Board of Selectmen as currently written is too vague and it appears that both the Town Administrator and the Facilities Manager are responsible for overseeing purchasing.

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Joe Pecevich, Wilson Road, agreed that the ZBA should be elected. Mr. Pecevich added that the complaints he hears most often are: 1) people don't know who they are voting for; and 2) they need to make it easier for people to attend town meeting. Mr. Pecevich said that he would like to see a Town Ombudsman who is available and accountable to residents. Mr. Pecevich also said that the airport should be owned and operated by the Town.

Kay Ramsey said that there is a misperception that Town departments do not communicate; Ms. Ramsey said that they talk to each other all the time.

Question #2 – What changes, if any, should be made to the way in which the annual and special Town Meetings are being conducted?

Jean McDonald said that all Town officials and committees should have better communication leading up to Town Meeting. She added that she is not sure how representative town meeting works, the current Town Meeting is long and sometimes inefficient but she does not know if representative town meeting would be any better.

Bob Galvin explained how Representative Town Meeting works and said that representatives would be elected for each precinct and could have meetings or do surveys to get a sense of the views of their precinct.

Dan Burke said number of representatives would depend on the population of the precinct.

Jean McDonald said that Town Meeting gives residents an opportunity to express their opinions and a representative may not be able to express the opinions of the people he represents, so she would prefer to keep the present form of Town Meeting.

Kathleen Mulvey said that she feels that representative Town Meeting would be a better system because more people could get involved by attending smaller meetings within their own precinct. She noted that many people are discouraged by the divisiveness of Town Meeting in its current form. Ms. Mulvey also said that the process for filing a petition article should be made easier for people who are new to Town Meeting.

Kay Ramsey said that there should be two regular town meetings instead of a Special Town Meeting in the fall. Ms. Ramsey noted that zoning articles are very important and sometimes cannot be put on the fall Special Town Meeting warrant and therefore have to wait until spring. Ms. Ramsey spoke in opposition to representative Town Meeting and said that she believes that Open Town Meeting is the best form of government ever.

Kaleena Minehan, Meeting House Lane, said that the way people get up multiple times for the same question is frustrating for many people attending town meeting. Ms. Minehan wondered if there is a way to live stream the meeting and take questions from viewers, or to allow residents to submit questions in advance of Town Meeting if they cannot attend.

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Joe Pecevich said that he would be in favor of live streaming meetings and allowing questions from viewers. Mr. Pecevich spoke in opposition to Representative Town Meeting, and said that Town Meeting should remain open and they should do away with the lottery system. Mr. Pecevich added that some town meeting articles should be on the ballot to be ratified by the electorate.

Mike McNamara, Magoun Path, said that Town Meeting is flawed; a few people monopolize the meeting causing people to leave early or stay home. If we stay with open town meeting there should be a limit to the number of times one person can speak, not just on a specific article but during the entire meeting.

Question #3 – What changes should be made, if any, in the way in which the warrants for the special and annual Town Meeting are opened, closed, and published to the citizens of Marshfield?

Kay Ramsey said that it is hard for people to know when the warrant is opened and closed and stated that there should be a better way to make this information available to the public.

Question #4 – How can the charter of the Town of Marshfield be altered or amended to establish a local government and budgetary process that is responsive to the needs of residents and taxpayers of the town?

Jean McDonald said that the key is excellent hiring of finance staff whether it is a Finance Director or a Treasurer/Collector, which is not really a charter issue.

Joe Pecevich said that he would like to see the annual reports for each department include budget information and added that he is not sure if the charter can mandate this.

Kay Ramsey said that there has been talk about hiring a Finance Director for years. Ms. Ramsey said that the Town did have one person who could have handled this position but she left the Town and since then the hiring has not been good at all and the finance department has been a horrible mess. Ms. Ramsey added that there should be a better way of hiring personnel, and she doesn't think that making a big position at a higher pay will help.

Question #5 – Would the creation of a more centralized government and budgetary process allow the town to more efficiently deliver services in a cost effective manner?

Jean McDonald spoke in support of a five member Board of Selectmen. Ms. McDonald said that the budgetary process is very difficult to follow, but she is not sure how this can be put into the charter. Ms. McDonald added that she would like to see a better layout for the budget that is easier to follow.

Kay Ramsey spoke in opposition to a more centralized form of government.

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Dennis Vetrano, Jedediahs Path, said that the current charter does not work for the Town because there is a lack of authority since no one reports to anyone. Mr. Vetrano spoke in favor of a more centralized form of government and added that the charter is not an effective means of operating a budget this size.

Mike McNamara spoke in support of a more centralized form of government.

Dan Burke asked if there was anything else that people would like to address.

Kay Ramsey said that she has heard it said that Town Hall should be run more like a business but that is impossible due to the legal constraints placed on a municipality.

Dennis Vetrano asked for clarification on the process for revising the charter.

Bob Galvin said that when the charter review process is complete, the committee will make a recommendation for a charter change at Town Meeting. If supported by a Town Meeting vote, it will be submitted to the legislature, and once approved by the State it will be put on the ballot.

Bill Bowers said that it is unlikely that the committee will have a recommendation for the ATM in the spring of 2017, but could possibly be ready for the STM in the fall of 2017.

Dennis Vetrano asked how old the current charter is. Bob Marzelli said that it was written in 1975, and was last reviewed in 2003.

Dan Burke announced that the committee will be meeting with union leaders at their meeting next Thursday and will be having another public forum on Wednesday, September 28 at 7:00 p.m. at the Governor Winslow School.

At 8:15 p.m. Scott Borstel moved, seconded by Dan Burke, to adjourn the meeting. The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Catherine Burke

The following documents and exhibits were presented at the meeting: power point presentation; letter to the Charter Review Committee from Kay Ramsey.