

**Government and Charter Study Task Force
Meeting Summary 03/24/2010
Selectmen's Meeting Room**

Attendance:

Peter Cahill
Thomas Daly
Margery Eramo
Charles Flahive
Paul Fitzgerald
Ken Foscaldo
Frank Jacobs
Karen Manor Metzold
Alice Moore
Michael Jaillet
Anne Marie McIntyre

Meeting Summary

Approval of Meeting Summary 01/20/2010

Meeting Summary 2/3/2010 and 2/24/2010 will be circulated prior to the next meeting to be approved.

Introduction of Mike Jaillet, Town Administrator

Town Administrator

Mr. Jaillet distributed his written recommendations describing how the current Charter could be improved (*Recommendations related to the Town Charter*). He also posted on the Selectmen's Meeting Room walls the organizational charts of the Town of Westwood.

The charts identify gaps in administrative functions that need to be addressed. One is the lack of a Land Use Department Head or Community Development Director. Glenn Garber currently fills this role. Second is a centralized Human Services function. Tom Viti, the Library Director, helps to cover these responsibilities along with monthly meetings of representatives from various departments (Council on Aging, Youth and Family Services, Housing Authority, Veterans, etc.) to discuss human resources issues.

Mr. Jaillet spoke to the Task Force about each section of his written recommendations. Please refer to the written recommendations for details. (Attached.)

Discussion not contained in written recommendations provided by Mike Jaillet

Mr. Jaillet stated that the Town Charter should be a document that describes how the Town is organized and how it functions.

Mr. Jaillet would like the Charter to include a general statement that defines the relationship between boards and commissions and its staff. Mr. Jaillet manages staff on a day-to-day basis and evaluates all Town staff. Two people give reviews for each staff person. In addition, Mr. Jaillet evaluates all Town department heads.

With regard to hiring, Mr. Jaillet utilizes a committee, and their unanimous approval is required. Mr. Jaillet stressed that the hiring process is very important because competent staff is key to a well functioning town. He noted that the hiring process be formalized in the personnel administration section of the Charter. Mr. Jaillet indicated that the language should state that the Town Administrator ultimately oversees all hiring and is able to appoint an ad hoc committee when needed. Mr. Jaillet is the Chief Procurement Officer and has a staff person who helps with this workload. He suggested adding detail in the Charter for those areas of his job which are more static and including language that allows for flexibility related to his responsibilities that are dynamic in nature.

Mr. Jaillet provided additional rationale for maintaining the current number of three selectmen. Like a mayor, a smaller board results in more frequent unanimity and helps to achieve a crisp decision. In his prior experience, a five-member board often resulted in a three to two decision. If the goal is to have “district” representation through five members, Mr. Jaillet believes that it works in the legislative branch but not in the executive branch because members may base their decision on what’s best for their district as opposed to what’s best for the town. With respect to the point that three selectmen are overwhelmed with the workload, Mr. Jaillet is of the opinion that they are not if the Town Administrator is doing his job.

A discussion ensued about the necessity of a second Town Meeting. Paul Fitzgerald commented that a lot of towns do bonding in the fall. Costs associated with Town Meeting were discussed: approximately \$1500 for hosting up to 650 people in the auditorium and approximately \$5000 in the gym. Currently, there is a line item in the budget when a Special Town Meeting is anticipated. Otherwise, reserve funds are utilized.

Alice Moore mentioned that many boards, even while working very hard, find it difficult to get all work accomplished in time for a May Town Meeting. When that is the case, it may be beneficial to have issues addressed in six months rather than waiting another year. The Government and Charter Study Task Force is a good example of this situation because it’s likely that a report would be ready for the fall. Tom Daly further noted that if planning and zoning issues were on a fall warrant, these articles would be given the attention that they deserve. Mr. Jaillet responded that important decisions are typically placed earlier in the warrant and non-controversial issues are placed toward the end. Mr. Jaillet believes that Special Town Meeting provides the needed flexibility, but if Westwood were to formalize a Fall Town Meeting in the Charter, the Selectmen should have the flexibility as to the timing and have the ability to cancel it for that year if deemed unnecessary.

Mr. Jaillet does not support a zero quorum.

Mr. Jaillet offered additional support for changing some positions from elected to appointed: most voters do not know who the people are running for election and rarely does an incumbent lose or even have an opponent.

Mr. Jaillet recommended that the Task Force members meet with Dan Bailey on the topic of associate members or similar membership for the Planning Board. Given the requirements of the permitting process, continuity can be a major issue. The Planning Board has been overwhelmed with the permitting of Westwood Station. The Board, however, is responsible for both future planning and consideration of current plans/proposals. Mr. Jaillet questions if we should have two groups to address these separate areas or a better “hybrid” board?

Mr. Jaillet advocates for a municipal finance director that would be the coordinator over the part-time elected positions. For this to be put into practice, the elected positions would have to be changed to appointed positions.

Mr. Jaillet suggested an inquiry on the determination of stipends for members of certain boards.

Tom Daly asked if the name of the Finance Commission should be changed. Mr. Jaillet agreed that the name should be changed: the Commission votes on many issues and some residents do not consider being a member because of the name. He suggested changing the name to the “Advisory Committee” as used in the Town of Sharon. Further, Mr. Jaillet recommended that the Finance Commission members remain appointed; they challenge the work of the other committees/boards and represent the Town.

Next Meetings:

April 7, 2010

April 21, 2010 (Town Counsel, Tom McCusker and members of Board of Assessors)