

**Government and Charter Study Task Force
Meeting Summary 01/06/2010
Selectmen's Meeting Room**

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

Meeting Summary

I. Approval of Meeting Summary 12/16/2009

II. On behalf of the members Task Force, Peter Cahill offered well wishes and a speedy recovery to Selectman Patrick Ahearn.

III. Introduction of the Finance Commission Committee Members: Chairman Mary Masi-Phelps, George Hertz, Michael O'Hara

Significant Points Presented by the Finance Commission (Fin Com)

Commission Overview

15 members, volunteer board, appointed by Town Moderator

- 1.) The Commission plays an Advisory Role to all town departments. Studies and evaluates all town budgets.
- 2.) Studies and evaluates all warrant articles and holds public hearings prior to Annual and Special Town Meetings.
- 3.) Votes to recommend each warrant article. Publishes its recommendations, estimates and advice. The report is then distributed to all voter residences.
- 4.) Fin Com's recommendations become the first motion under each article of the warrant and are considered the main motion on Town Meeting floor.
- 5.) Considers requests for and controls the town's Reserve Fund.

Ms. Masi-Phelps commented that the Commission's name is a misnomer because the majority of their work is not finance related. The name may deter potential members because they do not feel qualified to serve on a "financial" board. Renaming the commission may encourage a more diverse set of potential members to step forward.

Ms Masi Phelps presented and elaborated on the Fin Com's Meeting Schedule:

June: Organize after Town Meeting.
Moderator fills vacancies and chair is appointed.

September-December: Meet with town departments for budget updates including but not limited to: Finance Director Pam Dukeman, School Committee, and Planning Board. Ms Masi-Phelps stated that they like to hear from the Senior Center because of the important role they play in the community.

January-February Prepare for Town Meeting. Warrant closes. Meet with warrant article sponsors and provide feedback.

March: Second round of recommendations for articles for Town Meeting. May be Special Town Meeting held at this time.

May Town Meeting

Subcommittees

Appointed by the Chairman.
Provide in-depth study of budget and warrant articles.
Municipal and Education are standard; other subcommittees formed as needed (i.e.:
Library, Westwood Station)
Representation on other boards (GIC, Budget Steering and Long Range Planning)

Members commented that questions do arise on the appropriateness of Fin Com inquiries, but lack of specificity gives greater latitude to study articles and budget line items. This independence gives Fin Com the ability to ask tougher questions when the need arises.

The Town Charter outlines the Commission’s advisory duties in a very broad fashion that is open to different interpretations. With no guidance on how to come to a decision on issues, Fin Com members struggle with their lack of consideration guidelines. Town Meeting members rely heavily on Fin Com’s work, and Fin Com members take their work seriously. Fin Com questioned their expectations at arriving at decisions: Are they expected to be stewards for the town, ombudsmen, or well-informed average residents? Should there be guiding principles which Fin Com should follow?

Alice Moore commented on the professional quality of the Fin Com’s Warrant recommendations. Karen Manor-Metzold stated that Fin Com could play a more vocal role at Town Meetings; subcommittees could express how they arrived at their decisions, and this information would be helpful on the Town Meeting floor. Charlie Flahive also expressed his support of the flexibility of the Fin Com.

Membership and Term Limits

Mary Masi-Phelps stated that she is not in favor of term limits as it takes time to learn how the Committee works - an evolving process. The Vice Chairman has traditionally been groomed to succeed the Chairman; it is an informal succession process. Fin Com members stated that Fin Com positions should remain appointed because fewer people would be interested in serving if an election is required. George Hertz likes the fact that the Committee is comprised of fifteen members. This size provides newcomers with the opportunity to “get their feet wet” while more experienced members take active roles.

Representative Town Meeting

Fin Com Member George Hertz commented on his concern over the well organized, vocal minority seizing control of town meeting. Fin Com commented that conceptually, Fin Com plays a role much like the representatives in a Representative Town Meeting. Overall the Fin Com supports Open Town Meeting.

Two Town Meetings

Fin Com stated this would be helpful:

- 1.) Reduce need for Special Town Meetings.
- 2.) Provide for a more thoughtful process by reducing the pressure to rush articles and by dividing the workload.
- 3.) Provide a better vehicle for coordinating budgetary review and decisions with State budget process.
- 4.) Offers more flexibility to review items if needed.

Long Term Planning

The Fin Com stated that this is an area that merits consideration. Fin Com plans one to two years ahead with less emphasis placed on the five year plan. With the financial challenges facing town, increased attention should be placed on the five year plan. Some suggestions to help address this problem are:

- 1.) Increase the authority of this board.
- 2.) Lengthen terms to foster dialogue that may take years to yield results.
- 3.) Seek more permanent solutions rather than short term fixes.
- 4.) Educate townspeople on issues that need to be addressed in a five year plan, particularly related to schools, seniors and municipal services in general.
- 5.) Include a Charter Provision to provide for a five year plan report (suggested by Paul Fitzgerald based on Harwich’s Charter).

Other Issues

The Fin Com is not allowed to change technical errors in Articles that they identify during the Warrant review process. This problem usually arises with petition-based articles. It would be helpful if an educational tool and a more specific process were implemented to guide petitioners through the warrant article development and submission.

IV. Pam Dukeman, Finance Director

Upon introduction of Pam Dukeman, the Chair relayed to Ms. Dukeman the very positive feedback the Task Force has received regarding her abilities as Finance Director.

Position Overview

Ms. Dukeman has been a Town employee for 18 years and the Finance Director for 16 years. She explained her duties as:

- 1.) Serves as Chief Financial Administrator for the Town.
- 2.) Acts as the Chief Financial Coordinator for the financial management team (Town Accountant, Assistant Treasurer, Assistant Collector, Chief Assessor, Assistant Purchasing Agent and Finance, Commission Administrator).
- 3.) Prepares annual operating and capital budgets for Board of Selectman.
- 4.) Serves as Town Administrator in his absence.
- 5.) Coordinates the Town's bond rating process and manages presentations and reporting.

The Department of Revenue has guidelines that allow towns to set up a financial department, coordinate finance departments and details the Finance Director position. Westwood has never formally adopted this. Ms. Dukeman stated that Westwood's municipal finance is one of the best in the state, even without the formal organizational structure for the department. Ms. Dukeman commented that the Town should formalize a change in the Charter to reflect the current structure of the Finance Director position and the Finance Department. Ms Dukeman commented that her department works well due to the cooperative nature of elected financial officials, the strong support from the Board of Selectman and Town Administrator.

Town Meetings

Ms. Dukeman commented that spring and fall Town meetings would be helpful for easier handling of the annual budget process particularly since state aid is not known until late July. Was very supportive of adding a fall Town Meeting.

Finance Commission

Ms. Dukeman commented that a nine-member Finance Commission may be more efficient than fifteen as there probably is not enough work for fifteen.

Permanent Building Committee

Ms. Dukeman commented that the Permanent Building Committee's role should be clarified as confusion sometimes results regarding the correct committee or department signing the appropriate bills. In addition, Ms. Dukeman recommends that the expertise required to serve on the Committee should be stated more clearly. She is an ex officio committee member.

Audit

The language in the Charter needs to be updated as it pertains to auditing; the State no longer performs this function. The Task Force asked Ms. Dukeman to recommend language with regard to auditing that should be placed in the Charter.

Long Term Planning

There is a five year capital plan and a five year operational plan, but they are not utilized as much as they could be. Ms. Dukeman felt that the Long Term Planning Committee needs to have more authority and structure. Committee member turnover makes it difficult.

V. Dottie Powers, Town Clerk

Position Overview

A three year elected term.

The Clerk's office is primarily that of a disseminator of information; it is usually the first office people contact for guidance and information. The Functions of the Clerk's office include but are not limited to:

- 1.) Administer and comply with laws for Town Elections
- 2.) Administer and comply with laws for Town Meetings
- 3.) Public Records Officer
- 4.) Licensing Officer
- 5.) Town Census
- 6.) Campaign Finance Regulations

Ms. Powers provided the Task Force with a comprehensive report on the duties of the Town Clerk in Massachusetts as well as *Office of the Town Clerk*, an overview brochure that she created and distributes to residents.

Ms. Powers commented that the Charter needs a clearer description of what the job of Town Clerk entails. Ms. Powers commented that the election of the Clerk's position works well because there is an extensive amount to learn and appointed positions tend to have a higher turnover rate.

Town Meetings

Ms. Powers stated that having both fall and spring Town Meetings annually would not be a burden. Ms. Powers commented that lengthening the time between Town Meeting and the Town Election makes it easier for the Clerk's office. Special Town meetings are not budgeted in the office, and given the number of Special Town Meetings in recent years, two scheduled meetings could be budgeted and help with this process.

Ms. Powers does not recommend lowering the quorum but rather educating residents on the importance of participating in Town Meeting.

Petition Articles

Ms. Powers commented that the articles have to be certified through her office. She suggests to petitioners to seek help from Town Counsel when writing a petition.

Other:

Ms. Powers has concerns about Town Meeting attendance and is working with town officials to increase the attendance. She is also discussing with the selectman the potential use of just one precinct in order to focus all resources in one location.

Ms. Powers commented that her office works hard to serve the community in a professional and cordial manner. It was pointed out by Charlie Flahive and Karen Manor-Metzold that her management style has created such an office.

VI. Task Force Business:

January 20, 2010 the Board of Selectmen will attend the meeting. An 8:00 p.m. start time was requested by BOS Chairman Phil Shapiro. The Task Force suggested an 8:15 p.m. start time for the Board of Selectmen. Mike Jaillet recommended that a speakerphone be set up for Patrick Ahearn to participate. It was agreed that the meeting will start at 7:00 p.m. (not 7:30) to review past interviewees responses to survey.

February 3, 2010 Public Forum. Peter informed the Task Force that he asked Karen to spearhead a subcommittee to plan and implement a media campaign for the public forum. Ken and Alice volunteered to help. Marge Eramo stated she could obtain a list from the Westwood Library of the Boards and Committees in the community that can be contacted. Charlie Flahive suggested the use of a recorded telephone message with details prior to the meeting.

Peter reminded the Task Force they are still in a fact finding stage and members need to frame and discuss the issues more in depth before issues are formally brought to the public. The forum will thus be utilized to receive comments from interested citizens.

Motion to adjourn the meeting.

****COMPLETE RECORDED VERSION OF MEETING AVAILABLE ON TASK FORCE NETWORK****